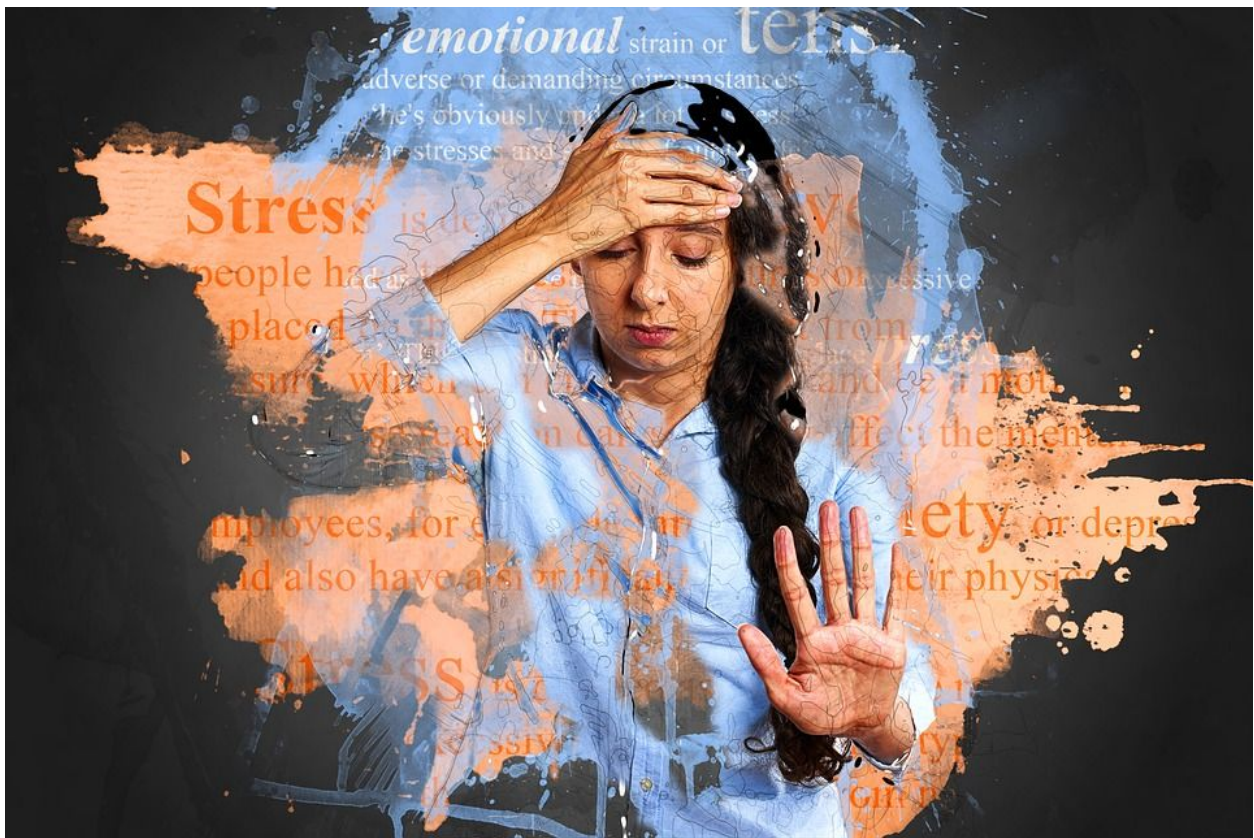




## *Be Not Anxious - Yet Be Anxious!*

*-Rev. Hugh Odhner*



## *January 2019*

## *Readings:*

Genesis 41:54 ; 42:1-7, 9-11, 13-24

Luke 12:13-34

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* §5470

*“If ... when a person takes evils to himself ... he feels any anxiety when he reflects upon his having done what is evil, it is a sign that he will still receive influx through the angels from heaven, and it is also a sign that he will afterward allow himself to be reformed. ... For with those who are then in anxiety there is an internal acknowledgment of evil, which when recalled by the Lord becomes confession, and finally repentance.”<sup>1</sup>*

-Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* §5470

Everyone has experienced states of anxiety. Anxiety is a part of life. We may have experienced some anxiety in the closing days of this last year, or we may be anticipating and already have anxiety about things coming up in this new year. The point of this sermon is that there are two types of anxiety, one is good and the other --- not so good.

We read stories from Scripture which involves state of anxiety. The first story was about the sons of Jacob going down to Egypt to buy grain, because there was a severe famine in the land of Canaan. Facing starvation is certainly a cause for anxiety. But then when they arrived in Egypt they were confronted with an unanticipated anxiety. They were accused of being spies and locked up in prison for three days. And then, when they were released, and allowed to return

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<sup>1</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. Translated by John Potts. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1998.

to the land of Canaan with grain, one of their brothers was kept in prison in Egypt. And they could only return if they brought their youngest brother with them.

The second story treats of another form of anxiety. The ground of a certain rich person yielded a great abundance of crops. He was worried about not having enough room to store his crops. His solution was to tear down his old barns and build bigger ones. Then he thought, he could relax, and eat, drink and be merry, only to be told by God that that very night he would die. So much for his life of ease.

Our third reading was about states of anxiety that we may experience when we feel guilty for things we have done in the past. This type of anxiety may actually be good for our spiritual development – even though we certainly do not feel good experiencing the guilt.

States of anxiety may serve to make us aware that we need to change something in our lives or take care of something that we keep putting off. So anxiety may motivate us to change or to act. In general, we may have anxiety about two different classes of things. We may be anxious about spiritual and eternal things or we may be anxious about natural and worldly things. In our reading from *Arcana Coelestia* 5470, the anxiety treated of there has to do with spiritual things and looks to eternal things. This type of anxiety is said to serve as a sign. But, on the other hand, there *is* that type of anxiety which is spoken of in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew:

*“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”<sup>2</sup>*

-Luke 12:29-30; Matthew 6:31-32

Here it is talking about anxiety concerning things of this world, such as food and clothing, to which we may add such things as shelter, health, money, work, and care of children. What is meant in these Scripture passages is not that we are to take no care at all for such things of this world, but that they are not meant to so dominate our thinking that we put the things of this world in the first place and the things pertaining to eternal life in last place, for it is said following these verses: "...seek first the Kingdom of God and His Justice..."<sup>3</sup> (Luke 12:31; Matthew 6:33)

It is this type of anxiety that is treated of in *Secrets of Heaven* §2689, where it is said:

“They who cannot be reformed are altogether ignorant of what it is to grieve on account of being deprived of truth [...] For they believe that the only anxiety that can possibly exist is on account of the deprivation of the goods of the body and the world, such as honor, fame, wealth, and life... It is well known that all anxiety and grief arise as a result of being deprived of those things for which one has an affection, that is, one loves.”

As the Word says, where a person's heart is, there his treasure is also. (Luke 12:34). A person comes into anxiety for what he treasures. If a person seeks the Lord first, he puts his

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<sup>2</sup> New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

treasure, not primarily in things of this world nor in the things pertaining only to himself, but in spiritual things pertaining to love to the Lord and love toward the neighbor.

The Word tells us that we ought to seek the Lord and things having to do with eternal life in the first place, while also doing things that are necessary for a life of charity in the world. Thus while we are seeking the kingdom of God, we are, at the same time, dealing with our life in the world and taking care of necessary worldly concerns and duties.

This is made clear in *True Christianity* §406, where we read:

“There is a common saying that we are all neighbor to ourselves. The body of teaching on goodwill, however, shows how we should understand this. We are all supposed to provide ourselves with the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, a place to live, and many other things that are required by the civic life in which we participate. And we provide these things not only for ourselves but also for our loved ones, not only for the present but also for the future.

If we do not provide ourselves with the necessities of life, we are in no state to practice goodwill, because we lack everything. How we are to be neighbors to ourselves, however, can be shown through the following analogy: We should all provide our bodies with food. This has to come first, but the goal is to have a sound mind in a sound body.

We also ought to provide our mind with its food, that is, things that build intelligence and judgment; but the goal is to be in a state in which we can serve our fellow citizens, our community, our country, the church, and therefore the Lord. People who pursue this goal are providing well for themselves to eternity.”<sup>4</sup>

A person, in order to live responsibly in this world, can hardly avoid providing those things necessary for his worldly life and also those things necessary for the lives of others. In fact, we

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<sup>4</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan S. Rose. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2006.

are told in *True Christianity* §430-431 that a person even has a duty to provide certain things, such as payment of taxes and care of one's children. To provide for these things, and to have concern for providing them is not contrary to order as long as they are seen as means to an eternal end. Those who trust in the Lord, who seek the kingdom of God first, do have cares and worries concerning worldly affairs. But they do not place their heart in these. A description of such people is found in *Secrets of Heaven* §8478:

“[...] These, notwithstanding they have care for tomorrow, still have it not, because they do not think of tomorrow with solicitude, still less with anxiety. Unruffled is their spirit whether they obtain the objects of their desire or not; and they do not grieve over the loss of them, being content with their lot.”<sup>5</sup>

While the Word tells us to "be not anxious" for the concerns of this world, and also that we can come into a state in which while we have care for the things of this world, we need not be anxious about them, yet the Word also says that for a person to feel a certain type of anxiety is a good sign. This type of anxiety is not so much about the things of the world, but it concerns things of the spirit, namely, evils. As we read in *Secrets of Heaven* §5470,

"If therefore when a person has taken evils to himself ... he feels any anxiety when he reflects upon his having done what is evil, it is a sign that he will still receive influx ... from heaven and ... will afterwards allow himself to be reformed..."

This sign comes not from a person's reflecting upon what goods he has done, but upon what evils he has done. The fact that he feels some anxiety on account of them means that he recognizes those evils as sins in himself and condemns himself on account of them. Such anxiety as this is good because, by means of it, a person can eventually be brought into a state of repentance as we are told at the end of of that passage from *Secrets of Heaven* §5470:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

"... with those who are then in anxiety there is an internal acknowledgment of evil, which when received by the Lord becomes confession and finally repentance."

Many influences arising from cares for self and the world conspire to hinder a person from ever coming to this type of anxiety concerning evils. People who allow themselves to become too immersed in the cares of this world may not ever take the time to reflect upon their evils, and without reflection upon evils, how can evils be recognized and acknowledged? Also, as is indicated in *Secrets of Heaven* §5470, even if a person does reflect upon his evils, he may not be concerned about them because he may by various rationalizations either attempt to excuse them or to make them appear as good.

There are then these two kinds of anxiety. The one is anxiety concerning the things of this world. This anxiety affects all of us to some degree. Yet being natural, it can be decreased and given up as we come to trust in the Lord. The other anxiety focuses on the state to our own evils. This anxiety, which comes by reflection and acknowledgment of our evils, has as its object our eternal life. This kind of anxiety we need not fear for by it we may be led to the life of heaven and a life in the Lord.

Amen.