



OUR DAILY BREAD
Resources for Spiritual Questers

An Introduction to the Swedenborgian Way of Life

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A Course Consisting of Weekly Reflections on Swedenborg's Theology

Course Outline

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Week II: God Image

Swedenborg claims that having a correct idea of God is of paramount importance. He says that it is at "the very core of the thinking of anyone who has a religion." Reasonable individuals may differ on this. Here is what Swedenborg says about it:

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 13:

We may gather how important it is to have a right concept of God from the fact that this concept is the very core of the thinking of anyone who has a religion. All the elements of religion and of worship focus on God; and since God is involved in every element of religion and worship, whether general or particular, unless there is a right concept of God there can be no communication with heaven. This is why every nation is allotted its place in the spiritual world according to its concept of a human God. This [understanding of God as human] is where the concept of the Lord is to be found, and nowhere else. We can see very clearly that our state after death depends on our avowed concept of God if we consider the opposite, namely that the denial of God, and in the Christian world, a denial of the Lord's divinity, constitutes hell.¹

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY:

Traditional Christianity divides God into three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these names is a different Person. This doctrine of three Persons is called the trinity. Yet, while asserting that God is three Persons, Christians maintain that these three Persons are one. Swedenborg thought that traditional Christians were poly-theists and that essentially, Christians believe in three gods. The doctrine of the trinity can be found in the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. The Nicene Creed was formulated in 312 CE and the Council of Nicaea. The

¹ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Divine Love and Wisdom*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008. Print.

Council of Nicaea was convened by Constantine because he saw that Christians all over the Empire were disputing and arguing about doctrinal matters that were difficult to understand. He thought that if he brought all the bishops together they could settle matters. The result was the Nicene Creed.

Nicene Creed:

“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”²

Athanasian Creed:

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the

² Wilhelm, Joseph. The Nicene Creed. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 17 Nov. 2016

Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood by God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who

suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.”³

SWEDENBORGIAN VIEW:

Swedenborg's image of God is different from that of traditional Christianity. For Swedenborg, the Old Testament God, Yahweh (Jehovah, in King James Version of the Bible), Came down to earth and took on a human body as Jesus. The Old Testament God is the soul of Jesus and Jesus is the body of the Old Testament God. God's outgoing power and influence is God's Spirit, called The Holy Spirit. So there is One Person who is God: Jesus. Jesus' soul is the Father, and the outgoing power of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. In the language of Hinduism, Jesus can be considered an "Avatar" of Yahweh--an incarnation of the Infinite, Eternal God. For Swedenborg, God is the One Divine Human.

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 11:

“God is the essential person. Throughout all the heavens, the only concept of God is a concept of a person. The reason is that heaven, overall and regionally, is in a kind of human form, and Divinity among the angels is what makes heaven. Further, thinking proceeds in keeping with heaven’s form, so it is not possible for angels to think about God in any other way. This is why all the people on earth who are in touch with heaven think about God in the same way when they are thinking very deeply, or in their spirit. It

³ Sullivan, James. The Athanasian Creed. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907.

is because God is a person that all angels and spirits are perfectly formed people. This is because of heaven's form, which is the same in its largest and its smallest manifestations.”

Swedenborg thought that these creeds taught three gods. He lampooned the idea of the trinity in *True Christian Religion* (*True Christianity* in the New Century Edition):

True Christianity n. 141:

“It was proved above, and will be shown more fully in the following numbers devoted specially to the subject, that the Divine Trinity is in the Lord. At this point we shall merely mention certain absurdities arising from the division of the Trinity into Persons. It would be as if a minister of the Church should teach from the pulpit what ought to be believed and practiced, and another should stand at his side and whisper in his ear: "You say truly, continue;" and they should say to a third, standing on the steps of the pulpit: "Go down into the church, open the ears of the people, and put these things into their hearts; and at the same time make them pure, holy and subjects of righteousness." Again, the Divine Trinity divided into Persons, each of Whom singly is God and Lord, would be like three suns in one solar system, one placed on high, the second near it, and the third below them both, encompassing angels and men, and conveying the heat and light of the other two with all their power to their minds, hearts and bodies; and as fire acts upon material substances in retorts, rousing, purifying and refining them. Anyone may see that if this were to happen, men would be reduced to ashes. The government, of three Divine Persons in heaven may also be compared to the government of three kings in one kingdom, or of three generals of equal authority over one army; or rather to the Roman government before the time of the Caesars, when there were consuls, a senate and tribunes of the people, amongst whom power was indeed divided, yet all had supreme power at the same time. Anyone may see the incongruity, the absurdity and the folly of introducing such a government into heaven; and yet this happens when there is ascribed

to the Father a power like that of the supreme consul, to the Son a power like that of the senate, and to the Holy Spirit a power like that of a tribune of the people, especially when a peculiar function is attributed to each, and it is added that those functions are not communicable.”⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus is called Son of God, which indeed makes it look like Jesus and God are two separate Beings. And Jesus prays to God as to another Being. These Bible passages make Swedenborg's idea hard to accept for some. But there are other Bible passages in which Jesus and God are seen to be One Being.

John 10:30:

I and the Father are one.⁵

John 8:42:

“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God.”

Jesus then makes the shocking statement that He is the same Yahweh God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, by saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). This statement is a reference to Exodus 3:14-15. God appears to Moses in a fiery bush. When Moses asks God for His name, God answers with the same exact words of Jesus, “I am.”

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14-15).

⁴ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010. Print.

⁵ *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek--the language of the Gospels. The Greek edition of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Septuagint. God's words to Moses in the Greek of the Septuagint are identical to Jesus' words in the Greek of John's Gospel, "ego eimi"—I Am. Claiming to be God Himself incenses the Jews so much that they try to stone Jesus to death for blaspheme, "So they took up stones to throw at him" (8:59).

John 13:31-32:

Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

John 14:7-11:

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

John 15:10:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Luke 1:35:

The angel answered, "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.

"The Holy One" is a theological term from the Old Testament that means Yahweh (Jehovah), as in Isaiah 43:3, "For I am Yahweh, your God,/ **the Holy One** of Israel, your

Savior;" 43:14, " This is what Yahweh says—/your Redeemer, **the Holy One** of Israel;" 43:15, "I am Yahweh, your **Holy One**,/Israel's Creator, your King."¹ So when the angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus is the Holy One, Gabriel is saying that Jesus is the Old Testament Yahweh.

FOR FURTHER READING:

True Christian Religion (True Christianity) nos. 5-184, (Ch. I-III).

Doctrine of the Lord

Angelic Wisdom concerning Divine Love and Wisdom nos. 1-6, 11-13, 17-33.