

## **Outreach Talks**

Monthly talks from the Swedenborg Enquiry Centre, Sydney

January 1984 to February 1988

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## **1. The Future of God - Richard H. Tafel, January 1984**

Today with the coming of the new year, we move out of the season of Christmas into the season of epiphany. Epiphany is a Greek word which means 'the showing forth of God', or his 'manifesting Himself' to the world. This is represented by the coming of the wise men and their worshipping Jesus as their new-born king.

Unfortunately epiphany has largely dropped out of our church calendar. As a result Christmas is all too quickly packed away and becomes just a part of the year passed and closed. With the new year we come down to earth again. The passage from Christmas to new year is almost like merging from a fairyland into the world of hard facts and cold statistics, leaving behind "the world as we would wish it to be" for "the world as it actually is".

Perhaps this is why the one season is intensely and beautifully religious and the other thoroughly pagan and secular. What is religious or spiritual about our celebrating of the new year? How we shout and cheer and make as much noise as possible when that magic midnight appears! Do we ever stop and think why we act that way? It is really to drive away the bad spirits which have brought us misfortune, bad luck and disappointment during the year that is gone. Of course we are not aware of that; we are just following an old pagan custom.

Also, as we count down the seconds to that bewitching hour we are, according to the belief that is as old as the race itself, actually killing the passing year, and making it lose its hold upon us. That is really why we say, "happy new year", and look forward confidently and hopefully to a better year to come. How much more pagan can we get?

The old romans may have been pagans but they had the insight to name the first month of the new year after the God who presided over it, "Janus", who was the "door keeper" or "janitor" of the year. And they also had

the insight to make "Janus" a two-faced God, looking backward to the past and forward to the future, we have just celebrated Christmas, testifying to the momentous truth that God has come to make his abode among us and, from within history; is henceforth involved in human affairs. Thus Christmas looks ahead to the new year, just as the new year looks back to Christmas.

The difference between the "person of the world" and the "person of Faith" is the difference between a clock and a compass. A clock ticks from within! It runs by its own mechanism. A compass is controlled by a magnetic force from outside. For the humanist and secularist, history is controlled entirely from within, and we must find our own mechanism to deal with our problems, however, for the person of faith, the dominant power in history is that magnetic spiritual force beyond and within creation. For them that force is the Christ God who came into our world and continues to exert His influence and presence, being the compass which determines the direction and course of human destiny.

In addition to that, for those of us who believe that we are now living in the days of our Lord's second coming, He is moving to 'make all things new', pointing the present to a glorious future. As soon as you say that, you are laying yourself open to the charge that you are ignoring the condition of the world around us. That you are closing your eyes to the misery, suffering and inequities of our times. That you are sweeping under the rug the corruption and wrong doing in high places. You will be faced with facts that you cannot very well deny; the loss of faith in government, technology, the democratic process and the news media; the rising incident of crime, and all the other evils and disorders that plague our society.

You will probably be asked, 'in light of conditions as we know them', isn't it worse than absurd to talk about the world moving towards a glorious future? Isn't it more accurate and more realistic to see things as they truly are, in all their ugliness and foreboding consequences for the future? There speaks the "person of the world", your spiritual pagan!

But what of Christmas and the good news from heaven? "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.*" Luke 2:13. What about God-in-a-human-life making this earth His permanent home, and assuring us of the successful outcome of his coming? "*take heart! I have overcome the world.*" John 16:23

What about the vision of the coming glory of the Lord, seen first from afar by John on Patmos, and today declared 'coming to pass' in these days of the Lord's second coming?

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."* Rev 11:15

Things remembered so vividly in December are so quickly forgotten in January.

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come:  
let earth receive her king!  
He rules the, world in truth and grace:  
And makes the nations prove  
The glory of his righteousness  
And wonders of his love".

It is strange that those who sing so lustily at Christmas lose sight of what they have sung about when they get back to the nitty-gritty of living!

You hear supposedly informed religious people saying, "how can you talk of God being somehow here, when such terrible things happen all the time?" and I am sure that you have heard people say, "either God is an all-good and an all-loving God, but not an all-powerful God one or He is an all-powerful, but not an all-loving God." this neat formula might logically seem to account for the presence of evil in our world, but it either presents a caricature of God or makes Him a hideous and a foreboding person,

We who believe that this is God's world and that He is in control of it, see that He is both all-good and all-powerful. We who believe that in His perfect life among us, God showed how good, how loving and caring He

is, as well as how strong and wise He is. We who believe that as the God Man, He is here "with us always", and that in this new age He is fulfilling His promise to come again with power afresh, believe that He is here to "make all things new",

We who believe all this see in the very evils, disorders and demands of our times, and especially as these are laid on our conscience, the divine providence of our Lord. We see in all this churning around us the moving of our God, the pressures of His divine and loving hands, and His promised coming in power and great glory.

Many want God to be a Santa Claus; he will never be. Though present in our midst He will not use His almighty power to straighten out the world and to redress what is wrong. He will not force us to be good, law abiding and unselfish, to do so would be to destroy what is most precious in His sight: the free will of the human being. Rather, by sending forth of His spirit upon His world, the human heart is resensitized, our minds are being quickened and we are made to see with greater clarity. Conscience and public concern is being stirred and set to new standards. Another way of saying this is that evils and wrongs and injustices, which have for too long been tolerated and swept under the rug, are now being brought to light and thrust upon our conscience, demanding action and solution.

One taking of the present pulse or the world, one reading of the barometer of events and happenings in our times, might indicate that never were things worse; that never were evil, disorder and wrong doing so rampant! That never was the future so dark. Another reading, from a truer spiritual insight and from Christmas, indicates quite the opposite; realistically, confidently and expectantly, we can look out upon the still untrodden future and shout happy new year! We can do so because the Lord our God has come, is coming; and will continue to come with ever greater power and glory! In the light of Christmas, and throughout the new year before us, we can say joyfully and confidently, "*We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.*" Rev 11:17

### **Reading from Swedenborg, The New Creation**

The word beginning is being used for the very earliest times. The prophets frequently call them "the days of old." "The beginning" includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation."

The progress of faith in those who are being created anew is as follows. Initially such people are without any life, as no life exists in evil or falsity, only in goodness and truth. Afterward they receive life from the Lord through faith. The first form of faith to bring life is a memorized thing — a matter of fact. The next is faith in the intellect — faith truly understood. The last is faith in the heart, which is faith born of love, or saving faith.  
Arcana Coelestia 16 & 30

## **2. Ephphatha - Brian Kingslake, February 1984**

Our text is the single word "ephphatha", Mark 7:34

It means "be opened", and is one of the few words we know that Jesus actually spoke. He lived in the little country of Palestine, where the language spoken by the common people was Aramaic; a variant form of Hebrew, now lost. But ever since Alexander's conquests in the 4th century BC, the whole mediterranean world, right through to the borders of India, spoke Hellenistic Greek as a universal language. So, when the evangelists wrote the gospels, they translated all our Lord's teachings from Aramaic into Greek and the Greek translation forms the basic text of the New Testament; and nobody really knows what lay behind the Greek.

However, there are four instances, all in Mark, where the original Aramaic words actually spoken by Jesus have been retained. One instance is "abba", Mark 14:36, an intimate word for "father". Another is "talitha koum" Mark 5:41, meaning "little girl, get up". The longest, from the Cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" -

"my God, why have you forsaken me?" probably quoted because people thought "eloi" was "elias" or "elijah". Mark 15:34. All were instances when the disciples must have felt that the actual words were important.

"eph-pha-tha" is such a strange word that they might have thought it had a kind of magic about it. A man had been brought to Jesus who was deaf and dumb. Many people who have been deaf since infancy cannot speak, because they have never heard what speech is; but this man had an actual impediment in his speech. He couldn't hear other people, nor could he express himself, no verbal communication was possible, between him and his friends. He was completely isolated, drawn in upon himself, a kind of "solitary confinement".

Now comes the healing miracle, Jesus put His fingers in the poor man's ears, spat and presumably put some of his saliva on the man's tongue, looked up to heaven, sighed, and said the word "eph-pha-tha!" - "be opened"! What a shock for the man, being able to speak for the first time — a memorable experience: though the man would need to learn to do this, to control his newly loosened tongue. The point is, that having communicated with the Lord, the man could now communicate with other people; which previously he had been unable to do.

We learn all sorts of techniques for communication, both verbal and nonverbal. The main problem is that we don't listen. While the other person is speaking to us, we are busy working out what we are going to say as soon as they stop talking! We hear with our ears, perhaps, but not with our minds, let alone with our hearts.

And self-expression? We can chatter on the surface level but real exposure? No! We call it "modesty", but all too often it is an inverted form of pride, or a fear of getting involved! Two people can live next door to each other for years and know nothing about each other, or work at the same desk and not even know the names of each other's children.

Even in the new church, in one of my societies we arranged for the members of the women's league to take it in turns to tell the others about themselves, at first they protested "we have known one another all our lives, we meet at church every Sunday; we know one another through and through"! In fact, we soon discovered that they hardly knew a thing! All their contacts had been on the surface only: they were completely ignorant of one another's inner problems, nor were they of any help to one another in their regenerating lives. They needed to have their ears unstopped and their tongues loosed; and that is precisely what Jesus can and will do for us. He opens all doors even into our most intimate private chambers.

The purpose of a church is not just to worship the Lord. We can do that on our own at home. the purpose of a church is that a group of like-minded people should regenerate together, supporting one another in their trials and temptations, sharing their deepest thoughts, inspirations, joys, sorrows, hopes and fears, as well as worshipping together. Our services should be a group approach to God, a family reunion with a loving Father. But to achieve such an approach we must be prepared to expose our secret thoughts and feelings, all barriers down, all doors wide open. Perhaps to a trusted Friend who shares our spiritual ideals and is as eager as we are for the extension of God's kingdom,

Communication is particularly important in a family situation, children leave home, or take up vandalism because they cannot communicate with their parents - the so-called "generation gap". Married couples seek divorce because they can no longer communicate together. Almost every quarrel would be settled if the parties would only talk! You may say that a loosened tongue would release a flow of insults and blasphemies: but experience shows that even a shouting match in a quarrel is more likely to lead to a settlement than a tight-lipped sulk, and listening is more important even, than talking,

So far we have been speaking of communicating with other people, now consider the importance of being able to communicate with yourself, do you really know yourself? There is a door between our conscious minds and our unconscious. Do you ever go through that door and confront your real self? - or is that door permanently shut and locked?

There are folk-stories about someone living in a house where there is a locked door and one day the key is found and the door is opened and dreadful and wonderful things are revealed. This will surely happen to each

one of us when we die. "*There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*" Luke 12:2. Many self-satisfied people will be shocked to find what they are really like inside; whereas some who, in this world, have been looked down on and scorned as atheists or immoral, may turn out to be perfectly sound within. In the other life it's like Pentecost, where everybody can understand everyone else's speech and all hidden thoughts are revealed.

Finally, how about communicating with God? How often per day do we talk to Him, or hear Him talking to us? Are you spiritual tongue-tied or spiritually deaf? "ephphatha"! Cries Jesus "be open"! To be healthy we must have a free flow of communication and response, between us and one another, between us and our inner selves, and most important of all between us and God. Compare the sea of Galilee with the dead sea, water flows in and out of the sea of Galilee, it is fresh and sweet fish swarm in it and vegetation grows along its banks. The dead sea receives a continual inflow of water, but passes nothing on. It has become like a salt stew-pot, everything in it dies. "ephphatthe! Says the Lord. "be open and let the water flow"!

Remember the letter to the church in Philadelphia - the city of brotherly love. "*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*" Rev 3:7

Let our Lord Jesus put his fingers in our ears, and touch our tongue with is saliva) and say "ephphatha's" then life will be transformed for us. Our understanding and love will increase between us and our friends, and between us and our heavenly Father, we shall become 'responding members' of God's family. People, seeing the change wrought in us and the miracle which has been performed, will say of Jesus as they did in Palestine of old: "*He has done everything well,*" they said. "*He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.*" Mark 7:37

### **3. Facing Tensions - W M R Woofenden, March 1984**

*"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."* Matthew 10:34-36

This is a text which does not seem to embody what we expect of Christ, it is one of the sayings which many followers of the Lord find difficult to reconcile with their pattern of thought about Jesus and His teachings. It does not seem consistent with what we know of His wonderful love which He so freely bestows. The nature of love is to unite rather than to create division. The beautiful treatise on love found in the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians reads in part "*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*"

If all this is so, how could it be that the Lord of love should come not to send peace but a sword? How could it be that a result of His coming should be to break and divide the family circle, the very place where love is the binding element? In fact, this is contradicted by many other passages which quote the Lord's words? Familiar sayings from the sermon on the mount come to mind , "turning the other cheek", or "going the second mile", and Jesus certainly seemed to confound this strange saying by His deeds, for instance at the time of His betrayal in the garden of gethsemane, He said to Peter, "*Put your sword back in its place,*" Jesus said to him, "*for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.*" Matt 26:52

However there must be a way out of this dilemma, for a basic tenet of our faith is that we accept all the teachings of Jesus as true. Probably the most usual way of defending the literal truth of the saying that Jesus came 'not to send peace but a sword' is to call attention to the situation back in the days when Christ walked the earth The gospels tell us that as He went around teaching and healing Jesus did arouse enormous

resistance. Both His mission and His methods were grossly misunderstood; it took real courage to give Him full allegiance in those days and many who did follow Him actually were forced to sever family ties.

Peter said at one time "*We have left everything to follow you!*" Matt 19:27 the Lord, in His reply indicated that even despite such hardships it would be well worth the sacrifice to those who did decide to follow Him.

However in sharp contrast to this is the case recorded of the man who said, "*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*" Luke 9:59. An important fact we need to know here is that in those days burials took place the same day a person died and therefore this man's father must still have been alive, so what he was really saying was that although he wanted to be a follower of the Lord, he was not willing to make the sacrifice of severing the family ties so long as his father was alive. Perhaps it was such an attitude of mind as this which the Lord had in mind when He spoke the words of our text. For in the final analysis these words, "*not peace, but a sword,*" must have been spoken not in defiance, but in sorrow.

Surely the Lord was sensitive to the sense of loss of His followers. He saw the tragedy of it, but He also saw that it was unavoidable. Was He not estranged himself from His own mother and brethren and friends? Mark 3:21; John 7:5.

Modern psychology recognizes the principle involved. Conflict and tension are recognized as normal accompaniments of group life, misunderstandings, tensions of various sorts and degrees, are a normal part of life. Psychologists agree that even among those who love one another dearly, a constant basis of tension is necessary for the relationship even to exist, it is for this reason that marriage and friendship always involve a process of give and take. Our response to this should be not to live in the false hope of someday being free of all tensions but rather to learn how to keep the tensions at a healthy level.

Unhealthy tensions are those which are tinged by lack of proper perspective, by lack of sufficient tolerance and patience and trust, usually on both sides. What complicates the problem still further is that in the relationships we have which are closest and therefore potentially most rewarding, it is never easy for us to know with certainty the true nature of our own feelings. Quite often the harder we try to express our genuine feelings the clumsier we become or the more self-conscious. This sometimes develops into a tragic pattern.

We all have either seen or participated in relationships; sometimes it will be between husband and wife, sometimes between friends, in which each falls into the habit of letting the other take their affection and appreciation for granted, until in time, both may wonder whether any love exists at all. This unhealthy tension may well be a factor at any time problems or misunderstandings arise, often by trying to ignore or bypass the tension, instead of its simply going away as we hoped it would, it may suddenly become unhealthy.

Then how can we get to know ourselves well enough so that in all our interpersonal relationships we may avoid falling into either the net of indifference or of misunderstanding? Or worse, of self-righteousness? How may we condition our minds so that we may not fall into the error of always assuming that the way we act, or fail to act, toward others in tense situations is the Christian way, with the Lord on our side, as distinguished from the response of the other person or persons?

First, we need to be aware of the truth of the psychological principle cited earlier: that conflict and tensions are inevitable and universal in a moral and spiritual order of life

Tensions not only do exist, but they need to exist, not only in our families but in all our human relations. We should also expect to find them within our own makeups as individuals. The person without inner tensions is a spiritual jellyfish.

Conflicts and tensions in themselves are not bad nor are they intrinsically unhealthy, it is only as we handle them clumsily or badly that they become bad or unhealthy, but at all times they are a necessary part of life and growth.

As we face this fact, the first thing we can do is to make our own peace with it. Not by throwing up our hands and resigning ourselves to intolerable conditions nor, by concluding that life is a perpetual battleground that

requires constant fighting for self-preservation. But somewhere in the middle ground we need to reconcile ourselves to the vital role of tensions in our spiritual development. Each has to find their own way.

There is a principle found in our New Church teachings which can and should be applied to every life problem. The principle is that every conflict, every misunderstanding, every case of unhealthy tension is permitted by the Lord to serve a definite purpose; and therefore every painful situation contains within it the seed of a possible blessing,

Please note that it is not God's will that we experience unhealthy tensions He merely tolerates them so as not to interfere with our free will, but He does not leave it at that; He plants in the uncomfortable circumstances an opportunity, equally for all parties involved, to grow in wisdom and in stature if we will only respond lovingly and wisely.

Our task in such situations is to put self aside as best we can, and as objectively as possible, seek the blessing which lies hidden in the particular tension confronting us. Nine times out of ten, to get to the root of the matter quickly, we will do well to look in before we start to look out, each one of us needs to be able to say "unless I can win the victory over self-love in my own soul, it is useless for me to seek for lasting peace elsewhere," it is to this facet of life that the message inherent in our text points,

When our Lord says, "*I did not come to bring peace, but a sword,*" He is telling us that even among His followers, however devout, to be human is to have tensions. This is the price we must pay if we are to grow into the spiritual beings the Lord wants us to be. He comes to us in the pages of His word as the standard of what human life can be when it is lived in a truly human way. He comes to us in every truth we know concerning our relationship to him and our neighbour. He comes to us in our every good impulse and desire to live a better life, He comes to us by giving Himself to us, continually yearning to give us enlightenment and strength by His presence in our minds and hearts.

Just as truly as He said that His peace is the final goal, the Lord also said "*I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*". Understood properly, this text is applicable to young and old alike. Young people who learn its significance can go forth into life with the proper attitude towards tensions, being aware of the opportunities they present, instead of being baffled or defeated by them, all of us can see tensions as a challenge. A challenge to measure our words, desires, ideals and deeds by the standard of the Lord's Divine humanity. We can, if we will, see in every difficulty, misunderstanding, disagreement or tension an opportunity to grow more Christlike, an opportunity to gain greater control over our hereditary dispositions, and an opportunity to seek above our own wishes the spiritual good of those around us.

The same principle applies to the tensions in the world at large, our teachings solemnly tell us that this age in which we live is the beginning of a new era. The old era, in which many social inequalities and injustices and international greed were accepted as a part of the way of life, is passing. Together we face the possibility of a new day, even though present world tensions indicate that it will not be easy to bring about. But even now, efforts unthought of a few years ago are being put forth, in such movements as the World Health Organization, Save the Children Federation and many, many others. Such creative steps are founded on the belief that no matter how much at odds the east and west seem to be on certain points, there are some underlying goals which both sides desperately want. And in time the net result may well be to illustrate that many of the supposed differences in philosophy should more accurately be defined as differences in temperament, opening the way to steps which will both resolve the unhealthy tensions and preserve the dignity of both sides.

Then let us resolve to make the best possible use of all our tensions, both within and without. To do this we must rule out indifference, lack of concern, or irresponsible laxity. We must, as the apostle says, "*put on the full armour of God, ... Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*" Eph. 6:13.

This is not simply that we may preserve our own souls, but that through our full commitment to the Lord He may play our part in bringing the new day into being.

#### **4. The Role of Women in the Resurrection Scene - Erwin Reddekopp April 1984**

The title suggests that women played a major role in the events of the resurrection scene. As we examine the gospel record of the Lord's trial and crucifixion, we note that even before the entombing a special point is made of the fact that "*Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs*" Matt 27:55

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph were there. We read in Luke 23:27 that as Jesus was led to His crucifixion "*A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."*"

When His body was being placed in the tomb, we read that, "*The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes.*" Luke 23:55

On this day of resurrection, the first people at the tomb are women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. It is they who first discovered that, following an earthquake, an angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the opening of the tomb and sat upon it. It is the women who, upon instruction from the angels, who are in the tomb, Luke 24, run to bring the message to the disciples. From all these references we conclude that there is a special significance in the emphasis placed on the role of women in the resurrection scene. This is our theme today.

First we would note that our hearts or emotions are most deeply affected by the events of the trial and crucifixion, and especially the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, we take for granted the expression; 'Happy Easter'. It is the emotions that are affected to produce happiness. We do not know how to explain it. We just are happy! We even want to express the feelings of the day by the way we dress and by our festivities with family and friends. It is a joyous day, and it is appropriate that we share our feelings of joy with others. The women at the scene, and their announcement to the disciples, have this special significance for us. It is a time for rejoicing, rather than for a time of thought and reflection. That can come later. Swedenborg states will (affections) comes first, and leads to understanding. But the understanding must still remain apart, withdrawing itself from the 'feelings', and so be elevated into the realm of spiritual values and principles.

Thus we see one significance of the role of women in the Easter scene. While playing a practical use the embalming etc, they picture the fact that there is a time when love, not truth, must take the leading part in a life that is going to be changed. We may look back and see this in our own lives and also see it in the great changes that have taken place for the better in human society. The love may not always have been well-guided, but without that driving force, change could not have taken place.

A great change was taking place, both in the spiritual world and in the natural, at the time that the Lord was crucified and when He arose and ascended to Heaven, uniting His humanity with the divinity of which it was begotten. A new church was coming into being, the Christian church, this was a new dispensation. The old church, represented by the daughters of Jerusalem, was coming to its end. From that time on, the church as a spiritual movement in the lives of all people, would be more effective. Our Lord Jesus Christ would be, even as He promised, immediately present. This was accomplished by His assuming a human becoming a man, right here with us. This human was glorified and made Divine.

Now He is a personal God to all who seek Him and ask His help and strength. Yet He is with all, even the wicked who by their deeds mould deny Him. All this and much more, is signified by the church renewed and

revitalized in the lives of people. For this reason the women, who represent the church, figured so largely in the scenes before and after the resurrection,

But even this renewed church, built on the remains of the former; even as the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt several times, would come to its end, when a new and crowning church would take its place. That is the new Jerusalem spoken of in the book of Revelation. Jesus before His ascension, alluded to this when He said to the disciples, "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Not the end of the world, as in the KJV.

What is ever outstanding in the message of Easter is the teaching of life Eternal. Jesus revealed before the eyes of those people who loved Him and believed in Him that life does not end with the death of the physical body. While we are taught in the gospels, that the Lord arose from the sepulchre with His whole body, glorified - made Divine, we, unlike Jesus leave our physical bodies behind and awaken in the spiritual world completely intact as spiritual beings.

Life further on, that is, life beyond the physical experience of dying, is real and near and vital. The spiritual world; and its inhabitants is all around us. Spiritually we are in tune with that world, and many times we feel it. But physically we are in touch only with what is physical. The women who came early to the tomb of Jesus saw the stone pulled away and an angel sitting on it, the guards for fear "*became like dead men.*" Matt 28:4, so they didn't hear what transpired. It was to the women that the angel spoke, saying, "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*" Matt 28:5.

This was an experience of the nearness of the spiritual world and of the opening of the spiritual awareness of the women. They could believe, they could accept this vital lesson for what it was and what it could mean to others. While there could have been good men, as later, who would accept this presentation of a great truth, it needed at this time to be given to the women. This was because of their representation of the feeling of emotional side of human personality. We often say in trying to get across a great principle, "we must appeal to the emotions," later the understanding can take over.

The role of women in the resurrection scenes reveals to us the need and value of allowing our feeling to be affected by the inflowing, of the Lord's infinite love, and of the sure conviction that He is alive and active in our lives. Our natural faculties deceive us when they witness the death of a loved one and tell us this is the end, but it isn't. Even when Jesus was crucified and His enemies thought they had Him out of the way, He was more evident in His resurrection than before. Our hearts know this, and our understanding can be led to accept this.

Then comes the business of living according to what He taught and exemplified. This is part of the miracle of the Easter message, and it is the women who first proclaimed the message, for the angel said to them "*go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you.*" Matt 28:7

*"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."* Matthew 28:5

## **Resurrection**

It is the resurrection day again! There is joy upon the hills and gladness in the fields, wherever we listen, there comes the songs of the blossoms, the chime of birds and stream. Wherever we look, we behold the miracle of life new risen. The green tide rolls from the south, pressing on over the hills and running into the valleys, bringing hope to winter bound souls,

Even thus the word of God runs swiftly upon the earth, searching our hearts, as the soft spring rain seeks the roots shut in the dark mould, and awakens in them the impulse to rise and share in the glory of leaf and flower. Sunshine and song.

So may the word of life awaken in us an irresistible desire to think more deeply, feel more sincerely, love more generously and be more worthy of our spiritual heritage!

This is the fairest of all resurrections " the rising in our souls of a nobler self. Now is the moment for us to rise out of the darkness of our selfish lives and, quickened by his love new risen in our hearts, go forth in his steps with healing in our hands for the wounds of the world,

Helen Keller.

### **Reading from Swedenborg, The Divine Human**

Step by step he took off the human nature he had taken on from his mother and put on a human nature from what was divine within him, which is the divine human nature and the Son of God.

It is generally known that the Lord was divine and human, divine because of Jehovah the Father and human because of the Virgin Mary. That is why he was God and a human being and therefore had a divine essence and a human outward nature, the divine essence from his Father and the human nature from his mother. This meant that he was equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, but less than the Father with respect to his humanity. It also meant that, as we are taught by the so-called Athanasian statement of faith, this human nature from his mother was not changed into or mixed with a divine essence, since a human nature cannot be changed into or mixed with a divine essence.

Because the Lord's human nature was glorified—that is, made divine—on the third day after his death he rose again with his whole body, which is not true of any human being, since we rise again with our spirit only and not with our body.

So that we should know this, and so that no one should doubt that the Lord rose again with his whole body, he not only said so through the angels who were in the tomb but also showed himself to the disciples in his human form with his body, saying to them when they thought they were seeing a spirit,

*"See my hands and my feet—that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* Luke 24:39-40; John 20:20

*And again, Jesus said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach out your hand and put it into my side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Then Thomas said, "My Lord and my God."* John 20:27-28

To make it even clearer that he was not a spirit but a person, he said to the disciples, *"Have you any food here?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb, and he took it and ate in their presence.* Luke 24:41-43

Since his body was no longer material but had become divine substance, he came to the disciples when the doors were closed (John 20:19,26) and disappeared after they had seen him. Luke 24:31

Once the Lord was in this state, he was carried up and sat down at the right hand of God, for it says in Luke, *"It happened that, while Jesus blessed his disciples, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven.* Luke 24:51 and in Mark, *After he had spoken to them, he was carried up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.* Mark 16:19

Sitting down at the right hand of God means gaining divine omnipotence. . Doctrine of the Lord 29, by E Swedenborg

## 5. The Man Who Had to Know - Ian Arnold, May 1984

In terms of intellectual stature and original, creative thinking, he has been compared to Leonardo da Vinci, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of him as "a colossal soul".

His religious writings are known to have influenced the earliest anti-slavery movements, and teaching in those same writings was what largely inspired the establishment of infant education in Germany and England in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Books by him, once in the possession of George Washington, are now preserved in the Athenaeum library, Boston, USA, and the list of those who acknowledged an indebtedness to him includes Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Butler Yeats, Sir Isaac Pitman, Benjamin Franklin, Carl Gustav Jung and more recently Dr. Helen Keller.

At the time of the 250th anniversary celebrations in 1938 of his birth, the Boston "Sun" newspaper spoke, in an editorial of his "pioneering and creative intelligence, a restless, germinal, well-nigh universal mind that took all of earth's secrets, and at length, Heaven's for its province":

He was Emanuel Swedenborg, the man who had to know.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm in 1688. His father, a Lutheran clergyman, was at the time a military chaplain there, and he later became bishop of Skara. His mother was a member of a wealthy Swedish mining family. The family name at this point was in fact 'Swedberg'. The name 'Swedenborg' was assumed in 1719 when the family was ennobled.

Swedenborg's education largely took place at the university of Uppsala from which he graduated in 1709, at the age of 21, with a masters degree in moral philosophy. As was the custom of the times he left Sweden the following year in 1710 to go abroad both to further his education, and to further his great interest in mathematics and science. In London he made the acquaintance of some of the great men in the scientific world including the astronomer Flamsteed. He studied Newton 'daily', he wrote and took the opportunity to purchase scientific instruments not available in Sweden. He deliberately changed his lodgings frequently choosing to stay with craftsmen from whom he learned such arts as book-binding, watch-making, cabinet-making, and mathematical instrument making.

He entered the competition announced by the royal society to determine longitude with the help of the moon as being the means to make navigation at sea safer. On his way back to Sweden he studied in Paris and in Holland, noting the jealousy between English and continental scholarships, and learning what he could of latest thinking and discoveries.

Inspired and stimulated by all that he had learned and discovered during his 4 years abroad, Swedenborg returned to Sweden in 1714 his mind brim full of new ideas and determined to apply himself to many of the questions then exercising thinking minds. Two years later in 1716 he edited and published Sweden's first scientific journal, *Daedalus Hyperborea*, in which, over 6 issues, he set out some of his amazing inventions. Swedenborg, for instance, looked at the question of flight and his design for a flying machine was to be later described by the Royal Aeronautical society in England as "the first rational design for a flying machine of the airplane type"

Whilst *Daedalus hyperboreus* is said to have caused Swedenborg trouble and some financial worry it came to the attention of the then Swedish King, Charles xii, who offered Swedenborg a position on the prestigious Royal Board of Mines. Swedenborg seems to have henceforth thrown himself vigorously into his work, and his scientific papers and larger books on mineralogy, published by him over the next few years, established his European reputation.

People looking back on Swedenborg's life rightly detect its division into three main phases. There was the period when his great interests were the natural or physical sciences. In the 1730s, and by then well into his forties, Swedenborg became much more philosophic and his thinking focused on some of life's deepest

questions. In addition, he was concerned at what were seen to be the atheistic consequences, it was believed, that thinking based on Renee Descartes's philosophy would inevitably lead to. In a way that had never been done before Descartes postulated the material world as "utterly different from psychical reality in which, thought rules. And between these two worlds there was no real communication". (Inge Jonsson, p 14). He argued for the setting free of all subjects and people's thinking from the dogmas of the church and from constant reference to the scholastics. He urged the importance of making one's own deductions and forming independent conclusions. People are to think for themselves said Descartes.

Whilst not opposing his basic premise, some saw in the thinking of Descartes the seeds of scepticism and disbelief, which unquestionably and subsequently, flourished. And Swedenborg was one of these. And to stem the tide of scepticism and disbelief Swedenborg sought to demonstrate religious truth and such things as the existence of the soul by arguments and reasonings taken from the human body. With the benefit of hindsight we are able to say that such an attempt was doomed to failure. But that is not how Swedenborg saw it. It is interesting that in the preface of his book, "the Kingdom of the Soul", a book bringing together studies on the human body, and deductions based on those studies, Swedenborg wrote:

"these pages of mine are written with a view to those who never believe anything but what they can receive with the understanding. Such persons are inclined to deny the existence of anything sublimer than themselves, like the soul. Such things as immortality and Heaven they deny as empty phrases and fables. They worship nature, the world and themselves; they compare themselves to brutes and believe that their souls exhale and evaporate, and thus they rush fearlessly into wickedness..... For those persons only, I am anxious, and to them I dedicate my work".

"The Kingdom of the Soul" was published in 1744. Some of the reviews were scathing. Swedenborg's great hope had been to throw light on the existence of the soul. Even before the reviews appeared he had decided to suspend publication of any more of his anatomical series. In putting them aside he wrote: "it will be a satisfaction to me if my labours are of some service to the anatomical and medical world, but a still greater satisfaction to me if I afford any light towards the investigation of the soul. (see Epic, p.173).

We repeat the point that Swedenborg abandoned the publication of his anatomical studies not because of critical reviews, but because he knew he had come to the end of the road as far as the process of analysis could take him. He realised that however clear and logical a set of arguments maybe to one person, they would not necessarily convince another or even have the slightest effect on that other. And although he had probed the limits of human knowledge to postulate the existence of the soul, and for all the deductions he brought forward, rational as these were, yet he had not yet arrived at the soul or actually come upon it. There was as he saw, a limit beyond which human reasoning and the processes of deduction could not go. And it is at this point that we come to the third phase of his life.

E. Swedenborg was to come into further knowledge of the soul and unlock the many mysteries which surrounded it, then that knowledge, he slowly began to appreciate, would come from within would come as something which flowed into him from above. It would come in the form of intuition. There would have to be an inner guidance - an inner guidance, or intuition, such as everyone of us relies on when no other way is open or available to us.

Although he never became a recluse and continued for many years his membership of the upper house of the Swedish Parliament, the house of nobles, Swedenborg abandoned his studies of the physical sciences in the early 1740s and resigned his seat on the Royal Board of Mines. His life underwent fundamental changes as he began a probing of the inner world of the spirit into full consciousness of which, he claimed he was admitted. And as extraordinary as the claim first sounds to our ears, he states that for the last 27 years of his life, from 1745 until his death in London in 1772 he was, to all intents and purposes, a citizen of both worlds. This natural or physical world of which we are all conscious and the spiritual world, or world of the spirit, into complete consciousness of which we shall enter when we die.

As a philosopher trying to demonstrate the existence of the things of the spirit, frustrated and saddened as he must have been, Swedenborg was brought to see that the answers he searched for and the principles he tried to discover but couldn't, would need to be revealed from above and from within. He was also brought to see that it would be his particular mission and his particular responsibility to serve as an instrument through whom these answers and principles could be revealed, whereas, for example, the Bible had been previously used and referred to as a medical, geological and history text book, now it would be shown that it was not given for any of these purposes. Rather it is a text book about our spiritual life and the journey we make from earth to Heaven. Swedenborg wrote of the revelation of an internal or spiritual meaning within the word of God; a revelation that is given through him. Here in page after page, and chapter after chapter, he dwells on the reality of the spiritual world. One of the smaller of the books written during this third phase of his life dwells on the relationship which actually exists between this world of matter, and the world of spirit. The profoundest questions about the existence of God, the creation of the world and the Divine Government of the world, are all, discussed in one or other of the approximately thirty volumes which comprise Swedenborg's religious writings. He saw these things written by himself, as others who have come to embrace those teachings do, as a God given response capable of satisfying the questioning and the probing of man in full possession as he now is of his rational and critical faculties.

We live in a world where even today the possibility of another spirit world, or a transcendental plane of existence is greeted with considerable scepticism or even outright denial. Certainly this is so where western people are concerned. Other peoples in other cultures are much more receptive to such a concept, or idea than we are.

Happily this is changing. The change may not be as yet on a very great scale, but it is there. And it has been brought about in large measure as the result of research into near death experiences such as we have them tabulated in Dr. Raymond Moody's best-selling paper back, published in 1975, "Life after Life". Remarkably a number of universities in America have established chairs to further research this phenomenon. At the same time the world is taking greater notice of psychic power.

There has always been a belief with people that there is survival after death. However childish it has been regarded, however patronisingly the more learned and sophisticated have looked upon it, it has always been there. Now medical doctors and scientific researchers are involved with the study of experiences of people who, to all intents and purposes are "dead", and have come back to tell the story. And amazingly, what they say is almost always borne out by the accounts of others who have had similar experiences. The thing is that it has happened too many times now to be denied. Tens of thousands of people who have been involved in near death. Experiences have been interviewed. And what they say has convinced the scientific world that there is something in all of this. Perhaps after all, there is another world.

It has been said of Swedenborg's book "Heaven and Hell" published in 1758, that it is "the most comprehensive description of the life after death ever given to mankind". The important thing is that he writes of it as a world to which we are destined by God from the beginning. It is the soul's true home. By comparison our life in this world is for training and preparation purposes only. From love and desiring our happiness, God created everyone to live in Heaven to eternity. But to be in Heaven and to be happy there, we ourselves must have the feeling of having chosen to be there. And it is for this reason that we are born into this world so that we might make just such a choice and form such a character that would enable us to be happy there.

Swedenborg wrote, in reality man is a spirit clothed with a physical body for the duration of our life here. He explains the spiritual world is all around us. It is another dimension of consciousness. We are already unconsciously, and throughout our life here, in touch with it. At death, being the point at which we withdraw from consciousness of this world, we awaken to consciousness of the spiritual world. And so complete and whole 'shall we find ourselves there, and discover life there to be, that it will be difficult for us to accept that we have died.

Here are some of the things Swedenborg wrote on the subject;

When someone's body can no longer perform its functions in the natural world in response to the thoughts and affections of its spirit, then we say that the individual has died. The person, though, has not died at all. We are only separated from the physical nature that was useful to us in the world. The essential person is actually still alive. I say that the essential person is still alive because we are not people because of our bodies but because of our spirits. After all, it is the spirit within us that thinks, and thought and affection together make us the people we are. We can see, then, that when we die we simply move from one world into another. Heaven and Hell 445.

A person's spirit is seen in the next life within a human form, exactly as that person was seen in the world. The person is also endowed with the powers of sight, hearing, speech, and feeling, as he was in the world, and possesses the full ability to think, will, and act, as he did in the world. In short, he is a human being in every single respect except that he no longer has the coarse body which clothed him in the world. This he leaves behind when he dies and never takes it up again. Arcana Coelestia or Heavenly Secrets 10594.

There is always the danger that Swedenborg will be seen only in spiritist terms or of him being associated with those kinds of practices. Spiritists have been known to "claim" Swedenborg as one of their "own" - which he is not. The approach taken in his writings is so much grander and wider than that. He asks us to see the whole of our lives against the background of the spiritual world from which we are continually being influenced and into which we pass when we die.

Deeply grateful for what this opening up of the life after death had meant to her, the late Dr Helen Keller, who we mentioned earlier, wrote:

"Swedenborg's revelations take from every grave its fear. Before he was raised up into heaven, the future life was, for most "Christians", full of terrors. It was a disputed question whether life or death brought greater opportunity whether death was the end of life or the door to another existence. Now we are positive that the larger, nobler life is beyond the grave. The child dying in their mother's arms was an intolerable thought. Now we know of the sweet, unclouded childhood which awaits them, the bright abodes where angels will teach them to speak, think creative thoughts and do the work for which they are best fitted, where they will grow up in beauty and go forth to deeds and adventures mightier than were ever beheld on earth. We know now that every faithful love which has been thwarted here has tenfold greater joy in store for it on the other side. Heaven and hell have become facts in our deeper consciousness about which there can be no dispute. We have an intuitive certainty of them - not a halting knowledge inferred from arguments or reasons which we can accept or reject as we choose. Only such face-to-face knowledge gives reality to things, since it springs from life, and Swedenborg's living testimony will shed a low but ever increasing light upon the dark "hinterland" of our soul experience, and reinforce our groping efforts with the daring of immortal purpose". My Religion p. 85 and 86).

Reference was also made earlier to the 250th anniversary celebrations in 1938 of Swedenborg's birth. Here are words quoted from an American newspaper editorial of that time:

"with utter calm of reason, Swedenborg studied the material world, and then, with rare intuition, he considered man's spiritual nature and he offered guidance and encouragement to reconcile and unify all conflicting sources of power". the Transcript, Boston

## 6. A New Era - Erwin Redekopp, June 1984

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Rev 21:1-2*

The world at large little realizes the second coming of the Lord is already an accomplished fact and that it is also a continuous spiritual event. It is also generally unknown that a new church has been Instituted by the Lord, which is the New Jerusalem This church is the crown of all churches. It is in reality a spiritual dispensation permeating the spiritual lives of all people who believe in God and genuinely try to live a good life in acceptance with the truth they accept as the guide for heavenly living,

People who know and acknowledge the truths found in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg generally accept the statement he made as follows "after this work was finished, the Lord called together His twelve disciples who had followed Him in the world; the next day He sent them forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose Kingdom shall be for ages and ages". True Christian Religion. This took place on June 29th 1770. Each year in June we think about this historic event, seeing it as a turning point in the spiritual life of all people for ages to come. At that time, according to Swedenborg, the Lord instituted a new church on earth and in the Heavens, known as the New Jerusalem, that Holy City seen in vision by John, the revelator.

The beginning of the New Church in this world and the spiritual world, ushered in an entirely new age of freedom and rationality in matters of the spirit, and also in matters of earthly social concerns. The New Church as Swedenborg describes it, is with all people who acknowledge God and live the good life accordingly therefore those who make it up are known to the Lord alone,

We are taught about the churches that have existed since the beginning of time. There have been four other churches or great spiritual eras preceding the New Church, they are the Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, represented by Noah and his family, the Israelitish church, ushered in with the history of Abraham and finally the Christian Church, which began with the birth of Jesus the Christ. The New Church, represented by the New Jerusalem, is the Christian Church renewed and revitalized. All are members of it who believe in God and genuinely try to live a good life in accordance with the truth they accept as the guide for heavenly living,

We are all part of the spiritual world and have been ever since we were born. Therefore, what happened in the spiritual world would in time have its effect in this world and on all those who would live here hereafter. Of course, for those who have never had the opportunity of knowing these revelations about the nature of the spiritual world, it may be difficult to grasp the practical significance of these statements, which may at first sound far-fetched, but that should not deter us from considering them in the light of reason and common sense.

We are essentially spiritual beings and as such we have a constant communication with the spiritual world, even though for the most part we are not aware of it. Therefore what transpires in the spiritual world must have its on-going effect here in this life, where it is reflected and embodied. That is, all things of this world and nature correspond to the spiritual world and to the principles of love and wisdom which originate in God.

Our good Lord and creator has provided from earliest times some form of a church, by means of which He could be present with His earthly children. Each of the churches in its time served the use for which it was instituted, namely to lead mankind towards regeneration, spiritual growth; towards a heavenly oriented character and disposition. When one particular church could no longer serve that use, another would take its place. This spiritual process has gone on through the ages up until the first Christian church was established. It too, served its glorious use, but its demise was prophesized in Daniel, and also in Matthew's gospel which speaks of the tribulation of those days, "*Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken when the sun shall be darkened; the moon shall not give its light and the stars shall fall from heaven, then shall appear the sign of the son of man,*" Matt 24:29.

Paraphrased, this speaks of that time which people have traditionally thought of as the "end of the world" and the "second coming of Christ", what it does mean; however, in its spiritual sense, is the very thing our theme is all about. It speaks of "the end of the age", not the end of the world, the ending of one spiritual

dispensation and then beginning of another. In this new age, this new church, love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour, again become the ruling principles of the church. Heavenly knowledges, like so many stars, are again brought to light so that the rational mind can accept "truth in freedom" this is the new age. This is the age of the second coming of the Lord.

What outward signs should there be of this new age? How should it have been inaugurated? Do things have their beginnings in the natural world; or in the spiritual world? Of course they begin as spiritual reality we have inner or spiritual needs, but we realize these by our outer actions. We need a home for our family, so we plan, make blueprints and build. We have a house and home in the natural world in answer to our needs and desires on the level of the spirit. Thus the beginning of a new church, the new Jerusalem and the second coming of the Lord was first conceived and instituted by the Lord in the spiritual world. This knowledge was granted to Swedenborg to share with all posterity.

What have we seen in this world as evidence of this new age, and as the result of a new church in the lives of people? Well, in most respects, there seems to have been little change outwardly. Man, in his time frame, would not necessarily be aware of it. "The state of the world from now on will be very much the same as it has been up to the present. This is because the immense change that has taken place in the spiritual world does not impose any change on the earthly world with respect to its outward form. So the business of civil life will go on afterward as it did before; there will be times of peace, and treaties, and wars as there were before; and other things characteristic of communities on both a large and a small scale will continue.". Swedenborg The Last Judgement 73.

So much for that statement about the outer aspects of the world in which people live and have their relationships, with one another. But look at these deeper changes as a result of the new age the new freedom and the new rationality. At the gathering in London in 1970 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the spiritual events which took place on the 19th June, 1770, it was written by Richard Tafel snr, "with the second coming, man's mental and emotional environment was quickened, his mind stirred by a new idealism, his sympathies and concerns broadened and deepened, with the Bible being set forth in a new light, a fresh burst of truth broke in upon him in all areas of his thinking. He acquired a heightened sense of his dignity and worth as an individual. He experienced a freeing of his spirit. The first area to feel this new spirit was the field of international politics. In the American colonies amazing doctrines of the "rights of man" were being preached from the pulpit and platform alike. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Where did such ideas come from? Modern science, as we know it, was born; the industrial revolution launched; and the world to which we belong began to take shape. This is our world; its spirit is ours. We too, respond to the challenge of the new and to the daring of change, accepting only the authority of truth and freedom. We have made more advances in the last fifty years than in all the preceding twelve hundred years.

How can we reconcile this newness, this expression of freedom and rationality and this second coming of the Lord with the turmoil, the trauma, the violence and seeming lack of concern for human life that are so much a part of society in which we live today? There is no easy answer. But this we can say, no significant change comes about without tensions and human conflicts. Regeneration likewise does not come about except through inner conflicts, permitted by our good Lord that we might overcome in His strength. He said "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you."

#### **Reading from Swedenborg's The Lord's Second Coming:**

Now is the Lord's second coming; and a new church is to be instituted. The second coming of the Lord is not a coming in person, but in the Word (Bible); which is from Him and is Himself. We read in many places that the Lord will come in the "clouds of heaven". The "clouds of heaven" mean the word in its natural sense, and "glory", the Word in its spiritual sense; and "power", the Lord's power by means of the Word. So the Lord is now to appear in the Word.

He is not to appear in person because; since His ascension into Heaven, He is in the glorified humanity, in which He cannot appear to any man, unless He first opens the eyes of His spirit. Therefore it is vain to believe that the Lord will appear in a cloud of heaven in person, but He will appear in the Word, which is from Him, and so is Himself. Swedenborg (collated)

## 7. Every Christian a Saint - Edwin Capon, July 1984

Do you believe in saints? The average protestant would answer that question with a no, probably with a resounding no. Nevertheless they may well have stated rather positively on more than one occasion, "I am no saint," which makes no sense if one does not believe in saints.,

Saints; the term is not just a Roman Catholic and Anglican term. It happens that our Bible uses the term a number of times and it seems to have been in common use among the early Christians. Has this term anything to say to twentieth century protestants?

When we say, "I am 'no saint'", we mean that we are not perfect, that we are not possessed of unusual spiritual gifts, we are saying that we are not a lot better than other people are. We probably do not mean that we are rather bad, even if we happen to think we are. We may only mean that we are regular people. We know we are not candidates for canonization. But if a first century Christian were to say, "I am not a saint", their hearers would understand them to be asserting that they were not a Christian. In New Testament times the word 'saint' was simply another name for "Christian". It did not imply that you were superior in virtue and character to other Christians. It meant that you were holy in the original sense of that word, a meaning that went back to Old Testament days.

For the Old Testament, one who was holy, was a saint (the words mean the same), was one set apart and dedicated to God or one who is "set apart for God's possession, use and service." They have this status whether they are fulfilling it or not. They belong to a people specially chosen by God for service, as this passage from Deuteronomy 14:2, indicates: "*for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.*"

Your holiness is a special relationship to God, which you may or may not be living up to or which you may not yet have lived up to, but which nevertheless involves special concern on His part and special obligations on yours. In a sense that makes you fortunate, but at the same time it increases your responsibilities: as God says to the children of Israel through Amos 3:2. "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.*" This expresses a similar principle to one Jesus expressed in these words: "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded,*" Luke 12:48,

In Old Testament times, the Jews were considered to be the saints, and in the early days at least, quite apart from their individual or collective character. Later ethical expectations arose, but did not replace the requirement of Hebrew identity for sainthood. It was only as the infant Christian church began to incorporate gentiles into its fellowship that those not born Jews could expect to be called "saints". This is the assurance Paul is giving to the Christians in a Greek city in Asia Minor, the city of Ephesus. "*you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*" Ephesians 2:19-22

Actually St Paul was a great one for addressing his fellow Christians as saints. The salutations which began several of his letters used the term. For example, Philippians begins with these words: "*Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*", in using this term I am sure there was no intention of flattery upon Paul's part, but rather a reminder of the privileged status of those who had heeded God's call in Christ. In the words of Peter, Paul is addressing "*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a*

*holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light .*" 1 Peter 2:9

Hear the echo of the words of the Lord to the Jews already quoted from Deuteronomy 14:2 "for you are a people holy to the Lord our God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession". To both Israel after the flesh (the jews) and Israel after the spirit (the Christians), God had given a very special status and with it an equally great obligation. But he did not expect that obligation to be carried out perfectly by people all of whom were perfect. And of course they were not. From the Old Testament, we know that the Jews were not. And from Paul's letters, and from the letters to the seven churches in Asia in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, there is no doubt that the fledging Christians were not.

Some people excuse themselves from participation in the fellowship of Christians because of the shortcomings they observe in professing Christians, but it is imperfect Christians who are addressed as saints in the New Testament. As one scholar has written, "saints did not mean for Paul what has come to mean for us. They are not perfect people; they are those who have responded to a call and are going in the right direction . It is part of the gospel message that those who are saints in this sense, ultimately become saints in the other also; but meanwhile they may be very imperfect people, or, as someone else has said, they may be "feeble saints" or "sorry saints".

How was the medieval concept of sainthood developed? It may well have been by a process similar to that which resulted in a double standard in the Catholic church: one standard for the average Christian and another for the clergy, and above all for monks and nuns. It may also have resulted in part from the fact that in a society almost completely Christian, and spreading across many kingdoms and principalities, the sense of being set apart by and for Christ was hard to maintain. In any case a saint came to be one of unusual piety and perfection whose relics worked miracles and whose voice in Heaven was efficacious, by the year 900 a religious festival known as all Saints Day came to be celebrated on November 1st. "in medieval England the festival was known as all hallows, from which we get Halloween, the eve before all hallows. Halloween is associated in countries where Celtic influence is strong, with age old customs peculiar to that night; bobbing for apples, for example, is known to date from the Middle Ages. These pagan survivals of Halloween probably represent old Celtic practices associated with November 1st, the beginning of winter."

The example of the latter kind of saint, the saint of unusual spiritual attainments, has surely had a beneficial effect on many lives over the centuries. It is helpful, even inspiring, to know what the human spirit infilled with the spirit of God is capable of. We have all too many examples of the depths to which human beings can descend. There may be more encouragement for most of us in the lives of lesser saints, men and women more like us with whom we may more easily identify.

In part, this may be for reasons implicitly in this comment of George Orwell: "many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probably that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings." It may be in part because the saints we think of as saints are so far ahead of us on the road that we cannot imagine that they ever struggled at the point where we ourselves now are. In any case I like to remember some of the lesser saints I have known. Men and women of simple faith who have fought the good fight in their small corner of God's world and have shed a light which has illumined some brief stretch of the way.

### **Death and Life - reading from Swedenborg**

Angels have no knowledge at all of death or of sickness and consequently form no mental image of them. Instead they form, when a person reads about sickness and death, an idea of the continuation of life, and an idea of resurrection. The reason they do this is that when a person dies he casts off solely what has served him for use in the world and enters into the life his spirit has led. This is the idea that comes to angels' minds when a person reads about 'dying' and 'being sick'. An idea of regeneration likewise comes to mind, since

regeneration is resurrection to life. For at first the person was spiritually dead; but once he has been regenerated he is made alive and 'a son of the resurrection.'

The person who, while living in the body, is desirous of heaven thinks of death and of sickness previous to it as nothing else than resurrection to life. For when he thinks about heaven he detaches himself from thought of the body, especially when he is sick and approaching death. From this it is evident that a spiritual idea of death of the body is an idea of newness of life. Arcana Caelestia 6221.

## 8. God is Really Here - Robert Kirven, August 1984

"God alone, the Lord, is love itself, because He is life itself. Both we on earth and angels are life-receivers. The Lord, who is the God of the universe, is uncreated and infinite, while we and angels are created and finite. Since the Lord is uncreated and infinite, He is that essential reality that is called Jehovah and is life itself or life in itself. No one can be created directly from the Uncreated, the Infinite, from Reality itself and Life itself, because what is divine is one and undivided. We must be created out of things created and finite, things so formed that something divine can dwell within. Since we and angels are of this nature, we are life-receivers. So if we let ourselves be misled in thought so badly that we think we are not life-receivers but are actually life, there is no way to keep us from thinking that we are God."

Our sense that we are life and our consequent belief that we are life rests on an illusion: in an instrumental cause, the presence of its principal cause is only felt as something identical to itself. The Lord Himself teaches that He is life in itself in John: "As the Father has life in Himself, so too He has granted the Son to have life in himself" 5:26 and again in John 11:25, 14:6. He teaches that He is life itself. Since life and love are one and the same, as we can see from the first two sections above, it follows that the Lord, being life itself, is love itself." Swedenborg's Divine Love and Wisdom, 4.

How often have you heard the assertion that God is present with you all the time, beside you in the car as you drive to work, by your bed when you are falling asleep, with you when you are explaining something to your friend or talking with the plumber? It is said so often, and challenged so seldom.

But we know the words more than we know the fact. We do not disbelieve the words, but we put them in a special category; they are words that do not mean what they say in the same way that other words mean what they say. If you are talking with the plumber and the phone rings, and you ask the caller if you can call back, saying; "I can't talk now, the plumber is here," the words are truer in an ordinary common-sense way.

When I say now that God is here, I expect you to regard the words as true, but true in a different way. Do not think, of that difference as being "good or bad, right wrong", but consider whether it is a fact or not. Talk about God and talk about people and things use some of the same words, but the words have different meanings. "God is here" sounds similar, but functions quite differently than statements like; "The plumber is here".

Given that functional difference, how can you understand what I mean, or how can I really mean what I say when I say, "God is here?" How can we think together when the words we think with will not hold still? Frankly, it's difficult; I know, because I have worked very hard at it for a long time with very limited success. However, we need to find a way, because the matter is tremendously important. God is really here, and the sense in which you and I hear those words is perhaps even more important, than whether we believe them or not.

When God said through Isaiah 41:10; "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" He was speaking in the context of his reminder to Israel that, they should not think of their God in the same way that they think of an idol, which they could make. Perhaps the problem arises when we slip into an unconscious assumption

that the different sense or meaning of words about God is that they are somehow less true than words about people or things.

The case is just the opposite: the plumber comes and goes away, but God is really here. God's being here is a necessary precondition of there being a "here" and a "now", since He creates and sustains the space and the time that we mark off by those little words. God does not come here, go there, for he is here, wherever here is.

Unlike people, who can appear to be here when they are really "a thousand miles away", God is really here for each of us all the time, in the fullest possible meaning of presence. Let us look for a moment at the idea of presence - for being present is another word for being here. Swedenborg says not only that God is real and that God is present, but that God is Reality Itself and Presence Itself. For people and things, the Creation, in other words, reality is a quality that distinguishes them from what is imaginary or illusory; and presence is a quality that distinguishes them from people and things absent in space, or past or future in time. But for God, Reality and Presence are not qualities, for He is Reality and Presence: it is Divine Reality and Divine Presence which enables things and people to have these qualities. It is God who makes it possible for anyone and anything to be heard.

Before Swedenborg says in Divine Love and Wisdom that God is Reality Itself and Presence Itself, he makes the statement that God is Reality Itself and Life Itself, and then explains that life and love are the same thing, so God is Reality Itself and Love Itself. Part of what all that means is that God is the intrinsic Reality of Life and Love Itself, and Presence Itself is the reality of Life and Love. The more real, the more fully alive, the more deeply loving we are, the more truly it can be said that we are "here;" and God, who is Reality, Love, Life and Presence, is really here.

When God said through Isaiah, "*do not fear, for I am with you,*" he promised to be "here" for each of us in the "now" of every moment. When Jesus said, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,*" John 1:14,6, He was making the same promise in the more personal reality of the Incarnation. In the still more intimate reality of the Second Coming, we realize that we can be aware of God's presence in the words of his Holy Word. We are never alone, for God is really here.

That is meant to be reassuring, and it is. Whenever we are faced with problems too deep for us to understand, troubles requiring efforts greater than the power of our love, it is comforting to know that God is here.

But it is important, for us to remember, whether we are seeking comfort or not, that God is really here. Not only is it true that we are not alone in our efforts to love and to understand and to act; it also is true that we cannot do any of these things by ourselves alone. Everything we think and do is the Wisdom and Love of God working in us and through us; and if we ever forget that, we are in danger of taking the responsibility and the credit for ourselves and thinking that we are like God. And that thought, we are told right at the beginning of the Bible, is the origin of sin and of all the troubles in our lives and in the world.

But we can forget that thought, and the lonely anguish that accompanies it, because of this one simple fact: God is really here. We are not life, but we can receive life from God. We are not love, but we can be recipients and channels of God's love. We are not wisdom, but we can be recipients and channels of God's wisdom. We are not presence, but we can present God to each other. When we live, we are God's agents. When we love, we are God's strong arm and gentle hand. When we say true things, we are voices of God. We are never alone, for God is really here.

### **Reading from Swedenborg: The Christ God**

We ought to have faith in God the Saviour, Jesus Christ, because that is faith in the visible God in whom is the invisible; and faith in the visible God, who is at once man and God, enters into man. For while faith is spiritual in essence, it is natural in form, for everything spiritual, in order to be anything with a man, is received by him in what is natural.

Man's conjunction with the Lord is not with his supreme Divine Being itself, but with His Divine Humanity, and by this with the supreme Divine Being; for man can have no idea whatever of the supreme Divine Being of the Lord, utterly transcending his thought as it does; but of His Divine Human Being he can have an idea. Hence the Gospel according to John says that no one has at any time seen God except the only-begotten Son, and that there is no approach to the Father save by him. For the same reason he is called Mediator. T 339, A 4211.

## 9. Countdown to Armageddon – Ian Arnold, September 1984

There are billions of people in the world, and there is a percentage of people living in absolute poverty. The numbers of those in dire need is expected to increase faster than the rate of population growth.

Also, each year desert-like conditions around the world claim a considerable area of land. This is the result, amongst other things of erosion, poor farming methods, drought and excessive tree cutting. Much of the forests of the poorer nations is predicted to disappear.

The world Health Organisation has estimated that more than 25,000 people a day die from lack of clear drinking water and that 30% of all sickness and disease can be attributed, at least in part to inadequate water and sanitation facilities. Incredible, isn't it?

A study by the Environmental Protection Agency forecasts a doubling of carbon dioxide in the air, such as would raise present world temperatures by 3 degrees by the middle of next century. The call goes out to countries to research for ways to minimise the impact of such changes.

Sadly our problems do not end there. The world is spending more than billions of dollars each day on arms - an absolutely colossal figure which we find almost impossible to take in. And then there is the perception of many in the world nervously and precariously walking a tight-rope between peace and nuclear annihilation. Our politicians and peace negotiators anxiously try to hose down limited conventional warfare for fear that it will escalate and involve the super powers.

That these are challenging times, is universally acknowledged. However some are going further than this. They speak as if the problems confronting the world are now out of hand and beyond our capacity to deal with them. They see all these things as being but 'signs of the times'. The 1980s are being spoken of in terms of a 'countdown to Armageddon'. Is this really so? Or is there another way of looking at things?

While in no way minimising the problems and difficulties we face today, it helps to put them into context. We suggest that possibly every age and generation has known a sense of despair, even hopelessness, about the problems facing it. We do not wave away our problems or pretend they do not exist. They do and they have to be faced up to and dealt with to the very best of our ability. But we are in our day, not alone and the gloom and pessimism has been known before. We cannot imagine that they had any problems of great significance many years ago.

Clearly it is not how it seemed. At the time in 1851 the dying Duke of Wellington said, "I thank God I shall be spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering around us." Incredibly, and years earlier, William Wilberforce had said, "I dare not marry - the future it so uncertain." As bleak as the future can seem to us to be at times, yet our sense of predicament, is not new. Others have felt the same way about things in their day.

Another point which is usefully made is that whilst there are many negative and discouraging factors in the world situation today, there is also much that is positive and encouraging. It is as well we keep a perspective that by no means is it all bad.

Happily we enjoy religious freedom, the right to vote and the right to a reasonable education. Also happily our government is accountable to the people, these are things we take in our stride and take for granted. However they are very recent developments. It is only in the late 1900s, for instance, that religious freedom

has come to be guaranteed in the constitutions of nations. Before that any deviation from the official line was punishable with persecution or death. Unbelievable, and yet that was so.

How much better off we are today than then! Think how far the world has come since then. It is the same with the other things, such as our right to vote and our right to education. These are not the only signs of progress or things which give us hope. Thankfully the world no longer sits back and meekly accepts racism. The equality of peoples of all races and creeds and cultures is rightly being insisted upon. There is a growing awareness of our membership of the international community of our international brotherhood and of our international responsibilities, which transcends the old, narrow, nationalistic, barriers of the past.

It is an interpretation to speak of the present dilemma in which the world finds itself in terms of a 'Countdown to Armageddon' or to talk of our problems as if they indicated that we are coming to the end. And like all interpretations, it is open to question and dispute. Some of us whose thoughts are deeply influenced by the teaching given in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, see it in an altogether different light.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm in 1688 and died in London in 1772, a famous scientist and philosopher in his day. At the age of 57, he turned to theology, detecting at that time the end of one age and the beginning of another. He wrote of the end of Christianity as it had become and of the commencement of a new Christianity, based on a redefinition of basic Christian concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs. The old ways, the old values, the old corruptions and the old distortions; would give way to the new, and a new order. A new Christianity, and a new spiritual age would take its place,

According to Swedenborg we are already in the early stages of a new age, this is not to say that it is not a time of chaos and upheaval. It is, but it is a chaos and upheaval caused by the questioning of the old and inadequate structures inherited from the past and the search for something better to take their place. He wrote on this point: "before anything is reduced into a state of order, it is most usual, that things should be reduced into a confused mass or chaos, so that those which do not well cohere together may be separated, and, when they are separated, then the Lord arranges them into order. This process may be compared with what takes place in nature, where all things in general and singly are first reduced to a confused mass, before being arranged into order. For instance, unless there were storms in the atmosphere, to dissipate whatever is heterogenous, the air would never become serene, but would become deadly by poisonous accumulations," Arcana Caelestia 842.

We do not like storms, but how lovely it is to be out of doors when they are over. Even in the city the streets have been washed and the air is so clean again,

Nothing in the universe happens suddenly or overnight, least of all the transition to a new age. It is a drawn-out process. People do not suddenly abandon the structures, the concepts, the traditions and beliefs which have previously held life together in favour of new and different ones. The old are shed gradually and the new taken on. While this is gradually happening there is bound to be confusion. The competition of alternative life styles, the demands for rights and freedoms and sometimes the abuse of these after they are won. At the turn of the century it was not at all easy for society to let go its traditional assumptions about the nature of women and the place of women in the face of the suffragette movement, but it happened, and more enlightened thinking has prevailed. We can and if we choose to, emerge from the present turmoil. A bright and inviting future lies ahead if we are prepared to make it so.

But what of scripture passages such as in Matthew chapter 24 the bit about war and rumours of war? And the promised return of Christ? His second coming? In Matthew 24:3, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "*Tell us, they said, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*" They didn't say end of the world as translated in the KJV. The Lord was talking about the end of one age and the beginning of another when He spoke of wars and rumours of war. He was foreshadowing the disputes and clashes, ...falsity against truth and good against evil. This life style against that life style, and the inevitable tensions at that level which would all be part of the process.

So far as the second coming is concerned, it is not a question of waiting for Him to return, He is already here, on hand now, at work with us, helping us to wrestle with the problems which confront us and the dilemma in which we are in. And bringing His love and wisdom to bear on the human situation to the extent that we will let Him.

## 10. The Quest for Peace – Ian Arnold, October 1984

### Part 2 on the future of the world

We all want peace. The last thing we would want is another war. To a large extent, we enjoyed peace for nearly forty years after the end of world WW2. We hope and pray it will continue, we would hope and pray that our young people will grow in peace to adulthood, have a worthwhile career, live usefully, marry and raise their children, all in peace.

However, the threat of war or, the risk of war, is always there. We are scared in case countries push each other too far, or that some madman will get control of nuclear weaponry, or that some limited conventional war will escalate into all-out nuclear war involving the major powers.

**World-wide anxiety.** There is a lot of concern around the world. There are people who are terribly concerned about the levels of defence spending. While so much else, like health and education, has to be neglected. Spending on defence goes on at staggering levels. Concern about nuclear weaponry and a possible annihilation of the human race, tends to focus on the uranium mining issue. It is argued Australian uranium will find its way into the manufacture of nuclear warheads. There is tremendous controversy over the deployment there of new nuclear cruise missiles.

We cannot avoid the issue. So frightening is the prospect of a third, nuclear world war, and so uneasily does the world live, never, so it seems, far from such a thing happening, that it must come at us as one of the biggest of all issues. What of the future for mankind? Can we know? Where are we to stand with regard to the arms build-up? If there were to be unilateral disarmament, on all sides, would this put an end to wars?

Answers suggested in the writings of Swedenborg: -

The questions, as we know, are being asked on all sides. There is evidence that the majority of people see world peace and the future for mankind as being amongst the most pressing issues of all.

But where do we go for the answers? Has anyone got the answers? Is it all a matter of getting the leaders of the two super powers to the negotiating table?

Some people find in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg a lot which helps us formulate our thoughts with regard to the issues raised and find in them an interpretation of world events and of the means by which this can become a safer world. Not that the answers are categorically stated in those writings. Or that they suggest solutions which can be magically arrived at overnight. We do not turn to those writings of Swedenborg as if he were some kind of a prophet, which he was not, rather we find in them an understanding of human nature and an understanding of the purposes of a loving God which has direct bearing on what we are talking about here and what follows is based on that understanding.

#### 1. The Lord and the Future.

For years, for generations, for centuries, people have half expected the end of the world. It has generally been believed that this is what Jesus talked about and that it all fits in with the Divine purpose and plan. As the Authorised King James, version of the bible has it "*Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*"

However in later translations it is written "*Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"*" Matthew 24:3, and when Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection He said "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age".* Matt 28:20.

Neither did the disciples, nor did Jesus talk about the end of the world. They talked about the end of the age. The end of one age and the beginning of another. At this very moment, we are living through the end of one age and the beginning of another. The Lord wants this world to go on. The Lord wants the human race, as we know it here, to continue. A new and better spiritual age is dawning. The future for the Human race is a good and inviting and exciting one.

**We cannot rule out war** and the lord cannot rule out the possibility of world-wide war. If it were up to the Lord there would be no wars. We can be absolutely certain of that. The Lord does not want war. And it is as far as from Him to set a war in motion as Heaven is from hell. We have a teaching as in the book Divine Providence, para 251 "It is not because of Divine Providence that wars happen, because wars are inseparable from murder, plunder, violence, cruelty and other appalling evils that are diametrically opposed to Christian caring."

However wars continue to break out and they do because we have freedom. The freedom to do good or to do evil, and because our unregenerate nature is what it is. However unwelcome, it is a fact of life, we are all born with inclination that would lead us, if not checked, to want to dominate over the lives of others, and to needlessly and selfishly accumulate the goods and wealth of the world.

**These are inclination we all share.** We are determined to act on those inclinations. In the end, reluctantly, God has to permit us to do so. Because we have freedom and because our unregenerate nature is what it is. We are capable of all evils imaginable. The Lord is all the time working against the direction these inclinations take us. He restrains and holds us back as far as it is possible for Him to do. But if an unswerving determination to go to war sets in on both sides, He must permit it. The human race can annihilate itself if it makes up its mind to do so. The one encouraging thought in all of this is the thought that the Lord unceasingly works to head off such a calamity or to hold us back from it. This we know from the teaching given. "When mankind strays towards evil, the Lord in His Divine Providence, directs and bends us by leading us away from evil and leading to good."

**Disarmament will not stop war.** In the light of what has just been said two important points are worth noting. We sometimes get the idea that it is just a few, war hungry types who are responsible for wars and if we eliminated them, particularly before they got to the top, then we would have no wars. That is wrong. The love of dominion and of self-aggrandizement is present with us all. What needs eliminating, or what really needs eliminating, are these loves in all our hearts and minds.

Even if we could get countries to dump their nuclear weaponry, and to make bonfires of all their other armaments, this would not stop war. "Arms do not make wars". And a reduction in arms does not mean a reduction in the chances of a war occurring. It is what lies in the hearts and minds of individuals everywhere which leads to war.

**We have a duty to make this a safer world.** There is no doubt that we all have a duty to make this a safer world. It is the Lord's world, it is not ours. And He created it that people might be born here and that by means of their experience of life here they might prepare themselves for a life of use and service in heaven. War itself is evil and involves such terrible suffering, we want to check it. Nuclear weaponry if used, would be so destructive, we must strive to ensure, as much as we can, it will not ever be used.

But how? This is the question. And each of us must and will answer it for ourselves. Some say that the only way to make sure there is never a nuclear, or third world war, is for each side to have in its arsenal the equivalent of what the other has. Others argue for the dumping of nuclear weaponry and a reliance only on conventional arms. Some, by joining marches and demonstrations set out to do no more than remind the world's leaders of a fundamental yearning for peace

**Campaigning for peace.** But there is something else here which it is important for us to remember. We are taught wars and conflicts between nations and peoples are reflections of wars and conflicts going on at the higher, spiritual level, where mankind is concerned. The one corresponds to the other, or the wars which break out in this world are no more nor less than reflections of the disruptions and conflicts which are taking place and which afflict us at the level of his spirit. "all things which take place in the natural world" we read "correspond to spiritual things in the spiritual world." Divine Providence 251:4

And this has very real implications for us. Spiritual forces from the spiritual world are all the time having an impact on life in this natural world, and in however small a measure it may seem to be, each of us can affect and does affect, the quality of the spiritual forces in and around us, and as those forces touch life here, it is not a matter of something too big for any one person to do anything about it. We each can play a part. We can each strive to put our own lives into better and better order. We can each strive to improve the quality of the spiritual forces in and around us. We can affect the quality of the spiritual forces reaching this world. The Lord calls us to go to war against evil and selfishness and bigotry in our own hearts and minds, and to the extent we do, we can be truly effective campaigners for peace.

## 11. Turning the other Cheek - Erwin Redekopp, November 1984

The literal words of Jesus...about turning the other cheek, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, have often left devout Christians in some kind of a quandary as to what their conduct ought to be. Taken just literally, His words might be considered contradictory when taken in context with other statements. For example, on one occasion He said, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.*" Luke 14:26. He also has said, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" Matthew 10:34.

Serious study of the Bible, with its deeper implications, must lead us to the conclusion that the Lord has much more to say to us for use in our spiritual development than just that which appears on the surface. It is a wonderful truth. In some other words of Jesus, that "*The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.*" John 6:63. It is with this understanding that we note the words of Jesus about turning the other cheek in the Sermon on the Mount and try to see how it must relate to each of us, as we strive for rebirth with His help.

It is significant to note that Jesus referred to the "right cheek" which may be struck, before turning the other. We will take this into consideration later. First I want to carefully look at the words of Jesus on this occasion. You will note that He refers to the Old Testament scripture which, in effect, quotes from the laws of Leviticus which we read today. How differently He now applies the law! Yet the law is not abolished; it is now being fulfilled by Him in a spiritual sense.

He said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*" Mathew 5:17. But in place of a hard and inflexible adherence to the letter of that law, made for its use at that time He will now apply the spirit to that law to an infinite degree. The law said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.*" Matt. 5:38. This translation is somewhat different from the King James which says, in effect, "*Do not resist evil*".

Now, obviously, we must resist and combat evils at every point. But what is it to refrain from "resisting an evil person"? We see this as significant, for it is applying the principle that you do not respond to an evil-doing person by doing likewise.

It is our Christian responsibility to combat evil wherever we see it in our society, and there is plenty of it around us and within ourselves. But you cannot right one wrong with another wrong. That is what is

important. We are so tempted to want to apply punishment for wicked and evil acts in society for the sake of vengeance and "wanting to get back." But, in a way that makes us no better than the criminal.

We comment so often that we are living in a "new age" What do we mean by that? If we infer that society as a whole is becoming more tolerant, more socially concerned, acting with "freedom and rationality" in our determinations for human betterment, then yes, we are in that new age of which Jesus alone, is the author. But if we want to regress to the states of the pre-Christian era, where the laws of Leviticus, for example, were literally applied, then we are not conforming to the principles of the New Age and the Lord's Second Coming.

If we want to apply the law, literally, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life" or to be stoned for blasphemy, then we are no different than those early people of the Israelitish Church who needed to be controlled and guided by extremely harsh and inflexible laws. Without that their nation could not have survived. We know too that in the course of providence that nation (or church) which would preserve the Old Testament word was representative of the Lord's church in people, and which must be preserved and led towards the spiritual Canaan.

If we can see how controlling and inflexible were these old Levitical laws, we must see a kind of counterpart in the spiritual laws of the Commandments, as fulfilled most perfectly, by Jesus Himself. That is why He said that He came to fulfill the law. But He also said that He came to bring a "sword". That is the militant weapon of Divine Truth in combat with evil and falsity wherever it may be found, in us and in society at large, and even in the hells of the Spiritual World.

In our progress towards spirituality and a truly better life there can be no compromise with things evil and false. The Divine Law of "love and wisdom" united, must be as inflexible as were those early laws of Leviticus that controlled and preserved the people as a nation, even though Israel and Judah were for a time taken into captivity, the remnant was to survive. So in us, in people, a "remnant" of what is holy, true and good, must survive to lead us individually to our "Canaan".

I happened to be a fringe participant in an emotionally charged dialogue on the matter of capital punishment. This confrontation grew out of comments made about some recent gruesome murders. Unquestionably we would see the horror and the evil, that must be regarded as an out flowing of the hell into this world. This is only one manifestation, close to our experience of what evil and falsity can do when left unchecked. But can the answer and control be in society using literally a law that has its origin in the Levitical law of the Old Testament? The easiest and simplest answer appears to be, on the surface, yes! A life for a life is the law of the Old Testament. But is this law also contrary to the Commandment that says, "You shall not kill"? Can we justify the breaking of the Commandment in order to try controlling and punishing the individual for crimes that reflect spiritual and social crimes? What I am saying is that as members of society we are all individually guilty to a lesser or greater degree.

Hear again these words of Jesus, "*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.*" Matt 5:22

Anger, left unchecked and harboured in the affections, is tantamount to killing - if not physically, then spiritually. So, what I am suggesting is that as a society we are all guilty. But nevertheless, even as we try, with help and guidance from the Lord, to control and check ourselves and to grow into the image and likeness of God, as members of society, we must also practice "charity" in checking and controlling those who outwardly commit crimes, even murder, by such means, even by punishment, that are consistent with the principles of the new age of Christianity.

But this would seem to be so alien to our dispositions, even as it seems so alien to us to turn the other cheek if our right one has been struck. A liberal interpretation of this is obvious. It has been said that resentment breeds on resentment, we get our feelings hurt - how resentful we are at times! what is our response? we somehow want to strike out. Our cheek, particularly the right cheek, is a symbol of our feelings and affections.

But it is a symbol, more specifically of our love for truth. This may often be assailed on us in so many subtle ways: in business, in our daily shopping, in our everyday relationships with people and neighbours. We have an affection and respect for what is honest and right, but it seems that at every turn we are assaulted, spiritually, by false principles and values that appeal to our selfish instincts.

We are, by our human finite natures, quite self-serving. When our right cheek is struck, we really don't need to get distressed; we turn the other cheek. We know better, we know the spiritual values that have brought us through other situations, even by hard times and pain. So, with complete trust and faith in the Lord's strength, we can, as has been written, foil the tempter's power. We are in the sphere of the Lord's Divine protection. It is significant that Swedenborg has written, from spiritual experience, that one angel can turn back a host of evil spirits who would, except for the power of the Lord, overcome them.

A test of our spirituality can be determined, to some degree, by these words of Jesus: "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.'*" Matt 5:43-46

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Retaliation**

For the evil who wish to do violence to the good by introducing falsity and evil on them expose themselves to retaliatory punishment, which involves the recoiling on themselves of the falsities and evils which they aim to inflict on others. This punishment, called retaliatory punishment, has its origin in the following law of order existing in heaven. All things whatever you wish people to do to you, do also to them; this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12.

Therefore those who are moved by good, or from the heart, to do good receive good from others; and also conversely, those who are moved by evil, or from the heart, to do evil receive evil from others. So it is that all good has its reward attached to it, and all evil its punishment. AC 8214

But the situation with that law in the next life is in addition such that when some like or retaliatory action carried out is evil it is inflicted by the evil, and never by the good; that is, it comes from hell and never from heaven. For hell or the evil there have an unending desire to do evil to others; that is altogether the delight of their life. They perform evil therefore the moment they are allowed to; and they do not care whom they do it to. They do not care whether the person is bad or good, companion or foe. And since it accords with a law of order that the evil which people aim in the direction of others recoils on themselves, they rush in to do it when this law allows it. The evil in hell behave in this way, the good in heaven never do. The latter desire constantly to do good to others, for that is the delight of their life, and therefore the moment the opportunity exists they do good both to enemies and to friends. Nor indeed do they resist evil, for the laws of order defend and protect what is good and true. This is why the Lord says,

You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Evil is not to be resisted. You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:38-39, 43-45. Arcana Caelestia 8223.

## **12. God With Us – Paul V Vickers, December 1984**

One of our problems, especially at Christmas, is that the coming of the Lord can take on the atmosphere of a beautiful legend, rather than a stark reality. If we think for a while of the way God came, it can make Christmas and also Christian life more real.

### **Life Given to Man**

There are two characteristics of our life in this world which are important, and they arise from the one intention of God - to give us His life as though it were our own. The love of God has no other purpose than

this, to give His own joy to others He creates. Now His joy is from a love that is His very own nature, and for us to have that joy, He wants to give it to us as our own nature. This is the reason for the natural world we live in. Once we have been given the gift of life and have truly received it, we can die as to this world and move on to heaven to express that life; but this earthly existence is essential for us to take life as if it were our own.

To feel that we are really alive ourselves, we must experience life in such a fashion that it seems to belong to us.

First, this involves experiencing and learning from the beginning. Because a baby begins life with no previous memory or knowledge. It starts from the experience of its own sensations. All that is built up by experience and then formal learning seems to the child to be its own. The life in all this activity is from God; but it seems to belong to the one who has come to know it in the process of experience and learning.

The second essential factor is that we must have a sense of freedom. Now all love feels free. We feel free when we can do what we want to. When we meet new situations, new relationships, it is important that we should feel we freely make the decision as to how we will behave in them. Life will only appear to be really ours if we have this freedom to choose the way we react to experience. Still the life that is flowing in will be the gift of God, but in us it appears as a power we control, choosing and directing its activity.

By these two factors, the process of learning or experience and the power to choose our life direction, God can give His life away to us so that we seem to be alive in ourselves. It is a completely real appearance; we do take the life in ourself as our own and we do direct the way that life will work and the effects it will have. Yet the life entering us, is the life of God's own love.

### **Life Distorted by Man**

But now a third factor enters the situation. Because we feel ourselves to be alive, we can assume that life is ours. We can assume that we are entitled to life for our own self. If we do this, all the powers of life are directed to serving ourself as an individual. Our life becomes a way of taking what we want. This is not an academic choice, a mere matter of thinking; it is a way of approaching every problem, a way of living. God's life that gives us our sense of being alive is totally unselfish. Its very definition is that it wants to give itself away to others and never thinks of, or takes for, itself. But when that life is given a new centre in each one of us, the life seems so completely our own that, if we so choose, we can take it and use it in a totally opposite way, the way of selfishness. Here is the origin of evil.

This has an effect in the world and on subsequent generations. Over centuries, because parents must care for their children, a pattern of heredity has to be allowed which brings distortion even from birth, so that this "self-directing" attitude to life appears in human beings even before they come of an age to choose. And the world around them is devastated by selfish ways of life until its whole example is destructive. This direction of the gift of God's life into self-seeking is the origin of evil, and is described in the Scripture in the image of the fall of man and his need for salvation.

We must be careful not to think of salvation as a change in outward things. It is not a process which makes some "lucky" and lets them escape from the world, and others "unlucky" because they have to remain in the world. We all must go on choosing our characters by choices made in the circumstances of our life and in our own generation. The Lord in His providence can maintain a balance to leave us free to choose. But the work of salvation is the Lord's way of bringing in the necessary power for us to cope with the situation we are in now, when the human race has turned to selfishness.

Let us consider the problem for a moment. The life that we are directing to selfishness is the life of God's love flowing into us. Any increase in that source of life will only stir our distorted mind to greater strength. Because selfishness restricts the activity of God's life, it can only be challenged at the level where it is created - our life in this world. We cannot suddenly change our whole nature; but we could face up to the succession of happenings in our life and try to reject the selfishness in us, if the life of God could be with us in those individual happenings. This is the key to the way of salvation. It involved God sending His life into the world at

our level. It involves our being able to use that life to resist selfishness in one aspect of life, even though we have much else in us that is evil. Since we must be changed step by step, the way of salvation had to be for God to enter earthly life step by step.

### The Love in Salvation

This is not some "ingenious method" worked out by God. The Gospel points out that it sprang from the urgency of God's love, from His sorrow and distress. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"*. John 3:16. It may seem strange to use words such as "distress" and "sorrow" of God; it seems at odds with philosophy. But the failing of philosophy is that it reduces things to a system of abstract forces, rather than recognising the vital life of God in human patterns powering the universe and all its proceedings. The only way we can grasp God's approach to us is in such words as the prophets use. There is an urgency in God bringing, salvation to us *"How can I give you up?"* is the cry in Hosea 3:8 - and the burden of the Psalms is *"the steadfast love"* of the Lord that endures for ever. And the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah show us the Lord entering into the agony of our condition - *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering"*. Isaiah 53:4. God did not work out a method; He came from love to our need. Let us look at how it was done.

### The Way of Salvation

We have to keep this world in perspective to grasp what happened. In abstract terms and definitions, it seems beyond belief for God to make a personal entrance into this world. But if the world is seen as God's making for God's people, then it becomes rational that God should step into it to do the work of salvation.

But still it had to be a coming to our need. In Gethsemane Jesus said, *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"* Matt 26:53. But how, then should the Scripture be fulfilled that it must be so? "The "Scripture" was not some arbitrary rule that had to be followed. The Scripture proclaimed our need in the selfishness we had made; and it was there we had to be really helped in our situation - no "unreal" act was to be performed. We have already seen the two factors which make the purpose of this world for us: to begin at a beginning and go through a process of experience and learning, and also to face situations and choose our way in them and so accept true life into our behaviour. For God to reach us, His life had to go out into that situation and live in it. He had to make a beginning, to go through a process, to accept true life into our situations.

### The Son of God

Now we begin to see the vital importance of the Gospel message of the "Son of God". Divine Life in itself could not begin at the beginning and go through a process and be involved in successive acts of choice. For those things to take place, God had to become man, to put on the human condition. It involved beginning at the beginning and so birth into this world.

Mary as mother provided the earthly body and external things for Divine life to come into. It was exactly like our birth, except that there was no earthly father involved. The life that came into Jesus Christ was the very love of God. It would begin, it would learn and choose. But the centre of life was God, not the mere appearance of being his own life which is man's. The only Father of this life was God Himself. Mary's contribution has often been misunderstood. There can be no doubt that she was a good woman; the Gospel itself makes this clear. But she was just an earthly mother, and she passed on to the child born of her an earthly body and the earthly tendencies to selfishness that all human beings have. Such ideas as a "perfect" or "immaculate" Mary miss the whole point. The life of God had to get to grips with the selfishness of man, and from Mary's side this was what was provided.

From the very first sensations, the love of God was making experience into the pattern of His very self. As learning was added to experience, all was formed by the love of God within into the very pattern of the Divine. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* John 1:14 We are not to understand by this that the baby Jesus had all the wisdom of God. Only as each sensation, each piece of knowledge, each experience with others happened, could it become part of the mind of Jesus. A great deal of sensation,

learning and experience had to take place. All these experiences, because of the birth of Mary, would call into activity the selfish self-centred approach of man.

The life in Jesus had to reject all these perversions and struggle to grasp life and understand His purpose from the love within. These learning and experiencing processes moved more quickly with Jesus than with us, but they all had to be gone 'through'. By the time He was twelve, He could understand that "He must be about His Father's affairs". By then, the experience and learning He had, were sufficient for the life of God within to give some understanding of the fact that He was the Saviour sent into the world. So by puberty, Jesus was already aware of His mission, though He may not have yet understood how it was to be accomplished. It meant that, as other young men and women became sexually alive to another person, Jesus was aware of the power of love within Him to all mankind - He was the "bridegroom" and the whole human race was the "bride".

Such thoughts may lead us to wonder if the life of Jesus was really like ours, but it undoubtedly was. The difference lay only in its intensity and the scope of His life, because the power of life at work in Him was the Divine - as Jesus put it, "*it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.*" John 14:10. Still, every battle had to be fought with selfishness. Every experience, had to be handled from love for many years. He was thirty before He was ready to begin His ministry and manifest the power He had brought into human life.

We sometimes forget that, before He ever was faced with the woman taken in adultery, He knew all about the village "bad girl" and had a different attitude of true compassion from the usual village derision. Before He faced the mob in Gethsemane, He had been through the usual experiences of a boy at school and a young man with his contemporaries - and doubtless made no easier by the love and truth that was His whole nature. There is a reality about this work of the Son of God that we need to hold on to. The whole point of it was to be with us in similar times, in the same stresses. Every experience we pass through, Jesus faced, and always the Divine Life within brought love into the truth He obeyed. Steadily the love of God became one with the truth by which we fight our selfishness. Any idea of truth we call on now actually has power within it, the living power of the mind of Jesus.

### **The Power of Jesus Christ**

When the work was complete, Jesus could say, "*I and the Father are one*". John 10:30. The love of God had entered fully into the process of beginning and experiencing and learning and choosing. But we must not imagine that then it all vanished. We are all baptised into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, or Breath, because the power Jesus brought into this natural world still remains and is "breathed out" into our living.

When we think of the babe in the manger, let it not be a beautiful legend. Think rather, because Jesus came at Bethlehem, the life that is Jesus has been working in us since we were that size, fighting through the truth to save us from selfishness.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Son of God**

Since "the Son of God" means the Lord in the human nature that he assumed in the world, which is a divine human nature, we can see what was meant by the Lord's frequently saying that he was sent into the world by the Father and that he had gone forth from the Father. His being sent into the world by the Father means that he was conceived by Jehovah the Father. This and nothing else is the meaning of "being sent" and "sent by the Father," as we can tell from all the places where it also says that he was doing the will of the Father and doing his works, which were overcoming the hells, glorifying his human nature, teaching the Word, and establishing a new church. The only way these things could have been done was by means of a human nature conceived by Jehovah and born of a virgin - that is, by God becoming human.

Many people these days think of the Lord only as an ordinary person like themselves because they think only of his human nature and not at the same time of his divine nature, when in fact his human and divine natures cannot be separated. "The Lord is both God and a human being; and God and a human being in the Lord are

not two but one person. He is one altogether, as the soul and the body are one human being". Doctrine of the Lord, 20-21

### **13. What is Progress? - Rev George Dole, January, 1985**

*"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door."* Matt 24: 32-33.

Just about everyone is in favour of progress, for progress is another name for improvement, and improvement means making things better. Our way of life is founded on progress: the infant learns to roll over, to crawl and to walk; the child progresses from grade to grade in school; the young person looks for a job that has possibilities of advancement.

But in many ways, we do not agree as to what constitutes progress. At the beginning of the Second World War, Germany was the world leader in atomic research. For various reasons, this lead was lost in the course of the war. A description of the process by which this happened would be a chronicle of mistakes in policy and in judgement. It would describe the very opposite of progress. Yet from the world's point of view, progress and success would have been a terrible thing. It was better that the Allied nations made this progress. It was necessary that they overtake and pass German science. Yet there are few people who would say without reservations that it was progress to develop weapons of such immense deadliness.

It is stated in the book, "Divine Providence" by Emanuel Swedenborg, that material "goods" may be either blessings or curses. This means that economic or technological advances may be either blessings or curses; and it means that something deeper within the human being determines which they will be. Airplanes bring us within hours of Russia; rockets bring us within minutes; television brings us within milliseconds. Whether this is good or bad depends on what we and Russia want to do to each other. We know that there has to be real progress in this last area. We know that nations cannot long afford to wish each other ill. They must at least be willing to "live and let live". It may soon be necessary for them actively to work for each other's good.

But even this is not enough, because not everyone agrees as to what this "good" is. One person says, "I wish your nation well because I want it to have our form of government." Another says the same, because he wants to loan it money; another, because they are for its technological progress; another, because they want the overthrow of its present regime. Yet these are just the things that may be blessings or curses. We want an "underdeveloped" country to make progress toward industrialization. Do we wish its people also the anxieties, the ulcers, the pollution, the inflation, the divorces, the suicides and the crime that characterize our own high-pressure world? Is all this simply the necessary price of progress?

The more closely and clearly, we look at the matter, the more evident it is that we cannot define progress in strictly material terms. Probably the closest we could come to universal agreement on what progress is would be to define it in terms of human happiness - not temporary pleasure, but stable, lasting happiness.

This particular brand of happiness has certain hallmarks. It must be of a kind that is not gained by taking it from others, but that grows by being shared. It must be based on true understanding not on illusion or self-deception. And it must lead us to go forth and act rather than to lie back and bask. In other words, what we are looking for has three main characteristics: love (which is the sharing), understanding and use.

These characteristics are the three essentials of the Lord. The only final definition of progress is motion toward Him, for this is motion toward the greatest possible love and understanding and effectiveness. Until this definition is widely accepted and taken with complete seriousness, there is every probability that our world will continue to "ride madly off in all directions" with every one calling his own direction "progress".

Still, even for those who accept this definition and take it seriously, the way is not necessarily clear. How do we measure our nation or our world against this standard? For we must be able to apply this standard to what has been done, if we are to have any clear idea what to do next.

One major way of application is given in our text. "*Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.*" This comes after a description of great and terrible events to come: wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, treachery, false Christs and the like. It comes then, in a picture which can easily be applied to the world in which we live. But at some point in all this upheaval, the branches of the fig tree soften and put forth leaves - a very small, quiet event among the trumpets and earthquakes.

This fig tree is the Lord's symbol of outward, everyday living, and particularly of our view of that living. For us as individuals, the meaning is clear. How can we discern signs of progress? When we see our own attitudes beginning to soften, and beginning to put out new thoughts, this is a sign that we are drawing nearer to the warmth and light of the Lord.

The same holds true of our world. When we see a softening of "hard lines" and a fresh flow of ideas on human good, we have a sign of the approach of summer. These signs may appear in the middle of the storm, but they are signs that the tree wants to bear fruit, and that given the proper protection and care it can and will.

This is not to say that this is in fact what is happening now. It is simply to say that we may know where to look for the signs we seek; and each of us must look for himself. Nor is this to say that if we see these signs the end of human tribulation is at hand. There may be many more winters and summers ahead.

Perhaps it does no more than cast a different light on a later verse in the same passage. When we are told, "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*" Matt 24:32.

We need not read this as a threat. Indeed, we should not read it as a threat, for the Lord does not come to punish but to save. What we are being told is this: in the midst of tribulation, watch for the little signs of growth, for they mark the approach of the Lord. They indicate that life is not a labyrinth of blind alleys or a senseless tug-of-war, but that beneath the surface there may even now be true progress, true motion, toward the love and understanding and use which are the Lord.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - What The "New Heaven" Means**

"*And I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth*" Rev 21:1, means that a New Heaven was formed from Christians by the Lord. Today it is called the Christian heaven, and those who have worshipped the Lord and have lived according to his Commandments are there, in whom therefore there is charity and faith. In this heaven are also all the infants of Christians.

By "a New Heaven and a New Earth" is not meant the natural heaven visible to the eyes nor the natural earth inhabited by us, but the spiritual heaven is meant, and the earth belonging to that heaven, where the angels are. Every one may see and acknowledge that this heaven and the earth of this heaven is meant, if we can in some measure be withdrawn from a purely natural and material idea when we reads the Word.

It is clear that the angelic heaven is meant because it is said in the next verse that he "saw the holy city Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," by which is meant not any Jerusalem coming down, but the church. The church on earth comes down from the Lord out of the angelic heaven because the angels of heaven and the people on earth make one in all things of the church. Apocalypse Revealed 876.

## **14. The Ten Commandments - Part 1 - Ian A. Arnold, February 1985.**

### **Introduction**

Like the average person everywhere, I imagine you could name without much difficulty a few of the Ten Commandments . If you are a church goer, or someone who knows their Bible well, you could possibly name them all. You might also be able to say that they are to be found in the book of Exodus, and that they were originally given to Moses on mount Sinai, having been written on tablets of stone by the finger of God.

But should you be able to do so, you would be in a minority. Those of us who are reasonably familiar with the Ten Commandments and the circumstances in which they were given can forget at times how little others know about them. And even where they are known their relevance is questioned. People talk about updating and rewriting them, and serious and well-meant attempts have been made to do this.

Commandments are a set of absolute values. Some reject them as such, their view-point being that moral rules, such as the Commandments are, "only express the collective choices of different human individuals and societies over the centuries." in other words, and according to them, the Commandments were a meaningful code of conduct for the people of Israel when they lived centuries ago, but they by no means or necessarily apply today. These people would deny that they were given from above, by the Lord. Rather, so their argument runs, did they 'evolve' and come into being to meet the immediate needs and circumstances of that time.

Though they are sometimes couched in terms which were more immediately relevant to the people of Israel to whom they were first given, it is nevertheless so that the Commandments were given to people for all times. In themselves, and as the Lord on earth taught, they are as relevant to people today as they were in times gone past. Contrary to the thinking of some, the Ten Commandments did not evolve in response to a particular set of circumstances. They were given by God and apply in every set of circumstances. They are the framework within which is lived the truly good and worthwhile life. And if we would best serve others, and be a source of blessing to them, which we should strive to be, here is how we go about' it. "*if you love me*" the Lord said "*keep my Commandments*". "*Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.*" John 14:15,21

Firstly an introduction covering some general points. People complain about them being 'too negative'. It is argued that they ask of us standards of behaviour which few can maintain and if in fact they were given on mount Sinai the question arises, 'why?'

Before I begin to answer these questions I would like to say something about the reason for there being Commandments at all, and why it is that they have been necessary. Why did God give us, the Commandments and what does He seek to achieve by them?

Concerning God, it is important to bear in mind that above all things He desires and is ever seeking the eternal and long term happiness of every one of us. This is why He formed the world and created us. He is a God of love who unceasingly strives to make others happy from Himself. Swedenborg, "True Christian Religion 43. He longs to bless the lives of individuals everywhere with happiness. And yet if that happiness is to be received we must arrange our lives to make it possible to flow in. The Commandments have not been given to deny us pleasure or to restrict us in some unnecessary and irksome manner. Rather they remind us of what is necessary, and of how we must curb and discipline ourselves, if we are to know and enjoy the happiness which at all times He is pressing upon us. This is why they have been given.

As with the Lord and ourselves, so with a parent and their child. Because they love their children and want their happiness and well-being, every parent has to insist on rules. of us, As parents, who hasn't found ourselves insisting, "don't go into deep water" or "don't run on the road". Of necessity, and where the raising of children is concerned, there are so many rules. And we know them to be in our children's best interests. They may not think so, but we do. They at times find them restrictive and a nuisance. But we are seeing further than they are. They are looking to their short-term satisfaction. We are concerned with their long term

happiness, hence the rules. And so it is with the Lord. He of all things wants us to be happy, but He also knows that our happiness ultimately depends on our obedience to certain laws. And this is the reason why the Commandments were given.

We cannot imagine that the people of Israel did not know, before they left Egypt, that it was unlawful to steal, a crime to murder and an offence against society to adulterate. Nor can we imagine any nation or community holding together, from the very earliest times, unless these laws were obeyed and offences against them punishable by law. Why then, the awesome drama associated with their being given to Moses on Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt.

There were many people then, as indeed there are today, who accept these laws as necessary civil and moral laws, and who are prepared to abide by them accordingly. To all intents and purposes good, moral people, who see the need for them to be obeyed and who are very conscious of the disorder and upheaval which results whenever they are disregarded.

Besides being civil and moral laws which were already well known, it was to be clearly understood that they are also spiritual laws and that transgression of them involved not only an offence against another but, and more importantly, sin against God. Hence the events of Mount Sinai. And this brings home to us that what matters in the final analysis is not that we obey the Commandments to keep peace at home, or at work, or because we are frightened of what others would think of us, but because the evils that are spoken of are sins against the Lord, which will cut us off from Him and deprive our lives of all the qualities that would otherwise flow into them from Him.

Do Commandments set a standard which is too high? Some think so. To which it must be answered that the Lord never asks of us more than we can do. They are not beyond us by any means. In the course of a normal life time we shall be tempted many times to break them. And it is not to say that we will not give in to those temptations, telling ourselves that we haven't got the strength to hold on.

But if we look to the Lord, and trust in Him, knowing that He will help us in the temptation, it is entirely possible to keep to the ideals that are embodied here. However let an evil establish its roots in the mind and the job of uprooting it becomes a lot harder. It is still not impossible to get rid of it, but it is going to require greater effort. The thing is not to let these things sink their roots into our minds in the first place.

Criticism has also been made that the Commandments are framed so negatively. All but two of the ten of them talk of things we are not to do. Couldn't it have been the other way around? A list of things we can do, rather than a list of things we can't do?

But we need to remember, we are all impure vessels receiving the Lord's life and love; impure because of an accumulation of tendencies to evil hereditarily received from our forebears. If the Lord's life is to flow through us to others, and be a blessing to them, the impurities of our nature have first of all to be removed. The things that inhibit, block, interrupt and taint that love and life as it flows through us, have first of all to be expelled. And those things are our tendencies to do evil. This is why the Lord says 'you shall not kill', 'you shall not commit adultery', 'you shall not steal'. And as much as we control such inclinations to do so, so the flow of His love in and through us becomes fuller and more able, to be a source of real and genuine blessing to others. As Swedenborg says, "a person's interior, or thoughts and affections, must be purified before the good they do is really good.... Only as much as evils are shunned and put away as sins does good flow in". Apocalypse Explained 939, 949.

I have spoken of, the importance of the Ten Commandments and stressed that even though in places, they are couched in terms which were more immediately relevant to the people of Israel to whom they were first given, they have been set aside as a code of conduct for all time. Far too widespread is the readiness to question and reject them, and much too frequently we hear the argument that they now no longer apply. But this is not so. In every age people have needed, and we need today, as people will need in years to come, to be reminded of things that must not be done and of evils that are to be rejected, if there is to be order and

happiness in human living and everyday affairs. The Lord himself wants that happiness and order. He Himself yearns to be present with us bringing the blessings of peace and contentment and able to work through us as an influence on others. And by living according to the Commandments He is able to do this.

*"I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* Rev 3:20. And how else do we open the door but by the way described? That is, by living according to the teaching of the Commandments .

### **You shall have no other Gods besides me:**

The Commandments list ten things to which we lean, but which must be rejected if the Lord is to be in any way present in our lives and if human living is to know the joy and happiness with which He wishes to bless it.

The first of those things - the worship of other Gods and the creation of graven images".

*"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

*"You shall have no other gods before me.*

*"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my Commandments.* Exodus 20: 2 - 6

When idolatry was widespread and when every nation and individual community had its different idols and various Gods, we do not wonder at the necessity of such a Commandment nor the need for the point to be made so emphatically. Here was anticipated a temptation which would come upon the people of Israel many times and they are warned against it. "*you shall have no other Gods before me.*"

But of course the world changes. And the question arises, who at this day would make idols to worship? Or bow down to images of stone or wood with fear or reverence? Yet the Commandment is not obsolete. For surely the same tendency exists with us all, to put other things in place of God and to love them more than Him. We can make Gods of ourselves, Gods of other people, Gods of our own ideas. And there are false ideas of the Divine which divert and side track us from the worship of the Lord.

Swedenborg makes the point that our God is what we love above all things. And he goes on "any person or thing that is loved above all else, becomes to the one who loves it, a God and is Divine". TCR 293. As far as 'things' are concerned, pleasure and money can become God's, as can self and the things of the world in general. Whatever we put on a pedestal and look up to, that becomes a God. And that is what this Commandment is getting at. People, things, material possessions, cars, music, pop stars, anything which diverts us from the worship of the Lord and above all, ourselves. "*you shall have no other Gods before me.*" We are to worship and love and look up to none other but the Lord himself and relate our lives to Him at all times.

Most people think the first Commandment is about little statues and graven images, and are quite convinced that it is seldom broken. Yet no single law is in fact broken more than this. Who of us when we stop and think about it has not put other things in place of the Lord? Who of us has not preferred our own thoughts and ideas and ways of dealing with situations in preference to the teaching of the Bible? Who of us can deny the worship of self and our ardent concern for the image we are projecting? All of these things enter into it.

In connection with this first Commandment, things are said which puzzle and confuse many people. God talks of Himself, for example, as a 'jealous' God, and He promises to visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the 'third and fourth generation of them that hate Me'.

These to many people, seem to be unnecessarily strong things to have said and can convey an impression of God which is not strictly correct. Is there then something that can be said about them? It is important for us to

remember that God has spoken to people down through the ages in the way that has been most meaningful and helpful to them. That God could be jealous, could punish them, bless them and curse them, was a meaningful concept to the people of Israel, and so God spoke to them accordingly.

He is never angry nor does He punish or seek to hurt in any way. But in that particular situation and with those particular people, it was useful to allow Himself to appear to be that kind of God. They could not have understood nor indeed would they have responded to a God, who was otherwise. Swedenborg comments on this point in many places. For example "the people of Israel believed that Jehovah' leads into temptation, that all evil is from him, and that He was in anger and fury when they were being punished, wherefore it has been so said in the word according to their faith".*Arcana Caelestia* 4307. In other words, and because it was meaningful to them, God allowed Himself to be seen, and to be written of, in this light.

Yet something might be said about jealousy and the different ways it can be understood. There are two kinds of jealousy, one sick and full of envy, suspicion and leads a person to interpret everything wrongly. But there is another kind which is a just and valid zeal to protect what is one's own.

A husband who dearly loves his wife is jealous for the protection of his marriage: he wants to preserve and defend something which he cherishes, and we would wonder if he didn't. In the same way God can be described as a jealous God in that He too is zealous for the protection of a person's relationship with Himself. His love and concern, as with a husband for his wife, is to want to preserve and to protect and defend a relationship which is dear and important.

We tend to think that all jealousy is of the one kind, unhealthy and bad. We talk of being jealous of another person; jealous of their position; jealous that they have been promoted. But that is only one kind. There is also the other, the valid concern we feel for a relationship which is important to us. God has such a concern for His relationship with us.

But there is also spoken of the visiting of a man's iniquity from one generation to another; the idea being that the transgressions of the parents are handed on to their children, and that they suffer for what has been done before them. Elsewhere this is flatly contradicted, as in Deuteronomy 24:16: "*Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.*" No one suffers the punishment for sin which is due to another. Each is only accountable for what they themselves have done.

Then what do we make of this statement; of this threat and promise which is contradicted elsewhere?

What we have got to recognise is a deeper meaning in these words. The generations spoken of here refer to successive states, to new ideas, to one thing leading on to another, in our own minds. We talk of people as conceiving new ideas; and of ideas being born in the mind. This is what is meant here. Once a person commits evil their iniquity leads from one thing to another. A person does something wrong, and then they find themselves telling a lie, and making excuses which are untrue. One thing leads to another. The iniquity is visited, as it were, from one generation to another, from one desire, or thought to the next. In the end it pollutes the whole mind. Not that the Lord would have it so, but that this is the nature of all evil. It goes on and on, unless it is stopped, and we root it out.

## 15. The Ten Commandments - Part 2 - Ian A. Arnold, March 1985

### Introduction

Swedenborg writes in Religion and Life, 15, "religion with us consists in a life according to the Commandments." We can talk of knowing our Bibles, believing in God, praying and going to church. But these things by themselves do not constitute real religion. Anyone can know their Bibles, claim to believe in God,

pray to God and go to church. However what makes a person truly religious is that they sincerely strive to live according to the Commandments . This is what matters.

Those other things are necessary and useful, but they do not constitute religion or by themselves make us religious.

In "Religion and Life" 5, Swedenborg also said "I know that many people think in their hearts that no one can shun evil of himself, because we are born in sin, and therefore without power to shun them of ourself. But let them know that everyone can shun them who in their heart thinks that there is a God, that the Lord is the God of Heaven and earth, that the Word is from Him, that Heaven and hell exist, and that there is a life after death." in other words, where there is trust in the Lord and confidence that He will supply the necessary strength, evils can be shunned and overcome. Despite what we are sometimes inclined to think, it is entirely possible to live our lives according to the Commandments . And who of us does not need that reassurance?

In the closing paragraphs of the book Religion and Life 83, Swedenborg wrote: "the Lord conjoins a person to Himself by that person knowing, understanding, willing and doing the Commandments" and here, in a sense, is what this series of talks on the Commandments is all about.

If the Lord is to be present in our lives, in our marriages and in our relationships with people generally; if unselfishness and sincerity is to be the key-note of our thinking and behaviour, here is how we go about it. *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."* Rev. 3:20. And there is no other way of opening the door but by "knowing, understanding, willing and doing the Commandments ."

We can think of the Commandments then as focusing attention on ten basic requirements if the Lord is to be in anyway present in our lives, and if human living is to know the joy and happiness with which He wishes to bless it. The first Commandment is that we should love the Lord above all things and put him first at all times. We are especially to be wary of the growth of self-love and the love of the world and not let these things become the all consuming passions which they so frequently seem to do. It is these inclinations, to love ourselves and the world in place of God, and to worship other things in place of Him, against which we are particularly warned in the first of the ten Commandments .

#### **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain:**

Here we are first dealing at length with the second Commandment, "*you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*" as we think about it, we wonder, 'who doesn't?' the Commandment is broken widely, indiscriminately, and unthinkingly by possibly the majority of people simply because the easy use of God's name has become so ordinary and every day. People curse in God's name, use it when swearing, when in distress and at a time of surprise or disappointment. Something breaks, the television fades, the car stalls, or a meal burns, and almost invariably God's name enters into the expression of annoyance somewhere. Even worse, in an argument, God is called upon to silence the other person and to make them see a particular point of view. The question is what is wrong with this?.

Does it really matter? It has been argued that 'only the most pompous among us would decry the amiable and easy use of God's name in the everyday currency of our language'. I cannot agree. Why call upon God thoughtlessly or use His name indiscriminately? God's name has a special use and is to be used in particular circumstances. When we utter God's name it should be done thoughtfully and with reverence. We seem to forget the fact that we are dealing here with our Maker; with Him who loves us and whose Providence is at all times over us. Why then be careless about our use of His name? Why invoke it unthinkingly? Why must anger or annoyance, surprise or disappointment, find an outlet in the use of a name, or names, with which only our best and deepest affections and thoughts should be associated?

Some will argue that it is never meant that way, and that for many God isn't deliberately slighted. But what of others who are within earshot, and children and youngsters who are nearby? Why drag in the dirt something which is sacred to others around us? "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*"

However thinking further about the Lord's name, and about teaching concerning it, adds an entirely new dimension to this Commandment and widens considerably the implications it has for us.

Every name brings to mind and is closely associated with certain characteristics and qualities. If in conversation, the name of a person we know is mentioned, there invariably comes to mind certain character traits and qualities we associate with them. In time, even people's names come to be identified with certain qualities in our mind. A certain name becomes synonymous with certain qualities which we might like or dislike. We choose the name of our children because of what those names suggest to us and because of the qualities we associate with them.

By God's Name mentioned in the Word, we are to understand and bring to mind, not just a series of titles by which He is designated in the Scriptures, but all the qualities which He possesses and which we associate with Him and by which He is known. And these are many. We think of His love and His wisdom. We think of His mercy and forgiveness. We think of His power and work in creation. We think of the Scriptures that tell us about Him and help us to understand Him better. All of these things we associate with God. All of these things are what is meant by His Name.

Knowing this not only adds a new dimension to our understanding of this Commandment but it helps to make sense of the promise the Lord made, "*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*" John 14:14. Millions of prayers have been uttered in the Lord's name, but as people have learned, sometimes with bitterness and disappointment, this has been no guarantee that the petition, that what they ask for, would be granted. The fact is that to ask in the Lord's Name means to ask for those things which are in accordance with His love and His purpose for us, things which are in agreement with His order and planning, with His will and His wisdom.

We are warned in this second Commandment, of the need to respect and to treat reverently, all those things and qualities which are the Lord's; all those things His Name suggests and stands for. We are to respect and reverence the Scriptures. So too all things He has created. We are to respect and reverence the gifts and talents He has given us and given others. We are to reverence the knowledge of truth another has and the faith they live by. "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*". You shall not use carelessly and irreverently, all those different things, all those various qualities, which bring the Lord to mind, and which are what is meant by His Name at the deeper, spiritual level.

### **Remember the Sabbath day by Keeping it Holy**

We now come to the third Commandment, a subject of "much dispute and controversy" (Barclay)... "*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*" I refer to it as the third Commandment and some of you, and this may be puzzling by. In many listings it comes as the fourth due to the fact that at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century the first Commandment was separated into two in order to give added emphasis to image making and idol worship. But it does not seem to matter greatly whether you regard it as the third or the fourth Commandment. The important thing is what it says.

There is dispute and controversy for several reasons. Some people reason that since the Lord did not specifically name Sunday as the new Sabbath, we should continue as before and observe Saturday to really obey the Commandment. As well as this, and from the Gospels, there were few things the Lord more strenuously disputed than the narrow and legalistic observances of the Sabbath amongst the Jews. And yet such extreme observance has been known amongst Christians and in our own time, there are widely differing attitudes as to what is involved.

There was controversy which surrounded the running of the first Sunday train from Glasgow to Edinburgh on March 13th, 1842. Leaders of the Church of Scotland in Glasgow denounced the move as a "grievous outrage on the religious feelings of the people of Scotland, a powerful temptation to the careless and indifferent to abandon the public ordinances of Grace, and most disastrous to the quiet of the rural parishes along the line of the railways." Passengers were met in Edinburgh and solemnly warned that they had bought tickets to hell.

(Barclay, p.38). And though we might smile at this, we are obliged to sit down and ask ourselves whether in fact we have a clear understanding of what the Commandment is getting at. What are the duties and responsibilities of modern-day Sabbath observance? God saw fit to include this Commandment in what has been described as "the most relevant document in the world today". What is it asking of us?

For the Jews, Saturday was singled out and set apart as a holy day. For them it was inextricably connected with the creation story and above all else, commemorated God's rest after it. As in Genesis 2:2 and 3. "*By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*" From the beginning observance of the Sabbath was hedged round with regulations, but these were multiplied to the point of absurdity as the years went by. At the time of the Lord's Advent it was forbidden to tie a knot, to light a fire, to move a lamp, to go on a journey, to prepare a meal or to heal those who were sick. "In the case of an illness or injury steps could be taken to keep a man from getting worse, but not to cure him or make him better." (Barclay)

Is it then to be wondered that the Lord was constantly at variance with the leaders of the Jews over this issue? There are numerous such instances of dispute recorded in the Gospels, and here is just one of them: Matthew 12, verse 10 to 13: "*and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*"

Though for a time, the early Christians, most of them being Jews anyway, continued observance of the Jewish Sabbath, it was inevitable that the first day of the week, the day of the Lord's resurrection, should assume an increasing significance for them. And it did. For them it was a day of victory and hope which they would commemorate, and right from the earliest times it became the focal point of their religious observances. Hence it was on the first day of the week that the congregation met to break bread at Troas (Acts 20:7). And, we read of that occasion, "*Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.*" It was also on the first day of the week that the Corinthians were to put something aside for the collection for the Jerusalem Church. (1 Corinthians 16: 2).

Though we can trace the beginnings of the Christian observance of Sunday as a day set apart and to be kept holy, the pity is that it became a matter of dispute at all. Even though Sunday reminds us of the Lord's resurrection and final victory "it is inessential whether one day or another be declared the Sabbath." (Odhner) The important thing is that the Lord is telling us how necessary it is to have a day apart; a day when we can cut ourselves clean away from worldly worries and external concerns; a day during which we have the opportunity to worship, to probe the deeper currents of our lives, and to spend time with and for people in a way that is not possible on other days. In "True Christian Religion" 301, Swedenborg writes of it as "a day of instruction in Divine things, and thus also a day of rest from labours and of meditation on such things as are of salvation and eternal life, as also a day of love towards the neighbour."

This does not mean something sombre and cheerless. It does not ask of us Church attendance two or three times every Sunday. It simply asks of us time for the Lord and for the things of religion. God did not give us this Commandment to spoil our Sundays. Rather He knows that it is in our own best interests to spend time once each week in this way. We need to remember because we are so inclined to forget the Sabbath and what it stands for. We are so easily diverted and side-tracked; so many things press upon us. In any case we naturally incline to what is external and superficial and have to be brought back to a contemplation of what is real in life and of the deeper values upon which worthwhile and deeply-satisfying living is based.

So far we have talked of this Commandment concerning the Sabbath Day in terms of the obvious, surface meaning. Now we will go a little more deeply into it. Just as in dealing with the second Commandment, I showed that the Lord's name has a far deeper significance than just those series of titles by which we know and refer to Him, so too here with this Commandment. There are deeper implications in it for us.

The implantation and establishment of any truth in our lives is never without a certain toil and struggle. As we try to hold on to a truth we know and to live by it, temptations come upon us to abandon it. Inevitably there is conflict and torment. We feel ourselves drawn in two directions. However if we have held on, in the end the conflict dies down. The truth itself begins to become part of our nature. We no longer think of acting otherwise. So far as that particular truth is concerned, we come into a state of spiritual rest and peace. And this, in a deeper sense, is what the Sabbath represents.

Looking again at the Commandment. We are to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, the Sabbath, in a deeper sense, representing the rest and peace that comes after the successful establishment of a truth in our lives. And that state, that peace of mind, is not to be violated or intruded upon in any way.

We are to do nothing that would harm it. We are not to let ourselves slip back and fall away.

We remember the Sabbath Day when we bring to mind the rest and peace which inwardly the Lord wishes to give us, and when we co-operate with Him that it may come about. And that can be any day of the week and any time of the day. The Sabbath Day represents a state of mind; a state of peace and well-being which can be ours, for the Lord wishes to bless us with it. Let us always 'Remember the Sabbath Day'; for in remembering it we can, be spurred on to make it more of a reality,

## 16. Honour Your Father and Your Mother - Ian A Arnold, April, 1985

Few of the Commandments are more direct and to the point than the fourth, which reads, "*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*" Exodus 20:12. It occurs again in Leviticus 19:3, slightly differently worded, "*Each of you must respect your mother and father,*" And elsewhere in the Old Testament the sternest punishment is threatened for those who did not do so. Exodus 21:17 reads "*Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.*"

Previously in dealing with the Commandment concerning the Sabbath Day, we saw Lord's constant conflict with the leaders of the Jews over their narrow and totally legalistic approach to proper observance of that day. We saw the multitude of rules which had been drawn up and how it was that everything was defined, down to the actual distance one could travel, the meals which must not be prepared, and the burdens which were not to be carried. They were horrified that the Lord healed on the Sabbath, for that was forbidden, and His disciples on the Sabbath, walked through a corn field and picked and ate the grain as they went. Luke 6.

Inevitably, the Lord found it necessary to challenge this rigid adherence to man-made rules and regulations, and to point out that this kind of approach was neither wanted nor involved.

Also the Lord took issue with the leaders of the Jews in regard to their attitude to this Commandment; an attitude which spoke of their hypocrisy and which helps us to understand the reason why He spoke so forcefully about them. Sanctioned by the Scribes and Pharisees, for they stood to profit by it, a person could avoid their obligation to their parents by declaring their goods and property formally dedicated to God. This did not mean they could not go on enjoying them or that they had to surrender ownership of them. It was nothing more than a subtle way of escaping expenses that might otherwise have to be incurred on behalf of aged parents. "*You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."*" Matthew 15:7-9.

In one other place in the New Testament this Commandment concerning parents is spoken of, and it deserves special mention. In Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians 6:1-4 he wrote, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" which is the first commandment with a promise, "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*"

Both sides of the parent-child relationship are touched upon here. As well as the duty of children to parents, Paul also speaks of the duty of parents to children. Both aspects are brought forward. And since we are concerned here with such a sensitive area of human relationships we will look at each in turn.

As parents nothing is more important for us than to remember that our children are not our own. They are the Lord's. Through conception and birth they are placed in our care and entrusted to us. But they do not ever become exclusively "ours". And once in our care heavy responsibilities rest upon us, not only that they be fed and clothed to the best of our ability, that their health be safe-guarded, and that they be properly educated, but also that they be led to know and love the Lord and to see the need for living their lives according to the teaching He has given us. There is both the material and spiritual welfare of our children to be borne in mind. Both are to be safeguarded and we do not properly discharge our parental responsibilities unless they are.

Many argue that so far as religion and spiritual things are concerned they will leave this decision to the child when they grow up. They make the astonishing statement that they would not want to impose their beliefs and religious outlook, if they have any, on their children, despite the fact that they are constantly impressing their children with their own cultural, moral and political values and cannot help doing so. So far as religion is concerned they forget that the child is going to make up their mind anyway. No one can impose religion on a person, not even in the parent-child relationship. In time the child will demand to make up its own mind about the matter. It is inborn in them that they must think these things out for themselves.

But how do they get on if they know no religious values? How can they make a decision about something they know nothing of? Parents talk of them deciding things for themselves later, when they are grown up. But on what basis could a decision be made? In any case the attitude totally ignores the fact that the directions of adult life are largely formulated in the earlier years of infancy and childhood. As parents, we exercise extremely far-reaching influences over our children, and if that influence has been noncommittal as far as religion is concerned, or even anti-religious, can we really expect our children to readily shake that influence off and make a balanced judgement about the matter?

I am impressed by a statement Swedenborg made, "Whatever a person from their first infancy thinks, wills, speaks and does, adds itself to their life. While these things can be removed, though sometimes only with difficulty, they cannot be exterminated," Arcane Caelestia 9333.

That parent who worthily fulfils their responsibilities will have these things in mind. Material welfare is one thing. However much more important is their child's spiritual welfare. Worldly success is one thing. But much more important is that our children come to know and love the Lord and that their highest aspirations be in terms of service to their fellow man.

In view of what is done for them, in view of the role they must play and the authority they must exercise, it is right that children should honour their parents. They must be brought up to obey them and to accept the fact that parental experience and understanding must prevail over their own impulses and often insufficiently thought out wants and desires. And in young adulthood, parents should be consulted right up to and indeed concerning, marriage. Conjugial Love 298 by Swedenborg. Of necessity, they have got to accept the limitations of their youthful state, their inexperience of life and lack of understanding of people in general.

Nevertheless, such courtesy and respect cannot by itself be arbitrarily insisted upon. Most definitely as children grow older. A parent must earn the right to be obeyed by the obvious example of their own life. They cannot expect respect when they have done nothing to win it. If there would be consultation there must be sympathy and understanding. It is no use a parent loftily dictating to their children and expecting them, in turn, to want to consult about matters. And in too many homes parents and children are almost strangers to one another. They have never developed the art of communicating. Too many parents fail to look upon their children as developing and independent personalities in their own right. And in the eyes of many young people parents are somewhat remote and busy figures who never try to look at life from their point of view.

Not surprisingly many look upon this Commandment as having special application for us only in our earlier years, especially while we are children and as adults, so long as our parents are alive. But this is far from so. Because of the deeper levels of meaning within it, this Commandment is of universal application and it is binding not only on people in this world, of all ages, but on the angels of heaven as well who know no earthly parents and cannot be required to honour their father and mother according to the flesh.

In the light of its deeper, spiritual meaning, this most familiar of all Commandments takes us beyond earthly parents and family ties and speaks of adoration and love of God and devotion to the Church (Odhner). For these are our spiritual parents. God, of course, is our heavenly Father. "*And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.*" Matthew 23:9. And what words are more familiar to us than these?

"*Our Father in heaven ...*" Matt 6:9 And the Church is our spiritual mother, for it feeds our spirits and clothes our minds. As our earthly mothers nourish our bodies and care for our welfare, so the Church, our spiritual mother, nourishes us spiritually and is constantly caring for our eternal well-being.

The Commandment is in fact of universal application. It has relevance for us all old or young, whether we are in this world or have become angels of heaven. All of us need to be reminded to love and honour the Lord God, our heavenly Father, and the Church; our spiritual mother, which so cares for us in the way it does.

### **You Shall Not Murder**

There are several controversial issues which almost always arise in connection with the fifth commandment, "*You shall not murder*". The taking up of arms, capital punishment, suicide and euthanasia are some of these. In view of this it is important to make one thing clear from the outset. The Hebrew word which has been translated "kill" is a word which means violent and unauthorised killing or what we would call "murder". And some of the more recent translations of the Bible render the Commandment accordingly. Rather than read, "Thou shalt not kill", simply because of widespread misunderstanding which has arisen, they have, "Thou shalt not commit murder". And this is really what is being said here.

This does not automatically solve all the problems or settle all the controversies. The issues spoken of are still debated with considerable feeling and vigour. But at least we do not have to be side-tracked by arguments, without foundation, that this Commandment forbids any kind of killing or the taking of life under any conceivable circumstances. It is 'violent and unauthorised' killing that is involved.

So there is very little argument with the Commandment or questioning of its importance. Of all the things listed in the Ten Commandments murder strikes us as the most terrible of all. Most of us are at a loss to comprehend the workings of the mind of a person who commits murder, especially where it is premeditated and cold-blooded. The average person scarcely even thinks of it.

And yet, there are other ways of killing people, apart from the physical act and the malicious taking away of their lives. It is possible to destroy people as to their name and reputation, for example. And this is done. Facts are misrepresented, rumours are spread, and things can be so distorted in such a way as to totally blacken the character of a person and to destroy their continuing usefulness because of the mistrust and suspicion that has been implanted in the minds of others. Things known about another are deliberately whispered which profoundly alter the standing of a person in other people's eyes. Sadly, this takes place between neighbours in the same street, workers in the same office, workmates at the same factory.

And this brings home to us that just as we are to protect another person's physical life and guard it at all times, so we are to protect their reputation and good name. We need to look upon ourselves as the guardians of each other's honour and avoid pointless discussion of another's shortcomings and self-righteous comment on their failures. We ought to have the courage to kill rumours when they first reach us, and to defend another in their absence when this is called for. Swedenborg makes the point that in the sight of the angels a person who 'kills' the honour and good name of another is held to be as guilty as if he had destroyed the bodily life of his brother. *Apocalypse Explained 1012:3.*

So far we have spoken of this Commandment in terms of actually doing things; of physical acts and aspects of our behaviour. And yet, as the Lord Himself demonstrated, the intention and deed - even if it doesn't go any further - makes a person guilty of murder and in danger of punishment. "*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment'*" Matthew 5:21-22.

Clearly, what the Lord is speaking of here is rash or unjust anger; the anger which is associated with annoyance, impatience and contempt. And because it is such a deadly thing it is important to say something about it.

When does a person get to feel such anger? What are the circumstances that generally give rise to it?

It is true to say that unjust anger comes to us when people or circumstances oppose us in some way; oppose what we want to say or thwart what we want to do? We state an opinion, for instance, and are perhaps quite proud of our contribution to a discussion or debate, then someone dismisses it. Straightaway a flame can be kindled of indignation and contempt. We go on the defensive and want to hit out. And before we know where we are we are suddenly meditating hatred and revenge.

Swedenborg wrote of anger that it is, a "general affection" resulting from what opposes ourself-love. It is a fire which is inflamed when our self-love is attacked or opposed or resisted. At the heart of it there burns hatred and revenge against those who do not favour and flatter us. Here is where grudges are formed, because someone opposed our self-love, showed us up, and cast us into a different light from that which we thought we should occupy. And it is this that the Lord warns us about. "*anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*" Matt 5:22

It is said angels have no notion of bodily death; but they understand by murder anything that injures a person's spiritual life. Arcana Caelestia 7089. And that introduces us to the deeper, spiritual meaning which this Commandment carries. Just as it is possible to injure and do harm to a person as far as their life in the world is concerned, also it is possible to damage and do harm to their spiritual life; to destroy their faith and kill their interest in spiritual things.

This opens up important responsibilities and at the same time considerably broadens the implications the Commandment has for us. "Varied and manifold are the methods employed" wrote Swedenborg, "such as turning people away from God, and creating aversion for the things of worship and instruction". There are television programmes and idiotic comedy which makes the Church a laughing stock and which subtly scorns religious belief. Doesn't this amount to turning people away from God and creates aversion for the spiritual side of life generally?

But this is just one aspect of what is involved. We can deliberately create doubts in other people's minds and undermine their values and standards. We can intentionally persuade them that what they regard as evil and wrong is not evil or wrong at all. We have heard a lot of talk about personal liberty and individual freedom; a lot of talk which at the same time has done a lot of harm; talk which has blinded people to the realities of the human situation, which has distorted the meaning of freedom and which, in turn, has done harm and caused injury to the spiritual growth and development of people.

As the Lord pointed out, anger and hatred are murder in intention and inevitably incur their own kind of penalty. Although only infrequently does such anger, contempt and hatred manifest itself, nevertheless it lies dormant within us all and can only be removed by the process of spiritual rebirth which is called regeneration. Let someone cross us and see if it is not there. Let someone oppose us or criticise us, and what of circumstances which thwart and frustrate us.

But to encourage us, as far as we shun and reject anger and overcome feelings of contempt, so the opposite qualities of mercy and forbearance are able to flow in and take their place. With the Lord's help change can be

brought about. We do not have to remain the sort of person we sometimes realise we are, or forever entertain the hateful feelings which occasionally flood through our minds about others.

## **17. The Ten Commandments - Part 4 – Ian A Arnold, May, 1985.**

We are examining the significance and meaning of each Commandment and trying to show how and in what way each applies in our own lives. We have the firm conviction that the Commandments are meant for all people for all time. They are the laws of a loving God who knows that as far as we live according to them we shall enjoy the happiness which He ever intended should be present in human living. The various efforts over the years to rewrite and update them have been dismissed, because this is not necessary. The Commandments are as relevant today as they were yesterday and as they will be tomorrow. It is just as necessary today as it was in times gone past that God should say to us, "You shall not commit murder" or "You shall not commit adultery". Times change, certainly. But human nature basically remains the same, and every generation needs to be told of the necessity of rejecting those evils of which the Commandments speak, if spiritual and heavenly qualities are to be present with them. Speaking of heaven and of heavenly life we read in Revelation Chapter 22, "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*"

And this is what the Commandments are all about, being what we are. By nature we incline to these various evils which have to be overcome and rejected. To the extent that we successfully do this, what is good is able to take its place. To the extent we reject feelings of anger and impatience with others, so feelings of mercy and understanding are given a chance to develop in their place. As far as we reject covetousness so contentment has a chance to take its place. And as with the Commandment about adultery, if we reject adultery in all its various forms, so the love of marriage, and the true love of one's married partner, is able to take a firmer hold and grow within us.

### **You Shall Not Commit Adultery**

We can picture the human mind as a somewhat small and crowded room, crowded at the outset of our adult lives with impurity and insincerity, with covetousness and discontentment. Only as far as I expel these things do I make room for their opposite qualities to take their place. Sincerity is a quality which can only develop within us as we reject insincerity. Mercy and tolerance can only become part of our nature as we reject feelings of anger and impatience. The love of what is chaste, and pure, can only develop and grow to the extent that we reject what is impure and adulterous.

Strictly speaking, adultery refers to a sexual relationship involving a married person. The dictionary defines it as the 'voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with one of the opposite sex, other than their partner'. But adultery also has its wider connotations not necessarily involving married people or strictly defining one particular relationship.

In reality anything is adulterous which harms even the ideals and expectations a person has in regard to marriage or mars their future enjoyment of a marriage relationship. Swedenborg wrote of this sixth Commandment, that it means "not only the committing of adultery, but also obscenity of will and conduct, and consequently impurity of thought and speech." True Christian Religion, 313. All of these things do harm to a marriage and threaten our enjoyment of what is the most sacred of all human relationships. And such things are adulterous.

Looked at in the light of much wider implications the Commandment does not only apply to adults and married people. It is applicable to us all, even to children and to young, people whose hopes can be shattered and whose ideals can so easily be polluted by the misrepresentation of marriage, by the snide jokes, and suggestive literature, which abounds in our community and is openly available on every bookstall. To young people and adults, married or not, the Commandment is there, "You, shall not commit

adultery". You shall not do anything that would degrade the marriage relationship. You shall allow nothing to enter your mind which distorts what marriage is all about, and do nothing, the burden of which you will have to carry in your marriage or at some future time when in fact you do marry.

People complain at the seriousness of it all and argue that the harm is overstated. There are the vociferous advocates of premarital sex and no censorship. But these have no idea of the scars upon the mind which such experiences give rise to. What is seen is impressed upon our memories only to return, unwanted, to haunt what should otherwise be a pure and uplifting experience.

How we can be protected against such things which would erode our ideals? How can parents best safeguard the interests and wellbeing of their children so that their minds remain unsullied and their behaviour kept wholesome? From where do we draw our strength to resist the allurement of the lewd novel and the appeal of the blue movies? These things do have an appeal to the unregenerate side of our nature and almost invariably stir us in some unclean way.

The answer lies in keeping in front of us the ideals of marriage love; by reaffirming our belief in marriage as something divinely set apart; by remembering that in the marriage relationship, if we are prepared to work hard at it, there is possible the deepest happiness that we can ever know, both on earth and in heaven. Part of our trouble lies in the fact that the marriage relationship is itself being questioned. People do not realise that it is an ever deepening relationship, involving essentially the marriage of two minds, and that such a marriage when it comes into being survives death and goes on being perfected to all eternity. Instead marriage is looked upon only as an agreeable legal contract signifying commitment to one another, useful particularly in the case of children, but breakable at will. And what a tragedy this is. For this is no defence against adultery. This kind of attitude will not protect a person against temptations when they come upon them. This is not the kind of reasoning which gives one the strength to reject out of hand things that are unclean and impure.

One of Swedenborg's books, the work "Conjugial Love" has been described as a virtual exposition of the sixth Commandment concerning adultery. (Odhner). It is truly one of the most amazing books which have ever been written for it was given to Swedenborg there to describe and explain the nature of true marriage love. Though true love and the ideal marriage are rare, yet they are possible. True marriage love is itself something which flows in from the Lord and is received by partners in a marriage to the degree that they look to Him and strive to live their lives according to the teaching He has given us. Marriage itself is essentially the marriage of two minds; two distinct minds which nevertheless complement each other and interact with one another.

As we have already indicated a true marriage relationship grows and deepens over the years and the partners themselves become ever more close. And this is not dream talk. This is the reality of the situation which has virtually been completely lost sight of. And it is these kinds of ideals and this kind of teaching which best protects us, and protects our young people from the things which would otherwise intrude upon and spoil their future happiness.

One final point regarding adultery, is just as we can adulterate on the natural plane of life so too we can adulterate on the spiritual plane by defiling the truths of the Divine Word with our own false reasonings and false thinking. A person adulterates at the spiritual level if in their own mind, falsifies a certain teaching the Lord has given us, and argues that it does not apply to them. They 'adulterate' the truth to make it seem different from what it actually says.

### **You Shall Not Steal**

In terms of what the word usually suggests to us, most people would resist being called a thief and would hotly deny actions which could be called stealing. The popular idea of a thief is of some shifty character who slyly takes what belongs to others. And stealing is reckoned to be some definite thing such as happens in a supermarket or department store. We talk in terms of cars stolen and goods taken: Our newspapers speak of organised theft; of warehouses broken into and houses burgled. But this is about as far as it goes. Thieves are a criminal minority in the community and few of us have first-hand knowledge of them.

This is the popular idea of what thievery and stealing is all about. But let us stop for a moment. Many of us have to fill our Tax Return Forms. The routine is a familiar one. We are required to declare our total income in one column and list against it, in another, legitimate deductible expenses. How many of those forms give a totally honest and accurate picture? Could you say of yourself that every item of income has been accurately listed and every deductible expense a legitimate one? If not, then you are guilty of theft, as guilty for all that you might strongly argue otherwise, as a person who has lifted something from a department store.

I suggest it is also worth thinking about the application of this Commandment on stealing where the sensitive area of industrial relations is concerned. There are the two sides of the picture. There is the employer who hired labour and tries to get work done for the least possible outlay; who would rob their workers of even what is fair and reasonable in their chase after unjust and excessive profits. On the other hand there is the employee who does the least possible amount of work for the largest possible financial return. To accept a job is nothing less than to contract with an employer for so many hours of our time in return for an agreed wage or salary. To waste that time is to rob our employer of a commodity which is rightfully theirs. Here again you might argue strongly about the matter and yet this is so.

Fortunately, we seem to have largely left behind the days of dishonest advertising; of adulterated goods and speedometers turned back in used cars up for sale. Acts of Parliament have been brought down which protect the consumer. And yet we are reminded by these things that anything which misrepresents a product or some object we may have for sale; which causes people to make a purchase when, were they to know, they would not buy; is stealing. There is no other word for it. And the person who does these things is a thief. The law may allow them in certain circumstances, to get away with it. But they are still a thief,

One of our problems is that we do not give things their proper names. Our tendency is to think of such people as clever businessmen or slick salesmen and to congratulate ourselves when we pull off this kind of deal. We protest the use of terms such as fraud and stealing, though this is precisely what is involved. Maybe though, if we did use the proper terms, we would have to face up more squarely to the nature of what we were doing. It is the same with adultery, people feel uncomfortable with the term. They prefer to talk of an 'affair' because somehow this takes the edge off it all. And there lies the danger. If they gave it its proper name maybe they would have more of a conscience about it and more of a realisation of the nature of what they were doing.

In discussing the Commandments we have ever to be mindful of so multiplying the applications they carry that we come to forget the essence of what is being got at. Yet there is no avoiding the countless ways in which we can steal and the vast implications this seventh Commandment carries. We can rob people of their happiness by constant criticism and unkind attitudes. We can rob a person of the praise which is rightly theirs by diverting it to ourself and by claiming that we were the architects of what has been accomplished. We can rob people of their good name and reputation; of their innocence, and most important of all, of their trust and faith in the Lord.

It is this latter point which is specifically meant by stealing at the more interior or spiritual level. Swedenborg wrote that "by stealing in the spiritual sense is to deprive another of the truths of their faith, and of the goods of, their charity". Life 80. It means to rob people of, what are to them, meaningful religious concepts; to question and confuse what they believe in; to suggest that human happiness and life in heaven can be obtained by other means. Ministers and priests do this who fail to confront their people with the Divinely-revealed realities of the human situation, and the corresponding need for individual repentance and effort. Wherever there is a modification of truth and a playing down of its plain implications, there you have an incidence of spiritual theft, for the person concerned, be they priest, minister or teacher, is taking away from their listeners the means of their salvation. If for example, I as a minister, connived at adultery, I would be guilty of spiritual theft, for I would have taken from the adulterer the means of their salvation; I would be implying that a certain truth, the truth about adultery, does not apply, when it does. For their eternal wellbeing and happiness is tied up with their obedience to it.

But apart from priests and ministers, all of us can steal in this way. The systematic and destructive criticism of another person's faith so that at last they do not know where they stand or what to believe amounts to spiritual theft. They have been robbed of their certain faith and sure convictions. And some, it seems, almost delight in doing this, in dismantling the beliefs of others because they haven't any beliefs themselves. To scoff at another's principles so that they themselves begin to doubt and question them is also a form of spiritual stealing; as is the deliberate endeavour to undermine another's conscience in inducing them to commit some evil.

In his treatment of this Commandment it was given to Swedenborg to warn of the ease with which the habit of stealing may be confirmed.

"When a person plunges themself into some evil - first because they give in to it, then because they deliberately intend it, and finally because they love and delight in it, they are like blatant thefts which a person cannot refrain from committing once they have deliberately engaged in two or three; for they cling constantly to their thinking. At least not without deep and sincere repentance. The habit grows so quickly, and the first success whets the appetite for subsequent and more ambitious thefts. And the reason is that the evil, once committed, brings us into contact with influences from hell, which for ever more urgently press upon us. These influences, it is said, 'do not let up, but obstinately bear in on a person, and cause them to think about that evil, at first occasionally, and afterwards as often as anything presents itself which is related to it.' A.C. 6203.

Because theft is inevitably associated with cunning and deceit, "the evil of theft enters more deeply into a person than any other evil." Swedenborg: "Doctrine of Life" 81. Once the principle of fraud and theft is accepted, quite apart from the fact of whether it is permissible by law or not, deceit and cunning take over, and the mind of the person is constantly set upon further schemes of personal profit and unlawful gain.

As far as we reject a particular evil and drive it out of our lives so its opposite enters in and take its place. As far as we reject all impure and unchaste thoughts and behaviour, purity and chastity is able to enter in and be established with us.

As far as we reject all forms of fraud, unlawful gain and dishonest practices, so sincerity and honesty is able to be established with us. The rejection of the one makes room for the establishment of the other. As Swedenborg says, "How can anyone fail to see that. the Lord cannot flow in from heaven with a person, and teach and lead them, until their evils are put away? For these stand in the way of, repel, pervert and choke the truths and goods of heaven, which press, thrust and strive to flow in from a higher plane." *Apocalypse Explained*, 969.

## 18. The Ten Commandments : Part 5 – Ian Arnold, June 1985

*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour Exodus 20:16*

Your first reaction on reading or hearing the Commandment, "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour*" is probably, to think of a court-room situation and of the untrue testimony which a person might be tempted to give there. This is no doubt. "*to give false testimony against your neighbour*", "or to testify falsely, means first of all to bear false witness before a judge, or before others not in a court of justice, against anyone accused on a groundless charge of some crime." TCR 321. It means the solemn misrepresentation in court, of facts or of a situation, to the harm and injury of another; sworn testimony which a person affirms in the name of God is true.

Therefore you would think it is not a Commandment which particularly concerns us or has special relevance to our ordinary and day to day living. But in these few words of explanation given so far, the Commandment has only been touched upon in its most obvious meaning, and that much more is involved here than what is otherwise first suggested.

It is the same here as with the other Commandments. So much more is involved. And when we examine them more closely it becomes clear that things are touched upon in each case which deeply concern us all.

We don't have to be in a court-room or under solemn oath to bear false witness and break this Commandment. Any misrepresentation of facts or a situation, especially where it injures another person, is false witness. The Commandment is talking about lying in all its various forms; things said which hurt another; which wrongfully shift the blame for something to another person; which suggest or even imply things about others which have no foundation - these are the things that are meant here.

Forget for the moment the formal, legal connotations this Commandment carries. If we suggest things that are not true about someone else, then we are testifying falsely about them. Again, if we say things of another with the deliberate intention of casting them into an unfavourable light or belittling them, then this would involve our breaking this Commandment. Any attempt to persuade others that what is untrue or without foundation, is true, is to bear false testimony.

We commonly call this malicious gossip in which people are tempted to indulge out of their small-mindedness and tragic need to bolster their sense of self-esteem and importance, and concerning it, the scriptures themselves have much to say. As in Leviticus 19:16 "*Do not go about spreading slander among your people*". And the reason is given in the proverbs where it is said: "*A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret*". Proverbs 11:13. "*Do not testify against your neighbour without cause, would you use your lips to mislead?*" Proverbs 24:28.

Talking about others can be of the friendliest nature and quite devoid of malice. Yet it is something to be carefully watched because it so easily leads into the realm of slander and backbiting. There is much to reflect upon in the words of the apostle James where he describes the tongue, though little, as "unruly", hard to "tame", and able to cause vast destruction.

'Misrepresentation' can be of two kinds. There is the misrepresentation which belittles, injures, sows suspicion and doubt about another person; and the misrepresentation which exaggerates and flatters. In both cases this is to bear false testimony. In both cases an evil has been committed. We can as easily harm a person by over-stating their abilities and by creating expectations about them, as we can be running them down and slandering them. Questionable motives are involved in both instances. So often the flatterer's aim is to win their way into the favour of another; even to gain influence over that other, which the plainer statement of the facts would not win for them. The Commandment demands of us strict truth about another at all times; not supposition and guesses, not whispered suspicions or gossipy anecdotes; at no time downright falsehoods or deliberate lies; nor insincere flattery and over-stated praise. "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour*".

Previously we have said that all forms of lying are a form of false witness. Lies about ourselves, lies which misrepresent us; incorrect statements which create a wrong impression and which suggest to others, other than what is the truth of the matter. We can create a wrong impression by suggesting knowledge we have not got, or experiences which we have not had: and what other word is there for this other than 'false witness'? there are also the misrepresentation of situations which few of us can. Resist. Who of us in relating some personal experience, can totally resist the temptation to tell it in such a way that it shows us in a better light than the facts actually warrant? (see Barclay p. 191). By such misrepresentation we break the Commandment concerning false witness.

What is of special concern is that such misrepresentation, such lying, becomes habitual. People can become so chronically inaccurate in their statements that they forget what strict honesty is. They forget what it is to be honest about themselves, about situations and experiences, and about other people. By nature they exaggerate and over-state. Others learn to take what they say 'with a pinch of salt'. It is sad that this has to be said about anyone. Unhappily it is said of many: of people in business and of neighbours in the same street. We learn not to depend on the total accuracy of what they say or the complete truthfulness of some

statement they make. Complete honesty is a somewhat rare commodity in our community and it is an indictment of us all that this is so.

The question is, why? And the answer is that by lies and misrepresentations, we attract to ourselves spiritual influences from hell which lodge in the mind and obscure what total honesty and truthfulness is all about. Constant lying and the distortion of the truth seals the mind off from the Lord's inflowing life. Conscience becomes silenced and exaggeration and mis-statement become habitual and are like second-nature. The mind and manner of a person becomes orientated to that way of speaking about and presenting things.

And this in turn brings home to us the harm that is caused in bearing false witness, not just the harm caused to the person slandered, but the harm that is caused to the person who tells the lie or misrepresents the facts. Rarely do we consider this aspect of things and yet it is certainly there. Thinking becomes so distorted that at last they no longer recognise what total honesty and truthfulness is all about.

There are, surely, lessons in all of this for everyone; for us and for people everywhere. Things have been said which should, as well alert every parent to be on their guard where their children are concerned that they might cultivate in their children this very important virtue of honesty. It was once wisely said, "accustom your children constantly to this: if a thing happened at one window and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them: you do not know where deviation from the truth will end". (Dr Johnson).

False witness, is the attempt to persuade others that what is false is true; to witness falsely about situations, people or ourselves. At a deeper and more interior level to bear false witness means to witness falsely about the truths of the Lord's Word and to try to persuade people that things that are false are in fact true.

Here is a simple illustration of what is meant: say someone comes to you, someone, who has been hurt or wronged by another person. If you encourage them to get their own back, to take revenge on them, you have broken this Commandment. You have witnessed falsely concerning the Lord's truth which teaches mercy and forgiveness. This is what is meant. Swedenborg wrote: "in the spiritual sense, to bear false witness means to persuade people that what is false in faith is true, and that the evil of life is the good of life." (True Christian Religion 22).

### **You Shall not Covet**

The ninth and tenth Commandments concern covetousness. "*You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.*" In many churches these are combined into a single Commandment and listed as the tenth. And the reason for this is that at the time of the reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Protestant Reformers divided the first Commandment into Two, in order to give added stress to the evil of idolatry, and joined the last two together. Originally they were two, but the Reformers made them one. And yet, because two very distinct things are involved, the original separation is preferred and we shall refer to them as the ninth and tenth Commandments .

The first thing to note about them is how they differ from the first eight. All of those deal with outward actions and obvious evils. These two deal with inward thoughts; with things that go through our minds; with evils that are within the heart of a person and which may never be seen by other people. And in this regard, they lay by far the hardest task upon us. To control one's actions is one thing. To control one's thoughts and feelings and emotions is quite another'. Barclay. And yet this is what these Commandments concerning covetousness ask of us.

This is how they differ. They speak of evil in the mind and heart of a person; of thoughts and desires that come to us; of private longing for the possessions or the wife of another. And in doing so they emphatically broaden our responsibilities and show us that it is not just actual actions which are concerned in keeping The Commandments , but the things we would love to do as well. It is as if the Lord is saying: "don't think that

because you haven't stolen the goods of your neighbour you haven't broken the Commandments .To covet them is just as bad".

Not only do we need to control our actions, but we need to, and must, control our thoughts and desires as well. This is what these last two Commandments are saying to us.

Swedenborg wrote of them; "these two Commandments have regard to all the preceding Commandments , teaching and enjoining that evils should neither be done nor lusted after. Consequently they relate not only to the realm of outward behaviour, but also to the realm of thought and intention, for he who does not commit evils, and yet desires to do them, nevertheless does commit them, as the Lord said." True Christian Religion 326.

The teaching is plain enough. And yet how many people are facing up to it? Facing up to the fact that intention and desire, if evil, are just as damnable as if the act itself were committed? The Lord taught that to lust after a person was to commit adultery with them already in one's heart. But how many of us really accept that this is so? He also taught that to harbour hatred, to be angry, and to bear a grudge, is to murder a person in one's heart. How many of us really accept that this is so? Our tendency is to accept that, yes, the outward act constitutes sin, but not the inward desire. But this is not what the Lord is saying. Sin is involved at both levels, and we are to face up to a responsibility in both cases.

Earlier we spoke of preference for the original numbering of the Ten Commandments which separates the evil of covetousness into two. Why? At first glance there seems to be very little difference between the law '*not to covet the neighbour's house*' and the further injunction '*not to Covet the neighbour's wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbours*'. Both prohibitions are warnings against envy and jealousy and against the lusting after those things which belong to another (Odhner). Then why separate them into two?

Let us look at them a little more closely. The first warning is essentially about possessions. "*You Shall not covet your neighbour's house*". It talks of the things of the world. It speaks of our discontentment. It warns of the constant chasing after things, so characteristic of our age; of the endless pursuit of wealth and comforts which is going on all around us and in which, to a greater or lesser extent, we find ourselves caught up in. It specifically addresses itself to our love of the world, and to the potentially insatiable desire we all share for acquisition; for new and different, and bigger and better possessions.

The second warning is a different one. Its central theme is self-aggrandizement. What it talks about is power and control over people, as against the first warning which addresses itself to our love of the world. This second warning is a warning about the love of self, and the desire to dominate over and control others. And it is in this respect that they are different.

There are two basic loves which are ever seeking to raise their heads in our lives and these are the love of the world and the love of self. And here in these ninth and tenth Commandments, attention is directed to them. This is why we prefer the original numbering of the Commandments and the separation of this law about covetousness into two. The thing is that two separate things are being treated. In these last two Commandments the Lord is warning us of the need to resist, first, the promptings of the love of the world, and second, the promptings of the love of self. "*You shall not covet your neighbour's house*". That's one thing. And then He goes on to say: "*You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbours.*" And that is the second thing. To resist the desire to control and dominate the lives of others and to have them for oneself.

Concerning the love of the world, the Lord Himself had much to say. "*What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*" Matt. 16:26. "*do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear, your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" Matt. 6:25-33. "*Watch out! Be*

*on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*" Luke 12:15. There is as well, the parable of the rich fool, and so it goes on.

Even more insidious and subtle is the love of self. The love which makes much of our own importance; the love which is constantly making us worry about our standing in the eyes of other people; the love which would have us yearn for praise and recognition, which has no respect for the thinking and viewpoints of others, which is intolerant, and even contemptuous of those who do not favour us or let us have our way.

We are all born with a tendency towards the love of self. It is present with everyone without exception. "Every person is born of their parents into the evils of the love of self and of the world. Swedenborg, Arcana Caelestia, 8550. Our dominant inclinations lie in that direction. We tend naturally to love ourselves, to think of ourselves, to wish well to ourselves, to favour ourselves. This is so with people everywhere. And it must be resisted. This is why the Lord said, *"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* John 12:25. Our own life is our tendency to exalt and love ourself, a tendency which, when not resisted, comes to consume a person completely. "The love of self" wrote Swedenborg "is such, that in proportion as rein is given to it, it rushes on, and at last to the Divine throne itself, so as to want to be a god." Arcana Caelestia, 6878.

This is something that is present in every one of us. We all have this tendency to live our lives and to do things, not from the point of view of the service we may be rendering our fellow man, but from what we can get out of it and from the point of view of the benefits that will possibly come to us. We like people who flatter us and agree with us and dislike those who, irrespective of whether what they say is right or not, disagree with us. So often we find ourselves doing things for the sake of a good image and to create the right impression. We want to be looked up to and admired, and we imagine ourselves in positions of importance and power. Such is the love of self to which our attention is specifically directed in the tenth Commandment; a love which at all times must be resisted.

The Commandments are important and far-reaching are their implications for us. We have spoken of deeper, spiritual meanings within the Commandments, which Swedenborg unfolds for us. The Commandments are as important today as they were when they were first given. Times change, certainly. But what does not change is our need to reject and resist those evils detailed in the Commandments. And as so far as we do this, the Lord Himself can be present in our lives bringing blessing and happiness.

## **19. The Wave of the Future - Richard H Tafel, July 1985**

We are indebted to the Ancient Greeks for the concept of history as we know it. They discovered that events are not isolated and unrelated happenings, but that a particular event assumes its real significance and importance only as it is seen in relationship to what happened before and after it. Thanks to them, we have a connected human story reaching far back into the history of the race.

To the Ancient Hebrew people we are indebted for a quite different understanding of history. They believed with utter conviction that this is God's world - that He created it, sustains it, governs and directs to His purposes. To them, the most important thing was to look at their past to see how God's controlling hand had moved throughout it all, so that they might have a sustaining faith and assurance that He was also moving in the very same way in their present times.

In other words, what we call history was for them seeing God's eternal truths, as these were pointed out to them in the grand and wonderful ways He had dealt with them in the past. Therefore, they did not write any of what we would call 'history books'. Yet, certain of the books which they have given us in the Bible are generally referred to as 'history books', such books as Joshua Judges, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings.

Their title for these books, from the beginning right up to the present, was and is 'the former Prophets'. That is what they are, a prophetical presentation of history. They teach God's eternal truths and principles in a vast over-view of their past which shows how He deals with His world, and with peoples and nations, as He moves onward to His timeless goals. They proclaim all this just as surely as did the great prophets of Israel with their living "thus saith the Lord!"

Of course they recorded bits of their actual history, sometimes large pieces of it, but it was always used to teach moral or spiritual lessons. Often they are silent on what we would judge to be important and outstanding events, but which they did not feel were pertinent to their purpose.

An example of this is the great battle of Karker in 766 B.C. which has been cited as one of the decisive battles of the world. Ahab, the king of Israel had formed an alliance of small states to withstand the onrushing Assyrian Empire. At the head of the allies he defeated the Assyrians and stopped their drive into the fertile crescent. The significance of this great victory was that it gave almost fifty more years for the development of Israel's national identity and religion.

We hear nothing of this in the Book of Kings, and we have to learn about it from Assyrian tablets, which record the high esteem in which they held Ahab and his father Omri. So important were they in their eyes that their name for the Land of Israel was 'The House of Omri'. Yet in the Book of Kings, Ahab and his father are dismissed in a few words as bad and ineffectual kings. The Ancient Hebrew writers were not so much interested in what happened as they were in why it happened. To them 'history was synonymous to "God in Action" '.

Perhaps this prophetic interpretation of history can best be seen in the Book of Judges. During this early period of their national existence, as they struggled to win the land promised to them by their God, they had no king. They operated as individual tribes, or groups of tribes, weak and largely at the mercy of their stronger and better organized neighbours. This is how the writers of that Book analysed those days. From time to time - and repeatedly - Israel turned their backs on their God, forsook Him, and served idols of their own choosing. As a result they were enslaved by their neighbours.

Then, over and over again, they would repent and turn to Jehovah for help. Their God would then raise up a deliverer, a 'judge' who would free them from their yoke. Then, faithful to their God, they would live for a time in peace and prosperity. But inevitably that pattern would be repeated, and the writers pointed it out as a formula; apostacy, subjugation, repentance and turning to their God, the raising up of a new deliverer. Then again the same thing over and over again throughout a whole line of delivering judges; Shamgar, Gideon, Samson, Elihud and Deborah.

But notice throughout it all the Divine patience, forbearance and mercy. God, not angry, not sitting in condemnation or judgement, but God willing and ready to move with power to save and deliver His people when they call upon Him. Maybe we today need to remember this! And notice that these cycles of history are not a meaningless 'going round and round without getting anywhere'; bit by bit, gradually and over a long time, Israel is being led to a point where they can choose a king and can live in peace in their Land of Promise, where God can be in their midst 'in His Holy Temple'. We, today on the contrary, still repeat the shibboleth of the ages, "History does not repeat". At the same time we say that it has no meaning and leads nowhere, and "is all sound and fury, signifying nothing" - quite missing the great truth that God would teach us in His Holy Word. Another thing we say is, "History teaches nothing except that it teaches us nothing". That would be anathema and blasphemy for those 'people of the Book' who saw so clearly and unmistakeably God's hand moving in human affairs.

But now, to come to the subject, "The Wave of the Future", based on the words in the Book of Judges 5:20, "*From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera*". Israel was in one of their 'low' periods. They had turned away from their God, and the inevitable result was they were slaves to their conquerors, this time the Canaanites. But in answer to their cry for help, God raised up a deliverer, Deborah. She summoned Israel, and ten thousand men responded to her call.

We do not know how many Canaanites were assembled for battle; we are only told that there were nine hundred horses and chariots, a tremendous force when opposed by soldiers on foot - what can infantry do against tanks? But note the inspired way the writer records what happened. They say nothing about the strategy of their generals or the bravery of their troops. The most important thing, that which carried the day, was this: "*From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera*".

To understand this, you have to look hard at Judges 4, which is a prose account of the battle, and at Chapter 5, which is a poetical account of it. Remember that the writer believed with utter conviction that God controls the world and its destiny. There were ten thousand soldiers of Israel arrayed against nine hundred chariots of the Canaanites, plus how many more well equipped foot soldiers we do not know. What happened? At the crucial point in the battle there came a tremendous cloudburst. Immediately - as happens in such terrain - the little brook, 'Kison', overflowed its banks, making the battlefield a swamp and immobilizing the mighty chariots. With that the battle was over.

What if "the stars in their courses" still "fight against Sisera?" What if there is amoral order built into the very framework of God's world? A power which champions the cause of spirit, and which laughs at the world's easy philosophy that God is on the side of the heaviest artillery?

The teachings recorded by Emanuel Swedenborg emphasise that this is God's world and that God is moving at the heart of human affairs. He was given to see the Garden of Eden - life as God has intended it to be for us - culminating in the "Garden City" pictured in the Book of Revelation: the Holy Jerusalem, a New Church, a new order of life - "A new Heaven and a new earth" now making its way from God into our midst and into our times.

What, if we believed this, our vision, and this, our faith - instead of what we insist on believing only on the basis of what our earthly eyes would tell us about our world and our times? All those inspired spokesmen of God had visions of the Apocalypse, but they also had visions of the all-conquering Kingdom of God. They faced the future calmly and unafraid, knowing that whatever that future might hold, God would be in it, and we?

#### **Reading from Swedenborg: New Heaven : New Church**

The Lord derives and produces the New Church on earth through the New Heaven by means of a revelation of truths through His mouth, or from His word, and by inspiration. This will be shown in the section of the four churches in their order, especially on the Israelitish church, and on the present Christian church. It should be known that when hell has increased and has passed over the great gulf fixed between itself and heaven (Luke 16:26), and has raised up its back even to the confines of the heavens where the angels are, which came to pass during the interval of the vastation and consummation of the church, no doctrine of the church could be conveyed by the Lord through heaven to the men of the earth. The reason is that man is then in the midst of Satans. As long as this state continues, no doctrine of truth, and good out of heaven can be infused into man, because it is falsified. But after this tangled veil of falsities, has been taken away by the Lord, which is accomplished by the last judgment, then man is led in a freer and more spontaneous spirit to discard falsities and to receive truths. With those who adapt themselves, and suffer themselves to be led by the Lord, the doctrine of the new heaven, which is the doctrine of truth and good, is afterward conveyed down and introduced.

This, the Lord's second coming, is not in person, but in the Word, which is from Him and which He is. True Christian Religion 776).

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth. This symbolically means that the Lord formed a new heaven out of Christians, which today is called the Christian heaven and is inhabited by people who worshiped the Lord and lived in accordance with His commandments in the Word, who consequently possess charity and faith. Found in that heaven also are all the little children of Christians.

The new heaven and new earth do not mean the natural heavens that are visible to our eyes or the natural earth inhabited by the human race. Rather they mean a spiritual heaven and the land of that heaven where

angels dwell. That that heaven and the land of that heaven are meant is something everyone sees and acknowledges if only he can be drawn away from a purely natural and material idea when he reads the Word.

It is apparent that an angelic heaven is meant because we are told in the very next verse that John saw the holy city Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. This does not mean some Jerusalem coming down, but the church, and the church on earth descends from the Lord out of the angelic heaven, since angels in heaven and people on earth are united in everything having to do with the church. Apocalypse Revealed 876).

## 20. Making Love Last - Paul Zacharias, August 1985

Here are some thoughts on making love last. Here we use the word love in the broadest and best sense - the love between husbands and wives, between parents and children, brothers and sisters, between friends, and all the way through is implied the love between ourselves and God. How do we nurture and keep alive the tender flame of love, in some ways a fragile flame, but also a tough and enduring flame?

As we look within ourselves, and as we see the lives of people around us, we observe that the love between two persons is not a smooth, even flow. It has ups and downs, sometimes the current is calm and serene, other times turbulent and unsettled, even as all of life is. There is a measure of mystery, uncertainty and challenge in every area of our living.

So our main thought is: how do we make true love last, through time and eternity, because what we learn here, the way in which we live and love, is carried with us throughout all of eternity, which is a very long time indeed.

What kind of love are we talking about? Swedenborg describes love in these different ways: "The essence of love is that from two, makes one... love is when two persons are conjoined as to their inner states... such as is the love, such are the shared delights and joys... the soul after the death of the body is such as is its love... to love others is to do good to them as one is able, and this from the heart... where there is love there is respect and trust... love consists in this, that we feel the other person's joy and pain as our own... in the spiritual world, presence is according to love.., the Lord alone is Love itself, because He is Life itself, and we receive love and life from Him."

Ideally, this is the kind of love the Bible is talking about when it says that we are to love another as God first loved us - this deep, ongoing bond of affection between two or more persons that is based on shared trust and respect. How do we keep this kind of love alive? Every time there is a wedding, the bride and groom stand forth in the presence of God and they pledge their love for one another. They have such high and noble ideals for their marriage, and they promise they will-stay-together "for better for worse for richer for poorer...", and they believe that their marriage will last forever. But the tragic fact is that within five years about one-third of those marriages will have broken up, leaving behind an enormous legacy of bitterness, guilt and mental anguish. So we need all the help we can get'building strong, enduring relationships. Following are five thoughts on making love last - in marriages, in families, and in friendships.

1. We have to keep in mind that people and relationships are never static; there is constant change in all of life. This means that every hour, every day, is different. We are not the same person we were last month or last year, which means that we have to keep on our toes and be aware of what goes on right now, both in ourselves and in those we love. There will have to be constant adjustment and compromise in every relationship; life is an ongoing, unfolding process where there is both giving and taking, and where both parties must be willing to change and adapt to current situations. So we might ask ourselves: "How do I deal with change? Am I willing and able to change so that this marriage, this family, can become a stronger, viable unit?" Being flexible and willing to compromise, adjusting to changing conditions, on both sides, is a very important factor in making love last.

2. Lasting love is based on mutual trust and respect, and this kind of trust grows out of being honest and fair in our dealings with the other person. Love simply cannot survive if there is lying and cheating, if promises are repeatedly broken, if there is no regard for the other person's welfare, if there is little respect for each other as individuals. Where these conditions exist the flame of love gradually fades away and dies. Again, this calls for consideration and sensitivity from all concerned - treating others as we want to be treated - giving encouragement and support when things are tough; showing the other person, with our words and our actions, that we do care. These are two key concepts in making love last: mutual trust and respect.

3. Accept the fact that we are the architects, the builders, of our own lives, our friendships and our marriages. We are in charge of our own destiny but we can change only ourselves, we cannot change other people. Very often when things turn sour, we quickly find someone else to blame: our spouse or friend or partners Or someone out there. And it may be that this other person has done something wrong or hurtful, but to just heap all the blame on that individual, and stop there, solves nothing. It does not get to the root of the problem. Every time we get into a right-wrong situation, where "I am totally right and the other person is completely wrong," we lock ourselves into a box, and there is no way out. That is a lost cause, every time.

Some very good books have been written about fair fighting. In the boxing ring, and in virtually all forms of human activity, the people involved have to abide by certain rules of the game; and so it is in marriages and all relationships. Some of the rules of fair fighting are: avoid win-lose situations, where one person is the winner and the other person is knocked out. Rather, negotiate so that both parties win something. Also, deal with only one, problem at a time, that is, the present difficulty, not something that happened, last month or last year. Dredging up the past is not fair fighting.

Also, make certain you are talking about the same thing; listen to each other's thoughts and feelings and give some feed-back. Does the other person have a true picture of our version of the situation? We cannot read minds; we must verbalize our thoughts. and feelings. Finally, using mainly negative expressions, fault finding, putting the other person down, is going to erode and finally kill any relationship. This is unfair fighting.

4. When we expect the best, from ourself, the other person and from God, we have gone a long way toward building a stable, lasting relationship. When people expect the best from us and act accordingly, doesn't this give us a lot of confidence and self-esteem? Recently I read an article on the training of athletes going to the Olympic Games, and the main point of it was that at least half of the training is devoted to developing positive mental attitudes. At this class of world competition the abilities and strength of the athletes in the various categories is so close, physically speaking, there is very little to choose from. In many cases the difference between winning and losing is based on the will to win; the one who most expects to win is most apt to win. In our marriage and in our friendships what do we expect? What do we truly wish would happen? We need to be aware of our deep-down wishes, because they generally come true.

How do we live, knowing that God expects us to act in a certain way? What do parents really expect of their children, and of course the children pick this up, regardless of what the parents say? This matter of expectations is very important in making love last.

5. Swedenborg also gives this definition of love: "To love means the same as to do, for he who loves, does." This is something of a chicken-egg situation - which comes first, motives or actions?

He means that when we act or behave in a loving manner, this in turn gives birth to more love and so on endlessly. Very often we need to do something good to feel something good, Hasn't this happened to us dozens of times? Perhaps we're feeling down for some reason, depressed and blue, and then we do something worthwhile for someone else and very soon we are feeling a lot better ourselves. There is a basic spiritual law at work here, which says that positive actions are likely to promote positive reactions, first in attitudes and then in behaviour. When we act responsibly, with compassion and love, this in turn generates the same kind of behaviour in people around us, in ever widening circles, as when you toss a pebble into a pond.

These are five guideposts that can help to make love last: being aware that all of life is changing, flexible; nurturing, mutual respect and trust; taking responsible charge of our own lives; expecting the best, from others and from ourselves; acting from love, which generates more love.

When we know and understand that God loves us in all of these ways, plus a great deal more, this helps us to understand and love other people. We can love others because God first loved, and loves us. Read the gospels from this point of view and see how Jesus Christ lived this way every day of His life. And then He asks us, His friends and co-workers, to go out and do likewise. With the Lord's help we can continue to grow in love through time and eternity. Isn't this a beautiful and powerful thought: to realize that God has not given up on us? That God has not yet finished with us? That we too can grow in love forever? Therein lies our hope, and the hope of the world.

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* - Galatians 5:22,23.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - True Marriage Love**

Truly conjugial love today is so rare that it is generally unknown. Nevertheless there actually is such a love. Besides, who does not know that such a love is possible, a love which so transcends all other loves in excellence and gratification that they are all inconsequential compared to it? Evidences of experience testify that it exceeds love of self, love of the world, even love of life.

Are there not and have there not been men who, for the woman they long for and implore to be their bride, throw themselves on their knees, adore her as a goddess, and submit themselves to her wishes as the humblest of servants - evidence that that love exceeds love of self?

Are there not and have there not been men who, for the woman they long for and implore to be their bride, count any price as nothing, not even great riches if they have them, and who also spend their fortunes lavishly - evidence that that love exceeds love of the world?

Are there not and have there not been men who, for the woman they long for and implore to be their bride, regard their very life as worthless and wish to die if she does not consent to their entreaty - evidence, as also testified to by the many battles of rival suitors even to their death, that that love exceeds love of life?

Are there not and have there not been men who, for the woman they long for and implore to be their bride, at her refusal have been driven out of their minds?

From this inception of conjugial love with many, who cannot rationally conclude that from its essence that love rules supreme over every other love, and that the person's soul is then in that love, promising itself eternal blessings with the one he longs for and implores? If one searches this way and that, who can see any other cause than that the person has committed his soul and his heart to the one woman? For if a suitor were to be given, while in that state, the alternative of choosing the most estimable, most wealthy and most beautiful woman of all her sex, would he not spurn the option and cling to his choice, his heart belonging to her alone?

So much has been said, kind reader, in order that you may acknowledge that there is a conjugial love of such a superior nature, and that it exists when only one of the opposite sex is loved.

If the intellect regards correlations in connected series with a cultivated eye, what one cannot deduce from them that if a lover from his soul or from his inmost being steadfastly persists in a love for the same woman, he would attain those eternal blessings which he promised himself before her consent and continues to promise himself upon receiving it? Conjugial Love 333.

## **21. The Laws of Happiness - Dr W Woofenden, September, 1985**

The first in a series of eight talks on the Beatitudes

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 5:3. Or as Today's English Version words it, *Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them!*

The Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew, is the most challenging sermon ever preached. It is set in context as follows: "*Now when He saw the crowds, (Jesus) went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and He began to teach them*". The opening words of the sermon which follow, we know as the Blessings or Beatitudes.

By this time the Lord had already begun His public ministry. He had chosen the twelve who were in time to become apostles, and He had already performed many miracles of healing. His fame had spread so that now crowds began to follow Him. And in the language of the spirit, where it says that "*He saw the crowds*", we understand this to mean that Jesus saw their spiritual states: states of the darkness of ignorance and of even greater darkness of wrong desires. They were working for "*food that spoils*" instead of "*food that endures to eternal life*". John 6:27.

So it was most appropriate that His first words to them were the Blessings, for these are the laws of happiness. The word used here, usually translated "blessed", means "happy". So the Lord was saying in effect: "Do you really want to find lasting happiness? If so, these are the laws that govern such states." At first sight they may not appear what most of us might consider laws of happiness, but Christian experience has testified that they are in fact the principles underlying every true and happy life.

All of the Lord's actions as well as His words were representative. So it was not by chance that these words were spoken up on a mountainside. Going up onto a mountain, pictures His speaking from His great love for us. From a mountain one can get a clearer and broader view; and it is only from love that we can get a clearer and broader view and see the, states and needs not only of ourselves but of others, and so be enabled to help both ourselves and others.

The Lord knew that the crowds would follow Him, but in doing so they had largely selfish motives: to receive without cost or labour the loaves and fish, and to be healed of their sicknesses. In short Jesus knew that at heart they were far from Him. Yet His mission was not to condemn or punish, but to redeem and save.

Over 2,000 years have passed since the sermon on the mount was given. During that time mankind has advanced both spiritually and materially. And yet, the Blessings are far from the accepted standard even today. Pressures of the world, pressures of natural needs and desires effectively blind people to their highest good. This pressure, has led to truly amazing scientific and material achievements, leading to such development and such almost inconceivably vast accumulation of wealth and resources as to assure to all of mankind the satisfaction of all their external needs and desires, if only their ideals were true and good. Yet despite this incredible accumulation of wealth and resources we find the world bewildered and fearful; we find infants starving and school children doubting that the world threats will allow them to live long enough to become mature adults.

Why? Because all external achievements are at best superficial. The true task of human life is regeneration. If the heart remains unchanged, no change in external conditions will occur. The familiar words from Isaiah 1:16, "*Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!*" are a message to all people for all ages. The necessity of changing the heart, of regeneration, which can only be accomplished by means of divine truth, is a fundamental teaching of every true religion.

Although all people are capable of regeneration, all of us are born unregenerate. And the real nature of the unregenerate heart is described in stark detail in the Gospel in this way: "*From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these things come from inside and make a man 'unclean'.*" Mark 7: 21-22.

As we read history, and note the seeking after power and dominion, the conflicts and wars, together with the present-day confusion, conflict and unrest, we should be able to see that all this misery and suffering is self inflicted. It is because the life of most people is not guided by divine truth.

A lesson which the world has yet to learn is that the only way to peace - true and lasting peace is through victory over ourselves. This is the fundamental lesson that the Blessings teach. Any other, sort of "victory" is not really a victory at all. It was essentially to teach us this: that the Lord came into the world. As long as people seek personal advantage and power; as long as nations seek "a place in the sun" (a phrase popularized by William II of Germany, who claimed, "No one can dispute with us the place in the sun that is our due") the kingdom of the world will not become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Rev. 11:15

To teach this central truth the Lord opened His Sermon on the Mount by saying, "*Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them!*" This first blessing is properly first, for it is the gateway to heavenly life. It is the first law both for individuals and for nations. I have purposely quoted the law in unfamiliar language, rather than the traditional wording, for to be poor in spirit never was meant to imply either being debased or to have little spirit. Elsewhere (Matthew 11:29) Jesus described himself "gentle and humble in heart". And it is that combination of attitudes about self, gentleness and humility, that is the key.

In Proverbs 11:2 we read, "*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*" Conversely, those who know and admit to themselves that they are spiritually poor, humble in the sense of looking to the Lord for help and direction and not to themselves, do not fall into the trap of self-pride, setting themselves up as somehow better and greater than others. Those who know they are spiritually poor have a depth of insight that enables them to see and accept their weaknesses and limitations. They realize they are not self-sufficient. They look to the Lord as their ideal, recognizing their deep spiritual need, but at the same time they are able to see their spiritual possibilities, and seeing them, be glad.

This is where true Christianity begins. Let us recall the setting when the Lord first empowered His apostles and sent them forth to serve their fellowmen as His representatives. After warning them that they would suffer persecution, He then gave them these words of advice: "*Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*" Matthew 10:19-20

They were not to speak nor act from self. How hard it is for us to learn that great truth! How much time and energy we waste on the false presumption that it is all up to us if we are to be the Lord's apostles, that somehow we must have all the right words neatly in place in our minds, that we must be sure at all times how to act under whatever the circumstances; that we must be mature, courteous, highly educated and self-assured, if we are to help spread the Gospel. How far that is from the truth!

How easily we forget that striking scene when the Lord said to his disciples, "*I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" Matthew 18: 3-4. Then, just before His arrest and crucifixion the Lord gave these final words of advice to Peter, "*When you have returned to me, strengthen your brothers.*" Luke 22:31. What is not immediately obvious here in translation is that the word rendered "change" (to change and become like little children) is the same root as the word rendered "return" (when you have returned to me) in the words of Peter.

In either case, the "change" or "return" involves a radical change in our attitude towards ourselves, and an equally radical return to a childlike, not childish, attitude toward the meaning of life. It does not mean some sort of artificially constructed condition for the purpose of putting oneself down. It is instead a rejection of that feeling of self-sufficiency which bars the way to enlightenment and makes spiritual progress impossible. Anyone who thinks they are already wise will naturally not seek further truth or instruction.

Therefore, the Blessings begin here calling sharply to our attention the need of a sense of dependence on the Lord, because this is where spiritual life begins, and it is impossible for the Lord to begin the process of regeneration in us anywhere else. So it is written, "*This is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."*" Isaiah 57:15.

## **Reading From Swedenborg - Total Submission**

We are an organism recipient of life from the Lord. Because of heredity, however, and because also of our first experience in living, we refuse to admit to ourself that life, as it should be, is spiritual life.

Therefore, it is only at length, and only by repeated alterations of defeats and of victories over our own selfhood, of helplessness when left to ourselves and of hope when sustained from above, that we can come at last to will, to be no longer our own but the Lord's. This is to live spiritually.

In order to make us both blessed and happy, the Lord requires that we be not in part our own and in part the Lord's. For then there would be two masters which no one is able to serve at the same time. But He wills a total submission. Moreover, when a person has truly reached that state, they grieve and is seized with anxiety, whenever left to depend on themself alone. Then, when delivered from that thought, they return into happiness and bliss. Accordingly, the First Commandment to the Church, "*You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength,*" shows that a persons' submission to the Lord must be complete.

To this, the truth may now be added that even a person's love to the Lord cannot, ultimately, come from themself, but must be given us by the Lord. Consequently all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength - which in ourself are created to receive life from the Lord are meant to be not the person's, but the Lord's. Arcana Caelestia 6138.

## **22. The Laws of Happiness - Part 2 - Dr W Woofenden, October 1985**

The second in a series of eight talks on the Beatitudes.

*"Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!* Matthew 5: 4 (TEV)

The previous talk was based on the first of the Blessings, "*Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!*".

The first of the Beatitudes is the gateway to heavenly happiness. Unless we realize our need for more truth and goodness, we will have no incentive to learn.

The second of law of happiness. The laws which are expressed in the Blessings are eternal laws. They existed before people were created on earth. They belong to the nature of the divine life. The Lord Himself could not alter them, for they are attributes of His own being. Although these Blessings were spoken by the Lord from a mountain top near the shores of Galilee, they existed before this earth was formed. All true human life lies under this code. The Beatitudes have always been and forever will be the laws of human happiness. Any life that does not begin where they begin and end where they end is not only joyless, it is less than human, in the best sense of that word. Until these laws become the laws of human society, society will continue to be filled with tumult and pain.

The Lord Himself, as much as He wishes otherwise, cannot give mankind peace as long as we cherish in our souls, aspirations that are contrary to these laws.

The Blessings also show us how far people have departed from the intended way of life, how they have reversed the true order of life. The Lord called those blessed or happy whom we tend to regard as unhappy. We are inclined to say, Blessed are the great, the mighty, the famous, the rich". But it is those who mourn, not those who are carefree; the meek and not the mighty; the hungry and not the satisfied; the merciful and not the powerful; the pure and not the satiated; the peacemaker and not the conqueror that the Lord acclaims.

Life's great quest revolves around the question, "How can I be happy?" The child replies, "Give me what I want and I will be happy!" This is also the answer of many adults. But how often what we want, if we had it, would cause us unhappiness! Happiness does not result from or consist of getting what we want. True and lasting happiness does not come from outside, but from within.

Our text reads, "*Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!*" mourners are probably the very last whom we would call blessed or happy. Earth regards sorrow as a misfortune. No earthly mind could ever have conceived the thought, "*Blessed are those who mourn*". I wonder how well we understand the Scripture that describes the Lord as "*a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering*". Isaiah 53:3. It is suffering of the spirit that is referred to here, not mourning because of such things as the loss of friends or of money, or even the shattering of our ambitions and desires; for these things are not basic concerns of the spiritual life. Spiritual suffering or mourning, is connected with the emerging of the soul out of darkness. It is the pain that arises because of the slow development of character. It is the distress properly felt because we have not advanced further into true manhood or womanhood. It is the same sort of pang that the tax collector in the Gospel parable felt, the keenness of his suffering was not because of ruined pride, or business failure, or some slight, but because he was not a better man than he prayed, "*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*". Luke 18:13.

True mourning is this consciousness of un unworthy life. The Pharisee who congratulated himself for his attainments was not open to change, he was satisfied with himself as he was.

We do have bereavements and sorrows, and we are sometimes forced by circumstances to give up deeply cherished plans. But do we realize that the Lord will bring to us deep and eternal blessings from all our disappointments if we are faithful to him?

But here again, the Beatitude is not concerned with external trials and sorrows. The mourning that is blessed is spiritual grief of mind over the lack of goodness and truth in one's inner life. It is a longing to be a better person. And as such, it opens one's soul to the Lord. It comes when our eyes are opened to see our spiritual potential.

There is yet another contrast: there is also a kind of mourning that springs from selfishness, which leaves us resentful and discontented, doing us serious harm. Again, the lesson is that not all mourning is a source of blessing, but only that which comes from the desire to live a better life. In every instance the critical factor is the nature or source of our mourning. The Apostle said to Corinthians, "*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death*," adding, "*See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.*" 1 Corinthians 7:10-12.

Self-revelation is one of the greatest blessings that can come to us; yet it is inevitably accompanied with the deepest anguish. For we must win victory over self, over the evils in our hearts and the falsities that support them, if we are to be blessed with peace either here or hereafter. And it is for this reason that anyone in whom the Lord's kingdom is being established will come into states of mourning and grief. This is inevitable. All spiritual progress is under this law.

There is a passage in the book of Revelation that asks, "*Who are these people dressed in white robes, and where do they come from?*" And the answer given is, "*These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have made them white and washed their robes with the blood of the Lamb*" Rev. 7: 13-14.

Without mourning we cannot change; and if we do not enter into the conflict and with the Lord's help, win the victory over self, the result will be only bitterness of soul. On the other hand, mourning is of no value in itself, any more than pain is permitted so, that we may better appreciate its absence. There is no wisdom in that old cliché about hitting yourself over the head because it feels so good when you stop! The purpose of pain is to warn us when something is wrong.

One source of pain is weakness, on either the physical or mental level. And we cannot grow strong in either body or mind by avoiding all effort. If our burdens seem heavy it is because we have not yet gained sufficient strength. If we have enough strength, any burden will seem light. Just as the muscles gain strength through work, so the mind gains power by labouring to acquire truth. And if enter wholeheartedly into the struggle, victory will be in sight long before the battle is over.

The Psalmist spoke of this in poetic lines, descriptive of a future of newness and hope, as follows: "When the Lord turned the tide of Zion's fortune, we were like men who had found new health. Our mouths were full of laughter and our tongues sang aloud for joy." 126: 1-2, NEB

In contrast to this, little effort will lead to little consolation. But as the blessing of our text is worded in Luke, "Happy are you who weep now; you will laugh!" (6:21).

**Reading From Swedenborg:** Arcane Caelestia, 2116, 1798, 30.8034

The saying that those are saved who have faith, is true, but by "faith" nothing else is meant in the Word than love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour, thus the life thence. The doctrinal things and dogmas of faith are not faith (in themselves) but belong to faith ... for they are all for the purpose that a person may become such as they teach him to be.

By the faith which is the internal principle of the Church is meant no other than that which is of love and charity. In a general sense, faith is everything doctrinal of the Church; but that which is doctrinal, separated from love or charity, never makes the internal of the Church.

The progress of faith with those who are being created anew is as follows ... They receive life from the Lord through faith: first through faith in the memory, which is a faith of mere knowledge; next through faith in the heart, which is the faith of love, or saving faith.

Faith. is an internal affection, which consists in this, that a person wills from the heart to know what is true and what is good, not for the sake of doctrine, but for the sake of life.

If anyone should say to himself, "Who is able to have the internal acknowledgement of truth, which is faith? Not I.", let me tell him how he may have it: shun evils as sins, and come to the Lord, and you will have as much of it as you desire.

## 23. The Laws of Happiness – Part 3 - Dr W Woofenden, November 1985

"Happy the gentle; they shall have the earth for their heritage". Matthew 5:5 (JB)

This third law of happiness has apparently given the translators some problems. For instance, when the "Today's English Version" first came out they translated it, "Happy are those who are gentle." A later printing has it, "Happy are the meek". And the current edition says, "Happy are those who are humble." In the Jerusalem Bible, from which I have quoted the text, they put this beatitude second, before the traditional second one. The only information I could get on the possible reason for this transposition was in the Interpreter's Bible which says rather unsatisfactorily that "some early manuscripts transpose vs. 4 and 5, perhaps in order to bring the poor and meek together." So there are textual problems in the Bible, even in so familiar a passage as the Blessings.

Swedenborg cites this blessing just three times, commenting only very briefly on it in each instance. For example, in Apocalypse Revealed 285 he includes it along with numerous other passages containing the word 'earth' or 'land', and in the Swedenborg Society edition (1970 translation) it reads, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall accept the inheritance of the land." At the beginning of the paragraph it is stated, "By 'land' here and elsewhere is understood the Lord's Church in the heavens and on earth. The Church in both of these is the Lord's kingdom." Later he adds, "The reason why the Church is signified by 'land' is because very often by 'land' is understood the land of Canaan, and in that land was the Church, the 'heavenly Canaan' being nothing else. To complete the thought, he adds, " 'land' also has an opposite sense, and in that it signifies damnation, for where there is no Church with people there is damnation."

Let's look at the word "meek" and some of the appropriate alternative words. Depending in part on the context, the original words in both the Old and New Testament can often be rendered as "gentle", "mild" or

"humble". However in almost every instance when such words are used to describe individuals, it is not always immediately apparent that the particular good human quality referred to is not something that is natural with any of us. We may know of people whom we would describe as "naturally meek or mild".

Probably the most difficult thing for us to grasp is that what the Lord had in mind in recommending to us gentleness or meekness or humility, was a quality or temperament that has to be acquired, not one that anyone is naturally born with. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus offers us this invitation: "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*".

The yoke is not particularly familiar to most of us who live in an urban setting. But it should be easy to see that when it is used as a Biblical figure it implies a willingness to submit ourselves to work of some sort. In this instance the 'work' is to learn from the Lord what true gentleness is.

There are two remarkable and helpful passages from Swedenborg. First, from Arcana Caelestia 3909 where the subject of the text being treated is anger or indignation. It reads in part as follows: "*Burning with anger* means resenting, in an inner sense, because whenever an earthly emotion climbs toward inner levels, or toward heaven, it softens, eventually turning into a heavenly emotion. What we find in the literal meaning—"burning with anger," in this case—is relatively harsh, because it is earthly and bodily, but it grows milder and gentler as it rises from the bodily, earthly self to the inner or spiritual self. That is why the literal meaning, being suited to the grasp of the earthly self, is rough, but the inner meaning, being suited to the grasp of the spiritual self, is not.

This clarifies that burning with anger means resenting.

Real spiritual indignation, and more particularly heavenly indignation, does not draw at all on the anger of the earthly self but on the inner essence of zeal. On the surface, zeal resembles anger, but on the inside it is not anger or even hot resentment. Instead it is a kind of sadness accompanied by a prayerful wish that the situation were otherwise. In its still deeper form it is simply a dark blot imposed on our heavenly pleasure by something that is not good or not true in another person."

I would venture a guess that even the most naturally gentle person is not able, without prolonged inner struggle, to respond to every anger-provoking situation with no more than a certain sadness and prayerful hope that whatever the maddening thing is will go away; or, even more unlikely, with nothing more than an obscure feeling of discomfort that there must be something not altogether good and true in the person responsible for the anger-provoking incident.

The other instructive passage is from the book Divine Providence 86, Swedenborg, and reads as follows: "Since both evil and good people have rationality and freedom, both evil and good people can discern what is true and do what is good. However, evil people cannot do this freely and rationally, while good people can, because evil people are caught up in the pleasures of a love for evil while good people are caught up in a love for what is good.

The result is that any truth that evil people discern and any good that they do does not become part of them, though it does for good people; and if it does not become virtually part of them, there is no reformation and regeneration. For evil people, the evil intentions and their distortions are in the centre and the good intentions and their truths are on the periphery, while for good people the good intentions and their truths are in the centre and the evil intentions and their distortions are on the periphery. In each case, the qualities that are central spread all the way out to the periphery the way warmth spreads from a central fire or chill spreads from a central source of coldness. So for evil people, the peripheral good is corrupted by the central evils, and for good people the peripheral evil is mitigated by the central goodness. This is why evil deeds do not damn people who have been regenerated and good deeds do not save people who have not."

With a good or regenerating person their evils gradually grow mild because of the good at the core of the person. But again this is not a "natural" state but an acquired one. To fit the definition of a "good" person one

must have willingly entered into and persisted for some time in pursuing the process we know as regeneration.

We are also told in the theological writings of Swedenborg that the "meek" or "gentle" are those who are "in the good of charity" Apocalypse Explained 304:44. Just what does that rather strange expression mean?

It refers to those in whose hearts there is a genuine desire for the real good of others, at all times and under all circumstances, rather than the desire to vindicate oneself. For example, when an injustice has been done to us, how easy, how natural to say or think, "I'll get even with you, I'll pay you back!" How easy at such times to endorse the old law, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", And how difficult it is for most of us mortals to feel anything of the spirit of Christ on the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34).

Does this mean that we are always expected to submit unresistingly to what we honestly believe to be improper or oppressive or unjust? There are those who believe we should. Yet that is not necessarily the logical conclusion. Christ one time took a whip and drove the money-changers out of the temple.

While we are in this world, we are called on to do whatever we can in opposing injustice and oppression. But I also believe we are called on to do so without any feelings of rancour, of revenge, or even of ill will towards those we are convinced are doing wrong.

To be truly meek or gentle, to be "in the love of charity", would call on us to feel regret, even sorrow, for wrong-doers that they should have given way to self-love. But at the same time it calls on us to treat the other person as we would like to be treated by them.

Blessed are such kindly, forgiving, truly charitable souls, says the Lord, "they shall have the earth for their heritage". Or, they are the ones who truly form the Lord's church here on earth.

#### **Reading From Swedenborg - Heaven and Hell 363**

After death, our ruling affection or love awaits each one of us. This is never rooted out to eternity because our spirit is exactly like our love; and (what has not been known before) the body of every spirit and angel is an outward form of her or his love that is completely responsive to the inner form that is the character and mind of that spirit or angel. That is why you can recognize the quality of spirits from their faces, their postures, and their speech. That is why our own spirits are recognized in this world if we have not learned how to pretend with our faces and postures and speech. We may gather from this that our own eternal quality is that of our ruling affection or love.

A love of wealth and the usefulness it affords also remains with us forever; with exactly the quality it acquired in this world. There is this difference, though: for people whose wealth served them as means to useful lives, it is turned into delights in keeping with their usefulness, while for people whose wealth served them as means to evil activities, it is turned into filth - filth that they enjoy just as much as they enjoyed their ill-used wealth in the world. The reason they enjoy the filth is that the foul pleasures and pursuits that were their practices in the world, and their greed (which is a love of wealth with no thought of use), correspond to filth. Spiritual filth is nothing else.

#### **24. The Incarnate God - Clayton Priestnal, December 1985.**

Among the descriptive titles used by Isaiah in his prophecy of the birth of our Saviour, none is more appealing than the one which calls the incarnate God "the Prince of Peace". How often in this raucous and belligerent world we fervently wish, and perhaps even pray, for just a moment or two of transcendent peace! Being realistic, our desires are exceedingly modest. All we want is just a brief interlude of complete repose. But turmoil and anxiety continue to mark our days, this in spite of our faith in the words of the prophets and our

acknowledgement of the power and mercy of the Lord. So we sit and dream of peace, and grow envious of the angels among whom utter peace is a common, continuing and ecstatic experience.

The Lord's assurances that peace will surely come to those who wait upon them prods us onward in our search for this elusive state. No words of the wisest of people, no words of the Lord Himself, can by themselves bring about heavenly quietude in the spirit. Peace does not come like a Christmas gift, colourfully wrapped, and received without effort. Although we are unable by some magic formula to induce a state of celestial repose in any individual, we can perhaps identify the necessary ingredients of indescribable tranquillity. To know what peace is and how it is acquired is the first step towards eventually experiencing this much sought after state of the spirit. Certainly the word "peace" is so often now used almost as a slogan, as though to speak of it freely is all that is needed to bring it about.

Although there is little need to stress the point unduly, it might be well to dwell for a moment upon what the peace the Lord promises "is not". Many think of peace primarily as a condition when armies are no longer locked in combat; a time when people are not dying in a foreign land, or fall mortally wounded in defence of their own beloved native homeland. The peace the Lord promises can come to the soul while one is surrounded by conflicts of one kind or another; conflicts between members of a family, between racial groups, between rival business, establishments, or between political factions. This is obvious, but it serves as a preface to a consideration of heavenly peace, the only real and enduring kind of peace.

Another impediment to a full understanding of the Lord's peace; it is found in the words of the Scriptures: "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*". Matt 10:34. To many people this is a startling statement and one which puzzles the mind, even to the point of causing doubt regarding the ethics and practicability of the Scripture. All we read concerning the infant Jesus, born of Mary, seems to confirm the idea that brotherhood and good-will were brought into the world and exemplified in the Advent; peace and joy are the consequences of the Christ Child's coming. But it says categorically in the Gospel according to Matthew that the Lord came not to establish peace, but to incite combat.

This is only a seeming paradox, for both assertions are equally true. Here is why: the Lord's advent into the life of an individual at first induces a state of conflict. Perhaps some of us have never given sufficient thought to this aspect of the Lord's coming. There is a duality in the basic nature of each one of us; within our being there resides a spiritual self and a natural self, so to speak. Each is striving to dominate. At the Lord's advent into the conscious life of a person, He brings with Him spiritual truth and an affection for doing good. The baser part of our nature resents this intrusion, which becomes a threat to its dominance. Forces of resistance are marshalled and conflict ensues. Upon the outcome of this warfare rests all hope for the quality of peace called heavenly. The sword is divine truth for it is only by means of truth that evil and falsity are conquered. In this sense the Lord indeed brings both a sword and peace.

As we explore the nature of peace and how it is acquired, new aspects of the problem appear and further qualifications need to be considered. Our almost total ignorance or what heavenly peace is, leads us to believe we possess this grace when we do not. There is in common human experience, a sense of tranquillity which is spurious through and through. Whenever a desire is gratified, no matter how tainted it might be, there descends upon the mind a feeling of satisfaction, a sense of peace within the soul. Beware! It may be only the natural person who experiences this quietude. A grossly selfish impulse fulfilled can produce what appears to be a state of peace for the reason that for the time being there is harmony between the wish and the fulfillment.

But to go beyond these explanatory excursions and qualifications brings us to the very heart of heavenly peace, the only kind of peace which should be our goal. What do angels possess that we do not seem to have, which enables them to experience a joy and tranquillity unknown to the soul of earthbound people?

In introducing the first essential quality of heavenly peace, we have to use a word which is generally thought of as being archaic in this age of sophistication. It is a word associated almost exclusively with infants. We

dare say, if it were used today in describing an adult they would be embarrassed, and perhaps even offended. The quality without which there can be no real and lasting peace is "innocence". The use of this one word is by itself sufficient to cause most people to lose interest in our theme, heavenly peace. But the Scripture advises us over and over again that without this particular virtue the spirit will experience nothing but turmoil and defeat.

We associate innocence with infancy, but this is not precisely the kind of innocence required for true spiritual tranquillity. The peace found in the young child is a completely external state.

Within the secure walls of a home, guarded by a loving mother and provided for by a devoted father, the infant's limited desires are satisfied. There is no guile in the baby crawling on the floor, or in the toddler awkwardly waddling across the room. This absence of self-centredness makes the life of the very young unusually serene. The reason we say this early state of peace is not genuine is that it lacks wisdom. Whatever degree of peace we possess, if wisdom is not present it must inevitably be superficial, a "natural state" to express it in theological terms. And there is a vast difference between the innocence of childhood and the innocence of old age; the first is without knowledge and experience, and the latter is the consequence of a long period of purposeful living. In children, peace is external; in adults, whatever genuine peace there might be is internal.

Internal peace may exist deep within the spirit but outward circumstances prevent it from descending to the outmost edge of consciousness. So long as one is confined to a physical body and lives in a world of care and conflict, innumerable obstacles prevent a sense of inner serenity of the spirit. Anxiety over the health of a loved one, uncertainty about employment, the threat of a destructive war, and the general disorders of society, all serve to keep peace pent up in the deep innermost chambers of the soul. But if a person, regardless of how uneasy their everyday life might be, possesses true wisdom in time, "when they have shuffled off this mortal coil", they will share with the angels a heavenly peace.

Long after the Advent scene in Bethlehem, when the purposes of the incarnation had been all but accomplished, the Lord addressed to His disciples words of comfort and hope. In His valedictory we have what is for many of us one of the most moving passages of Scripture, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you! not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither: let it be afraid*". Mark well the words "My peace". It is the Lord alone who is the fountain spring of true repose; it is His presence in the spirit of people that creates the innocence, wisdom and joy from which comes heavenly peace. Peace comes from the Lord because in Him love and wisdom are inseparably united and are forever dedicated to cooperative action in bringing about the salvation of souls. People with their limitations, infirmities and mortality, can never hope to duplicate the sublime perfection of the Divine, but we can with the Lord's help develop within ourselves a capacity to bring together truth and goodness in order to usefully serve mankind. Then we will begin to know the peace which is the heritage of heaven.

The Lord cautioned His disciples that the peace He was to leave with them is not the peace the world gives. The peace of the world is little more than the gratification of human desires; it does not come from the restraint or from conquering of some natural passion. The peace of the world is transient; it is as elusive and fleeting as are the changing moods of a wilful mind. The peace of heaven comes to those who have overcome the world, those who have separated in their spirit the things belonging to Caesar from those belonging to the celestial kingdom of the Lord.

As a final thought let us return to the manger scene on the memorable night of our Saviour's birth. The night was calm, the shining star was bright in the high firmament, the happy angels chanted their glorious anthem to the astonished shepherds, and even the cruel passions of Herod were for the time being quiescent. All that beauty, stillness and solemnity, symbolize in one way or another what the Prince of Peace brought into the world. But the peace He left behind at His departure with His Humanity Glorified is a far deeper peace, a more permanent peace than that which radiated from the holy Infant's crib, a crude trough used to feed animals in the stable of a wayside inn. It showed us the way to peace everlasting.

"And his name shall be called the Prince of Peace" Isaiah 9:6.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Divine Humanity**

The ancients knew they could not be saved unless they formed a bond with the Divine. Divine humanity was therefore what the ancient churches worshiped.

Jehovah also revealed himself in his divine humanity among the ancients. His divine humanity was his divinity itself as it existed in heaven, because heaven constitutes a single human being called the universal human (discussed at the ends of the chapters leading up to here). This divinity in heaven is nothing other than divinity itself, but in the form of a divine person in heaven. This humanity is what the Lord took on and made divine in himself. He united it with divinity itself, just as it always had been united. From eternity, it was one. These things he did because the human race could not have been saved otherwise. It was no longer enough for his divinity itself to be able to flow into people's minds through heaven and thus through the divine humanity there. That is why divinity itself wanted to unite divine humanity with itself in a tangible way, through a human nature assumed in the world. Both are the Lord. Arcane Caelestia 5663.

## **25. The Laws of Happiness - Part 4 - Dr W Woofenden, January 1986**

*"Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied". Matthew 5:6 (JB)*

The first three blessings deal particularly with the inner life. With the fourth beatitude we move more clearly into the outer life and its actions.

Desires lie at the heart of the great necessities of life. Without desires, life and activity of every kind would cease. Each thing in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdom has its desires, and is seeking what it wants. The stone seeks mineral substances, the plant seeks these and more, and animals claim additional things: Everything in the universe is what it seeks, no more and no less. Hunger and thirst are signs of waning strength and a call for replenishment. Hunger connotes emptiness, and thirst pictures a dry, parched state.

Hunger and thirst are the powers that lift the whole creation upward. Everything is what it asks for. All life is a series of desires and fulfillment. Every man, woman and child is rated by desires, for according to the desire will be the future development and power.

If the soul does not seek food and drink, it cannot become "*Like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season*" Psalm 1:3. We must always have this hunger and thirst, for when it stops, we cease to grow. It must not stop in this world or the next.

Not to hunger and thirst is to go unfulfilled. Worse yet, it will become the death of being. It leads to extinction. Hunger is a sign of strength. The prelude to the building of a person is hunger and thirst; And just as food eaten is turned into substances of the body and becomes part of the physical body, so the food of the soul, goodness and truth, become the spiritual person. Mental thirst, for example, culminates in a mind stored with knowledge, the quality and amount determined by the thirst.

One who lacks hunger and thirst is sick; and when appetite is lacking, people may die amid plenty, not for want of things to eat, but for want of appetite. It is not unusual to hear someone say, "If only I could eat I would get well!"

All healthy life forces cry out for food. Music, art, beauty, love, purity, learning - all must have desire for their spring. Desire is the spur to action. No normal person is without it. Great goodness is attained only by a great desire for goodness. Great learning comes only from a great thirst for learning. And when there is hunger for righteousness, the Lord provides.

However, there are desires that are not good. These are desires for the things that turn to ashes on the tongue and do not satisfy, just as narcotics and stimulants inflame a desire but do not satisfy it. We must beware of depraved appetites. Husks are not food. They will usurp the healthy appetite that asks for bread.

We cannot live on frothy confections. And literature composed of the foam and froth of a shallow mentality will not satisfy the soul, but will leave the mind as vacant as before. Much of the literature of today is of that nature.

All over the world today there is a famine in the land, and multitudes do not know what is the matter. The answer is found in the words of Amos 8:11, "*Not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord*". Or as Isaiah 55:2 put it, "*Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?*"

Not all hunger has the stamp of blessedness on it. It is the hunger for the bread of God that comes down from heaven which yields happiness and satisfies the soul with good. We need to have a desire for the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "*Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink*" John 7:37. If we have no desire to learn of and to know God, we may be sure that we are desperately ill. We were created by God for the purpose of coming into a knowledge of God, so that we might be conjoined to Him and blessed by Him. The absence of this fundamental sensation of a hunger for God is a sign of danger, for it is an indication that a paralysis is settling over one's life, a paralysis that seems to soothe but which eventually will kill.

Healthy hunger calls for the great universals, which produce real Spiritual life. The Lord said, "*I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you*" John 6:53. By this we understand that it means the incorporation of His commandments and blessings into bone and sinew, heart and mind; the righteousness of the Lord building the righteous person. And it is not mere aspiration, mere longing for spirituality. It is spiritually eating, digesting and incorporating into the life the fundamental precepts of the righteous life.

No one ever dreamed a great building into existence; it had to be carefully planned and then painstakingly built, stone upon stone. No one ever dreamed themselves into a beautiful character; it had to be envisioned and wanted, and then patiently built by self-compulsion, self-restraint, and labour.

*"Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right".* This is the only hunger and thirst that is sure to be satisfied. We may hunger after wealth, fame, power or even great usefulness, and be disappointed. We may lose what little wealth we have by the intrigue of others. We may never achieve the fame we feel we deserve. We may go through all of life never gaining the power we had hoped for. We may even be denied the opportunity for great outward service. We may be condemned to a career of outward obscurity or even of inactivity. We may be very far from satisfied with our degree of success.

But if we hunger and thirst for what is right, we are certain to attain it. It is certain to bless us beyond our wildest imagination. *"For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things"* Psalm 107:9.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Good from the Lord and from Self**

The Lord is absolute Good and therefore the source of all good. Good that originates in Him has the Divine within it, and so is good right through to its inmost or prime being. But good that originates in man is not good, because in himself man is nothing but evil. Consequently good originating in him is primarily and in essence evil, though to outward appearance it may look like good.

Good originating in the Lord exists with those who love the Lord above all things and their neighbour as themselves; but good originating in man exists with those who love themselves above all things and despise their neighbour in comparison with themselves. The latter are also those who are concerned for the morrow because they trust in themselves, whereas the former are those who are unconcerned for the morrow because they trust in the Lord.

Those who trust in the Lord are constantly receiving good from Him; for whatever happens to them, whether it seems to be advantageous or not advantageous, is nevertheless good, for it serves as a means contributing to their eternal happiness. But those who trust in themselves are constantly bringing evil on themselves, for whatever happens to them, even if it seems to be advantageous and fortunate, is nevertheless bad, and consequently acts as a means contributing to their eternal unhappiness. Arcana Caelestia 8480.

## 26. The Laws of Happiness - Part 5 - Dr W Woofenden, February 1985

"Happy are those who are merciful to others! God will be merciful to them!" Matthew 5:7

Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us". Matthew 6:12

In Arcana Coelestia ·(587-6) we read:

"The Lord's mercy includes every single thing which the Lord does towards the human race, whose condition is such that He has mercy on it; on each according to His state. He has mercy therefore on the state of the person He allows to be punished, as He does on that of the person on whom He confers the enjoyment of good. Being punished is a manifestation of mercy; because it turns all evil that is being punished towards good. And conferring the enjoyment of good is a manifestation of mercy too, because nobody merits anything good at all. Consequently it is by mercy that anyone is rescued.

The word mercy, Misericordia, is used therefore because mercy rescues a person from misery (miseriae) and from hell, and so is used with respect to the human race... Nobody can know what the Lord's mercy is, for it infinitely transcends all human understanding. But one does know what human mercy is; it is repenting and grieving. And unless a person grasps the idea of mercy from some different feeling whose nature he knows, he can have no possible conception of it and so cannot learn anything about it."

There is really a very close relationship between the two Bible verses I have chosen for texts: the one from the Lord's Prayer, the other from the Blessings, the fifth in our series. Although mercy may not always involve forgiveness, forgiveness always involves mercy. And although mercy is centred in people, indirectly through people we are able to show mercy to God. Our Lord Jesus said, "*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me*". Matthew 25:40

Mercy is the active side of love. The merciful do not wait but actively seek out the needy. The Christian virtue of mercy goes beyond mere forbearance and patience. It could almost be called an aggressive virtue. It is always individual, always includes the personal touch. Mercy does not discriminate, even against an enemy. It does not stand on reservations, has no biases or angles, is never roundabout. Swedenborg once said that "mercy is love grieving" Arcana Caelestia 5480

Mercy is not simple meek, does not simply refuse to retaliate - mercy goes forth to heal by the power of vigorous sacrifice. "*Notice something against your brother*" - no he said, "*If your brother has something against you - go at once and make peace with your brother*". Matthew 5:24

Mercy loves from the heart, not ceremoniously or mechanically. It goes beyond promises and platitudes. It is a love that stands up, and does not evaporate in the heat of the day. Human mercy can be trusted to the fullest extent. It is love that embraces, even the undeserving and the unattractive. We hardly need be told that it is easy to love those who loves us, or those who are obviously worthy or brave or fair. But to love the ill-deserving and uncongenial person, the person who seems to be without a single redeeming trait; to love even the ingrate and the traitor, is to love as God loves, and is therefore to be a child of God. Jesus prayed for the people who had nailed Him to a cross, who were jeering at Him and who tossed dice at His feet for His last earthly possession.

Mercy never asks of anyone, "Does he deserve help?" but, "Does he need help?" Our Saviour said, in effect, "Blessed is the person who is so brimming over with mercy that there is no room for contempt or revenge who does not employ artful and winding methods of retaliation, sometimes misnamed justice. Is there any one of us who can honestly say that we have not in one of our own hours of trial felt the desperate need of such generous considerateness. That very mercy which we in turn are often reluctant to render to others?

Mercy makes all of humanity kindred; it leaps all barriers of race, nationality, creed or station. Recall that when the Lord asked in regard to the act of love described in the parable of the good Samaritan, "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" the reply was, "*The one who had mercy on him*" Luke 10: 36-7

Mercy is also ready to relieve spiritual misery, ready to carry truth to serve as food to a hungry soul, confident in the belief that if you know the truth, "*the truth will set you free*". John 8:31. The psalmist wrote, "*Kindness (mercy) and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss*". Psalm 85:10

Mercy is inseparable from forgiveness. If there is forgiveness there must be mercy also. The principle is illustrated in the parable of the unmerciful or ungrateful servant. His generous master had forgiven him a sizable debt. But instead of passing on this mercy to others, he rushed out, seized one of his debtors by the throat, and demanded, "*Pay back what you owe me*" Matthew 18:28. By this unmerciful act he forfeited the merciful forgiveness of his master. "*God will judge you in the same way you judge others.*" Matthew 7: 2. Let anyone be vindictive, malicious, quick to criticize, resentful, bitter or uncharitable in speech or act, and what that person has given will inevitably return, not like bread cast upon the waters, Ecclesiastes 11:1, but like ashes for bread, Psalm 102:9. The person will have set the mood or tone.

If on the other hand, "*you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you.*" Matthew 6:14. This should not surprise us. We are familiar with this principle, give and take in many areas of our lives. The seeker after beauty never fails to find it, often in the most commonplace objects. The person with a song in the heart, hears music even in the midst of toil and struggle.

The selfish person, on the other hand, is likely to tell you that everyone is selfish. The unfeeling and callous person mistrusts or suspects everyone, even God. The psalmist understood this when he wrote, "*You are pure to those who are pure, but hostile to those who are wicked.*" Psalm 18:26. We might ask about this apparent hostility of God at times. Do we sometimes ask if it is really in keeping with God's mercy that we suffer so much, often, we think, in His service?

I think the answer may be that mercy is also invincible. Being the highest expression of love it can never flinch, even though at times it may bring pain, even though at times its motives are misconstrued. So whenever we stray or step aside from mercy, either by blunder or by deliberate sin, we are reminded, mercifully, by a throb of nerves or a pang of conscience. This is God's humane warning of danger. Because love is really kind, wrong-doing never fails to hurt. For mercy always does what is best, not always what is agreeable.

It is as truly through divine mercy that we suffer as that we rejoice. For most pain is only temporary, and its purpose is to lead us to lasting happiness. Pleasure and pain are immutably bound together. It would be the greatest cruelty to permit injury without pain. Danger signals are always humane. If we felt no pain when physically injured, we should never survive to maturity.

The same is true of our spiritual maturing process. But the pain we feel from spiritual damage is not punishment or retaliation from God: it is a reminder, a merciful reminder, the Lord is to that extent dependent on us. If we choose to ignore His reminders, as we are free to do, we will also close His mercy out of our lives. The risen Lord said, "*Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into his house.*" Revelation 3:20

The clear teaching from this, is that if we choose not to open the door He cannot come in. The Lord will never force the door of any human spirit. For He knows in His wisdom that He cannot force the human door and at the same time leave the spirit free. By His own immutable law He cannot, will not, be forgiven. The State cannot forgive the persistent and determined criminal. Nor can God forgive the stubborn and persistent wrong-doer, because mercy or forgiveness is not an arbitrary thing, but is inseparably connected with sorrow, penitence and reform. It is not that God is a hard taskmaster. It is just that mercy and righteousness or justice, by their very nature, must go hand in hand.

One might as well put out his eyes and ask for light, as to show inhumanity and expect humanity in return. In either case the person would be in no condition to receive it. Inhumanity twists insinuation. There is a strikingly appropriate passage in the book Numbers 14:18, that reads: "*The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished*".

Does God then, demand so much mercy in return for so much mercy? The answer is a qualified 'yes', that is only in the sense that water seeks its own level. It involves, in short, a law of order. The unmerciful can make no proper claim for mercy. Our daily prayer precludes it. "Forgive us our debts", we pray, as we forgive our debtors". We might reword it, "Show us mercy in the same ratio that we show mercy." It is a principle or law of divine providence that we be dealt with as we deal with those around us. By our prayer we are really acknowledging that we cannot expect forgiveness if we ourselves refuse to forgive.

And after all, doesn't this make sense? The apostle James wrote (2:13). "*Judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful; but mercy triumphs over judgement.*" The ultimate question all of us must someday face will be, "What have you done for humanity?" not, "What is your school of religious thought?" or "What is your race or colour or social station? or "How were you educated?" or "How were you treated by others?" but "what have you "done to show mercy to others?"

I am mindful of the appearance that this beatitude - "*Happy are those who are merciful to others! God will he merciful to them*" all too often seems to fail, that often the merciful seem not to get good in return. Perhaps you have felt cheated this way yourself. If so, let me assure you that those who practice mercy in good faith always receive their reward. The reward is constitutional, that is, within the person, woven into the very fabric of one's soul and body. No matter what their outward circumstances, the merciful are steadily becoming more and more truly children of their heavenly Father.

And that, after all, is the real reward. It is what we are that is eternally important, not what we appear to be or what others think we are. There can be no failure in the sight of God among those who are truly merciful. Even if undue suffering seems to be their lot, it is in the long run incidental to this earthly probation. When the probation is over, the suffering will be over. And it will have been worth it. For no smallest deed of mercy escapes the notice of Him who is Mercy itself. Jesus said, "*You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he who is my follower, will certainly receive a reward.*" Matthew 10:42.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Nature of God's Love**

There are three things which make the essence of God's love: to love others outside itself, to desire to be one with them, and to make them happy from itself.

The first essential - to love others outside itself - is evident from God's love of the whole race of mankind. For their sake, God loves all things which He has created, because they are means; and He who loves the end loves also the means. And all persons and all things are outside God, because they are finite whereas God is infinite. The love of God reaches and extends, not only to good persons and good things, but also to evil persons and evil things; consequently, not only to persons and things in heaven, but also to those in hell. The reason why evil persons and things are evil, lies in themselves; for they do not receive the love of God as it really is, but as they themselves are, just as the thorn and nettle receive the heat of the sun.

The second essential of God's love - to desire to be one with His creatures - is evident from His communion with the angelic heaven, with the Church upon earth, and with everyone there. Love in its very nature is nothing but an effort towards union. This being the character of love, God created man, that communion with him might ensue. The divine love continually works for union with man.

The third essential of God's love - to make others happy from itself - is evident from the eternal life of blessedness, happiness and endless felicity, which He gives to those who receive His love. Thus angels and men are made happy by union with God.

## 27. The Laws of Happiness - Part 6 - Dr W Woofenden, March, 1986

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God!" Matthew 5:8

"The more completely the evils in our earthly self are dismissed by our abstaining from and rejecting them, the more closely we are united to the Lord. Further, since the love and wisdom that are the Lord himself are not in space, and since a desire of love and a thought of wisdom have nothing in common with space, the Lord seems to be closer in proportion to the union occasioned by love and wisdom. By the same token, he seems more distant as we spurn love and wisdom."

Space does not exist in the spiritual world. Instead, distance and presence there are appearances that depend on likeness or dissimilarity of desire. This is because, as just noted, desires (or properties of love) and thoughts (or properties of wisdom) are intrinsically spiritual. They are not in space." Divine Providence 33:4 Swedenborg.

"But the Lord's conjunction with a person in whom evils have been put away is meant by the Lord's words" "*The pure in heart shall see God*" Matthew 5:8, and by the words: "*Whoever accepts my commandments and obeys them ... I will come to him and live with him*". John 14: 21,24. "To accept the commandments" is to know, and "to obey them" is to love, for it is also said (14:21) that whoever obeys my commandments "*is the one who loves me*" "

The psalmist asks, "*Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?*" The answer follows: "*He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart*". (15: 1-2). And again we read, "*He who has clean hands and a pure heart . . . will receive blessing from the Lord*". (24: 4,5).

Careful thought is needed in this matter. Purity of outward conduct and purity of heart may reflect a person's true spiritual state, or they may indicate something radically different. Anyone good or evil, may conform to the moral code; but unless the motivation for good outward conduct is from the heart, it is only a mechanical and laboured thing prompted by self-interest.

The sign of purity of heart is this: it is to have a will which has been cleansed or purified by the operation of divine truth in the heart. In the Gospel this is described by the Lord as being "*more faithful than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees in doing what God requires*". Matthew 5:20.Or, as another version words it, "*I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*"

Swedenborg discusses this passage in the Doctrine of Life (84) as follows: "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20. Righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees means an inner righteousness, which is the righteousness a person has who is in the Lord. That he is in the Lord is something the Lord Himself teaches in John 17:22,23,26: *I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one ... in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them.*'

From this it may be seen that they are 'perfect' when the Lord is in them. These are they who are called 'the pure in heart who will see God,' and those who 'must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect'. Matthew 5: 8, 48.

The person who attains this state is one who, whenever they learn some truth from the Word, does not simply deposit it in the memory for safekeeping and possible later occasional thought and speculation, but instead right away sets about trying it in their life, thus making it a means of further purification of their inmost will. People who respond to new knowledge of divine truth in this way will find that it has a definite effect on their relationship to God. They move more and more into a state called enlightenment.

In the Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 57, we read, "Enlightenment comes from the Lord alone and is granted to those who love truths because they are truths, and who apply them to the uses of life; with others there is no enlightenment in the Word. Enlightenment comes from the Lord alone because the Lord is in all things of the Word. Enlightenment is granted to those who love truths and apply them to the uses of life because they are in the Lord and the Lord in them. For the Lord is His own divine truth; and when this is loved because it is divine truth, and this is loved when it is applied to use, then the Lord is present with the person".

Swedenborg continues by again citing the same passages from John and Matthew that we considered earlier (the latter being the beatitude about the pure in heart) and he concludes the paragraph by saying, "These are they who are enlightened when they read the Word, and with whom the Word is lucid and transparent".

There is obviously much for us to learn here. Do we perhaps not particularly enjoy reading the Bible, feeling that it is too obscure, too hard to understand, or perhaps rather dull and uninteresting? If so, it may tell us something about the degree of purity of our heart. Have we perhaps presumed that the premise of this sixth law of happiness, to see God, is intended only to be fulfilled in the future, when our days here on earth draw to a close? If that is our presumption, we have fully missed the point of the promise. This vision, is not merely one we may all be sure will be fulfilled at death and which we may look forward to, or dread, depending on our spiritual state. Its true intent is that we benefit from it here and now, as a priceless aid to our further spiritual growth.

One of our tasks here might be described as that of getting our mental optical equipment in proper condition and focus. A rather high percentage of us have to spend a considerable amount of time, money and effort in trying to get our physical optical equipment to operate at an optimum level, but I doubt that many ignore the need or refuse to take the necessary steps to insure themselves better vision. It is widely recognized that pure sight requires a purified instrument. A defective lens will not give us true vision. And if we cannot see things essentially as they are, we do not truly see them at all.

We also know that even physical vision is not purely physical or mechanical, it is generally highly selective. For instance, we may speak of someone as seeing only what they want to see. Some are said to see the world only through rose coloured glasses. One of my favourite bits of folklore says: "Two men look out through the same bars. One sees the mud, and one the stars" (F. Langbridge, A Cluster of Quiet Thoughts).

Jesus one time said to the people, "*Don't you know or understand yet? Are your minds so dull? You have eyes, can't you see?*" Mark 8:18. There are those, who see very little of the wonders of this world, even though they may gaze on the same scene as others. Shakespeare once spoke of the possibility of finding "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." As You Like It, Act II, Sc. 1, Line 12.

There apparently are those who cannot see God anywhere. Others, such as Samuel Longfellow, seem able to see the presence of God in all of creation. His hymn reads in part:

God of the earth, the sky, the sea,  
Maker of all above, below,  
Creation lives and moves in Thee,  
Thy present life through all doth flow.  
Thy love is in the sunshine's glow,  
Thy life is in the quickening air;  
When lightnings flash and storm-winds blow,  
There is Thy power, Thy law is there.

Only the pure in heart can see God. Only the pure can comprehend purity. It is possible for us to sever ourselves from everything spiritual, thus making ourselves blind to the continual presence of God. Such a condition is not magically cured by death. Death does not transform us in the sense of giving us powers in the afterlife that we never sought here. It only translates us. All of us die, the wicked and the good, and death transfers us as we are.

The lesson here should be obvious: if we show no inclination to purify our spiritual vision here, preparatory to the blessing of seeing God, it is unlikely that we shall ever see Him, here or hereafter. Yet the promise is forever valid, exhibiting a degree of love and mercy that only God is capable of: "*Happy are the pure in heart: they will see God!*"

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Why of The Incarnation**

Before the Lord's advent, the hells had risen to such a height that they began to harass even the angels in heaven, and likewise every person coming into the world and departing from the world. The hells rose to such a height because the church was completely destroyed, people in the world were by their idolatries caught up in nothing but falsities and evils, and the hells are composed of people. As a consequence, if the Lord had not come into the world, no mortal could have been saved.

Regarding these battles of the Lord, much is said in the Psalms of David and in the Prophets, but little in the Gospels. These battles are those meant by the temptations and trials that the Lord endured, the last of which was the suffering of the cross.

It is because of those battles that the Lord is called the Savior and Redeemer. This is so well known in the church that people say that the Lord conquered death or the devil, that is, hell, and that He rose victorious. Moreover, that without the Lord there is no salvation.

That He also glorified His humanity and thereby became the Savior, Redeemer, Reformer and Regenerator to eternity, will be seen hereafter. Doctrine of the Lord 33.

## **28. The Laws of Happiness - Part 7 - Dr W Woofenden, April 1986**

*"Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children". Matthew 5:9.*

The previous talk ended on what might almost be called an ominous note. You may recall, the final words of the talk on the pure in heart, "The lesson here should be obvious: if we show no inclination to purify our spiritual vision here, preparatory to the blessing of seeing God, it is unlikely that we shall ever see him, here or hereafter. Yet the promise is forever valid; exhibiting a degree, of love and mercy that only God is capable of: '*Happy are the pure in heart, they will see God!*' "

The intent was not to use scare tactics, but simply to underscore the utter illogic of thinking of ourselves as religious people if we are not willing to face up to the first fundamental demand the life of religion places on us, namely; to adjust our style of life as necessary to qualify as pure in heart in order to be what we claim to be: children of God.

This phrase - children of God - in fact, leads us logically into the consideration of the next and seventh law of happiness. A contemporary translation rather than the traditional one many of us memorized in childhood is "*Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children*". This wording clearly states that we must actively work to fulfill the beatitude. The familiar term "peacemakers" carries the same implication, but the phrase "those who work for peace" really lays it on the line.

There is a definite progression in the promises the beatitudes offer. As we consider each of them in sequence, we find that each blessing in turn offers even higher blessing, the possibility of even more intimate relationship with God. Surely it is a step forward from "seeing God" to being identified as "a child of God".

Peace is the goal of life and, properly understood, its supreme achievement. In Biblical language, the phrases "a state of peace" and "a state of rest" are often used synonymously. This is where we read: "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures this state is described beautifully as "*God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding*". Philippians 4:7.

However, as in so many of these areas of the spirit, people are prone to seek peace through man-made means, by such ways as material conquest or personal power. How often have we deluded ourselves by thinking or saying such things as this: "If only I had enough wealth, or enough political clout, or enough rank or station, I would find, that inner peace I so desperately want!" How hard it is for us to learn that any so-called "peace that we make or achieve according to worldly standards is a delusion!

The blessing of peace, that peace of God which far exceeds human understanding cannot be granted until the preceding blessings have been earned and given. Never forget that before there can be God's peace there must be purity, and mercy and righteousness, and submission to God's will, and penitence and humility. These are in reverse order. It all starts with humility, knowing and acknowledging our spiritual poverty, and then grows and spreads from there. There is no other path to peace.

Perhaps nine times out of ten, the reason we do not have inner peace is because it is costly, costly in things our natural inclinations tend to prize. The high cost of peace, as we see it, is that it would require us to give up things which in our foolishness, or perhaps near-sightedness, we dread to give up. Peace does exact a price in such terms as giving up our pride, our self-indulgence, our fancied rights. How slow we are, how reluctant to admit to ourselves that these are things that we must give up if we are ever to find the peace of God! How blind we are to the fact that the only lasting joy that can come into any human heart comes with a life that is at least to some extent achieving its divinely intended purposes. Put in other terms, it can come only through involving oneself willingly in that lifelong process we call regeneration, being born again.

It is precisely here that the promise to the peacemakers those who work for peace, enters in. It is said that "God will call them His children". And by the children of God are meant they who are "*children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*" John 1:13, which is the way the Gospel of John describes regeneration.

Regeneration is not complete in anyone until there is harmony and peace between the inner and outer parts of the individual. The apostle tells us that "*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*" Galatians 5:17. And this conflict, this opposition, which is the antithesis of peace, can be resolved only as we submit our natural desires to the leading of spiritual desires, until such time as our natural desires are so purified that our natural side naturally and willingly does what our spiritual side wills.

But in our characteristic way, here as in so many other areas of life, we tend to go at things backwards. For instance, we may decide that the thing for us as individuals to do is to turn all our attention toward seeking the brotherhood of man, which of course, is eminently worth seeking. However, what we may at the same time fail to see or to understand is that people have lost the brotherhood of man because they first lost the fatherhood of God.

We do not have peace with each other because we do not, as individuals, have peace with God. The true order of achievement must be observed. To become the children of God is the primary blessing and therefore has to be what we seek first. The other will follow in due course. The workers for peace who are blessed, are those who recognize the seeking of peace with God in their own hearts as a prerequisite to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Nature of Man**

"We are an organism that receives life, God alone is life itself. God pours his own life into this organism and every part of it, just as the sun pours its heat into a tree and every part of it. God grants us to feel his life in ourselves as our own. God wants us to feel this so we can live according to the laws of the divine design (that is, the commandments in the Word) as if we did so under our own initiative, and arrange ourselves to receive God's love. Nevertheless, although God constantly keeps his finger on the pointer of the scales to keep us in check, he never violates our free choice by forcing us.

[6] "A tree cannot receive anything that the heat of the sun brings in through the roots unless each individual filament of the roots grows warm. Elements cannot rise up through the root system unless those individual filaments, having received that warmth, give off heat to help the elements pass through.

It is similar with us in regard to the heat of life we receive from God; but unlike a tree, we sense this heat as our own, although it is not actually ours. To the extent that we believe this heat belongs to us and not to God, we receive from God the light of life but not the heat of love; instead, the heat of love we feel comes from hell. Because that heat is thick, it blocks and closes off the purer channels within us as an organism, just as impure blood blocks and closes off the capillaries in our bodies. This is how we turn ourselves from spiritual people into merely earthly people.

Our free choice comes from our sense that we have life within us as if it were our own. God allows us to feel this way for the sake of our partnership [with him]. A partnership with God would not be possible if it were not reciprocal, and it becomes reciprocal when we act freely, and completely as if we were on our own. If we were not allowed by God to feel this way, we would not be human and our life would not be eternal. Our reciprocal partnership with God is what makes us humans and not animals and enables us to live to eternity after death. What makes all this possible is our free choice in spiritual matters. True Christian Religion 504.

## 29. The Laws of Happiness - Part 8 - Dr. W. Woofenden, May 1986

*"Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake! Be glad then, yes, be tremendously glad - for your reward in heaven is magnificent. They persecuted the prophets before your time in exactly the same way". Matthew 5:10-12. (Phillips)*

The first seven blessings, culminating in the promise given to those who work for peace, the assurance of a sabbath state, the great biblical symbol of inner peace: these first seven, in their deeper sense, have to do with the inner life of an individual. In a very real sense, anyone who perseveres to the point of becoming a true child of God has, to all intents and purposes, become a complete or perfected person.

With this realization, we might almost feel that the eighth beatitude comes as something of an anticlimax: "*Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*" But, once again, as we consider the deeper implications of this promise, we find that the order of progression is sure, and divinely ordained.

After the victory has been won within, it has to be won without. A new inner life demands a new outer life. Nevertheless, it is fair to ask, "What sort of life situation are we talking about?" Can we get any sort of accurate picture of the kind of outer life the regenerating person should anticipate? We might almost ask, "What's so great about suffering persecution? Or being blamed or ill-treated, or having slanderous things said about you?"

The parallel passage in Luke seems to word it even more strongly: "*Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you and say that you are evil, all because of the Son of Man*". Does the Lord really expect us to be happy under such circumstances? Apparently, He does, for the text continues, "*Be glad when that happens and dance for joy*". Why? "Because a great reward is kept for you in heaven."

More than once in the Bible we are warned that the norms of truly Christian life are radically different from the norms of the worldly wise way of life.

For instance, in Isaiah, speaking of those who honour God with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him, the warning is given that "*the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.*" Isaiah 29:14. The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, cites this verse after noting that the message

of the cross is foolishness "to those who are involved in this dying world", but to those who are being saved from that death, "it is nothing less than the power of God." Corinthians 18. He then continues, "God has shown that this world's wisdom is foolishness! For God in His wisdom made it impossible for people to know Him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so called "Foolish" message we preach, God decided to save those who believe. For what seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human Wisdom; and what seems to be God's weakness, is stronger than human strength".

Later in the same letter, quoting from both the book of Job 5:13 and from Psalm 94:11, the apostle warns us: "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise are futile" I Corinthians 3: 18-20.

Before the Lord came into the world, even the idea of a kingdom founded on willing self-sacrifice was utterly unthinkable in the minds of people. It is still scarcely what we would call the norm! But at least the idea is known. Before the Lord's coming, empires were built on the ruins of crushed kingdoms. Self-preservation and conquest-by-might were universally accepted standards of life. To the mind so conditioned, the coming kingdom which Christ proclaimed seemed subversive of all intelligent human concepts.

Jesus taught that the person who aims at greatness as a personal goal can never become great; for the very purpose - which is evidence of littleness of soul - renders the person incapable of greatness. We recall that even Jesus' own disciples firmly believed that in the end their master would take up the sword and lead them in overthrowing the tyrant power of Rome. It was utterly incomprehensible to even these close followers of the Lord that He, who had in so many ways demonstrated His power, should deliberately choose to follow a path of persecution which would lead to a common criminal's death on a cross.

His words, spoken at the beginning of His ministry, had either been completely forgotten or else had only a hollow ring to them: "*Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs*". Does this mean that if we are to be good Christians we must go out and seek to involve ourselves in circumstances which will almost surely provoke violent antagonism, causing others to "*hate you, reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil?*" Are we expected to emulate the first Christian martyr Stephen, who so infuriated the people of his day by accusing them of being blind and disobedient that they were aroused to murderous fury and stoned him to death?

It should mean to us that a good Christian cannot, by definition, be a spiritual weakling. I do think it means that anyone who deserves the name of Christian is bound to suffer persecution and sometimes even active opposition from without because of the prevailing attitudes of the world. It requires what has been euphemistically called "intestinal fortitude", or - less delicately - "guts" to try always to do what is right in the face of almost certain scoffing by the worldly minded. If we find ourselves unable to face such challenges with a good courage, it is doubtful that we shall be able to withstand the more telling persecutions which inevitably will come from within.

Any person who is honestly trying to live a Christian life is going to face bitter times, brought on by such things as awareness of personal shortcomings. There is no avoiding the fact that sooner or later our very failures will mock us; in the truest sense, persecute us. All of us from time to time get discouraged; we lose confidence in our power to face life's realities. Inner turmoil and conflict seem endless. Victory over self seems at times so remote as to be completely out of sight. The further we enter into the temptation process, the more evil we seem to ourselves to be.

It is here that our faith has to take over. It is in such circumstances that we should be profoundly thankful that the Lord has gifted us with a faith to turn to. The teachings of Swedenborg tell us that "The Lord's presence is relative to the state of love towards the neighbour and of faith present in a person." Arcane Caelestia 904. It is only our awareness of the continual presence of the Lord that can keep us from becoming completely

discouraged by the vicissitudes of life. The even harder lesson that we can handle, knowing that the Lord is constantly there to help us, is that such persecution and trials are just what we should expect!

When Jesus said, "*Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires*", (To-day's English Version), He was unquestionably referring to this sort of inner persecution. The grossly evil tendencies, which all of us inherit and which reside in each one of us, do not suddenly become beautiful or acceptable when in the Lord's wisdom and in His good time they are disclosed in all their horror to our mind's eye; just the reverse.

To have these deep seated tendencies to evil brought out to our view is not necessarily a sign of personal wickedness. It depends entirely on what we do next. Actually, such times of self-revelation are intended to be opportunities for a blessing from the Lord, and can lead to moments of glory in a true Christian's life. And to say this is in no way to minimize the reality and the bitterness of the testing involved. This persecution for the sake of righteousness inevitably leads to inner struggle of a very real and vital nature. But, as is true of any worthwhile enterprise, without struggle, there can be no victory.

We must be willing to "stand up, stand up for Jesus", to be "soldiers of the cross" in the way we lead our lives. We cannot afford the luxury of being so afraid of criticism, of the possible rebuke or ridicule of our fellowmen that we do not dare take any stand that could possibly subject us to persecution, either from within or without. Such moral cowards are always astride the fence, unwilling to choose one side or the other and line up to be counted. They are unwilling to show their true colours by lifting high the royal banner of an openly declared Christian purpose. Theirs can never be the kingdom of heaven, either here or hereafter.

Jesus said, "*Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs*".

#### **Reading From Swedenborg - When Truth Becomes Second Nature**

In the initial stage of a person's growth, truth is a mere matter of information, or of knowledge in the memory. But as he advances a little farther, it becomes part of his life. So with children when they learn to walk, to speak, to think, to understand and reason about things. Soon, by the force of habit, these processes, and the knowledge they involve, establish themselves in the will. They cease to be simply memory materials and become spontaneous, flowing forth of their own accord.

It is the same with those who, by the Lord's power, are being born again. In the very beginning, the truths of the spiritual life are nothing more to them than memory, teachings drawn from the Word, which must be learned and remembered. Presently, however, these are called forth by the Lord and, as it were, one by one are transplanted from the soil of their memory into that of their experience. Once this has been effected, a transition takes place, reminiscent of a turn-about-face. This might also be called a conversion. In other words, from that time on, they no longer act from the memory but from life. Or, what is the same thing, they act from good, since good is truth in action. Thus they attain the wisdom and blessing of those who have been made anew. Moreover when, by practice, truth is so in rooted in man's life, he becomes so imbued with it that it becomes with him second nature. Arcana Caelestia 3203, 6904.

#### **30. All Things Made New - Clayton Priestnal, June, 1986**

The future of society, whether it will be utterly destroyed or undergo radical changes, is no longer an academic question. Those of us who are older and have passed the greater part of our expected life's span here on earth are inclined to be only moderately concerned about the kind of existence which will eventually be shaped by the strong, swift currents or unrest surging through our social order. But the younger generation those who have prospects of a long life on this troubled planet, and consequently have much more at stake, are deeply troubled about the future.

This anxiety is intensified by youthful idealism. From the many shades of thought which have been expressed, two extreme views about the present situation seem to merge. There are those who believe that a few basic adjustments are all that is needed in the existing framework of society. Others, less moderate, are convinced that nothing short of the total destruction of a corrupt, decadent society and the rebuilding of an entirely new form of social life can cure the ills of mankind.

A prophecy found in the Book of Revelation is of particular interest in thinking about these days of turbulence and chance. "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away*". Does this Divine prediction have any bearing on the course of events as they are unfolding here and now? Will the world as we know it, the particular forms of government, the organization of society, and the existing relationships between human beings become altered beyond recognition? These are pressing questions which should be a prime concern of each one of us.

Included in this picture of change, and perhaps of greatest importance of all, is the question of whether a new concept of religion will emerge. Some believe there is this possibility.

An influential periodical published a leading article entitled "Visions of a New Religion". The author of this provocative commentary on the future course of religion makes several observations which merit close examination. The writer points out that the young revolutionaries and traditional Christianity have two entirely different approaches to the solution of today's dilemma. The activists think the problem can be solved by social reforms, in other words, by attacking it from the outside. This perhaps accounts for their tendency to use force. The Christian church tends to take the view that constructive change must first take place from within the nature of people before conditions in the world can be improved.

There is a deep and wide chasm separating these two schools of thought, indeed the rift is so great that meaningful communication between them is exceedingly difficult. The author of "Visions of a New Religion", a professor of philosophy at New York University, contrasts these two positions with these words" "In the West, the church has exhorted us to seek our salvation, a matter in large part of acknowledging that we are somehow wrong in the very origin or centre of our being. The revolutionary on the other hand, speaks a language of liberation, implying that something's got to come down, and that the person to be liberated is basically sound but misused and victimized, perhaps without being aware that they are".

If one can detect any common ground of agreement in all of the movements towards change and the philosophies which guide them, it might be found in the search for the supernatural. Life in the world has become a deadly bore. Affluence has come to more and more people in this age of technology; conveniences, comforts, education, freedom to travel, leisure time and pleasures have become readily available to great numbers of people. With this increase of worldly goods, of things, this richness of the external life, there has developed an aridness in the soul. We have discovered that what we held up as the most desirable and precious possessions in life have brought boredom and sterility to the spirit.

To escape this bondage of material things, some have become addicted to drugs, while others have turned to other religions and cults which teach a renunciation of the world and finding oneself through intense and prolonged meditation. Surprising as it might seem to many of us, a large number of the younger generation are beginning to doubt whether the physical things with which they are surrounded constitute basic reality. Although we may disapprove of the dangerous and destructive means people are using to discover and explore areas new to human consciousness, we cannot condemn their desire to be released from the enslavement of the physical world and all of the superficialities of its social order.

This dream of the young for "*a new heaven and a new earth*", a paradise here and now, an Eden in the jungles of the world, makes them susceptible to philosophies which actually destroy the dream. Many of those who would refashion the world by introducing new standards governing human behaviour are loath to include in their scheme of things any sense of guilt. To them the whole idea of having done wrong was imposed by the narrowness and rigidity of thought of an earlier day and is therefore not consistent with the new morality. The

free, uninhibited expression of love is enough according to these reformers. Any feelings of guilt are looked upon as a repression of love. Such feelings, they say, only restrict the activities of this noble emotion.

There is a fatal weakness in this rejection of a sense of guilt which the church has long recognized. It is readily agreed that love is the life-giving element in human relationships, but how can one know whether they have hurt in any way those whom they love if it were not for the pangs of guilt they feel and a willingness to accept and recognize the possibility of wrong-doing? The church has to some extent instilled in the mind of many individuals an over-wrought conscience, an exaggerated sense of guilt not commensurate with the seriousness of a wrong act, and this is to be deplored, yet the church is right in declaring that there is such a thing as right and wrong. We cannot be completely subjective about our standards of morality, believing that sin and evil are only manufactured products of the human mind.

Our present day dilemma can be stated simply: both the older generation and their children and grandchildren are seeking the same goal, a new earth, a society which provides security, opportunity, justice and self-fulfilment for all. The differences which exist are found in the means of bringing about this "hope" for the future. In the opening verse of the Book of Revelation 21, can be found a formula by which all people, the young and the old, the liberals and the conservatives, the revolutionaries and the reactionaries, can work together for better world community.

Two things are brought together in this Scriptural promise of a transformed life, "*a new heaven and a new earth*". It takes both heaven and earth, the natural and the supernatural to embrace the whole of reality. The term "heaven" as it is used in the Scripture cannot be limited to that invisible realm where those of an angelic nature dwell. There is a "heaven" and there is an "earth" in each individual. There is in all of us a spiritual person and a natural person, there is an inner being where motivation begins and there is an outer being associated with the physical world and one's conscious existence. No change in the individual or in society can come about by modifications on only one of these planes.

Our spirit is not necessarily altered by alterations in our external environment alone. This fact is impressed upon us when we realize that improved housing conditions have not markedly lessened the crime rate; nor brought about any noticeable improvements in the incentive of the people to become more responsible citizens. And those who isolate themselves from the problems and pressures of the every-day life to focus their whole attention on the development of the inner being contribute nothing towards the external betterment of society. Our whole being must become involved in creating a new order. There must be proper motivation and there must be well-directed action; there must be love and there must be its wise fulfillment; there must be a noble cause before there can be a noble effect.

Now we come to the most difficult thing for most people to realize and to accept, even for those of us who feel the need of religion: a new heaven and a new earth cannot come about without our consciously and willingly looking to God as the source of this new life. Perhaps this idea is not new to any of us, yet it cannot be stated too often. So long as those who seek social change look to sociologists and atheistic activists, and leave the Lord out of the picture, there will be nothing but stagnation, even a continuing deterioration of the social order. History will bear testimony of this truth; the word of God asserts and demonstrates it, and future events will also be a convincing witness.

We can go on dreaming of a better world, we can discard old laws and enact new ones, we can tear down dilapidated buildings and put up new structures, we can feed hungry people and improve the plight of the poor, but this new earth will not endure until our heaven is filled with the wisdom and compassion which the Lord alone can give and does give to those who truly desire to receive them.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Man, A Form of Charity**

Every person who looks to the lord and shuns evils as sins becomes a form of charity, provided that they honestly, justly and faithfully carries out the work of their occupation or employment.

This follows as consequent upon the preceding law, that we are born in order to become a charity, and we cannot become a charity unless we constantly do the good of use from affection and delight. When, therefore, we honestly, justly and faithfully, carry out the work of our occupation or employment from affection and its delight, we are continually in the good of use, not only towards the community or state, but also towards particular sections thereof and towards private individuals. But we cannot do this unless we look to the Lord and shuns evils as sins; for, as shown above, the "first" of charity is to look to the Lord and shun evils as sins, and the "second" of charity is to do good. Moreover, the good we do are the goods of use we are doing every day; and when we are not doing them, we have it in mind to do them. There is an interior affection abiding inwardly, and desiring it. It is owing to this that, all the time, from morning to evening, from year to year, from our earliest age to the end of our life, we are in the good of use. We cannot otherwise become a form of charity, that is, a receptacle of it. . "Charity", paragraph 158

### **31. A Divine Rescue Craft - Erwin Reddekopp, July 1986**

*"make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.." Genesis 6:14.*

It was Noah, under Divine instruction who built this craft, Biblically called, Noah's Ark. The title may be thought of as "attention getting", but no, we are using a term in modern language which is meant to convey, from the Lord's Divine Word, a spiritual message of the salvation of a human soul.

The account of Noah's Ark and the world flood is about as well known, even for those who rarely, if ever, read the Bible, as is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There was an expedition that was to have found remains of the Ark on Mount Ararat. There may truly be some kind of remains there, but to affirm or even suggest that they were those of the famous Ark, is highly questionable. For myself it is of no significance whatsoever, as far as a Divine message is concerned, whether or not, some pieces of "cypress wood" were found on Mt. Ararat.

The Word of the Lord has come to us in many ways and forms, always with the intent of keeping communication between God and us open. The Word of God is His Divine means of conjoining or uniting ourselves with human beings. Yet, even for those who seek sincerely for a Divine message in the literal words only, there is a kind of communication. But we must all know that God is a God of infinite Order and perfection. Therefore, in recognition of that, we question, not God's Word, but rather the means of conveyance by which the eternal message is brought to us. In this sense we question the account of the Ark of Noah and the living creatures that were brought into it. With the word, "question", we imply, not doubt, but rather sincere search into the spiritual intent of otherwise unbelievable statements. For example, knowing that the God whom we worship is One of infinite order, having created all things with laws that are unbreakable, we wonder what is the message He is bringing to us.

We wonder when we are told that the Ark, which was to rise above the flood, would be about 450 feet long, about 65 feet wide and about 45 feet high; that it would have only one opening at the top, despite three stories and that opening would be approximately one and a half feet square? The Ark too, was to have only one door on the side. Can we imagine the thousands of living creatures, besides food for them, being brought into this structure? Can we see the water in high flood being twenty some feet over top of the highest mountains of the earth? We could call that an overstatement, but God does not speak to us in that manner. He speaks to us rather by symbols and representatives and correspondences when not by accounts of actual historical events.

Simply stated, the one great reason for the Ark, was a flood, not of physical and actual water, but rather an unprecedented flood of horrible falsities and hypocrisy, along with deep lusts, horrid passions, polluted imaginations, and "gross perversions of truth" that have put human minds into bondage. This is the time for a rescue craft designed by the Lord and built under His instruction.

That is, the Ark and its architectural design symbolizes the spiritual structure of the church of the time and the church, as the Lord provides it, in people. Right now, think not of the church, as spoken of here, necessarily as an earthly organization. But think of it as a spiritual dispensation from the Divine from God - infinitely adapted and suited for the time and for the individual. Briefly, think of it as it is now adapted to suit each one of us in our own unique need for reformation and regeneration. Think of the spiritual Ark, as our rescue craft! Yet, at the same time, think of it as a symbol of our spiritual selves in the process of regeneration of rebirth.

May we take a look at ourselves in the society in which we live today. I doubt if, spiritually, we are much changed from the time of our grandparents. Our lives are just more complex and we may think that we face many more temptations today. That however, is questionable, and really is not for us to know in any case. Suffice it for us to realize that, except for the infinite love and mercy of the Lord Jesus, who is constantly leading and bending our steps away from evil (to which we are inclined) towards the good, of which he is the author, we would be completely inundated, as by a flood, and end up in hell! Yes, hell is real. Most times we do not want to talk about it except apart from ourselves or our loved ones. We should however, want to approach life from a positive position, and as the Psalmist has said: "*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*" Psalm 121: 1,2. We want to be positive and approach each new day, putting the old away behind us, with the firm resolve that, with the help of the Lord, today we can do better, whatever the human relationship situation might be.

To this end, our Lord who is the Saviour for all mankind has provided a vehicle or means through which we can rise above the storms and floods of false values and persuasions that produce evil. We make an Ark of cypress wood. Not the best lumber, it is true, for it is highly flammable, especially with the pitch with which it is sealed. But this Ark, with three stories, made under Divine instruction, will serve our need for the time. One observation must be made: This Ark, as a symbol of the church (not as we normally know the church) is also a symbol of potentially regenerating persons of the church. In a word, it can be a symbol of you and me as we singly and personally try to live the kind of life that the Lord wants us to live: a life for and of heaven.

The Rev. Walter Orthwein, in one Swedenborgian publication has written as follows:-

"Coming into heaven is not easy. Hereditarily, we incline to evils of every kind. We are born into the loves of self and the world. We are born, as it were, upside down, and it is only through a lifetime of struggling with temptations of many kinds that our lives are finally brought into order, and we become truly human. But a wise person keeps seeking what is good and true; he perseveres in this spiritual quest because he knows in his heart that the reward is worth the effort. He knows that he will never be at peace until he finds it."

Speaking then of temptations, that which every regenerating person must experience, we note the fact that the flood lasted for forty days and nights. When we search other portions of Sacred Scripture, we will note this similarity regarding the figure 'forty', implying or representing a state of period of "temptation". Note these: The Children of Israel forty years in the wilderness; Moses on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights; Jesus tempted and fasting in the wilderness for forty days and nights; - all these, and others are indicative of periods or states of temptation. They could be very brief or over a period of time. Take note of this. The wonderful thing that protects us from diving into hell, or being wiped out by the "flood" is that Ark, that rescue craft which we mentioned before. Board it, now! Take with you, (which you cannot leave behind in any case), all your personality, with its host of feelings and thoughts, good and bad, - these being the clean and the unclean animals which Noah was told to bring into the Ark. You cannot separate them now (that is, the animals) for they are essentially you and me as unique individuals and personalities. Jesus referred to this principle in the parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds), not to be separated until the harvest.

Religion, or the so-called religious person, is often suspect by those who have seen so much of hypocrisy and even evil in the church. So the Ark was built of cypress wood, quite flammable, even as we see so much of selfishness and bigotry, resulting in conflicts in the church. But for now it is the best we have if we look to it genuinely and sincerely.

We are looking for real religion which we may know has three stories, even as the Ark. With the small opening above, for Divine influx, there is an inflow of truths in three degrees. First, we have the truths of faith (sort of seemingly abstract, for you can't explain faith); then we have rational truths that show us in a very practical sense that the good life of honesty, integrity and general thoughtfulness and tolerance does pay off in the long run; and finally we have what may be called scientific truths, with the lower or more natural understanding of the values that we find in getting along well with our peers and society. It is really at this point, that we start.

There is so much more in the Divine lesson of Noah and the Ark. But this much can be of help to us if we take to heart and apply the principles that we have considered, in our own unique situations. Life is good. It is beautiful! It comes from our Lord God and Creator; but as has been written: "*life is fragile, handle with prayer.*" Genuine prayer is "*talking with God*". Jesus said: "*If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.*" Learn then to pray for what is the Lord's will, not our own.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - How We Are**

We have been so created that we can look above ourselves to heaven and even to the Divine, and can also look below ourselves to the world and the earth. In this we are distinguished from the brute animals. We look above ourselves, to heaven and even to the Divine, when we have as a goal our neighbour, our country, the church, heaven and especially the Lord. We look below ourselves when we have self and the world as a goal.

To have a goal is to love, for what is loved is the goal. That which is loved reigns universally, that is, in every detail of the thought and the will. While a person looks one way, they do not look the other. That is to say, that while we look to the world and to self we do not look to heaven and to the Lord. Also the reverse is true, for the directions are opposite.

Because a person can thus look above themselves, it is very clear that there is an elevating of the mind by the Divine, for no one can look above themselves except by means of an elevation by Him who is above, whence it is also clear that all good and truth with a person are the Lord's. From this it is also clear when one looks below themselves they separate themselves from the Divine, and points their interiors towards self and the world exactly as the brute animals do, and that in so far as we do so we put off humanity. Arcana Caelestia 7607.

## **32. Prodigal Son - Richard H Tafel, August, 1986**

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the best known of all the Lord's parables. It is said that in this Bible illiterate age of ours, this is the one Parable which can be referred to without getting a blank stare. Its nearest rival, that of the "Good Samaritan", is just that to most people: just those two words, "Good Samaritan", meaning a helpful person. While this is a common expression, the majority of people are quite unaware that it comes from the Bible, let alone being able to give the story from which it comes. On the other hand the story of the Prodigal Son is well known by most people, both inside and outside the Church.

In this age of ours, which is so enthralled with "human relations" and with the "dynamics of personhood", our Lord's Parables are the best personal counselling that we can possibly have.

See yourself in the parables, and let them speak to you about yourself. For instance, we all have a younger son, this "Prodigal", within ourselves. He is impulsive, of roving eye, carefree and pleasure-bent, wanting to throw off restraints and to lead his own life. You know him well! He gets into trouble, does horrible things and sinks almost to an animal level. Yet there is something so admirable and lovable about him. He is honest enough to acknowledge his condition; when the roof falls in on him, he blames nobody but himself. He is quick to run off to the city and do just as he pleases, but he is quick to see the consequences of his impulsiveness, and to turn back to what once had been.

After an emotional binge there is normally something inside us which convicts us in our own eyes, which makes us regret and feel sorry for our behaviour and which drives us to seek pardon and release. To those who put this in a religious framework, this is the process of "repentance", of turning to the Lord for forgiveness in order to experience again a sense of His love and acceptance. All that, in non-theological language, is what is beautifully presented here in this "Parable", a story drawn so true to life that the "Prodigal" comes alive and we recognize ourselves in him. Yes! we are God's "Prodigals". We know His warm, forgiving arms, and His loving welcome of us when we have strayed. Always there is a loving home-coming waiting for us.

And yet, why is it that bad dreams of long ago come back to haunt us? Impulsive, thoughtless and careless things which we did in the past, thronging back to oppress and trouble us? Dark pages of the days, repented of, hopefully done and over with, now falling open to stare us in the face? Could it be that God has not forgiven us, after all? It is not so simple as that. Life itself is not simple, and yet we insist on trying to keep things simple! Maybe that is why we tend to end the Parable of the Prodigal Son with his homecoming celebration. But that is only part of the Parable; it is really the story of two sons, not just one.

Let us look at the "Elder Brother". At first glance, he has all our sympathy. He is hard-working, steady and law abiding. He has never given his father any trouble, but works day in and day out on the farm. His younger brother ran off to the gay lights of the city, squandered his inheritance and has now come back home, all his escapades forgiven and forgotten! Does it pay to be good, and to do what is right?

Well, you can make a case for the Elder Brother's feelings of resentment, until you remember that his position was not changed in any way by the return of the Prodigal. The farm and everything on it belonged to him alone, plus the increased value of it due to his and his father's labour. If his younger brother remained on the farm, it would be as a hired hand, to be paid as such and to have no equity in the estate. No, that wasn't why the Elder Brother was unwilling to join in the celebration at the return of the Prodigal safe and sound. It was because of his resentful spirit. He wasn't happy at this "return from the grave", as his father was. His brother had messed up his life and should have to pay for it, rather than being welcomed home with open arms!

There are people like that. The Puritans were like that; so were the Pharisees and, unfortunately, too many other people. Tertullian, one of the great Church-Fathers, and one of the outstanding Christian theologians of the Third Century, said that one of the greatest joys of the angels is sitting on the walls of heaven and watching the poor devils below, while giving thanks to God for having been spared their miserable lot! No; don't smile; you may agree with Tertullian more than you think. At least do not smile until you ask yourself how you think you would feel if you were to make it to heaven and if you were to see someone there happier than you; more popular than you and given more deference; and if you knew that that person in their earth-life was no good, was not concerned about other people, was not interested in religion, nor attended church and worked hard for it, as you did. What would you say as you saw them there in heaven? Would you say, "What wonders has God wrought! With us it is not possible, but with God all things are possible! O the grace of God! The divine miracle of forgiveness! The glory of the drawing power of Perfect Love! Is that what you would say? Or something quite different? I wonder.

There is surely something in Addison's famous couplet:

We are God's elect,  
All others will be damned;  
We can't have you in heaven,  
We can't have heaven crammed!

We have our own fixed ideas about the "right people", about "right and wrong", about the demands of "justice and judgement". In short, there is much of the spirit of the "Elder brother" in the best of us. This is the crucial point made in the Parable. Who was it who stood in the way of a complete and joyful family reunion? The Elder Brother, and he proves to be the key figure. There is no question about the Prodigal's penitence: he asks for nothing but to be forgiven and accepted. The father's forgiveness and welcome is joyous and full. It

remains to be seen what the Elder Brother would do. He could have his brother thrown out of the house and driven from the property because the farm was his.

Likewise, in our own experience of "forgiveness", it is not so simple a matter as being sorry for something we have done and asking the Lord to forgive us, or else we would not hear people say (or say ourselves!), "I can never forgive myself for" - referring to something done years ago and for which we asked the Lord to forgive us, but something for which we have never forgiven ourselves and with which we continue to beat ourselves over the head. No, the dynamics of forgiveness involve our conditioning ourselves in such a way that not only can we receive the Lord's forgiveness, but our own as well! Which means that, we must do something about that "Elder Brother" inside us.

If we would only do something about our feelings of superiority, about our critical and judgmental attitudes to other people. If we could see our Lord's commandments as guides to work by, rather than as yardsticks to measure other people by. If we would only not take ourselves so seriously, but would rather remember that a loving Lord is in the picture, and trust ourselves and other people more fully to His care and keeping. I keep remembering the Father, there behind the house, pleading with the "Elder Brother". "Be more loving, more tolerant, more understanding, more compassionate!" And I know that he is talking to us, too!

I suspect that as our attitudes towards other people change, we will find that it is easier to forgive them. As we do that, I feel sure that we will also find it easier, to forgive ourselves, and so receive our Lord's forgiveness. I believe it works that way. But of this we can be sure: our heavenly Father is seeking to reconcile those brothers within us, the penitent Prodigal and the resentful Elder Brother who would hold off the divine forgiveness.

The Parable ends abruptly; in fact, it has no ending. It leaves us hanging up in the air. We are left with the scene of the Father standing outside the house, pleading with his elder son to come in and join the festivities and so complete the joy of this wonderful occasion. Has the original ending been lost in the process of transmission? Or is this the mark of a great storyteller, leaving the hearer to supply his own ending? In any case, seeing how this is the climax of the story, each of us has to work out for themselves how it ends.

Does the Elder Son finally go in and greet the returned wanderer?

Were the brothers reconciled at long last?

Does the story end, like all stories should, with "and they lived together happily ever after"?

Will our story?

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Forgiveness of Sins**

Many in the world and in the church believe that when sins are forgiven they are cast out, as a burden, in a moment; or wiped away, as dirt is washed from the face by water; and that, after this, we proceed on. our way, clean and pure. Thus they believe that by the Lord's mercy, and yet apart from means, the state of our life can be changed instantly into its opposite. Let it be known, however, that such is not the case.

The Lord, who is mercy itself, indeed continually forgives us our sins. But we cannot receive forgiveness through repentance of the mouth only. We can do so in no other way than through the repentance of our life. For no matter how thoroughly we may suppose our sins to have been taken away, still they adhere to us; neither are they removed, until we live according to the Divine Commandments. It is only as we do this that they are removed. And in the measure in which they are removed, they are also forgiven. Nor can they actually be so, until then.

In other words, as far as we are concerned, there is no actual forgiveness, until we perform a repentance genuine and serious enough to desist from evil, to live a life of faith and charity, and even to persevere in it to the end of our days. In our endeavour to do this, we receive from the Lord a new life, which is called the spiritual life. And when, from this new life, we at last view the evils of our former life, and turn away from them, and hold them in aversion, then we may know for the first time that these evils are forgiven, inasmuch

as they have no more power over us. From then on, we may know also that, by the Lord, we are withheld from them, and held by Him in good and truth. It is therefore evident that actual forgiveness cannot take place in a single hour, nor even in a single year.

### 33. Chariots of Fire - Ted Le Van, September 1986

I was deeply affected by the tragedy of losing our space pioneers. It affected me more than the bombing of our marines on their peace mission in Beirut or any of the natural disasters that have occurred. And I suppose that this is partly because it was so unexpected. Had it happened when John Glenn made his first around-the-world space voyage, I would have been sad, but not so shocked; for back then, the whole idea of space travel seemed outrageously risky far too dangerous for us to contemplate.

It was something that only a daredevil would try. That is an interesting expression of our vocabulary 'daredevil'. We would apply it to reckless fools like Evil Knievel who would do crazy things just to get our attention. But there is no comparison between that kind of mindless, reckless abandon and the carefully researched, thoroughly tested 'space chariots' that we have built for the past two decades. Chariots that we have constantly improved upon, based on thousands of hours analysis of data by the most brilliant human and computer brains in the world.

No, definitely not mindless, and definitely not reckless! And one did not get a license to drive one of these 'chariots' by studying a manual for an hour, and then taking a 20 minute 'road test' with an instructor. It required a deep commitment to years of mental and physical training. Even Christa McAuliffe, the school teacher, needed months of training just to be a passenger.

When all is going well, we say, "this is wonderful let's do it some more and more and more."

But when things go badly, and we have a tragedy such as we had then, it sets us back on our heels, and we start to ask thoughtful, serious questions about what we are doing: Could this tragedy happen again? Are we really learning enough to make it worth the risk? Is it something that the Lord would really want us doing, or is this just a more sophisticated, more glorious form of dare-devil fun?

I would like us to think about these three questions now because I think it could help us examine our whole doctrine of life. How ironical that Swedenborg, whose birthday was one day after the tragedy of our 'space chariot' would tell us that 'chariots' represent 'doctrine'. It means that each of us will ride in a chariot that represents our doctrine of life be it selfish or unselfish, loving or hating, wisdom or foolishness.

Could this tragedy happen again? Of course it could! I am sure that a great deal of effort and time will go into examining the possible causes of this tragedy, and that everyone who has anything to do with the project will go back and study every physical part, and every process to try to prevent it from happening again. But we know it will. Has your car never failed you? Have you never had a vacuum cleaner or mixmaster or toaster go on the fritz? My first toaster lasted 25 years, but it shouldn't surprise me one bit if my new one should conk out in one year.

Those things happen. And it's not God sending down His wrath upon me, any more than the notion that God was blessing me for my good deeds because my first toaster lasted for 25 years. "See how great I am, my toaster lasted for 25 years!" No! Not at all. To base my 'doctrine of life' upon such a notion would be asking for trouble and disappointment. But this does not mean that God does not bless us nor does it mean that God does not get very disappointed in us at times. Thank God He has such great love and patience with us! The blessings that He tries to shower upon us, He tries to shower upon all people. But a great deal of the time we reject this offer because we have an "attitudinal problem".

Have you ever tried to make a 'peace offering' with a young child? They either reject it totally, or else they come over to you all stiff, and grab it out of your hand and walk away with a sour-puss expression on their face.

Much of the time, this is the way we treat God! We didn't expect to have to suffer quite so much in life, and we are quite disappointed with the gifts He has given us. Considering the gifts that He has given to others, we feel short-changed. But just think about it for a minute. What are the real blessings in life? Did you want to be wealthy? Why? So you could show off to others and make them jealous? That would only serve to make you a mean and nasty person

Do you really want that? You say that what you really want is peace of mind, right? But where does peace of mind come from? It doesn't come from wealth! Many rich people have no peace of mind at all and they are no longer under the illusion that money will buy them that peace of mind which makes them even more miserable. No, peace of mind comes from spiritual regeneration, from having a good relationship with God. It is based on what is inside us, not the external things with which we can surround ourselves. With this peace of mind, death of a loved one or for ourselves is not a tragedy, for we know that life goes on in another dimension where more lessons can be learned, and spiritual growth can continue. Oh, we will still mourn the loss, because we will miss the presence of this dear one. But because it is only a temporary separation, we can go on with our 'life' whichever dimension it is in.

So our 'doctrine of life' is built on a foundation of faith: Faith that there is a God who loves us and cares for us, and who has prepared a home for us and our loved ones so that death is not a tragedy.

The second question that I raised was: Are we really learning enough to make it worth the risk? Projects like space travel really stretch our minds. We do not have to be geniuses to know it takes geniuses to work on the problems that space travel present. Human knowledge has been growing enormously just in our lifetime, and our space program has given us the incentive that produced much of this knowledge, and can continue to inspire our scientists to push back the darkness of the unknown even further. Every discovery helps us to understand more about ourselves and our environment, and helps us to correct the defects that pain and baffle us. Yes! It is worth the risk. By all means let us continue to pursue this knowledge that has been such a help to us all. But let us do so with the realization that there is more to life than knowledge.

Spiritual growth does not come from discovering how to safely handle fuel that burns at high temperatures. No, spiritual growth comes from taking the knowledge that we have gained and using it to show love to our neighbour. A friend of mine put it this way: "Let us not make this our Tower of Babel by pretending that this is our way to find God."

It is an important doctrine for life: we must not get so caught up in love of knowledge that we forget love to the Lord and love to the neighbour.

My third and final question was this: Is this space travel something that the Lord would really want us doing? Let us look at the effect it has had on those who have made the journey in their chariots of fire. The reaction has been strong and positive. Each has found the experience awe-inspiring. Each astronaut and passenger has come back with a new respect for this planet. I hope we will send every representative and senator on one of these missions. I hope we send up everyone who is polluting in a major way our air, water and land. And I hope that we send up everyone who could trigger a nuclear explosion on our earth. I think the trip would give them all a more sober view of what they are or would be destroying.

The answer to my final question then, is yes. I think the Lord really does want us to get a new perspective on this beautiful earth we inhabit, and a fuller appreciation of our responsibility for preserving it.

We need never fear that our scientists will find all the answers, or that they could gloat over having discovered all of God's secrets. That day will never come because we are finite and God is infinite. For those who have an open mind and a willing heart, each discovery will be viewed as another example of God's infinite wisdom and great love for His creatures.

And so another doctrine of life that we can glean from this experience is that the Lord has so much that He would like to teach us, we need never think that we know it all. As soon as we have learned one lesson, and proved that we have really learned it by putting it into action to help our neighbour, He will be ready to teach us another. And there is a great secret that you know, it is about the depth of meaning that there is to the Bible, the Word of God. You can climb into your very own chariot of fire right in your own living room. Swedenborg tells us that the 'chariot of fire' which carried away Elijah signifies the understanding of the Word of God in its interior meaning. Let us thank the Lord for this blessing.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Chariots**

The Word frequently mentions *chariots*, and hardly anyone knows that they symbolize teachings about goodness and truth and the items of knowledge that go to make up those teachings. People do not know this because nothing spiritual enters their minds when the Word mentions a chariot or the horses that draw it. All they think of is the earthly story line. Yet in reality, horses in the Word symbolize matters of the intellect so a chariot symbolizes teachings and the items of knowledge composing them.

The meaning of chariots as religious teachings and items of knowledge has become clear to me from seeing chariots so many times in the other life. Furthermore, there is an area off to the right, surrounding the underground realm, where chariots and horses appear, and a line of stables too. People walk and talk together there who had been scholars in the world and whose goal in acquiring education had been to use it in their life. Sights like these come to them from angels in the higher heavens, whose conversations about intellectual matters and about teachings and items of knowledge present such sights to the spirits there.

This symbolism of chariots and horses is plain enough from the following evidence: Elijah was seen being carried to heaven by a fiery chariot and fiery horses, and he and Elisha were called the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. This is what 2 Kings says about the events:

Look! A *fiery chariot* and *fiery horses* intruded between them, and Elijah went up in a whirlwind into heaven, and Elisha was watching and shouting, "*My father! My father! The chariots of Israel, and its horsemen!*" Arcana Caelestia 5321.

### **34. Waking Up Again – Dr Robert Kirven, October 1986**

Anyone can see perfectly well that no hint of life ever exists without some kind of love and that no trace of joy ever exists unless it results from love. The nature of the love determines the nature of the life and of the joy.

If you were to take the things you love - the things you long for (since longings are bound up with love) - and set them aside, your thought processes would come to an immediate halt and you would be like a corpse. I have learned this through experience.

Self-love and materialism produce an imitation of life and an imitation of joy, but since they are diametrically opposed to genuine love - that is, loving the Lord above all and loving our neighbour as ourselves - it stands to reason that they are not forms of love but of hatred. Notice that the more we love ourselves and worldly goods, the more we hate our neighbour and therefore the Lord.

Genuine love, then, is love for the Lord, and genuine life is a life of love received from him. True joy is the joy of that life.

Only one genuine love can exist, so only one genuine life can exist, and it gives rise to true joy and happiness, like that felt by angels in heaven. Arcana Caelestia 33.

In the beginning, in the very beginning, the beginning of everything, God created the heavens and the earth. And in all our little beginnings - on all the occasions of our lives when we wake up again to the realization that

there is a better possibility than the way we are going in our feelings, our thoughts, our actions - God is at work again. In all our beginnings, God is recreating us.

To bring that imagery into a concrete example that may not be too unfamiliar to many of you, let me tell you something that is going on in my life.

Late one Friday afternoon, I learned something new about what my garage had done and not done for and to my car and me, and I became angry. It was a matter of comparatively little import to the operation of my car or the course of my life, and the anger I felt in response to it was out of proportion; but for a little while, that anger dominated my life. And if you don't know from any recent experience of your own, a life dominated by anger is indeed an empty, wasted life for the duration of that domination.

I am grateful today that the Spirit of God moved over the face of that troubled deep, and it dawned on me that I have something better to do with my life energy than to nurse a moment's indignation into a fury of vengeful resentment. I would say that I "woke up" to a realization that I can have my car's problem taken care of, and communicate with the garage as may be appropriate or necessary, without brooding or fuming over what I might have said or the garage might have done.

Of course that was not a new revelation to me, but I had to "wake up" again out of the darkness I came into as a result of my anger, and have my dark perspective on the situation separated from the perspective provided by light, before I could choose between the two courses of action that appear from the two perspectives.

In the light, the decision was easy, and I chose a way other than anger. That "day" in my regeneration passed; and it was all right.

At that point, I had avoided messing up my life as I might have to some degree if I had nursed the anger much longer; but I had not grown, had not moved forward from the experience. For that to happen, I had to separate the decision about what to do about the car and about my relations with the garage - the external decision from the more important, more internal, issue of how I feel about external problems that stir up such emotional storms in my consciousness. That distinction and the choices it offers is what the Bible describes in the second day of creation. It is the separation of what I know about cars, mechanics and other components of my worldly environment from the much more important knowledge that God has given me about my spirit, and how its development is affected by anger and by love.

As long as those two segments of my knowledge are mixed up with one another, a necessary concern for keeping my car in safe operating condition can be perverted by hellish influences into hatred toward some mechanic that I do not even know and really do not want to hate at all; and the distorting, warping force of hatred is a threat to the course of my spiritual growth. When those sets of knowledge were separated, so that I could distinguish the two issues, and deal with each in the appropriate way, then the problem with the car was transformed into an item for action in next week's agenda, my anger was transformed into a sermon topic, and most important, I had erected a new barrier in my spiritual defences, blocking a way through which influences from the hells have attacked me many times before and subverted my regeneration.

That day has passed for me; and it is very good.

I realize, in a subtle but very important way that I had not realized before, that the quality of my life is a direct, necessary and immediate consequence of the nature of my love. The anger - no, the hatred - that I felt toward the unknown mechanic that worked on my car, toward the supervisor at the service desk of the garage, and even toward the owner of the whole automobile agency, none of that hatred had anything to do with my need to get my car fixed. Although it masqueraded as a legitimate need in my perception of my situation, it actually was an expression of a childish desire, to be treated with more respect. Dealing with that desire in me is far more important than getting the problem with my car corrected.

There are more stages to come in this development, and I will follow them through. But the first two days of this recreation of me are interesting, and they should be instructive.

Similar events are common in your life. If you can remember your most recent one clearly enough, I believe you will find that your experience has this in common with mine: the new light on the situation, and the "waking up again", are the Lord's doing, not ours. There was nothing in me that was going to turn my anger off, or guide me into another path. I needed help to do that, help that was stronger than my anger. After I got that help, and accepted it, it was as if I had become a different person.

"How can a man be born again when he is old?" Nicodemus had a good question. We echo it every time we excuse our foolish or selfish behaviour by saying, "I'm only human", or "You can't teach an old dog new tricks". The way we can be created is by listening to the Spirit of God moving over the face of what is going on with us, and wake up again to the better possibilities He presents for our lives. The Spirit not only guides us into better paths, but also recreates our spirit into a different kind of person, a kind of person less likely to go that foolish way again.

Whether it is a major decision that redirects the whole course of our life, or just forgiving the jerk at a garage service desk instead of sitting home raging at him, we have to hear our Lord's words to Nicodemus as if they were spoken to us - because they are: "You must be born again."

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Regeneration: Life-Long Course**

Regeneration is the removal of evil and falsity from the heart of man, and the implantation therein of the truth and good which belong to the spiritual life. Consequently man is not regenerated hastily but slowly.

The fact is that all things a person has thought and intended and done from infancy, have added themselves to his life and have become intrinsic part of his nature. And furthermore, they are so interrelated in the fabric of his character that one of them could not be eradicated from it suddenly, without eradicating at the same time all the others which hold together with it. Therefore violence would be done to his life. For the very structure of his inner organism, and the connection of its parts one with another, would be so disturbed that the man would expire.

With regard to this, it could be said that an evil man is correspondentially an image of hell, and a good man an image of heaven. Thus evils and falsities with an evil man are interrelated just as they are in the spiritual world among the infernal societies with which he is already associated. With a good man, on the other hand, goods and truths have such a mutual connection as is found with the angelic societies of heaven in the spiritual companionship of which he lives even here.

Now, it is heaven in man which removes hell from him. Hence it is evident that evils and falsities with an evil man cannot be removed suddenly, but only as gradually as goods and truths are implanted within him, interiorly and in their order. For this reason, regeneration, or the implantation of the life of heaven in the heart of man, commences in infancy, and continues even to the last moments of his life in the world. And after that, the work goes on forever to greater and greater perfection. Arcana Caelestia para. 9334

## **35. The New Creative You - Jim Lawrence, November 1986**

We are all creative. Each moment, we are either creating a richer, better pattern of daily living, or we are creating patterns of tomorrow's obstacle course. Our creativity begins within ourselves, as we respond to the life that God gives, the life in which we simply discover ourselves. And the beginning point is our own attitude, the way we use our minds and our wills.

Consciously or unconsciously, we are creative beings. At an unconscious level, our thoughts go out, and create their own kind. Our unharnessed, undisciplined thought brings a resultant world of greater confusion and difficulty. Our harnessed thought brings more nearly into our experience what we have chosen.

Since we are all basically creative and creating something in our world every moment of every day, what do we mean when we speak of "creative people"? Creative people are individuals whose reach of creativity has

grown long through a more extensive use of their mind and will. They can be likened to a home gardener who, after a couple of successful crops of vegetables, decides to go into a fuller scale of operations and thereby raise not only for his own needs, but also enough left over to sell.

We too, are in the position to make our choice: whether the sum of our total living will be just enough to take care of our immediate needs or whether we will create love enough, joy enough, peace enough, caring enough to circulate with others all around us.

Believing and willing is essential for creative and powerful living, but we must not forget the third aspect, which Swedenborg so unceasingly stressed for us: that is the necessity of doing. New Thought philosopher, Ernest Holmes, was fond of saying, "God will not do for us what He can do through us". Great realities are possible for us, if we believe in and will it, but we must fire our own engines into action! Belief, will and action is the trinitarian formula for power - power in cocreating a meaningful existence with God.

Each of us can also be likened to a sculptor. Our hammer and chisel are our ability to think and will, and our marble is the substance of our minds and hearts. We sculpt a limitless number of separate works throughout the days of our lives. If we are not satisfied with the statuary in the garden of our lives, then we must know that we can do something about it. The substance and tools have been given, and we are already chiselling away. Though our possibilities may, not be truly unlimited, we err far too often and far too strongly in believing that we have little chance to change life. Rarely do we over estimate our co-creative abilities.

No one can sculpt your life for you, no one can think or will for you. Others may colour or influence your thinking, but you are the only one who can say to yourself: "I have within me right now the ability to be creative. I have the power to respond to life as I wish. As I think and will constructively, I activate forces; I begin to unveil the beautiful 'statue of perfection' within me". This is what a sculptor does in marble when he chisels away at the extraneous stone and releases the statue imprisoned within.

And this you are doing with your life. Let's heighten our ability to see that the substance of our thought and the direction of our will is powerfully creative, that in fact, it slowly and inexorably brings into being that with which it is concerned. You can begin to increase the amount of time you spend thinking positively and willing love. Inside you right now is the perfect image and a mighty power with which to bring into being your very best.

This presence is God. We can choose to expand and deepen the partnership we already have. One way is to decide that you really are a sculptor of life, that you are creative, as well as responsive. Begin to believe that you are on the verge of creating a wholly new and better you because of your love for God. You do not want to sculpt a life of disharmony, of physical, emotional and mental anguish. Discard such material in your hearts and minds: it is too inferior to be bothered with. Throw out those feelings of hate, resistance and inadequacy. You cannot sculpt much of a statue with them. You have no need of an image cracked with worry, hurry, stress and strain.

Dr. Carl Jung said that all of the people who came to him for help most needed a firm religious foundation - and he meant that in its profoundest sense. Without a grounding and a rooting in Truth and Love, he felt that he could not help them. So as we continue the sculpting of ourselves, we might lift as a high priority the placing of our foundation upon the best that we can know and be committed to.

Divine inspiration from within will guide us where to put the curved and straight lines, where to chip off a piece and where to leave a portion as it is. The result of our venture into personal creativity will be a beautiful Self, an image and likeness of God with perfect symmetry and balance.

Yes, we are co-creators with God. We were put here to glorify the Divine Creator by consciously exercising our freedom to think and will in accordance with the Power that is.

Today, as never before in history, the restrictions of duty and obligation to the menial tasks of daily living are gone. We are free, in the new age, to spend much more of our time in new, exciting, creative pursuits. Baking can be done in minutes, washing dishes and clothes takes a fraction of the time it used to, and word

processors even make the creation of a talk less cumbersome than it once was. Could we but arrange our lives so, we would have much more "free" time than our ancestors did.

But what are most of us pursuing? Do we pass the time, spend the time, or do we use the time? Being creative is not really so difficult. Yet, so few people seem to exercise their innate creativity very fully. Why? Because it demands a kind of discipline to which most of us are reluctant to commit. Discipline to turn away from busyness, from over achieving on the job, from the TV, from mindless pursuits. Discipline to turn within ourselves, where we can encounter the source of all our inspiration and creative force.

Creativity demands dedication - a dedication to start with earnest on our project and see it through to completion. Whether it is an oil painting or a pie we are baking, unless we finish that which we start, how will we ever gain from the experience and grow into a greater and greater manifestation of the vision of ourselves? Disregard the barkers on the streets of life who sell ideas of mediocrity and too-lateness. Don't buy the "it's too late fors" and the "what will people says". Be your own person. Be true to the best that you know, for that is your truest pathway to meaningful creativity.

Let us create an atmosphere of harmony and well being in our homes. Let us create joy and enthusiasm among our fellow workers. Let us create love in the midst of hate, balance in the midst of confusion, light in the midst of darkness.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Way To Heaven**

Since a person can live outwardly as others do, can grow rich, keep a plentiful table, dwell in an elegant house and wear fine clothes in keeping with their position, can enjoy delights and gratifications, and engage in worldly affairs for the sake of their occupation and business and for the life both of the mind and the body, provided they inwardly acknowledge the Divine and wishes well to the neighbour, it is evident that to enter upon the way to heaven is not so difficult as many believe. The sole difficulty is being able to resist the love of self and the world, and to prevent their becoming dominant, for this is the source of all evils.

That this is not so difficult as is believed is meant by these words of the Lord: "*learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" Matthew 11: 29-30.

The reason the Lord's yoke is easy and his burden light is that to the extent that we resist the evils that well up from love for ourselves and the world, we are led by the Lord and not by ourselves. Then the Lord resists those things within us and removes them. Heaven and Hell 359.

### **36. The Virgin Birth - Clayton S. Priestnal, December 1986**

In an age acclaimed for its advanced scholarship, for its enlightenment and understanding of complex problems and abstract hypotheses, it seems strange that one feels the necessity of defending the Scriptural assertion regarding the virgin birth of the Christ Child. The numbers of people, including clergy, who either doubt or deny the need for a unique conception is surprisingly large.

One should rest their faith on the statements of the Scripture, but how much more unshakable this confidence will be if they understand somewhat the why's and wherefore's of the most remarkable event in the world's history. Let it not be supposed our finite mind can ever fully fathom the depths of the Divine; however, there are truths available which cast considerable light on the process of the Incarnation.

More often than not, whenever we attempt to defend the validity of the virgin birth, especially among those unfamiliar with the teachings of Swedenborg, the response is usually framed in this manner, "It really doesn't matter. You are trying to split hairs. Personally, I am not interested, for it isn't very important and who cares?" The discussion thus becomes closed; another to remain in a state of relative ignorance on a most

To those who desire to probe more deeply into the complexities of the Incarnation, we can say that it does concern us greatly if we are ever to understand and appreciate the mission the Lord came to fulfill and how it was accomplished. A study of the spiritual sense contained within the words of the Old Testament prophets will confirm the extent and gravity of the crisis. The vital work of restoring freedom and rationality, the two essentials needed for regeneration, had to be done by God alone. It also necessitated His personal presence in the world so that the crucial problem could be corrected from the bottom up. The Lord came as the Infant Christ Child. He had a natural mother, Mary, but no human father. Why? Had Joseph been the progenitor of the Infant Jesus, the Child would have been like all other children, possessing merely a finite soul. But the inmost of the Child lying in the manger at Bethlehem and admired by shepherds and wisemen was the Divine Itself; in this respect He differed from all other infants born into the world.

The virgin birth was not a miracle, if by a miracle we mean a process which is outside the existing laws created by God. He would never need to violate the procedures by which the universe was created and is sustained. Indeed it is inconceivable that the Lord would act contrary to His Divine Nature; we are famous for our inconsistencies, our ambivalences, our self-contradictions, but the Lord is forever the same, unchanging. It is well to always bear in mind that the Lord did not arbitrarily step outside the laws He created at the beginning of time. He merely utilized a method unfamiliar to us, indeed still unknown to us.

When Mary conceived, it was the Holy Spirit, the Power of the Divine Itself, which implanted in her womb the seed of human life, not as we pointed out, by the familiar way, not by a male member of the species, but by a more direct process. If incredulity still lingers and the mind is reluctant to accept the unique method of the Christ Child's conception, reasoning that no birth on earth is possible without a natural father, ask yourself how the first man and woman came into being. There could not have been either male or female, father or mother, yet we know full well the human race had a beginning and still exists and procreates. If it was possible for God to create human beings without parents, the virgin birth seems easier by half.

One difficulty many people have in accepting the Scriptural account of the virgin birth is the generally accepted assumption that it is the father and mother who create the infant born into the world. This is not the case. There is only a single source of life and that One giver is the Lord alone. This means that the Lord is the sole propagator of the human race. Man and woman are merely instruments in procreation. To keep this truth in the forefront of the mind is a long step forward in accepting the unique circumstance of the Christ Child's birth.

God, in utilising a male and female in the process of birth, has assigned to each a distinct contribution to make. It is obvious the mother during the period of gestation provides the developing infant in her womb with a physical body. No one can possibly dispute this assertion. But when the question arises as to what the father contributes, the problem is more obscure, and many find it exceedingly debatable. It is the definite teaching of Swedenborg that God gives the child a soul through the instrumentality of the father. The rationale of the virgin birth should be convincing proof this is true.

When the above truth becomes clear, the distinction between the Lord's human and that of every other person becomes recognizable. My soul and yours is the initial receptacle into which life from God reaches us and then inflows down to our more external degrees of being, such as consciousness, rational thought and even into bodily functions. Again I remind you, the inmost of us is finite, limited, the recipient of life and not life itself. This important qualification is not usually made by those religious philosophies which teach that the divine is in each individual. As a consequence the adherents of these movements believe they are a part of the divine. The soul of the Christ Child did not possess the limitations of finiteness; the inmost of Mary's firstborn was Life Itself, Infinite, with no qualification of any kind or degree.

The angel at the time of the annunciation told Mary the Child she was to bear would be "the Son of God". If Joseph had had any part in the conception the Holy Scripture would have said so. The descriptive term "the Son of God" is significant for it emphasises the Divinity which was inherently a part of the Christ Child's nature. Jesus was also called "the son of man", and this appellation denotes the strictly human, finite,

elements of His being. In passing it might be well to point out that nowhere in the Gospels does it say the "Son of God" was tempted or suffered in any way, it was always the "son of man" that was faced with temptations and physical agony.

If all else about the Incarnation should be forgotten, at least remember this: in the virgin birth of the Christ Child, Jehovah, the One God, extended His arm down into the external life of people in order to ensure salvation. Everything we read about in the Holy Word, from Genesis to the Book of Revelation, is an account of the struggles and sufferings the Lord endured to redeem mankind from the power of its deadliest enemy. The humanity the One Divine Deity assumed and glorified was the medium through which He could fight and conquer and at the same time reveal Himself as a Personal God who loved and cared about what He had created. This is what makes Christmas so precious in the hearts and minds of the faithful, and evokes at least some respect from the worldly who still doubt and believe the natural world is the beginning and the end of each of our destiny.

Those who deny or belittle the validity of the virgin birth are saying in effect, "Jesus was only a mortal man who possessed unusual insights and an exceptional compassion for the human race".

If this assumption is correct then Jesus could have had no part in our salvation, since redemption is distinctly the work of the Divine. Perhaps most deplorable of all, the one who denies the unique circumstances of the Christ Child's conception and birth must at the same time reject the truth of the Holy Scripture. When the source of our enlightenment is undermined, where shall we turn to learn the meaning of life? True, the Word of God needs to be interpreted in order to be correctly understood, but if the means for doing so are deficient or completely lacking, it is well to rest upon its literal statements, one of the clearest and most important of which is a virgin conceived and brought forth a son who was Emmanuel, meaning "God with Us".

*"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35)

#### **Reading From Swedenborg – Jehovah, Saviour And Redeemer**

The idea that it was some eternally begotten Son who came down and took on a human manifestation turns out to be utterly wrong, collapses and vanishes in the face of passages in the Word like the following, where Jehovah himself says that he is the Savior and Redeemer:

*Am not I Jehovah? And there is no other God except me. I am a just God, and there is no Savior except me.* Isaiah 45:21-22

*I am Jehovah, and there is no Savior except me.* Isaiah 43:11

*I am Jehovah, your God, and you are not to acknowledge a God except me. There is no Savior except me.* Hosea 13:4

*So that all flesh may know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior and your Redeemer.* Isaiah 49:26;60:16

*As for our Redeemer, Jehovah Sabaoth is his name.* Isaiah 47:4

*Their Redeemer is strong; Jehovah Sabaoth is his name.* Jeremiah 50:34

*Jehovah, my rock and my Redeemer.* Psalms 19:14

*Thus says Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am Jehovah, your God."* Isaiah 48:17; 43:14; 49:7  
Thus said Jehovah, your Redeemer: "I, Jehovah, am the maker of all things. I alone stretch out the heavens. I extend the earth] by myself." Isaiah 44:24

*Thus said Jehovah, the King of Israel, and its Redeemer, Jehovah Sabaoth: "I am the First and the Last, and there is no God except me."* Isaiah 44:6

*You, Jehovah, are our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is your name.* Isaiah 63:16

*"With the compassion of eternity I will have mercy. " So says your Redeemer, Jehovah.* Isaiah 54:8

*You have redeemed me, Jehovah of truth.* Psalms 31:6

*Israel should hope in Jehovah, because with Jehovah there is compassion; with him there is the most redemption. He will redeem Israel from all its forms of wickedness.* Psalm 130:7

*Jehovah God and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, will be called God of all the earth.* Isaiah 54:5

From these passages and very many others, all who have eyes and open minds can see that God, who is one, came down and became human for the purpose of redeeming people. Anyone who pays attention to the divine sayings just quoted can see this as clearly as something in the morning light.

There are people, though, who are in the dark of night because they have convinced themselves that there was another god, eternally begotten, who came down and redeemed humankind. These people close their eyes to these divine sayings, and consider with eyes shut how to twist the sayings and apply them to their false beliefs. True Christian Religion 83.

I am the Alpha and the omega the beginning and the end.

### **37. Keeping Our Priorities - Richard H. Tafel, January, 1987.**

(text missing) .... among us in his Divine and Human Presence. As the Gospel writers were inspired to record that life: "He went about doing good".

We can read about how our Lord Jesus restored sanity to a devil-possessed man who had been cast out of normal society and who had to find refuge among the tombs of the dead. People "passed by on the other side," careful to keep out of the reach of this poor creature who was infested by all those demons. But not our Lord Jesus! His heart went out to him: he would cure him of his evil possession and draw him back again into the human fold - for had he not come on earth to save and to free? To "overcome the Hells", to turn back the tide of evil which was sweeping into the world, even to the point of taking possession of people's bodies as evidenced in the case of the poor man of the tombs?

And to show that those demons had indeed once and for all left his body, our Lord allowed them to enter a herd of pigs causing them to stampede and rush headlong over a steep cliff into the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The local farmers were not happy about all that! It was not that they begrudged this freeing miracle. They were not inhuman. But they just could not see why it had to happen at the expense of their livestock.

The Bible says that they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighbourhood - which is putting it pretty mildly! They probably said, "You care about people; we care about our swine. That is where we differ, so get out!" Here we see the contrast in their priorities. The farmers put pigs first and people second; Jesus put people first and pigs second. People were his priority, and where ever we look in the Gospels we see our Lord putting the stress on values and priorities. God is personal and religion is personal, and to miss satisfaction in personal relationships is to miss the fuller meaning of life. Our Lord Jesus, who came that we "might have life and life more abundantly" counselled us to "seek first the Kingdom of God and its rightness", saying that everything else would then fall into its proper place.

Every person inevitably has their priorities, and I think you can usually tell what these are by asking three questions about him:

1. What do they have time for?
2. How do they spend their money?
3. What do they allow to interrupt them?

Now you may think that this is a strange list, but when we apply these questions to Jesus, the Gospels give an immediate answer. What did Jesus have time for? Persons! He led the busiest of lives. He often had no leisure time even to eat. He moved with a sense of urgency because he knew that time was running out. Yet he always found time for persons: time to chat with a man at midnight or a woman at midday; time to visit the homes of friends or to take up little children in his arms.

How did he spend his wealth? - wealth which for him was not in terms of money, but in inner riches - Love, Wisdom, Power. How did Jesus spend all this inner divine richness? On persons! If you read the Gospels carefully you will see that whenever they describe our Lord as being particularly conscious of the Divine Power, they immediately tell us how he used that power in some act of service to people.

What did our Lord allow to interrupt him? People, again. It didn't matter where he was or what he was doing - preaching a sermon, eating a meal, taking his rest or praying - he could always be interrupted by persons who needed him. Persons were his priority; he always put persons first. For instance, when he made his frontal attack on the laws governing Sabbath Observation his purpose was not to undermine those laws, but he did want to expose their distortion of human priorities and he wanted to straighten these out. "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" he told the doctors of the Sacred Law. When they objected to his acts of healing on the Sabbath, he called them Hypocrites, and accused them of being kinder to their livestock than to people. They interpreted the laws of the Sabbath as making it allowable to pull a donkey out of a pit, while at the same time prohibiting a doctor from tending a patient.

Our Lord always also put persons before institutions. One day as he stood in the temple of Jerusalem, his disciples said, "Look at these wonderful stones!" Moments earlier on that same spot Jesus too had said, "Look!" But he was not pointing to that temple but rather to a poor old widow who had dropped two copper coins - her total wealth - into the temple treasury-box. In his eyes this was a big thing, the mightiest financial transaction in the world. And it was precisely because that temple building represented an institution that did not notice persons, exploiting rather than serving them, that he predicted its destruction. "There will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down".

And I would make one final observation. Our Lord always put persons before people. He did love people, but he related them not in the large, not as a mass, not as a race or as impersonal mankind. He related to them as individuals, on a person to person basis. (How easy it is for us to love "people in general", how difficult to love particular individuals. And when we relate to people in general, how impersonal our human relationships become!) Our Lord was always turning his attention from the many to the one, stopping in a crowd to listen to and to help the sick woman who just wanted to touch his garment. People, to him, were not just people, but persons. He said that the whole world could not be set in the balance over one human soul. He said that all heaven's energies are sometimes directed to saving one lost sheep.

All this is what we mean when we say that our Lord God is a personal God. He continues to love and care for us in that same warm one-to-one relationship which he has shown us by coming among us as a Human as well as Divine God. In his sight each of us is an individual, a unique person, a particular son or daughter of his. When we think, as we sometimes do, that we do not count in this vast scheme of things, that this you and this I - these infinitesimal bits of consciousness - are lost on our earthen speck of dust, remember the personalness of God. And at those times when he seems so far away, remember that persons are his top priority, and hear again his kind voice:

*"Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. The very hairs of your head are numbered. Never be afraid then, for you are even more valuable than sparrows!" Matthew 10:29*

Let me close with this little poem I recently came across.

"Why should I feel discouraged?  
Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely,  
And long for heaven and, home  
When Jesus is my portion,  
My constant friend is he?  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know he watches me.  
I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free -  
For his eye is on the sparrow  
And I know he watches me."

#### **Reading From Swedenborg - New In Will and Understanding**

The new heart in these passages means a new will and the new spirit means a new intellect, since "heart" in the Word means the will and "spirit," when it appears alongside "heart," means the intellect.

I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you. Ezekiel 36:26-27

From now on we regard no one on the basis of the flesh. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, she or he is a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

From reason as well we know about our renewal: the person who has been regenerated must have a new will and a new intellect, because these two faculties are what make us human. They are the parts of us that are regenerated. The quality of these two faculties determines the quality of the human being. People who have an evil will are evil; if their intellect supports that will, they are even more evil. The opposite is true of good people.

Only religion renews and regenerates us. It is allotted the highest place in the human mind. Below itself it sees civic concerns that relate to the world. In fact, it rises up through these concerns the way the purest sap rises up through a tree to its very top, and surveys from that height the earthly things that lie below, the way someone looks down from a tower or a high point of land onto the fields below. True Christian Religion 601.

### **38. Jesus' Revolutionary Attitude Toward Women - Dr. Friederman Horn, February 1987**

Where Jesus stood in relation to women is indicated by the following passage. Who does not know the story of Jesus and the adulteress?

*Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her". Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

*At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*  
John 8: 1-11

To this day many theologians express a doubt as to the authenticity of this text. The Editor of the *Zuricher Bible*, for example, suggests that this passage is an "addition of a later hand." Yet, it is really not so surprising that it took a long time for this powerful story to be acknowledged by the church fathers as valid and canonical. From a psychological point of view, it is a poignant indictment of male dominance.

The adulteress, caught unawares in *flagranti* that is, together with her lover - should be condemned to death "according to the law." But what is this law? We read to our surprise: "*If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.*" Deuteronomy 22:22

The command is put forth to the same effect in Leviticus 20:10. In terms of these examples we cannot speak of legal partiality: both man and woman, when it is a matter of capital punishment, will be dealt with on an equal basis. However the facts of this case illustrate better than many words that Jesus' contemporaries

specifically the Pharisees and the priesthood - were accustomed to expounding the law according to a strictly male frame of reference. The resulting bias was perhaps carried out with the best conscience in the world, as they were decisively pious people. However the *character* of conscience is such that it, in sharp contrast to the inner voice of God, is largely formed in relationship to the ethics and moral customs of the social environment. And how effortlessly human beings repress the evil in themselves, or in contemporary language, the dark side of the ego.

One suspects that despite the clear egalitarian intent of the law, they took custody of the woman and consciously let the man get away. For the time, it was a well-established assumption that women, as the root of all evil, sought to lead men astray. They were oppressively aware of their own ability to be led astray. From the beginning, it was clear, sinful deeds always have a perpetrator, as is shown in the Story of the Fall: "*The man said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*" Genesis 3:12

At this juncture it is perhaps allowable to mention that to this day pious Jews every morning express thanks to their Creator that they were created men, and not women.

However Jesus is not to be deceived. He does not judge the woman brought before him in order to instigate an accusation against himself, in case he, as they rightly suspected, did not condemn her. Jesus finds, as always, the most efficacious method of silencing his opponents: "*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" John 8:7

This expression is so precise it has even found a place in everyday speech.

And so they leave while he writes with his finger in the dust at his feet; one after the other they go, the oldest first. Jesus understands what occurs in the hearts of men. Their behaviour shows above all that they were not without conscience. Otherwise, they would have contested her guilt and with that provoked an avalanche, among which the woman would have died, according to old Jewish custom.

However Jese posture toward this woman, does not mean that he was indifferent to her sins. He dismisses her with the admonition: "*Go now and leave your life of sin.*" John 8:11

Jesus was certain that she, having so barely escaped death, would have more regard to his admonition, than if he had reproached or threatened her with godly punishment

### **Patriarchal Structure in the Bible**

The patriarchal structures in the Bible are in no way limited to the Old Testament, but are fundamental to the New Testament as well. The decisive exceptions are those passages relating Jesus own words and deeds. When we clearly recognize that, then the *singularity* of Jesus's character is apparent.

If one wants to know where Jesus' contemporaries really stood in relation to women, one must engage in a dialogue with Paul, who in all clarity embodied the ruling views among the Jews of his time. In contrast to Jesus, Paul had not resolved the negative side of his heritage and was not finished with his education as an apostle of Jesus Christ. That is especially valid in view of his position on women. The differences between Jesus and Paul have been reflected upon and debated for quite some time. On the subject of women, the difference becomes one of crass opposition between Jesus and his apostle. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians is in this regard well-known:

*"Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says."* 1 Corinthians 14:34

Paul is evidently thinking here directly of the command issued after the Fall, as God speaks of Eve: "*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*" Genesis 3:16

In Jesus' eyes the expression "*he will rule over you*" may have taken precisely the description of a factual condition, caused by human beings themselves, as a result of having turned away from God, than an expression of the will of God.

In this connection it would do well to think of what was finally determined regarding Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees when they "tempted" him with the question of whether it was allowed "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*" Matthew 19:3, i.e., divorce her for an arbitrary reason. The Jewish divorce law assumed that a wife was the property of her husband and that within the social and religious framework he had unquestioned authority and control. In principle a contradiction to Paul, Jesus answers the question in terms of the relationship between man and woman *before* the Fall into Temptation. And he says to those who would like to lead him over precariously thin ice:

*"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* Matthew 19:4-6

However the Pharisees are not reconciled, and they question further: "*Why then, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?*" Matthew 19:7

However the "writing of divorce" was a social measure meant to certify to a woman that she had lost her "innocence" in marriage; if divorced, she could not make an effort towards a new marriage, but would be forced to spend the rest of her life alone or as a prostitute.

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees leaves nothing to be desired and shows at once that it is not the will of God which stands behind such commands, but an interpretive distortion of God's will to accommodate those people at a real distance to him. Jesus says: "*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.*" Matthew 19:8

In the "beginning" then, a woman and a man in a true marriage to one another were one, and not one of the two ruled over the other. Nothing could better characterize the difference between Jesus and Paul than Jesus' return to the original state of conjugal love. However Paul seizes upon the expression taken from the Fall into Temptation, which was to have decisive consequences for the relationship between the sexes: "*he shall rule over thee*" ergo: "*the woman is subject to the man.*" The following two quotes illustrate that this is not one isolated expression of Paul:

*"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord."* Ephesians 5:22

*"Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."* Colossians 3:18

These quotations must suffice, although that could be much amplified in a demonstration of how patriarchal structures were smuggled into the New Testament. Emanuel Swedenborg, of course, recognized the limitations of Paul's casual letters to the various congregations, and he omitted them from his suggested list of books to be retained in the New Testament canon.

Hanna Wolff, the well-known German psychologist and theologian, has designated Jesus "the first man in world history who countermanded and annulled the projections on women." In other words, Jesus was free from the prejudices against women and free from the patriarchal need to project the shadow side of the psyche onto women, thereby enabling the image of women to be obscured, to be darkened.

### **Jesus And The 'Shadow' of Women**

In spite of the unselfish character of the women among Jesus' followers, it would be unwarranted to assert that women are better human beings than men in the eyes of Jesus. If we take the record or the struggle or power among the disciples, we discover something in the Book of Matthew:

*"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."* Matthew 20: 20-21

Jesus naturally does not accede to the demand of Salome, although she is probably his aunt, i.e., the sister of his mother Mary.

Her request is characteristic of what we may call the "shadow" side of women, that is, the intensive and symbiotic ambition of a mother for her son. Many sons could sing the tale of their mothers' ambition! And we know that Jesus' relationship to his own mother was not without its dark moments.

The strain was caused by two factors: due to her *real* nature, he could not remain within the bounds of a human relationship, although paradoxically, Jesus' manner of relating was the epitome of what it means to be human. Jesus had to contradict an expectation on the part of his mother that they would always belong to each other in the manner in which children "belong" to those who gave them birth. It was necessary for him to step out of this mutuality in order to fulfil his real, God given nature. And then perhaps Mary was too human to let him go completely; one thinks of the scene which Matthew handed down to us:

*"While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."*

*He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."* Matthew 12:46-50.

In the Book of Mark we discover in this connection the reason why they came: *"When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."* Mark 3:21. It is surprising that Jesus' own family thought of him in this manner, remember, in light of the above, that his mother was simply afraid of her son. This is much the same fear that those parents today desperately feel whose children have become involved in a questionable sect of some sort. "They are out of themselves;" "they don't know what they are doing;" "they are being brainwashed." The fact is that parents and children differ in their opinions, outlook and habits. Jesus had to protect himself against the human expectations of his family, if he was to be true to his calling.

This is not the only example of Jesus distancing himself from his loving, but angst-ridden mother. One thinks of the well known scene at the marriage of Cana, described in the second chapter of the Book of John: *"Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come"*. John 2:14

However we may disagree on the translation of this passage, what is certain is that Jesus is distancing himself from his mother's expectations. She wishes to induce him into action; he, however, wants to determine for himself the exact moment. The spirit of Jesus responds to the voice within, to the voice of God, and not to the calling of his mother here on earth.

The Jesus that is given to us in the pages of the scriptures is a saviour, who revolutionized the role of the genders. He did not favour one over the other. While he refused to be swayed by the patriarchal oppression of his day, neither did he glorify women over men. Rather, restored the egalitarian nature of the genders in their relationships with each other, much as his servant, Emanuel Swedenborg was to do seventeen and a half centuries later.

### **39. Acceptance: Pathway to Peace - James F. Lawrence, March, 1987**

What are we to do with real trouble, trouble that comes regardless of what we do, think or say? Trouble that persists and will not go away, no matter how much attention we focus on it? What are we to do with that terrifying problem that has no apparent solution?

Let us stop right here and define what a problem really is. A problem is a set of circumstances that threatens our well-being. And what are "circumstances?" Circumstances are people and things. So "solving our problems" usually means getting people and things to be the way we want them. Occasionally we can do it. More often we cannot. What then?

There are several things we can do. We can look around to find somebody to blame. Or we can put ashes in our hair, wear shabby clothes and make the rounds of our friends chanting, 'poor me, poor me' and we can invite them all over to our house for a gigantic pity party held in our honour. Or we can seek advice and pile up mountains of it - whole libraries of it - without ever practicing any of it.

These widely spread home remedies - blaming others, pity parties and all the rest - have but one result: they make everybody, including ourselves, more frustrated with life. Shall we, then, just "curse God and die", in the words of a particularly cynical philosopher? No. My theme will be to follow the old saying: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" If we cannot solve our problems, let us learn to live with them and relish life in spite of them.

"Oh, sure, sure; just like that! All very well to say 'learn to live with them,' but it is another thing altogether to do it! Just how are we suppose to turn this little trick?"

It is painfully simple. So simple that it does not dawn on us as worth considering until we are at our wit's end. So frustrated and beside ourselves that we will try anything. So try something that works: acceptance.

We need to learn to accept a tremendous number of things about ourselves, about other people, about the world we live in. We have in our religious heritage one of the great guides in the art of acceptance. Helen Keller had to come to terms with the "little" setbacks of deafness and blindness that life meted out to her. Think about that one for a moment. To be a young intelligent woman and to constantly butt up against the unforgiving brick walls of no sight and no sound, while all of her peers went charging off to their various pursuits. The world is brimming with people of lesser handicaps who never rise above the bitterness and resentment, People who ultimately let life just pass them by, while they are down-in-the-mouth about the cards they have been dealt.

It is no easy matter to rise above our resentments. They can go pretty deep, but Helen Keller provides us with a marvellous example of "going with the flow". She learned to accept her limitations, and to accept them with a twinkle in her unseeing eyes and a jauntiness in her step. What is more, she found them to be useful stepping stones in her spiritual development! Through a deep acceptance of the burden given her, she discovered a doorway leading to adventurous living. Once acceptance frees our hearts, all the energy fighting the thing or person resented is released to be put to creative use. Acceptance is basic to attaining spiritual peace of mind, and it can be acquired, if we have a genuine desire to make progress toward it.

However, a few things acceptance is not. Acceptance does not mean "giving up" trying for a better world or better life. Accepting that your children will not speak to each other, for example, does not mean that you throw in the towel and stop caring for their reconciliation. It does mean, though, that you do not take personal responsibility for it, and you do not let your children possess the responsibility for your happiness.

Some of you may have already thought of the famous serenity prayer addressing this topic and may even have it hanging in your homes. Written by a German pastor, Friedrich Christoph, in 1782, this practical and profound prayer is known round the world.

"Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."

To know the difference really does take wisdom! Most of us are under the illusion that we can change more things and people than we are able to. Changing ourselves is usually the arena where we are most capable. And a change in oneself will probably be the most effective change agent to project into the world anyway. Acceptance also does not mean that we believe everything to be O.K. - it means that we know we are all right in spite of the circumstances. Asking God for the ability to accept people and things as they are is a

tremendous step to attaining inner spiritual peace and power, which sets us free from the shallow appraisal that everything is perfectly of God's will, while yet knowing that all is in greater hands than ours.

Acceptance does not mean that we stop caring, either. I recently had a cartoon on my home study wall for several months, which depicted a manager talking to his team. He informs them that he is hiring a hypnotist to travel with the team. "Is it to stop us from thinking like losers?" asks one player. No, the manager answers. "Is it to psyche us into winning?" asks another. No, the manager says with that dreamy look of one who is about to be set free. "It's to stop me from caring either way." I took that cartoon down finally because of its use of the word "care". To stop caring is to be anaesthetized to life. The manager was looking forward, not to profound acceptance, but to tuning out to life, to being a zombie. That is not what I want! There is a whale of a difference between caring and obsession, and the difference is enlightened acceptance.

To be both caring and accepting is often how we come to terms with friends, family and coworkers. The caring and accepting person remains interested and keenly in relationship, while one who is accepting, but anaesthetized is aloof, only superficially related to life. The acceptance goal is to be alive, interested, compassionate - but not hooked!

However such acceptance of painful and of evil components in the world and in our immediate circle of life is not necessarily born overnight. Healthy and wise acceptance is often the result of a sustained process of grappling with the problems. For example, fear of death is one such aspect of life which many people find hard to accept. A great many people are furious with God and terrified when they are suddenly confronted with their own mortality. In fact, we all have fears around this area, subconsciously or consciously, that we must deal with.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, for many years an unknown physician in Chicago, working quietly with those going through the death process, discovered finally the powerful truth that people tend to work through their fears, frustrations and fury in definite and definable stages. Many of us have heard of and perhaps even studied Dr Kubler-Ross five stages of coping with death and any loss. Acceptance is there, but it is the last stage! Before a profound - as opposed to shallow - acceptance of the inevitable occurs, each person must journey through feelings of denial and isolation, anger, bargaining and depression.

So it is with accepting the fact that we never became the famous writer we wanted to be; that we did not have the kind of parents we wanted to have; that an important relationship was severed; that we were fired from a job. We must grapple with these setbacks with the sincere desire to resolve our feelings and not just get stuck along the way.

I know a story of a middle-aged couple who were transferred from England to the bush country of Kenya. It looked certain that they would stay there for at least three years. An anthropologist friend of mine working in the area at the time met them and was invited over for tea. What she found amazed her. Though the English couple had been there for nine months and could expect at least another two years, this man and woman from privileged English society were living out of boxes. They had not hung curtains, except in the bedroom, had not unpacked any of their belongings and only the bare necessities of their clothing. The woman was so mortified at having to live in the bush country of Africa for three years that she vowed to treat it as if they were going to be packing it back for England the following Monday.

She was isolating herself, not getting to know any of the very friendly folks who lived around them, and she was bitter and very depressed over this humiliating trick of fate that put her, a doyen of London society, mucking around, socializing, with natives. My friend, who as an anthropologist, happened to think it was a privilege to "muck around" with the natives, as well as the rest of English and American people there, gave her a tongue lashing that must have been the very height of impassioned eloquence. She told her that her down-in-dumps attitude towards her "tragedy" was the most ridiculous thing she had heard that month. Why, she had to live in rural Kenya for three years and that was that. She had better just accept it and then get on with enjoying it, for she would find that life in Kenya had a great deal that would charm and fascinate her, terrific

for little tea stories back home. She had better just hang some curtains, set up the furniture, unpack the boxes and start living.

And do you know, she did! The trapped woman had already gone through the denial stage, "It can't be true - not Africa!"; through the anger stage, where she cursed her husband, her husband's company, her country for doing so much business with those silly natives, and God for making those silly natives; through the bargaining stage where she surpassed herself in creativity trying to bring about some other arrangement, all to no avail; and she was in her depression stage, when my friend was able to jolt some life into her. That woman came to an acceptance of spending two more years there, and she ended up becoming fascinated with the continent of Africa and found herself more than busy as she tried to meet all of her new social obligations, while carrying on her exploration of Africa at the same time.

A great many tragedies are inevitable in our lives. Nothing we pray and nothing we scheme will alter the reality. There are things that will happen that we just don't believe can ever be accepted. It is as inevitable as death and mandatory sojourns in Africa. What then?

We need to ask for assistance from the God we know, the higher, deeper, farther-reaching power that is known to us, to let go of assessing how things and people ought to be different. We need to ask for the gift of trust that all things are in God's hands even though He allows some pretty tragic affairs in order to leave us in freedom. Divine Providence is what Swedenborg calls that never ceasing action of God to bring the best out of the evil which He permits the world to do in its freedom.

We need to know that God is protecting us from true harm and that He does have the power to do so; that what appears and feels to us to be a tragedy is really nothing more than quite digestible grist for our spiritual strength development. God does not will evil or condone injustice. He merely permits it. And in a way that is far more beautiful than we can appreciate from our earthbound perspective; good things can come from all painful experiences. So if we find ourselves in an apparently hopeless situation, with every attempt at resolution seemingly foiled, we must not rebel. Instead, we must stay faithfully in relationship with our Lord. We go through all those other phases - denying it, getting very angry, bargaining with God for it to be different, getting depressed. But through our faithfulness in working our feelings and thoughts through, we do finally accept it, saying, "Thy will be done!" What a great day that is! The weight lifts from our chest, and a deep peacefulness and a new hope pervades us. We are wiser then, for we have become stronger. We have moved more deeply into the mystery of God's reality, letting go of the candy-coated picture of life from our childhood, accepting instead our experience of good and evil, of weakness and strength, of despair and hope, as markers along the way in our journey to the Kingdom.

Dear God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; the courage to change the things we can, particularly ourselves; and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Lord or the Devil**

"Our deeper levels" means our inner thought processes. They are what we are dealing with. This is where either the Lord or the devil must be present. The Lord is there after our reformation and the devil is there before it. To the extent that we let ourselves be reformed, then, the devil is evicted; while to the extent that we do not let ourselves be reformed, the devil stays in residence. Can anyone fail to see that the Lord cannot enter us as long as the devil is there? And the devil is there as long as we keep the door closed where we are together with the Lord. The Lord tells us in the Book of Revelation that he will come in when that door is opened by our efforts: "I am standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to them and dine with them, and they with me" Revelation 3:20

The door is opened when we banish evil by abstaining and turning from it as hellish and demonic--it is one and the same thing if you say "evil" or "the devil." By the same token, it is one and the same thing if you say "goodness" or "the Lord"; because within everything good there is the Lord, and within everything evil there is the devil. Divine Providence 233.

## **40. Taking the Initiative - George Dole, April 1987**

There is enough bad news on television and in the papers. We are quite well aware of evil in our world. There is even some evidence that we are over-receptive to bad news. There have been several attempts to publish or broadcast good news; but not enough people would buy the paper or tune to the station to make it pay.

We do not seem to have too high an opinion of ourselves, either. Oh, if someone puts us down, we will rise to our defence. We have our convictions, and we seem to think they are right. But all the time, somewhere inside there is that uncertainty. If we were really secure, disagreement would not bother us as much as it does. But we know that we have good reason not to trust ourselves completely.

Just think for a minute of how we handle compliments. Someone tells us, gratefully, that we have done a really good job. Have you ever said, "You're right, it was a really good job!" It would almost be worth it just to see what kind of reaction we would get. But it would be a hard thing to say, because we know we do not deserve the credit, even when we do.

But if that is all there is to it, then the outlook is pretty bleak. We do not seem too interested in good news about the world around us, and we do not dare to believe good news about ourselves.

Common sense should tell us that there is some good news, and that it is important. After all, we could have destroyed our planet years ago, but we haven't. We might do it tomorrow, but we didn't do it yesterday. Surely that is good news. It is a solid fact, and it is just as blind to ignore it on the one hand as it is to pretend that there is no risk of nuclear war on the other. It does seem a bit strange that the good news of our survival does not get much mention.

Actually, it may be quite important that we somehow manage to be more receptive to good news. There is the psychological fact of our selectivity, for one thing. If we consistently screen out the good and focus on the bad, then we will wind up with a really distorted view of reality, and a profoundly depressing view it will be. But more vitally, the Lord has come twice to bring us good news, and there is no way we will get the message unless we are receptive to it. He will not force it on us.

You cannot read the Gospels, the "good news," very long without realizing that this is not your common or garden good news. It is not a lot of sweet stories about nice people doing kind deeds and living happily ever after. There is a lot of conflict. There is real fear, real doubt, real betrayal, real death. But there is also real healing, real faith, real trust and real love. The good news is not that bad things do not happen, or that evil does not exist. The good news goes deeper than that.

This talk was prompted by a statement in Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell 589, It is near the end of the book, in the course of the explanation of how even hell can be useful.

"For anything to happen, there needs to be an equilibrium of everything involved. If there is no equilibrium, there is no action and reaction because the equilibrium occurs between two forces, one acting and the other reacting. The state of rest arising from equal agents and reagents is called an equilibrium."

This spiritual balance or freedom occurs, then, between the good acting from the one side and the evil reacting from the other, or from the evil acting on the one side and the good reacting from the other. The balance between active good and reactive evil applies to good people, and the balance between active evil and reactive good applies to evil people."

What this seems to be saying is either very reassuring or rather distressing, depending on how you want to look at it. For it does seem to be saying that there is a mixture, in fact a conflict, of good and evil both in and around us, and that if we see the evil as taking the initiative, and the good as being on the defensive, then we have not heard or have not heeded the good news. Even that is an understatement. "The balance between the evil acting and the good reacting occurs in evil people."

As long as we are in this world, we haven't completely made up our minds whether we want to be good people or evil people. It is characteristic of us that at one time or another we try both life styles, and it fits right in with this whole picture of a balance of forces with a free space in the middle. So it is perfectly legitimate for our personal understanding to take the words "evil people" and read "myself in my evil states". It is not the Lord that tells me evil has taken the initiative.

No, the good news is that evil is always on the defensive. That is absolutely basic to the good news of the second coming. The Lord is the only source of life and strength. In the words of Swedenborg's "Intercourse of the Soul and the Body" 14. "God alone acts. We only react, and if you look deeply enough, even this is from God." You can't put it much plainer than that. And what is God acting toward? "*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.*" Luke 12:32

How do we react when things go wrong? One way I have heard of quite recently is to ask what the hells are up to this time, what the Lord is up to that the hells are so upset about.

It may seem like a harder way to find out what is happening, but it has a lot to recommend it. First of all, it recognises the absolutely essential truth that the Lord is in control, that He is not somehow desperately trying to cope with something that has nearly gotten out of hand. And second, the Lord wants us to know what He is up to, and the hells do not want us to know what they are up to. The hells will tell us that they are trying to teach us forgiveness and tolerance when they are actually trying to undermine our morality. The hells love falsity, and the truer it seems, the more they love it. The Lord wants to show us things the way they are - just as fully as we can understand and use.

There is one more aspect of this matter of initiative. We are familiar enough with internal conflicts, and with feeling discouraged about ourselves. It happens all the time. So let us take a fresh look at it.

When we are discouraged about ourselves, there is a person inside us who is discouraged about person B. Psychology would often tend to make it part A and part B, but our theology is pretty explicit that what is going on is a conflict between an inner person, namely person A, and an outer person, person B. The question raised by this matter of initiative is essentially the question of which one we identify with.

It is a major question that I cannot answer for you, nor you for me. Which is the real you - the one that always seems to fall short of expectations, or the one that keeps the expectations up? Which is the actor, and which is the reactor?

### **Reading From Swedenborg - The Diversions of Charity**

Charity is primarily love towards the neighbour. And it consists, chiefly, in acting faithfully and justly in one's office, business or work, as well as with those with whom one has anything to do.

But as in any employment there is an affection which puts the mind upon the stretch and keeps it intent upon its pursuit. Unless it were from time to time relaxed, it would at last become dull and its motive desire grow stale. It would then be as a bow which, never unstrung, would lose the force of its elasticity. For this reason, charity has its diversions which are various enjoyments and pleasures of the bodily senses, serving to recreate the mind.

Further, when such is the case, the Lord flows into these from heaven, and brings about renewal. He also gives a sense of pleasure in them, of which those know nothing, who are not in the affection of charity; until at last, the longing to return to one's work sets a term on the diversions, and causes them to come to an end. Doctrine of Charity 189-93.

## **41. Caring is the Soul of Life - James Lawrence, May 1987**

There is one sign that lets us know more clearly how we are doing spiritually than any other indicator. It is not how regularly we are attending the church of our choice; it is not how consistently we are reading spiritual classics; it is not, even, how deep our meditation and/or prayer life is. We have a direct pipeline, at the core of our being, to the utter reality of God. That pipeline is open to the very same extent that we experience ourselves as caring and compassionate people.

Nearly all the great religions of humankind speak of the importance of this kind of love, of its place, as the utter bedrock of an alive faith. Buddhism tells of the Bodhisattvas who deny themselves the bliss of Nirvana in order to return to more worldly conditions to help others find the same release and fulfillment. Many Hindus worship the saviour god, Ganesha, who is the heart and soul of compassion. Their extremism in the avoidance of killing even little insects arises from a compassionate concern for other life.

The followers of Islam are constantly referring to Allah as all merciful and all compassionate. Works of charity for the poor and for slaves are repeatedly stressed in the Koran. In Taoism and Confucianism, one is not following the Way or Tao if they are not compassionate or caring. The ancient book of wisdom, the "I Ching," repeatedly describes the creative life as characterised by quiet, humble, unobtrusive concern for others. And few discussions of the value and importance of deep caring are more profound than those of Hassidic Judaism.

While all this is true, no great religion places caring love as consistently in the centre of its thought and practice as Christianity. Being a human institution, the church has often failed to live up to the message and teaching of its founder. But the example and way that Jesus of Nazareth left for us, points unmistakably toward the knowledge of God as characterized by love and compassion intelligently expressed through concrete actions of caring.

However there are few words in the English language more ambiguous than "love." The word can refer to a passionate desire, which is little more than physical lust, or to the possessive love of a parent, which can stifle and destroy a child. It can refer to the love of a friendship, the love of brother and sister, or to romantic love. The word can even be used for scoring in tennis, as a corrupted form of l'ouef, the French word for egg, or zero.

The Greeks had many words for describing different kinds of love. But in English we use "love" to describe all of the possible nuances of positive human relationship, as well as some which are not so positive. The love that we are talking about now, a love which derives from a conscious compassion for the well-being of others, is a complexity of emotions, attitudes and movements of will and actions. It is a reaching out to others in a caring and concerned manner, desiring to communicate to them that we care about them and that we wish to facilitate the achievement of their potential.

But so far this is just so many words. Our lives are like stories, and it is through stories that we best see how a truth relates to life. Perhaps some of you are familiar with Arthur Miller's powerful drama, "After the Fall." Twice Miller had failed in life in loving, and he wondered if he were capable of love. His second marriage was to Marilyn Monroe, a woman with whom presumably half of the men in America would have been willing to enter into the challenge of marriage. But it was Miller who undertook the challenge of marriage to America's greatest female idol and Miller who failed; he was deeply disturbed that he might be incapable of love.

The play describes the gradual disintegration and dissolution of their relationship. Marilyn Monroe brought to the stage and screen her own wistful, haunting, hurting spirit which was crying out: "Can anyone really love me?" Her tragic suicide resulted at least in part from believing that no one could ever understand, care for and love her.

The play itself is fascinating. The stage depicts the mind, and people pop up and down on the stage, just as thoughts and memories do in the human mind. As in a reverie, there is no logical time sequence, though the story unfolds with clarity. In the play, Quentin, representing Arthur Miller meets a European woman, Holga,

who has survived the bombings of the Second World War. They are having a picnic outside a Nazi concentration camp. Such pain is often the backdrop of the human soul.

As Quentin and Holga begin to relate to one another, he discovers that she has great hopes, even after all she has seen and suffered. He questions her, asking how she can hope after all she has been through. She replies, in what theologian Morton Kelsey calls one of the greatest passages of modern literature:

"Quentin, I think it is a mistake to ever look for hope outside of oneself. One day the house smells of fresh bread, the next day of smoke and blood. One day you faint because the gardener cut his finger off; within a week you are climbing over the corpses of children bombed in a subway. What hope can there be if that is so? I tried to die near the end of the war. The same dream returned each night until I dared not to go to sleep and grew quite ill. I dreamed I had a child, and even in the dream, I saw it was my life, and it was an idiot and I ran away. But it always crept onto my lap again, clutched at my clothes until I thought, if I could kiss it, whatever in it was my own, perhaps I could sleep. And I bent to its broken face, and it was horrible...but I kissed it; I think one must finally take one's life in one's own arms, Quentin."

I understand that Arthur Miller married this Austrian woman in real life and they had children, the first a beautiful child and the second defective. This passage is not just sentiment. Arthur Miller knew what it was to love an idiot outwardly and inwardly. Toward the end of the play, Quentin begins to catch the secret of hope and love. Still puzzling over how Holga could hope and love after all the horror and pain and agony she has experienced, he cries out:-

"Or is that exactly why she hopes, because she knows? What burning cities taught her and the death of love taught me: that we are very dangerous! And that, that is why I awake each morning like a boy, even now, even now! I swear to you, I could love the world again! Is the knowing all?" To know, and even happily, that we meet unblessed; not in some garden of waxed fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love, as to an idiot in the house, forgive it, again and again, forever."

And often the second inner person we confront when we turn inward with honesty is the inner murderer. There is a deep trustworthiness in those people who have become aware of the dark side of their personality, who do not deny that it exists. Only those who know their capacity to destroy can begin to deal with it creatively, instead of letting it leak out of themselves in insidious ways and eventually poisoning virtually all of their endeavours.

Dealing with what truly exists within us is the only way to develop a sustained ability to care wisely. To do it cleanly is an art and a science, every bit as much as planting a good and productive garden is an art and a science. Besides knowing the basics of soil preparation and plant cultivation, there is a subtle intuitive skill in playing with all the nuances

Our souls are no different. There is much today going by the name of positivism, which counsels a persistent refusal to acknowledge the dark side of human nature. Over and over again in the repetitive chapters of human history, a similar attractive philosophy has gained popular acclaim, each time succumbing to ferocious social forces which gained their evil power through suppression from the social psyche. Like good, the dark side of human nature is a continuous flow of energy. With no effective and conscious dealings with it, it builds up a tremendous drive eventually strong enough to burst into the outward world. This century has witnessed, to my mind, increasing cycles of naive positivism and subsequent black evil, and I wonder if we have learned the lesson yet.

We cannot become effective carers until we can care for ourselves. I think 13th century Christian legend Meister Eckhart hit the nail directly on the head, when he wrote: "If you love yourself, you love everybody else as you do yourself. As long as you love another person less than you love yourself, you will not really succeed in loving yourself; but if you love all alike, including yourself, you will love them as one person and

that person is both God and man. Thus he is a great and righteous person who, loving himself, loves all others equally."

In order to become alive with the capacity to care for goodness and truth, we can embark upon some practical considerations. The first step is a simple one: we need to make a conscious decision to see ourselves through the objective eyes of the Divine Lover. A second step is recognizing that everyone finds this to be challenging, which frees us up to make mistakes and not let that drag us down. This, actually is self-forgiveness, and to the extent that we can do it, to that same extent we are healthy.

The clincher is that our so called dark side can be turned to our advantage. The very dark power within us which disturbs us, consciously or unconsciously, is purified when faced, brought to light and rejected. It is the same sort of strength that is often shown by recovering alcoholics.

Not only will such a journey into our depths furnish countless payloads of spiritual energy, we cannot even hope to become wisely compassionate until we have established our strong commitment and intention to becoming clean and clear with all that is within us.

Even prayer and meditation are not sure bets, for one can pray obsessively and with a closed mind. The only sure bet, the only infallible guide for the journey is the rock solid and pure of heart intention of becoming the best that we can be. When we are able to remain strong there, we are doing all that we can to become true carers - people who act from the depth of our soul.

### **Reading from Swedenborg - Practical Piety**

Practical piety, is to act in every work and in every duty from sincerity and right, and from justice and equity, and this because it is commanded by the Lord in the Word. For thus a person in his every work looks to heaven and to the Lord, and is conjoined with Him. But to act sincerely and rightly, justly and equitably, solely from fear of the law, of the loss of fame or of honour and gain, and to think nothing of the Divine Law, of the commandments of the Word, and of the Lord, and yet to pray devoutly in the churches is external piety. However holy this may appear, it is not piety, but it is either hypocrisy, or something put on derived from habit, or a kind of persuasion from a false belief that Divine worship consists merely in this. Such a person does not look to heaven and to the Lord with the heart, but only with the eyes; the heart looking to self and to the world, and the mouth speaking from the habit of the body only and its memory. By this one is conjoined to the world and not to heaven, and to self and not to the Lord. We can thus see what piety is, and what Divine worship is, and that practical piety is worship itself. Apocalypse Explained 325 4.

## **42. The Second Advent - Erwin Reddekopp, June 1987**

*"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory"* Mathew 24:30

All of the Christian world, regardless of denomination, celebrates in various ways the birth of Jesus Christ. We think of it as the "Advent," and that special celebration is called. "Christmas." Hardly a new or profound statement. However it is noted for the reason of bringing into context the term, "The Second Advent."

While the Christian world generally does acknowledge the first advent and the birth of Jesus, the Christ, as Saviour of the world, very few pay much attention to the Second Advent. It has been prophesied, and many literal minded fundamentalists have searched the clouds of the skies, in vain, for the fulfillment of the statement which we quote from Matthew's Gospel:

*"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."* Matt. 24:30

Were these words ever intended to be taken literally? Many good people have said yes, and many still do. But on the other hand, we must generally agree that the Lord Jesus spoke to his followers so often in parables. As

a matter of fact we note the words in Mark's Gospel 4:34: "*He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.*"

It then follows through to an obvious conclusion that the words recorded in the Gospels, as well as in the Book of Revelation, have an inner meaning. We call that the spiritual sense. The same principle is true of the Old Testament, even though there, as in the New Testament, there are actual biblical historical facts recorded, which have in their recording, also an inner meaning. We think of this particularly with reference to history of the Israelitish nation. Then with this background, we examine the words recorded regarding the second advent or the coming of the Lord.

Unless the study of the Word, as we begin to understand it in the spiritual sense, can be applied on a personal basis, to be used in the process of spiritual growth and regeneration, there can be little value in it to anyone except that, in a sense, it is a sort of spiritual bank provided for later use. This can be illustrated by the story in the Old Testament when Joseph interpreted the dream of Pharaoh, by which he was instructed to provide during even good years for a time when seven lean years would follow.

Referring this to ourselves, it may mean that the lessons which we take in today may not be useful to us until a spiritually lean time is experienced. Nothing of this truth may be particularly significant at the moment. Often we need to do a lot of quiet self-examination and reflecting and then, suddenly, a particular lesson or principle that we have learned - through the Word, through some reading or from the words of a friend or neighbour - come to mind, and then we know this applies to us and to our attitude or conduct.

The Second Coming of the Lord, we wonder what this really means to us. These words from Swedenborg have a special meaning for me. I quote as follows:

"Many passages say that the Lord is coming in the clouds of heaven. However until now no one has known what the clouds of heaven mean. People think the Lord is going to appear in person in the actual clouds in the sky.

The clouds of heaven stand for the Word's literal meaning, and the glory and power with which the Lord is going to come stand for the Word's spiritual meaning." True Christian Religion, 776,777

Following this statement, Swedenborg emphasizes the fact that it has been granted to him to be in the company of angels and spirits in their world (which is the spiritual world) and have it disclosed to him that the "clouds" symbolize the literal sense of the Word of God, and that by "power" is meant the Lord's might through His Word.

In simpler terms this says to me that when I read the Word of God in its literal sense with sincerity, spiritual strength comes to me from the Word by understanding the spiritual impact which it has on me. But how can I understand the spiritual meaning unless I have first learned to know the corresponding meanings of the literal words, i.e., what they represent spiritually? To illustrate, how would I know what the following passage means, and what possible spiritual use would it mean to me?

*"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple."* Luke 14: 26

This is just an example of the necessity of understanding and applying the spiritual sense of the Word of God to our everyday life and attitude and conduct. When I can know, through revealed truth - as given in this case through the system of "correspondences" disclosed through the instrumentality of Swedenborg - and when I sincerely and rationally desire to do what is good and true, then, in that sense or degree the Lord is making his second coming to me.

This is not to suggest that the Lord's Second Coming is only to those who happen to know and understand the spiritual sense of the Word. What I think and love and do has a spiritual impact on others, since we are all citizens of two worlds, and therefore someone who has never even heard or read of the Word (as I know it)

may be affected for good by what I understand, feel and do. Thus the Lord Jesus, through infinite ways, unknown to us, continues to make his Second Coming.

Anything good that we are able to think and will and do, that is, that which is genuinely good, is not really from ourselves but from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. As we see from the Scriptures, God alone is good. This Jesus made very clear when he responded to the disciples when they called him "Good Master." He said to them that there is no one who is good but God alone. This was not to imply that he was not, even then, the incarnate God, but rather that the infinite Divine which dwelt within him, in his Human, was God and the Author of all good.

The disciples saw only the external, and attributed to the natural and external of Jesus what is good. This can be illustrated by the very hard fact that when we see an externally good deed done by someone, it is obvious that we call that person, "good." But good is from the Lord alone. We must, as suggested by Swedenborg, "do good as of ourselves, but acknowledge that the power and impulse to do so comes from the Lord alone." Otherwise why did Jesus admonish us not to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing?

We, who acknowledge the reality of the beginning of a new age, are convinced that the Lord has come again, and is continuing his presence among us in his second advent. We may find difficulty in reconciling the state of the world and human society today (evil and corrupt as it appears) with the fact that the Lord Jesus is now making all things new and ushering in a new age of on-going improvement. A simple question is this, "Do you think the world and people in it are any better, spiritually speaking, than they were a hundred or two hundred years ago?"

This requires that we make some kind of spiritual judgement upon people and society that we can know only from history. Our response must be that surely, this is God's world. What we do with it, ruinous as that may be, it is still in His control and under the auspices of His divine providence and His divine permission or tolerance. His divine purpose in creation, for the purpose of a heaven of angels from the human race, cannot be thwarted by mankind.

The Lord God, in his infinite wisdom and omniscience, foresaw that even after His first coming as the Child of Bethlehem, a time would come for a further revelation and presence of Himself amongst people. This is what Jesus foretold in those well-remembered words in Matthew's Gospel:

*"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."* Matt. 24:29

We believe that time of spiritual history has taken place. We believe it climaxed the lowest spiritual ebb of mankind, about the middle of the 18th century. From that time on there has been a new beginning of freedom such as the world had never known. I suspect that we are just about at the height of that freedom now, and we just do not know quite how to handle it! Ushering in that new era, think of the conditions spiritually represented by the words in Matthew: the "sun" darkened, the sun - love to the Lord and neighbour - where was it? The "moon" not giving its light; the moon, faith in the goodness and truth of divine values falling away - not light to lighten the path of life. The "stars" falling from heaven: heavenly knowledge of valued principles of what makes life really meaningful and fulfilling.

All this has been spiritually taking place. Now, it seems of a certainty, we have reached the critical point. We are very much a part of this new age coming into being. You and I cannot escape our part in it, even if we wanted to. In our own individual and finite way we are partners, in a sense, with the Lord if we abide in him and he in us, and we follow his Commandments "*love one another even as He has loved us.*"

### **The Divine Fire**

"Flame" denotes love divine, because love in its first origin is nothing else than fire and flame proceeding from the Lord as the Sun (of the spiritual world). It is the fire or flame of this sun which gives the being of life to every man; and it is the vital fire itself which fills the interiors of man with heat - as can be seen from the fact

that, in proportion as love increases with man, he grows warm, and in proportion as love decreases, he grows cold.

Hence it is that when the Lord appeared in vision, he appeared as fire and flame. It is also said that "*his eyes were as a flame of fire*" Rev 19:12, and that "*the voice of Jehovah falleth down like a flame of fire.*" Psalm 29:7

That the divine truth might be represented as proceeding from the Lord's divine good, the command was given that they should make a lampstand of pure gold with seven lamps, which should burn continually before Jehovah. Exodus 25:31 etc

Fire was well known to the ancients as a representative of the divine love, as is very evident from the fact that this representative spread from the Ancient Church even to remote nations who were in idolatrous worship, who are known to have instituted a sacred perpetual fire, and to have appointed to it virgins, called the Vestals. Arcana Caelestia 6832.

In the passage in Zechariah where the Lord says: "*And I myself will be a wall of fire around it (Jerusalem),' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.*" (2:5), a war of fire signifies defence by divine love, for this the hells cannot assault; and glory in the midst of her is divine truth therefrom, in light on every side. Apocalypse Explained 504.

### **43. The Strangeness of Love – Otmar Tobisch, July 1987**

Two college students had a cup of coffee together around midnight. I do not know whether they were male or female. It does not matter. They talked about the one thing that puzzled them, although it comes naturally. "You know" one said "love is strange".

"What do you mean love is strange? I think I am quite familiar with it."

"Yes, it seems so everyday, so common, yet there is a strangeness, a remoteness, a newness about it."

One thing that makes it strange is its difficulty to define it. Again and again philosophers and psychologists, theologians and physicians tried to put it into the straight jacket of definition. It could not be contained. As soon as it was defined, it defied definition and was otherwise.

Erich Fromme, a recent popular thinker defines it: "Love is an act of faith and whoever is of little faith, is also of little love"

If I love my mate, I am going to be faithful to my mate, and will not stray. Is that love? Love is a strange force, I would say, a curious power. It must be a power for it makes us do things. It spurs us to action. It makes us do strange things. One kind of love makes us do unselfish things. This was never heard of by the ego.

There is such a multiplicity of loves. Love is characterized by the unlimited number of kinds, for there is an infiniteness in love. Innumerable varieties of love are actually known by us. Their variations range from utter self-love, worship of self, adoration of me, to complete negation of self for the sake of someone else. Love then is a characteristic of infinity, of the infinite, of the divine. If we can understand something of the divine love, we will also be able to understand something about our own lives. "the Lord's life is Divine love, that is, a love towards the entire human race, which love is such that His will is to bring eternal salvation, if possible, to the whole of it, that is, to all men." Swedenborg: Arcana Caelestia 1803

"The hallmark of love is not loving ourselves but loving others and being united to them through love." Swedenborg: Divine Love and Wisdom 47

Love puzzles us. It confuses us by its varieties, by its many forms. Furthermore, it often gives us trouble by its coming and going, appearing and disappearing, and yet it has in it a stability unmatched by any other vital power we know of.

When the lover says "I love you," they are not defining an intellectual condition but expressing a feeling which is diffused throughout their body and mind. We cannot locate love though for purposes of advertising, the seat of love is generally to be taken in the heart.

But again, it is not in the muscle, somewhere on the left side of my chest, but some mythical thing, object in a stylized form, most often seen on St. Valentine's Day.

It is all very confusing. Why is love sometimes so impermanent, or other times lasting forever? We fall in love, we fall out of love. A married couple often find that after a few years they seem to be strangers to each other. Is this the cause of the prevalence of divorce? Many marriages result in a divorce, a separation, an estrangement after a period of love, of desire to be conjoined, to be of service to each other.

The strangeness of love is its fluctuating character, belonging to the ebb and flow of life. Like all life. We are born, we mature, we die; at least as to our body. The seasons come and go. The tides and the moon do the same. The tree blossoms now, soon it will bear fruit and then loose its leaves and be dormant.

There is a mental flow and ebb. We are not always at our best in thinking, in intellectualization, as it were. We have an inspiration and then again, we are devoid of real thought,

Our brain sends forth waves, and loves come and go in waves. It is well to keep this in mind, to explain the nature of love and to make it less strange. When we want to think particularly of marriage love, or the love of husband and wife for each other, we should apply this universal law of waning and waxing to our marriage relations. For if a couple would realize this often and very strongly, their wishes to be separated and divorced would not so often result in legal and mental divorce. To understand the nature of life, is to understand the nature of marriage life. It is one of the glories of the philosopher Swedenborg to have discovered the nature of love and life in the universe. With a great enthusiasm he proclaimed that the whole universe is a marital relation, a conjugal system, beginning in the Divine Being itself, and expressing itself there in the union of divine love and divine wisdom, bringing forth in creative acts the existence of the Spiritual and natural world. Out of this divine spring forth all other unions and conjunctions.

Love can be defined as a continuous effort to unite two separate parts or being into one. It is built into the universe. All gravitation is cosmic love, you might say.

All attraction of the opposites to each other is love. But even as cosmic bodies do not always attract each other with the same force, so husband and wife do not always attract each other with the same force, or the same love. This is due to the fact that we do not always receive the cosmic force of love into our minds with the same strength.

We do not create love in ourselves. We receive love into ourselves, This is another strange feature of love, which many people do not realize, or are not conscious of. Love seems to appear from nowhere. We fall in love at first sight. But the fact is that we have received this love from above, from the creative centre of life. If we live under this aspect of life we will understand love better and it will be less strange.

"From the marriage of good and truth flowing in from the Lord comes love for the opposite sex and also conjugal love." Swedenborg: Conjugial Love 92

The ebb and flow of marriage love is then not really a strange phenomenon. Do not think that we must continually live in ecstasy just because we are married and love each other. Let us sensibly swing with the tides of our loves. Their strangeness will partially disappear.

However let us remain firmly grounded in the faith for each other. While love may wane temporarily, let other forces take its place. There remain loyalty, friendship, admiration, responsibility to family and children, to the welfare of human society, to the church.

In days of darkness, when we feel estranged or cold to each other, let us substitute other human forces, to hold the house steady while the winds blow, and the waters rush and swirl around. Love will return. If a couple is truly married, if there is a spiritual concern for each other, if they be truly fond of each other and

therefore care for each other's spiritual welfare as well as their own pleasures and comforts, then forces which would tear apart a shallow marriage, a couple who knows little of the true nature of love, will for the one who is perceptible, understanding and concerned, only be a period of dormancy, waiting for the coming of another spring.

Love will become less strange and more intellectually perceivable if we see in it the universal flow of life, the divine sun shining in its light, and the divine love warming our hearts and filling them with the love which surpasses all understanding and thus forever urging us to solve its strangeness and come to understand it.

In all its ups and downs, marital love has a quality of steadiness which it derives from its divine source and origin. Love is eternal, infinite, ever flowing, inexhaustible, defying the waste of it, the lack of it, coming back again and again, to maintain the divine end and to maintain the conjugal relationship of husband and wife to eternity.

#### **Reading From Swedenborg - All Things from Divine Love and Wisdom.**

"Everything in the universe has been created by the Divine love and wisdom of the human God. The universe in its greatest and least elements and in its first and last elements is so full of Divine love and wisdom that it can be said to be Divine love and wisdom in an image."

The reality of this clearly appears from the correspondence that all the constituents of the universe have with all the constituents of a human being. Each and every phenomenon that occurs in the created universe has such a correspondence with each and every constituent of the human being that one may declare the human being to be also a kind of universe.

His affections and resulting thoughts have a correspondence with all the constituents of the animal kingdom, his will and consequent understanding with all the constituents of the plant kingdom, and the outmost constituents of his life with all the constituents of the mineral kingdom.

The existence of such a correspondence is not apparent to anyone in the natural world, but it is to everyone who takes note of it in the spiritual world. That world contains all the phenomena that occur in the three kingdoms of the natural world, and they are correspondent manifestations of the affections and thoughts of the inhabitants there - of the affections emanating from the will and of the thoughts emanating from the intellect - and of the outmost constituents of their life. Moreover, these correspondent manifestations and phenomena appear round about them in a visible form like that of the created universe, with the difference that they do so in a lesser image of it.

It is clearly apparent to angels from this that the created universe is a representative image of the human God, and that it is His love and wisdom which are displayed in an image in the universe." Love & Wisdom 52.

#### **44. Trust In The Future - Ted Klein, August 1987**

*"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."* Matthew 6:26.

The birds of the sky simply are what they are. Far from them is our seeking to possess life. Far from them are our fears about what is beyond our control. Perhaps also far from them are our abilities to plan, reflect, choose and care responsibility. Yet the Lord takes care of the birds in the sky, and we can learn from looking at them.

How can we best approach being reminded to look at the birds of the sky? We do not need to approach the reminder as a command or prescription to which we try to measure up. Instead the reminder can point us to a way of releasing or letting go of possessive clinging, fear and anxiety. The reminder is not instructing us to give

up needed planning, decision making and facing of responsibility. It is showing us a way to be healed from slavery to possessiveness and fearfulness.

Each of us can recover a child in us which is in some ways like the birds of the sky. This child is free, happy, letting life be itself, enjoying life as it is. This child also *feels*, "Someone takes care of me so I do not need to worry," This child in us is lost if we not only plan, reflect and make decisions, but also try to control and possess our lives. In doing that we can become driven to manage our lives and fearful of what is beyond. We can come to feel "everything depends on me." The reminder to look at the birds of the sky can also remind us not to turn accepting of adult responsibility into a kind of life that completely loses the child.

We can be adults without losing the child in us. We can be both spontaneous and reflective. You can plan when needed, but also simply let go and accept when needed. If you let go of attempts to manage and possess your life, trusting in God's leading, you can become free from fearing what is unknown and beyond your control.

Perhaps you will soon face a challenge in your life, such as a new project, an interview, a new phase in an old relationship or a new relationship. As you approach a challenge, you can take responsibility for what is within your control, seeking to do your best with that. What is beyond your control is not your responsibility, and you can release it to God. You can trust that God is taking care of all that is beyond your control, as God takes care of the birds of the sky.

When needed you can plan, reflect, make decisions, take on responsibilities. While doing this you can stay in touch with the child in you. The spontaneous child side of you can bring a responsiveness which makes taking on of responsibility a form of caring rather than a struggle with what feels obligated and forced. You can be open and responsive to needs which show themselves in the present moment. The present moment brings unique opportunities; it is full of potential for learning and growth.

With trust you do not need to ask "Why is this happening to me?" but "What can I learn from this?" and "can others and I grow from this?" Facing these questions can help you to be responsive, do your part and let go of what is beyond your part. Whatever is beyond your part does not need to be feared.

Trust goes naturally with a spirit of contentment and acceptance of God's leading.

Those who trust in the Divine are altogether different. Though concerned about the morrow, yet are they unconcerned, in that they are not anxious, let alone worried, when they give thought to the morrow. They remain even-tempered whether or not they realize desires, and they do not grieve over loss; they are content with their lot. If they become wealthy they do not become infatuated with wealth; if they are promoted to important positions they do not consider themselves worthier than others. If they become poor they are not made miserable either; if lowly in status they do not feel downcast. They know that for those who trust in the Divine all things are moving towards an everlasting state of happiness, and that no matter what happens at any time to them, it contributes to that state. Swedenborg - Arcana Caelestia 8478:3.

In reading or hearing this you may wonder "how can anyone live that way?"

Living that way does not mean denying pain or accepting injustice. Rather it relates to what we can do beyond facing our responsibilities as best we can as well as a spirit with which we can face responsibilities. With trust in God we can do our part, and let go or release all of the rest to God.

Do not try to force yourself to do any of this; it is not something you can make happen. If you find yourself feeling anxious, saying or thinking to yourself "don't feel anxious," or "it is bad to be anxious" can keep you trapped. Instead you can face the anxiety and then open yourself to letting go of it, releasing it to God. This is much like letting someone remove a great weight from your back and shoulders. This process opens to God, seeking to place yourself in the stream of God's providence.

We can plan, choose, be responsible, but also let life be itself, be responsive, let go of fear with trust. In that way we are looking to the birds of the sky and the child in us. Accepting the child in us, we can trust God's

leading. Bringing together an adult and child in us, we can be responsive, spontaneous and accepting, while turning to reflection and planning when they are needed to guide our caring.

With trust, we can do our part, and then let go to God's leading of our lives towards good. If we trust God's leading, peace and contentment can become more a part of our lives. If we are in the stream of providence, we are being carried all the time toward what is happy. Swedenborg Arcana Caelestia, 8478:4. If we let go of our resistance, and accept that stream, our lives can grow in responsiveness to others and ourselves.

#### **Reading From Swedenborg - Good Works Must Have an Inward Origin**

If a man were able to fulfill all things of the law, if he should give much to the poor, if he should do good to the fatherless and the widow, and if he should also give bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, take in the strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and go to them that are bound in prison, if he should earnestly preach the Gospel, convert the Gentiles, frequent temples, listen devoutly to preachings, observe the sacrament of the Supper often every year, spend his time in prayer, and other things; and his internal has not been purified from hatred and revenge, from craftiness and malice, from insincerity and injustice, from the filthy delight of adultery, from the love of self and the consequent love of rule, and the pride of self-intelligence, from contempt of others in comparison with oneself, and from the other evils and their falsities; still all these works would be hypocritical and from the man himself, and not from the Lord. Apocalypse Explained, 803

### **45. Charity And Its Offspring - By Edwin Capon, September 1987**

What is true charity? How ought I to love my neighbour? Who is my neighbour? They are basic questions. For Swedenborg writes, "*All things of the church regard charity as their ultimate end.*" And the commandment that we love our neighbours goes hand in hand with the commandment that we love God. It is unfortunate that the word "charity" has changed in meaning over the last three centuries. That change complicates our attempts to answer these questions. For the 1611 King James Bible sometimes used the word "charity" where we would use the word "love" and so did Swedenborg in its Latin root "caritas."

The Greek word translated "charity" in the New Testament is "agape," a word more commonly translated "love," even in the King James version itself. Why it was translated "charity" in Paul's letter to the Corinthians we do not know; several earlier English translations had used "love," as does the present revised standard version. However, it really didn't matter much in 1611, when "charity" still meant "love," but it is misleading in a day when the dictionary defines "charity" as "the provision of help or relief to the poor; almsgiving." For it is not "charity" in the modern sense which the Bible stresses, but love for the neighbour. Love for the neighbour may take the form of "charity," but it may be expressed in other ways also.

When Swedenborg used the term "charity," he also did not mean it in its modern sense. He goes to considerable length in a short work entitled "Charity" to show that relief to the poor and other similar forms of caring are only one form and that not the most important form or expression of love. He speaks of "charity" or "mutual love." Basically he uses "charity" as another term for love to the neighbour, never so far as I know speaking of charity toward God, only of love for God. Charity then, is love when directed towards others. It is not intent on activity that is only relevant when we see someone in need.

Charity, or love for the neighbour, should be full time. Potentially, it is a relevant influence on our every word or action. We would hardly be responsive to the Lord's commandment, if we paid attention to it only some of the time. For in this interdependent world of ours what can we say or do that is without effect on others. For, as John Donne said, "I am involved in Mankind."

Whether this is a matter of revelation, of Bible interpretation or of just plain common sense, I am not sure, but Swedenborg stresses, that the principal avenue for the expression of love or charity is one's ordinary work or vocation. He says, "Charity itself is to act justly and faithfully in the office, business and work in which a

person is," so we take the trouble to discuss charity in priests, in judges, in magistrates, in business people, in labourers, in farmers, in soldiers and in sailors.

When we remember that he also says, "...charity consists in performing uses for the "sake of uses," what could be more sensible? While we may think our business or employment primarily as our means of support, they certainly must find their principal justification in what they contribute to individuals and to the community, whether the contribution be material, mental, emotional or spiritual. How fortunate that a recent survey showed that work stands number 2 or 3 on the list of sources of our satisfaction in life!

At this point I hasten to point out that Swedenborg was writing at a time when all men could be thought of as chauvinist pigs; all the offices, businesses and works he discussed were occupied by men only in 1750. But the principle he set forth applied to what was women's work in 1750 and to all kinds of work today, whether performed by men or women. Those who give full time to raising children have a wonderful, though often trying, opportunity for expressing Biblical charity. Their pay may not be great, but who says society's estimate of what a job is worth has any relation to God's.

So far, we have been talking about what Swedenborg sometimes calls "the duties of charity." But there are other categories for the expression of Christian love. In his last book, True Christian Religion 425, "It is important to distinguish between work-related acts of goodwill and incidental acts of kindness. "Work-related acts of goodwill" means those practices of goodwill that come straight from goodwill itself, since goodwill itself is a function of the work that we do, as I have shown just above. "Acts of kindness," however, refers to helpful acts that are done outside of our work."

They are called acts of kindness because we are free to do them as we please, and when we do them, the recipients see them as kindnesses and nothing else. We do them according to the reasons and intentions we have in mind as benefactors.

The teachings in Swedenborg's theological writings certainly do not downplay what we moderns call charity. Active concerns for the poor, the naked, the hungry, those in prison, is still a sign of our commitment to Christ. But in the much more complicated society of today charity with prudence is certainly called for. How we help those in need is certainly as important as helping them. Our help ought not to encourage irresponsibility and dependency. It ought to look to permanent remedies more than short term, non-lasting stopgaps. At the same time our help to others ought not to threaten to deprive ourselves and our families of the necessities of life now or in the future. Since Christ admonished us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, it seems reasonable that we should also be charitable to ourselves, if Christ calls us to be charitable to our neighbour.

Who my neighbour is has always seemed to me to be a question easily answered. Everyone. Perhaps we ask the question because we hope it is not so. I remember years ago hearing the results of a study which showed that concern for others lessened with their increasing distance from us. Historians and sociologists tell us that those who lie in the middle of our country are or have been less internationally minded than those who live on either coast. However far distance-wise, culture-wise or otherwise, people may be from us, they are no further from God than we are - at least from his side. Swedenborg was simply expressing basic Christianity when he wrote, "to love the neighbour is not only to Love and do what is good to the neighbour, to a friend, and to a good man, but also to a stranger, an enemy, and an evil man." A Christian need never ask the question, "Who is my neighbour?"

Though we need not ask the question, "Who is my neighbour?", we do have a good reason to ask the question, "Should I treat every neighbour in the same way?" Would we give the keys of our car to a seven year old because we have given them to an 18 year old? Would we consider a convicted thief as just as suitable for any kind of job as anyone else? Would we hire a known alcoholic to drive a school bus simply because he needed a job desperately? Swedenborg points out at length that charity is to be exercised differently to different kinds of people in different kinds of situations. It is charitable to say "No" to inappropriate requests. There are times when discipline and punishment may be the best forms of charity. It

is the object of charity to help, not necessarily to please, not only the individual but also the society to which he contributes or may harm. Charity must be discriminating.

Some other forms of charity Swedenborg mentions he calls "the public obligations of charity," "the private obligations of charity," "the domestic obligations of charity," and 'the diversions of charity.' "the public obligations of charity," he says, "are contributions and taxes... the spiritual pay them from good will." An interesting idea! We pay taxes willingly because we love our neighbour.

"The private obligations of charity," Swedenborg says, are paying wage's to workmen, paying the interest of money, observing agreements, keeping pledges, etc. The domestic obligations of charity are those of a husband towards his wife, and of the wife towards her husband, of a father and mother towards the children, and of the children towards their father and mother, of a master and mistress towards the servants, and of the latter toward the former...."

I particularly like Swedenborg's category, "the diversions of charity," which he says are various enjoyments and pleasures of the bodily senses, serving to recreate the mind.

Among them he includes "social occasions and conversation... walks and pleasant views...shows of different kinds .... melodies and songs...banquets, feast and entertainment...dice, cards, and dances..." These do not directly serve the neighbour, but they make us more healthy in both mind and body so that we can perform our particular uses the better.

There is much more I could say regarding Christian love or charity. Its nature and practice are often misunderstood. The Christian is called upon to love all others at all times, but judiciously and wisely. But we will not succeed in doing so all the time. As Swedenborg says,

There are alternation with a regenerate man - namely, that there is now no charity with him, and now some charity..., such alternation exist in order that man may .be perfected more and more...."

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Being Mindful of The Lord**

Regarding faith, people who accept it and hold on to it have the Lord constantly in mind. This is so even when they are thinking or talking about something else or are performing their public, private, or domestic duties. Even then they have the Lord in mind, although they may be unaware of it. In people of faith, remembrance of the Lord prevails in everything, and what prevails in everything goes unnoticed except when our attention is drawn to it.

This shows what it means to say that we always ought to be thinking about the Lord, salvation, and life after death. Everyone with a faith that results from neighbourly love does this. That is why such people do not think bad thoughts about their neighbours but exhibit justice and fairness toward them in every single thought, word, and deed. After all, what prevails universally influences all the particular elements, guiding and governing them. The Lord anchors the minds of such people in matters of charity and the resulting faith, and in this way arranges the details so that they conform. Arcana Caelestia 5130.

## **46. Abram And Lot - Rev Louis A Dole, October 1987**

Read Genesis (a book of Moses) chapters 12, 13 and 14).

The story of the return of Abram and Lot from Egypt as mere history would have little meaning for us today. It would be only a statement of the fact that two shepherds, to keep their herdsmen from strife, agreed to separate, one to keep to the highlands, the other to the plains. As mere history there is nothing in the story of the Jewish people any more than in the history of any other nation.

The Word of God is Divine not because of the mere historicals, but because the Lord has worded and arranged those historicals so as to express spiritual truths. By means of this history He has drawn pictures of otherwise

invisible and inexpressible spiritual things. And more than this, He has taken the natural events and ideas and arranged them so as to tell the story of His own Incarnation and Glorification, and to tell it in the order of its progress from infancy until His work was completed. (Refer Luke's Gospel 24:27, "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets; he (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.*") So the story tells about spiritual changes that took place in the human nature which the Lord assumed in the world, and at the same time it teaches us about changes that must occur in every regenerating person.

There is an evident and practical lesson just beneath the surface of the story we are considering. We cannot get knowledge of spiritual things until we have knowledge of natural things in some degree. There are two reasons for this. First the faculties are developed on the natural plane before they can be developed on the spiritual plane. Natural things are used to develop the faculties. Second, into the knowledge of natural things spiritual knowledge can be insinuated.

But the sense life is given us for a higher purpose than for its mere gratification and pleasures. It is a means by which life on a higher plane can be introduced. One cannot understand how the Lord gives the soul love and wisdom - its heat and light - if he does not know how the sun gives the earth heat and light. All nature, being created by the Lord, is a parable of spiritual things, for as Paul said, "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*" Romans 1:20

Our story turns on one point. Why did Abram and Lot go down into Egypt? It was because it was the country in which there was science, the basic knowledge not only of natural but of heavenly things, for it was in Egypt that the Ancient Word was still in existence. The famine in Canaan represents a famine in knowledge. Going down into Egypt represents acquiring knowledge. To represent this Abram and Lot went from Canaan into Egypt.

So did Joseph and Israel later. Moses was born there, and the Lord Himself was taken there by Joseph and Mary to represent the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is first necessary.

The cattle, silver and gold that Abram brought out of Egypt represent spiritual acquisitions. The cattle are natural affections, silver is truth and gold is goodness or love. But Lot's acquisitions are not so stated. It is said that he had flocks and herds, but it is not said that he had gold and silver, because his affections were not spiritual but merely for the things of the low sense plane.

Everyone has to be in Canaan first. This is provided by the Lord through the "remains" planted in infancy and childhood. But there must also be a desire for knowledge. This feeling of our need of instruction in spiritual things is represented by Abram's going down into Egypt. For us it is the feeling of the need of going to the Word for instruction, to obtain the knowledge of what life is for and of how to live rightly. And when we have gone there and learned about spiritual things, we then return to Canaan, that is, we try to enter into the life which the Word teaches. What we acquire of affection, truth and good constitutes our riches - in Scripture terms the cattle, silver and gold. The order in which these three things are named is not the order of their actual value either naturally or spiritually, but it is the order in which they must be acquired. The cattle are first because they stand for the natural affections, which must come before we will seek spiritual knowledge. Silver is mentioned next because we must then acquire truths. And gold is mentioned last because it is by learning truth and doing it that we acquire good.

When Abram went back to Canaan, he and Lot came into conflict. Abram represents the love of heavenly things, or the ruling love of the spiritual mind. Lot is the desire of the natural or external man or, more simply, sense satisfactions and pleasures. The conflict between Abram and Lot pictures that struggle within us when, after instruction, our spiritual nature comes into conflict with our natural worldly desires. At Abram's suggestion Abram and Lot separated. So must we separate our spiritual from our natural desires. Lot chose the low land because it was pleasant and fair. He did not want to climb the rugged hills, dig wells and shift his flocks and herds continually for pasture and water. He wanted things to be easy and abundant. His choice represents how the natural person in us, our natural desires, follow after ease and pleasure. It represents how

distasteful to the natural are the hard struggles, the thirst and the famine that the spiritual person must undergo.

Lot and Abram are both in us. The desires of the natural mind tend to the low land. Their choice is the plains of Jordan, the dead level of the lower things of the world, the things that look beautiful and abundant. Lot's choice is the choice of riches, honour, power, fame, indulgence, voluptuousness, all that the mere sense life craves. This is all pictured by Lot's choosing the low land and pitching his tent near to Sodom, that city immersed in sensual pleasures: "*Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.*" Genesis 13:13

If when we face the choice between the spiritual and the natural, we choose the things of mere sense gratifications, we do so because they are pleasing to us. And there are no elevated states of life there. We pitch our tent near Sodom every time we allow the external to rule over the internal, every time we stifle our sense of right for the sake of some pleasure or worldly gain. Do we choose our friends because they are rich in this world's goods rather than in spiritual graces? Do we choose our company from those who are learned regardless of whether they are looking to the Lord for light or only to themselves? If we do, then we pitch our tent toward Sodom. Do we love wealth for its outward show rather than for the uses it can be made to perform in our Father's kingdom? Then we pitch our tent toward Sodom. Pitching the tent toward Sodom is to separate natural from spiritual uses and live in the natural alone.

Abram chose the hills, the mountains; and Abram and Lot were separated. So must it be our journey toward heaven. When we have gone to the Word and learned about the heavenly life and are prepared to enter into it, we must make this separation. This is not to say that we are not to enjoy the pleasures of the natural eating, drinking, music, games and the like. All these things are beneficial when subordinated to uses. All our senses and all good things are Divinely given to be enjoyed. But we should not let the senses rule, not let worldly delights gain the dominion and suffocate our love to the Lord and His Word.

How like Abram and Lot we are today as we look over all the land before us! Look down upon the plane of sensuous living fair to look upon, but where does it lead? The Word tells us: to Sodom and its destruction. Then look to the high hills of the Christian life and remember that, though at times the way is rough and ascent steep, the Lord has assured us that He will go with us and give us peace. He will make the yoke easy and the burden light. And in the light of the truths of the Word we should be able to see the mountain tops brilliant under the Divine sun. The things that the Lord has prepared for them that love Him shall be more to us than all else? Let us attach ourselves to spiritual uses and in the strength of the Lord who is ever present with us make Abram's choice, that we may extend the Lord's kingdom on earth, making the hills of His presence our eternal abode.

### **Reading From Swedenborg - Keeping God Always Before Us**

What a person loves he has as his end. What a person has as his end is easily recognizable, since it reigns in every part of him. Thus it is present constantly, even when it seems to him that he is giving no thought at all to it; for it resides within and composes his inner life, and thus secretly governs every single part of him. Take for example someone who at heart honours his parents. That honour is present in every single deed done when in their presence and in what he thinks about them when absent from them. It is also noticeable in his gestures and speech. So also with someone who at heart fears and honours God. That fear and honour of Him is present with each of his thoughts, words, and actions because it is contained within them. It is there even when it does not seem to be present, as when he is occupied with affairs quite remote from such fear and honour of Him; for it reigns everywhere, thus in every individual aspect of him. That which reigns in a person is clearly discernible in the next life, for the sphere of his entire life that emanates from him originates in it.

From this one may now see how one is to understand the idea that a person should always have God before his eyes. It does not mean that he has to be thinking about Him all the time but that a fear or love of Him should reign everywhere in him; then in every individual aspect of himself he has God before his eyes. When this is so, that person does not think, speak, or do what is contrary and unpleasing to Him; or if he does, then

what reigns everywhere in him and lies concealed within him comes out and warns him. Arcane Caelestia 5949.

## 47. Why Worry is Wrong - Clayton Priestnal, November 1987

"*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" John 14:27.

Even the disciples, chosen by the Lord to assist him bringing a new message to the world, were susceptible to periods of anxiety. This was despite the many occasions they had to witness the power and purity of their leader. But the privileged twelve also experienced the coldness and the hostility which greeted the new concept of the religious life. Being human the disciples were understandably subject to doubts and fears. They had lingering hopes, perhaps, for worldly success, for public approval which was rarely forthcoming. So more than once the Lord deemed it necessary to speak reassuringly, and sometimes mildly reprove them for a lack of faith which resulted in recurring states of unwarranted concern. On the occasion before us the Lord again recognised the need to comfort and restore confidence in the small group closest to him. The disciples may have been dimly aware of the impending crisis in their lives and in the destiny of the Lord, so a certain disquietude took possession of their spirit.

The Lord observing their anxiety consoled them with words filled with understanding and compassion. "*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" How often throughout the Scriptures are found such phrases as "Fear not;" "Be of good courage", "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."

So many people lead tortured lives through undue anxiety. In saying this we do not mean the concern, or necessary forethought, required to insure a safe and secure future. However there is a sombre, depressing anxiety about the present and the years ahead which weakens physical strength and overburdens the mind with unwholesome foreboding. Although the Lord is most gentle in admonishing human beings to refrain from fear, or worry, there is implicit in his words the truth that worry is wrong.

Immediately we must qualify what has just been said. There is an essential and justifiable fear which should constantly be present in everyone. Life requires an awareness of countless hazards which surround this earthly life, dangers which could induce ill health, destroy property, impair one's general well-being in a thousand ways. These fears are normal and helpful as safeguards against accidents to individuals and society as a whole. There are people who are loath to go up in a high building for fear they might be tempted to jump off. Such a morbid and irrational fear is not conducive to a wholesome state of mind. However, let us put aside the anxieties which relate to the world and give thought to what the Lord means when He says, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid*"

There is an excessive fear of doing something wrong, of offending the Lord. Those thus afflicted are constantly amazing themselves to the extent of becoming destructively self-incriminating. So zealous are these guilt-laden individuals in questioning every motive behind every act that a feeling of despair, hopelessness and gloom pervades all phases of their daily life. Psychologists classify such a person as a neurotic personality. An improper over-emphasis hinders the capacity to act spontaneously and with freedom. This frame of mind will never bring happiness to anyone and it will impair to some degree joy in others. The Lord would have us to live a normal, healthful, and spiritually wholesome life, free from undue worry.

The kind of fear we have just mentioned is wrong. For one thing it is apt to be deceptive for it may lead one to believe their concern comes from a sense of humility when quite the opposite might be the case. What is more likely, this self-abasement springs forth from the belief our own strength and wisdom can overcome all personal imperfections. Self-confidence in matters pertaining to conquering spiritual weakness can bring about a neurotic state. It is well to remember the fear of evil occurs when we endeavour to meet it with what we believe are our own self-derived power, leaving the Lord completely out of the struggle. But when a

person recognizes that the Lord is on their side with armaments the hells cannot withstand, we can confront the enemies of the spirits with utmost confidence and the assurance of ultimate victory.

Although a misguided sense of guilt is wrong, one should not conclude that all self-examination of motives and acts should be abandoned. When the intent of uncovering areas of self-centeredness and the excessive love of material things is not to brood over them, or to merely bemoan their presence, but to remove them, there is less likelihood of becoming neurotically concerned about wrong doing. We should add to that, to spend time grieving over past mistakes is to invite states of anxiety.

What has gone before is over with; what has been done can never be undone. To learn the lessons that can be gained from the follies of former years can best be achieved by knowing that what we were yesterday need not be what we are today. What we will be in the time that lies ahead is the crucial question. To burden the mind with an overpowering sense of shame or remorse is to invite the errors of the past to remain in residence in our personality. There can be little virtue, nothing spiritually constructive, in saying, "How contemptible I am," or "I am no better than a worm." If we are to profit by the past, we must dismiss from the mind our mistakes after recognizing their quality and resolving they will not be repeated.

Among all those who constitute the vast population of the earth, those who have an understanding of what is taught in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, should be the last to be apprehensive about the future. With a more comprehensive knowledge of the Lord's divine providence, the future can be faced with confidence, with expectation that all events will be the means whereby each member of the human race will be led to the highest destiny of their own choosing. If angelhood is outside the realm of our aspirations then the Lord's providence will strive to minimize the degree of degradation.

Worry is wrong because it is born of doubts as to the effectiveness of the Lord's power to lead one heavenward, to bring peace and happiness to our hearts. If we are fully convinced the divine providence is like a mighty current carrying each person towards our highest destiny, can anxiety find a place to linger in the mind?

The Lord would not have cautioned us to refrain from fear if He did not possess the power to govern the universe and the personal life of each inhabitant. The Lord "*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom*" Luke 12:32. He is so eager to make good this promise that He even uses sorrow and misfortune to help bring about an everlasting state of happiness. The temporary griefs and failures experienced in the world can bring about enduring joys and successes in the never-ending life. Of course we mortals cannot immediately see the Lord's hand at work, nor the lesson to be learned by His permission. So, we allow our days to be darkened from time to time by brooding over what has been and what might happen henceforth in this world of uncertainties.

Now to answer the important and practical question: "How am I to acquire or strengthen my trust in the Lord?" One of the very first astronauts to venture far up into the stratosphere, when asked if he was afraid, replied, "We fear the least what we know the most about." Generally the anxiety a person may have about the future can be attributed to insufficient or imperfect knowledge about the laws by which the Lord governs the human race. It is an obvious truism that we cannot have faith in anything we do not understand.

Primitive people recoiled in terror at thunderstorms and other upheavals of nature, primarily because they did not know the cause. Science has provided an explanation for the violent acts of nature and how one can protect themselves from them. Among civilized peoples there is far less apprehension when dark clouds gather, deep rumblings are heard and flashes of lightning streak across the sky. In the same way that knowledge of natural laws can quell the fears regarding earthly phenomena and dispel superstitions, so an understanding of spiritual laws can free us from the debilitating anxiety about the future.

Fear should not be accepted as one of the inevitable, inescapable, realities of life in the world. Since trust in the Lord is not acquired in a single year or, in many cases, even after the middle years have passed, anxiety will continue to be a common affliction. But the nearer we approach the ideal in Christianity, the less fear will

be a governing factor in our thinking and behaviour. Such perfection does not come easily nor quickly, but the tranquillity it brings is well worth the effort. The peace of angels and their happiness are grounded in the knowledge and faith that their very existence is derived from the unfailing love of the Lord and their superior judgment and usefulness are completely dependent on the Lord's wisdom.

As a prelude to the words of the divine counsel the Lord said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.*" John 14:27. How true! Worldly knowledge may free us from worry about the external forms of harm, thus bringing about a sense of earthly security. But such information cannot eliminate the unruly passions which destroy the inner peace of the spirit. Worldly anxieties at best are temporary and vanish when the soul passes on to the higher life. The fears imbedded in the spirit can be forever a constant source of disquietude to eternity. Therefore listen well to the voice of the Lord when He tells us to "Fear not" and instructs us on how to overcome it

#### **READING FROM SWEDENBORG**

This atmosphere is also an atmosphere of innocence and peace from the Lord. Innocence and peace are the two innermost elements of heaven. We call them innermost, because they emanate directly from the Lord. For the Lord is the essence of innocence and the essence of peace. Because of His innocence the Lord is called a Lamb, and because of His peace He says, "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you*" John 14:27. His peace is also meant as well by the peace with which the twelve disciples were to greet whatever city or household they entered, and if it were worthy, to let the peace come upon it, and if not worthy, to let the peace return. Matthew 10:11-13. For the same reason the Lord is also called the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6-7.

Innocence and peace are the innermost elements of heaven for the further reason that innocence is the very essence of every good, and peace is the serenity of every delight that is connected with good.: Conjugial Love, 394.

#### **48. Follow That Star – Robert Tafel, December 1987**

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written."*

*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."*

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." Matthew 2:2-11.*

The magi. Philosopher-kings. Astrologers of an ancient priestly order of Babylonia or Media. Who were these travellers? We shall probably never know precisely who they were or even how many were in their company. Curiosity leads us to wonder and speculate. More important than their identity are the qualities of mind and spirit they demonstrate by their long and difficult journey and by their worship of Christ.

What kind of people were the magi? Do the magi represent spiritual qualities within us? Might there be a little of the magi spirit in each of us?

Certainly nothing could have been more frustrating or disappointing than what the magi found when they reached Jerusalem. No one seemed to know or care that a king had been born! Their king, in fact! Not so much as one hallelujah!

They expected to find celebrations going on. Dancing in the streets, trumpets sounding, torches lit. But they found nothing. Not a soul stirred. And when they learned the prophecy told that Bethlehem was the town where the Christ was to be born, they pushed on weary and perplexed to find a poor peasant couple with their infant son in a lowly abode. Surely it must have taken all the inner strength of firm conviction and faith in what the omens and signs and portents, especially in the bright star they had followed, to overcome the misgivings of common sense. Then they fell down and worshipped the child, opening and presenting to him their costly gifts.

The response of the magi demonstrated their spiritual qualities. From the outset of their journey, inspired by a bright new star, through a long journey until their return by a different route, we develop a picture of what kind of people they were.

The magi were, first and foremost, intuitive people. We are informed by the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg that, like the Egyptians and practitioners of magical arts, the magi possessed an understanding of correspondential relationships between physical and spiritual phenomenon. An understanding which in its roots and heritage goes back to earliest human kind. Most Bible translations refer to the magi as "wise men." And they were. But wise in a different sort of wisdom.

The wisdom of the wise men was intuitive. They reacted to symbols with a strong inner wisdom, or knowing. A conviction based on intuitive symbolic interpretation. For example, the star shining in the east was a most powerful symbol. The magi interpreted the meaning of the star as a sign that the heavenly king had been born somewhere among the Jews. They knew this because of astrology and symbolism pointing the way. But they did not know where the king was to be born. To learn where, they had to consult the Jewish scriptures and prophecy. And to do this, meant a long, tiring journey atop a camel.

The time and expense and effort required by the magi was evidently of no consideration. In fact, they brought and left many expensive gifts.

What is remarkable and noteworthy is that the effort would be made based on the wisdom of their strong, inner conviction that a great spiritual happening would be reward in itself.

They would receive no immediate recognition, nor was such their intent or need. They might be disappointed in their discovery; there was no assurance that the trip would be worthwhile in any way. They were guaranteed no "success" measured in either earthly or spiritual terms. It was only after the long trip around the desert, after consulting Herod and the scribes and chief priests, and only after beginning the five or six mile final leg of their journey to Bethlehem that the star (the very same star they had seen while in their home country in the east) would reappear.

Seeing the star again was confirmation of the "rightness" - the worth of their journey. And only then did it begin to lead them to the house where Jesus lay with Mary and Joseph providing care and nurture.

The pioneering, adventurous spirit of the magi is a spirit useful and needed in every generation. Magi today are genuine searchers, people of vision not content until they find what they are searching for. People who will take a risk and follow their star. The magi of the Bible were men. But magi today are women and men of every background who are "spiritual star gazers."

There are always enough "chief priests and scribes" within every culture, within every nation, within every human endeavour. These will never see any star, for their vision never turns upward. If a star were seen it would have little meaning and certainly would not evoke the effort required to change or travel.

Magi, on the other hand, see stars and follow them. Yet magi need guidance. Even as the magi of scripture needed to consult the prophecy and revelation of the Jewish Church. The Lord leads people by both intuition and revelation. Neither should be diminished or minimized in importance. The Lord is constantly leading by intuition. By insights which come into our awareness. And the Lord is constantly revealing Himself. In the Word and in the writings of the theologians, particularly, those of Emanuel Swedenborg. And yes, in your and my minds. Such revelation is precious and needed in times like these.

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

*"Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* John 1:14, 16-17.

What might have been the star the magi saw? I leave us with a closing thought from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg:

"In the world where I am currently living in my body, countless stars appear at night, large and small. They are all suns that transmit just their light to our solar system. When I noticed that there are also visible stars in your world, I reckoned that there are the same number here as in the world where I live."

Delighted by this topic of conversation, the angels said, "There could well be the same number. Every community in heaven at times shines like a star to those who are below heaven. There are countless communities in heaven, all arranged according to different feelings of love for what is good. True Christian Religion 160.

## **49. Swedenborg, The Spiritual Explorer, 1688 – 1772 - Rev. Erwin Reddekopp, January, 1988.**

A Tribute: "To my mind the only light that has been cast on the other life is found in Swedenborg's philosophy. It explains much that was incomprehensible." Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm on January 29th, 1688, and died in London, England in 1772. He was a Swedish Nobleman, son of a Lutheran Bishop of Skara. He was a statesman, scientist, philosopher and lastly, a theologian. It was of this man that Robert Ripley said in "Believe It or Not," 'No single individual in the world's history ever encompassed so a variety of useful knowledge.'

We honour him because he was a revelator for the New Age. We believe that he was, as he described himself, a 'servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.' It is for this dignified yet humble office as a theologian and true explorer of the spiritual world that Swedenborgians give thanks to the Lord for this servant who was providentially prepared to reveal a systematic body of truths up to now unknown to us. As other explorers in history have made known new continents and new worlds, so Swedenborg made known to mankind a new and fabulous world, far more exciting and real than any other known before.

What is particularly significant and wonderful about this recording is that it is new for every one in every generation. Its dignity and quality is preserved by the fact that only a few at a time seem to become sensitively aware of this world, or can be convinced of the fact that such a world does truly exist, and that every person, whether or not they acknowledge it, is a citizen of that world. This is what makes its exploration and discovery so unique.

Some writer has suggested that had Swedenborg propounded his new theology as his own ideas, without asserting that the Doctrine of the New Christian Church was revealed to him while reading the Word, and that he talked with spirits and angels as man to man, his writings would have been widely accepted. He spoke with authority, in a scientific manner according to the accurate system in which he had been trained.

Dr. Walter W. Horton, Professor of Theology at Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, wrote: "In the age of one-eyed reason, as it has been called, Swedenborg was among the very few who kept both eyes open, the eye of the soul and the eye of the senses. By sheer devotion to scientific research he discovered the limitations of science two centuries before Einstein and Eddington; but unlike many prophets of the soul, he never disparaged reason in the name of faith, or nature in the name of grace. For him, the material and spiritual universe were joined together by multiple correspondences, and an unbroken chain of discrete degrees."

What Swedenborg was to discover in his 'search for the soul,' which led to years of painstaking anatomical research, was that from birth we live in two worlds, the spiritual and the material. Simply stated, as to our physical senses, we are aware of only the physical world; as to our feelings and thoughts, those faculties that make us a person, we live in the spiritual world. That world is part of, yet is discretely separate from, the material world. It is in the spiritual world that we live to eternity. It is this world which Emanuel Swedenborg was to discover, explore and from twenty-eight years of firsthand experience describe in detail. Some readers have believed, some have scoffed, but the truth speaks for itself.

Swedenborg's exploration of that world had a greater use than just giving information about it. Through his Spiritual experiences, by having his inner senses tuned in to the spiritual world, he was enabled to give to mankind a system of teaching which help us understand our relationship with our neighbours and with God. He saw that heaven is a place or state of 'uses' where each angel as a regenerated human being finds their greatest delight in serving fellow human beings, and thereby adds to the greater good to all. Through revelation from the Lord while he was reading the Word, he learned how the internal sense of that Word describes the spiritual nature of man, and how in its deepest sense it tells about in the world the Lord's own life as he lived

Just how did Swedenborg experience that condition which brought him into open consciousness (While in full wakefulness as to his body) of the spiritual world? The answer is very simple. If it served some use to the Lord and man, any one of us could have the same limited experience. I say 'limited,' because I believe that it was of Divine Providence that Swedenborg was especially prepared for the mission which he was to fulfil. Recognising that we are unconsciously in association with the spiritual world by means of our spiritual senses, it would only require that our spiritual sight, hearing, etc. be opened in order to see all that is around us, that is, the spiritual world. This is exactly what happens to us at death. We are not aware of that world until death causes our physical senses to cease, whereupon our spiritual ones take over.

The only difference with Swedenborg was that both sets of senses were active at the same time. This then, was the way Swedenborg was to explore the spiritual world. Unlike earthly explorers, he did not need to leave his room. There was nothing fantastic about this. What he witnessed in the spiritual world, he was able, with his trained analytical mind, to record in every detail. This experience continued for a period of twenty eight years.

What more was he to discover in this new world? The first and most important discovery was that people lived there. They were people who had once lived actively in the physical world. While some of these people were angels, some were not. In a state, known as 'heaven,' there were angels, regenerated or reborn men and women. In a state known as 'hell,' he found evil spirits. These were people whose greatest delight came from complete abandonment to self-love and to a lust for control over the lives of other people. That is what makes 'hell' here on earth, and it is magnified in the hells of the spiritual world where no external bonds restrict or control it.

Since Swedenborg found such people in the spiritual world, he would want to find out something about their occupations. Unlike the old fairy-tale type of sterile, wing-equipped creatures strumming on harps, he found men and women actively engaged in whatever occupation corresponded to their most inward love of use, or its opposite. He found that people there had various occupations, similar in many respects to occupations here. However there were differences. What would a mortician be doing in heaven?

People there would be engaged in occupations that correspond to their inner loves. Say a person here liked to cook good food to feed hungry people. We would find that person feeding a newly-arrived spirit from the natural world with the 'bread of life' provided by our Lord. Just as here we find some people who make you feel at home at once, sharing their love and concern, helping you to feel loved and needed. Spiritually they are providing food for a hungry soul. Thus we can see how the areas of use and employment in the spiritual world can be of infinite variety.

For the whole area of the unseen or psychic world, Swedenborg uses the term, 'Spiritual World.' Within this, there are three general divisions, namely the 'World of Spirits,' 'Heaven,' and 'Hell.' The 'World of Spirits' Swedenborg discovered, is an intermediate state into which all people first enter after death. This is a sort of clearing house, so to speak, and in the language of the Bible can be described as the place where the Lord separates the sheep from the goats.

People remain in this state of the 'World of Spirits' for a longer or shorter period of time. Here they are prepared for heaven, if heavenliness is finally their ruling love; or they finally gravitate towards the hell, if this has been their delight. It should become clear - and this Swedenborg was to discover as being so different from what the Christian had been taught - that the Lord does not 'condemn' anyone to hell, nor does he 'reward' anyone with heaven. Heaven must be within us, as Jesus said. Heavenliness, lived and experienced in the other life, carries its own reward, even as it does here. Hell is what people choose of their own free will. Don't we observe that here? Consequently, heaven would be suffocating to a spirit who is panting for a hell suited to their selfish design. Some of these discoveries are much different from what has been the general concept outlined by the Christian Church of the past.

The 'World of Spirits' is necessarily an intermediate state, a clearing house. People need to go through different states or tests before they are finally ready for either heaven or hell. The first state there is called the 'externals.' This, Swedenborg describes, is much like the life here. We live mainly in externals, in order to accommodate ourselves to other people and to society and life in general. After death, not too long after having entered the World of Spirits, the externals which were so needful and useful here are removed, and a person begins to live from their internals. Their true colours begin to show and they do not care. In this state they begin to reveal their true nature by what has been their ruling love of life. Is it heavenly or is it hellish?

If it is of a heavenly character, in which love of the Lord and the neighbour are the essential criteria for their final decisions and conduct, then the person is prepared for heaven, and soon enters that 'society,' or state, which is uniquely suited for them. Here husbands and wives, who have lived in conjugal love, are reunited. People, who had no conjugal or spiritual partners here, are divinely provided with one. This is of the Lord's mercy and providence, for heaven is likened to a marriage, and what could heaven be like if there were no married partners there?

The reality of life, both here and hereafter, is the fact that hell is the only other alternative to heaven. Since we are free individuals, we are left with the alternative of choosing hell. It is of the Lord's mercy that hell exists for those who want it. This is the direct opposite of heaven, and of the two great Commandments of love to the Lord and to the neighbour.

We have briefly described something of that world around us in which we live, and yet of which we are mainly unaware. It is this world which Swedenborg discovered, explored, and described in the books which, by the mercy of the Lord, he was privileged to write. On this, his birthday, we honour him, who aspired to no higher title than 'a humble servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Emanuel Swedenborg's remains were interred in the small Swedish Church (now demolished) near the Tower of London, where they remained for almost 140 years. Then the Swedish government approached the British government for permission to remove the remains to Sweden, and on April 7th and 8th 1909 the coffin was taken by train to Dartmouth and thence by sea in the frigate *Fylgia* to its final resting place - a sarcophagus in Uppsala Cathedral, unveiled by King Gustav V on November 19th 1910.

In the words of the Rev. R. R. Rodgers, spoken on the deck of the *Fylgia* 'Swedenborg was great in science, greater in philosophy, but greatest of all as a theologian and an expositor of the Word of God.'

### **Swedenborg's Rules of Life**

1. Often to read and meditate on the word of god.
2. To submit everything to the will of the divine providence.
3. To observe in everything a propriety of behaviour, and to keep the conscience clear.
4. To discharge with fidelity the functions of my employment, and to make myself in all things useful to society.

### **READING FROM SWEDENBORG**

"The Lord cannot manifest himself to everyone in person, and yet he foretold that he would come and build a new church, which is the New Jerusalem. Therefore it follows that he is going to accomplish this through the agency of a human being who can not only accept these teachings intellectually but also publish them in printed form.

I testify in truth that the Lord manifested himself to me, his servant, and assigned me to this task; after doing so, he opened the sight of my spirit and brought me into the spiritual world; and he has allowed me to see the heavens and the hells and to have conversations with angels and spirits on a continual basis for many years now. I also testify that ever since the first day of this calling, I have accepted nothing regarding the teachings of this church from any angel; what I have received has come from the Lord alone while I was reading the Word." *The True Christian Religion*, 779

### **50. Gratitude - Rev. Lorentz R. Soneson, February 1988**

*What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?* Psalm 116:12

When we receive a gift, how do we feel? Unless we suspect bribery, our normal reaction is gratitude. A gift brings us pleasure. But more important, we are touched by the thought and intention behind the gesture. The token, whether large or small, 'represents' an affection, from giver to receiver. This is what fills us with joy. Gifts are a form of communication. They are an expression of love.

The happiness they stir is often followed by an urge to reciprocate. Kindness stemming from mutual love and respect stimulates thankfulness. Verbal acknowledgment is the first response. But the grateful heart desires more. We may not be comfortable until we have an opportunity to show our appreciation with a tangible gift or service to our benefactor.

Sincere givers do not expect anything in return. Their satisfaction comes from giving, and knowing that it spreads goodwill. A grateful "I thank you" is one sign that a present has been received with delight. And this is often sufficient. But if the gift is not well received; if it is ignored or returned, the donor is saddened.

The purpose in the gesture is to bring happiness, both to the giver and the receiver. If the symbol of love is refused, this goal is not met.

One true test of philanthropy is whether one can be satisfied giving anonymously. The possibility of acting for selfish reasons is eliminated by keeping our name unknown. This is not easy. Yet it removes feelings of obligation on the part of the receiver. And it convinces them that the gift was offered without ulterior motive. It is proof positive that the gift was a genuine symbol of love. However, such gestures are rare in this world today,

Parents face a challenging test throughout their years of responsibility for offspring. They give continually to their children with little thought of return. Selfish parents may strive to gain from the one-sided arrangement. They may demand gratitude, or enforced love. They can press for a return on their investment by insisting

upon repayment with servitude and obligation. Unselfish parents just hope their children will learn to be thankful, and become generous people when they mature.

But the question of giving and receiving involves more than proper etiquette and manners. Revelation commands that we love the neighbour if we are to enjoy lasting happiness. Loving the neighbour is more than an affection. It means serving others. Serving is giving. To serve is to 'do.' Therefore, human happiness depends upon our ability and skill in giving to others. Our love of the neighbour is best expressed through wise giving of goods and services. At the same time, we are charged with the responsibility of giving to ourselves and family.

Also, we need somehow to preserve others' freedom. They should be free to accept or reject our talents.

Serving the neighbour is not as simple as it sounds. Giving, to be effective, is done intelligently. How discouraging it is to hear: "I know you are trying to help, but what you are doing is not helpful!"

Genuine charity is discriminating. This is what makes us useful. But how does one learn to give wisely? What are the criteria?

Well, serving the good in the neighbour is the same as serving the Lord. He alone is good. We find our instruction for serving others by learning how to serve God. Guidance can be found in answering the Psalmist's question "*What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?*" The rules for helping the neighbour are found in the reply to Micah's question: "*With what shall I come before the Lord?*" The threefold answer: Do justly, Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God.

Worship is, in essence, showing 'gratitude' to the Lord. It is a way to show our thanks for His many blessings. Our first response to a gift is a verbal 'thank you'. And our first thanks to the Lord is given in external worship. We sing, pray and recite phrases of appreciation. But these actions can be shallow unless they are supported by internal worship. Emanuel Swedenborg, in the work Arcana Coelestia 440, writes: "the Lord cannot be worshiped except from charity. Faith that does not come from charity does not lead to worship, because it lives only on the lips, not in the heart."

Again, "External worship viewed in itself, without anything internal to sanctify it, is nothing, as anyone can see. What is outward devotion without the heart's devotion but a gesture? What is prayer on the lips without any thought behind it but blather? And what is a given deed without the intent behind it but a kind of nonentity? So every exterior by itself is a lifeless thing; only the interior can give it life." (para. 1094).

And then there is the teaching: "the first thing is not to do evil to the neighbour, the second is to do good to him." Swedenborg: True Christian Religion 435

From these teachings we learn that unless we shun evils, nothing of our worship is good. So the essence of how we thank the Lord is taught throughout the Word. The Ten Commandments, given by Him, outline the evils to be shunned. The Sermon on the Mount lists rules to heed. The life of religion is to do good by first shunning evils as sins against God.

The question of how to serve the neighbour intelligently then, is answered by this definition of internal worship, for they are one and the same! True charity to our fellow man needs the guidance of truth. To be good for something we require knowledge. There is only one source of truth to guide the will to do good . It is the Lord in His Word. That is where we learn the life of charity. The Word states what evils are to be shunned. And those evils are clearly defined, even in their most subtle forms. So first we serve our neighbour by not harming him,

"The second of charity is to do uses." Clear statements are given in the writings of Swedenborg as to how we are to be of service. The duties of charity, for example, show how everybody, whatever their employment may be, can serve others. The payment of taxes, for instance, is to be done with a heart disposed to goodwill. This is because the country is the neighbour collectively. There is no deceit and fraud when this duty is performed from a charitable will.

Instruction is even given in the Word about charity within the home. Domestic duties and education of children are to be according to Divine command. These are seen when one is shunning evils as sins; obeying the laws of the land, fulfilling contracts, and faithful paying of debts, practicing justice and acting sincerely in our daily life. All of these are what is meant by the words of Micah: "... to do justly."

The Psalmist prayed unto the Lord, "*Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love.*" Psalm 25:6. In spite of our helplessness, the Lord's tender mercy keeps us from casting ourselves into hell. It is the Lord's mercy that continually leads us upward, toward eternal happiness. For justice alone would not open the gates of heaven. Our nature would justly condemn us to hell. Therefore we repeatedly pray that the Lord will forgive our trespasses. Infinite mercy can redeem us from fallen ways. So we give thanks daily that "*He is good. His love endures forever.*" Psalm 136:1

From this we learn how to apply mercy in our own lives, The Lord's mercy extends to the whole human race. His compassion is shown in His forgiveness and mercy. Can we look at our fellow man with mercy? It is not for us to condemn the evil. We are to look for the good in others. The evil are punished by their own evil deeds. We are only asked to forgive, and help those in distress.

Charity is love toward the neighbour, and mercy is love grieving. Again, in the work Arcana Coelestia we read: "Sometimes we might sense or perceive inside ourselves that we are thinking rightly about the Lord, and that we are thinking rightly about our neighbours and wanting to render them assistance without looking for any financial reward or prestige for ourselves. Sometimes we might also feel sympathy for those who are suffering calamity and even greater sympathy for those who are misled about religious doctrine. At these times we can be sure that we have inside us a deeper dimension through which the Lord can work." (para 1102). This is to '... love mercy.'

Thirdly, we are taught that the word's 'to walk' signify 'to live', to live according to the truths of faith (Arcana Coelestia 1993). 'To walk' in the name of Jehovah is to be in true worship. Walking therefore implies the steps we take in our daily lives, our choices from moment to moment, hopefully taken in the light of heaven.

One of the most difficult doctrines for us to acknowledge is that we are nothing but vessels created by the Lord to receive the influx of life. To admit that all life comes from the Lord humbles the proud heart. And to walk each day knowing that the Lord alone is the Giver of all life is to '...walk humbly with your God,'

The Lord did not deny the usefulness of coming before Him with rams, with oil and with burnt offerings. These gifts were permitted in an earlier church to help preserve true worship. But today we can view these offerings to the Lord through what they represent. The 'rams' mean an unswerving faith in His teachings. This faith is conjoined to a life of service. The 'rivers of oil' stand for a life of charity, which, when one is shunning evils, flows in from the Lord. It fosters new truths in the understanding. These new truths then, guide us in acts of charity. The 'burnt offerings' mean active service, through deeds and gifts. We perform the acts of external worship to the Lord on the Sabbath. And we demonstrate our love to the neighbour through deeds. This efflux of useful service permits an influx of more faith and charity. More gifts of 'rams and oil' then flow through our actions as gifts to the Lord, in the neighbour.

Faithful performance of the work Providence has placed us in is 'to serve justly.' A reluctance to condemn the neighbour is 'to love mercy.' Finally, by trying to remove the beam of evil out of our own eye we will 'walk humbly with our God.'

Genuine gratitude and thanksgiving involve more than verbally saying "I thank you." To receive a gift from our fellow man is actually receiving from the Lord. And it can be acknowledged by worshipping the Lord. This worship, to be internal, means giving of our talent and time. An endless chain of giving and receiving creates happiness in both the giver and the receiver. And the good that is exchanged is really the Lord's. It is He that is to be thanked. And all that He asks by way of gratitude is for us to serve His children!

## **Reading From Swedenborg**

That no one is saved by means of goods from self, because they are not good, is evident from the following: "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of the heavens, but those who do the will of my Father. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, haven't we prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many great things in your name?" But then I will declare to them, "I do not know you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity." Matthew 7:21-23

*Then you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, "Lord, open the door for us!" Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I tell you, I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity."* Luke 13:25-27

*They are in fact like the Pharisee who prayed, standing in the Temple, saying that he was not greedy, unjust, or adulterous like other people, but fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed Luke 18:11-14 They are also the ones called "worthless servants"* Luke 17:10

"The truth is that none of us can on our own do anything good that is really good; but it is outrageous to use this principle to destroy all the good and caring actions done by people who turn away from evils because they are sins. Using this principle in this way is in fact diametrically opposed to the Word, which mandates what we are to do; it is contrary to the commandments of love for the Lord and love for our neighbour on which depend all the Law and the Prophets [Matthew 22:40]; and it is to demean and subvert everything that has to do with religion. Everyone knows that religion means doing what is good and that we are all going to be judged according to our deeds.

We are all by nature capable of turning away from evils with apparent autonomy because of the Lord's power, if we pray for that power; and what we then do is good that comes from the Lord." Doctrine of Life, 30,31