

## **Correspondences Part 1.**

The relationship which exists between things of the natural world with things of the world of the spirit.

If you are a regular listener to this programme you will perhaps recall a very recent series of talks I gave under the heading "The Internal Sense of the Word". Maybe; also, you recall, some of the Bible stories I dealt with in that series. There was the story of David and Goliath, for example. I also dealt with the stories of the healing of Naaman the leper; of Daniel in the lions' den and of Jonah and the whale.

In dealing with each particular story, I spoke of the symbolism of the different things mentioned and what they mean so far as our own life and experience is concerned. In the story of the healing of Naaman I spoke of the symbolism of the waters of the river in which Elisha told him to go and wash himself. It represents, or symbolises the Lord's truth and teaching which is what cures, cleans and heals us of the evils which cling to our thoughts, feelings and affections. And in the Daniel story we saw how the lions represent the powerful forces of evil in whose midst we often find ourselves, but which do not have to overwhelm and destroy us if we hold fast to what we believe in and place all our confidence in the Lord.

This relationship between objects or animals and spiritual qualities, forces and realities, is referred to in Swedenborg's theological writings as the relationship of Correspondences. It is one of the most important teachings found in those writings and, when understood, provides the key for unlocking the truth which the Word of God contains for us. This relationship of correspondences, things of the natural world corresponding to spiritual things, Swedenborg wrote, was understood and appreciated perfectly at one time. However, an understanding of the relationship was lost. Now it is being restored again.

One of the simplest ways to illustrate the relationship between things natural and things spiritual, or, one of the easiest correspondences to understand, is a smile. You might be waiting at an airport watching people greet friends arriving from a plane. A person breaks into a lovely smile at recognising a friend or relative. The smile corresponds to the happiness that person is feeling within. That is a very simple illustration of a correspondence. Something on the natural plane corresponding to something on the level of the spirit.

Correspondences are not just isolated things. The whole of the natural world and all that happens here is a mirror reflecting, or corresponding to, the spiritual world or the world of the spirit. In his book, *"Heaven and Hell"* Swedenborg wrote "All things which come forth in nature, from the least to the greatest of it, are correspondences. The reason they are correspondences is that the natural world comes forth and subsists from the spiritual world, and both from the Divine." (para. 106). There was a time long ago when people fully understood correspondences. There was a time when people would look out on the world around them and whatever they saw would speak to them in some way of spiritual things. There was a time when people would look up at the sun, the source of heat and light in this natural world, and be immediately caught up in thoughts about the Lord, the source of all spiritual heat and light, and to whom our sun corresponds. The thing is that this knowledge or awareness became lost. People began to worship the natural objects themselves, forgetting that they merely corresponded to spiritual realities.

It is stunning that our natural world, our environment, and what goes on here, corresponds to things on the plane of the spirit. But it is not difficult to see how this is so. If you're overseas and you come to a run down, terribly untidy, garbage strewn town, you cannot but conclude something of the state of mind and attitudes of the people who live there. You conclude that the people of the town are discouraged, dispirited, uncaring, perhaps slovenly. On the other hand if you come to a town beautifully kept with trim gardens and parks and no sign of litter you take this to indicate, or to say something, about the people here, that they are proud, clean, industrious, tidy, and so on. In both cases we say the town is a reflection of what the people are like. More than that, here is something on the natural plane corresponding to the state of affairs existing on the spiritual or mental plane.

A lot is said about western man's materialism and how materialistic life has become in the western, developed countries. Here again, the outward state of affairs which we identify and complain about simply corresponds to the inner spiritual state which prevails. Because man, within, is greedy and discontented, he is acquisitive and materialistic in the way he goes about life.

One of the truly interesting and perceptive things said at the 1982 Anzaas Conference held at Macquarie University was in relation to worker attitudes and wage demands. It might also have been said with regard to the push for profits. The speaker pointed out that we will have no end to this unless there can be a radical change of motivation for going to work or for operating a company. In other words we must get to the cause of things and not just deal with the effects. And the cause lies within, with people's thoughts and attitudes. If change can be brought about there; if people could be led to look on their work in an entirely different way, as their opportunity to be of service and to contribute to the common good, there would not even be these industrial problems which so preoccupy us. But of course it is an imperfect world. We are, ourselves, imperfect people. And our negotiators and problem solvers have got to deal with human nature and attitudes as they find them.

To point to this relationship of correspondences, all things of the natural world corresponding to what is of the world of the spirit, and to suggest that in that relationship there is the means for solving our problems and difficulties, can seem altogether simplistic. And yet that relationship exists and so long as we ignore it we will continue to treat the effects and not the causes. Who of us isn't aware of the troubled state the world is in, with wars and conflicts, death and destruction already written large over this year, 1982. But the natural world, in all its troubled state, is but a mirror of the troubled spiritual state man is in. The one corresponds to the other. Picking up what Swedenborg wrote, again: "The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, not only in general, but also in particular" (*Heaven and Hell* 89), And a very useful summary from another place: "Correspondence is the appearing of what is internal in what is external, and its representation there". (*Arcana Caelestia* 5423).

Forgive what I know sounds like an oversimplification; but the fact that we have to contend with physical sicknesses and disease is because of the sick and unhealthy spiritual state man is in. And though illnesses have been and will continue to be conquered, cures being found for them, yet there will be no eradication of disease so long as the sick and diseased spiritual state of mankind remains unhealed and continues to act as a source from which bodily sicknesses are fed. "All things of the Earth, and, in general, all things of the world, are correspondences." (*Heaven and Hell* 103).

Earlier in the talk we noted how ages ago people understood correspondences, seeing in all things of nature a reflection or mirror of spiritual things. They would look at the sun and straightaway their thoughts would centre on the Lord. Similarly they would look at trees or mountains or waterfalls or the animals and again, their thoughts would focus on spiritual things.

Swedenborg tells us that the Word of God is written by correspondences: that when mountains, trees, fields, animals, water, fire and so on are mentioned there, we are to understand that they correspond to spiritual things. I will speak about this in greater detail in my talk next week, but the healing miracles described in the Gospels are easily seen and easily remembered examples of the way in which correspondences exist in The Word.

The Lord healed the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the paralysed, the sick and the diseased. All of which is fair enough. All of the healing miracles are very impressive. But their point and purpose is to show how the Lord can heal us of the spiritual diseases which deafness, dumbness, blindness, paralysis, sickness and disease, correspond to.

The Lord, if we so wish, opens our eyes to see things we haven't seen or understood before. Whereas we were spiritually blind, now we see. Whereas we were spiritually paralysed, with the Lord's help we can "walk". And so we could go on.

The Swedenborg Programme – Number 65.

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