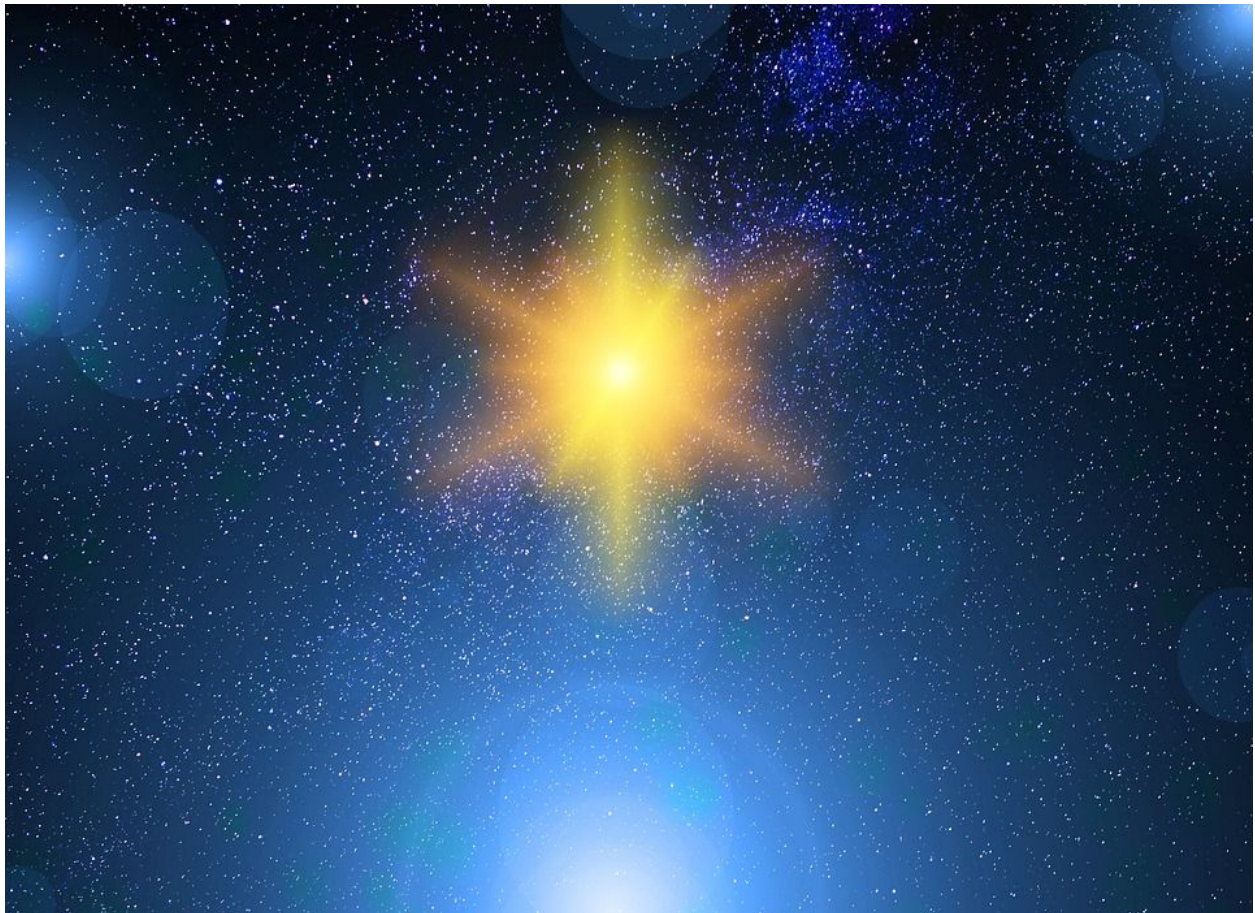




# *The Presence of the Lord Within Us*

*A sermon delivered at the Lord's New Church in Bryn Athyn, PA*

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*Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "Look! It is here!"; or "See, it is there"; For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'*

*-Luke 17: 20-21<sup>1</sup>*

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus, asking when the kingdom of God would come, they were thinking of a kingdom in this world. No doubt they were thinking of a kingdom in which they would be part of the ruling class and in which the Romans, who then controlled all of Judea, would be overthrown. So when the Lord said that the kingdom of God does not come with observation, but that it is within you, this is not likely the answer that they wanted to hear.

The Lord's answer to the Pharisees is similar to what he answered when Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews? Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (John 18:33, 36)

Now some Bible translations have rendered the Lord's words as, "for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." The reasons for such translation are that (1) the Lord was referring to himself as the "kingdom of God"; and He was then standing in the midst of the Pharisees, and (2) He certainly couldn't have been saying that his kingdom was within those Pharisees. But the Lord was saying precisely that -- that his kingdom was within those Pharisees.

Not only that, but his kingdom is within everyone, within the good as well as within the evil. Within the Angels as well as within the Devils. Within me as well as within you. The Lord's kingdom dwells within everyone, whether we like it or not!

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<sup>1</sup> *New King James Version Bible*. Nashville. Thomas Nelson Inc. 1982

Now what is meant by the Lord's kingdom? In most places in the Word by the Lord's kingdom is meant heaven and the church. And in this sense, the Lord is within those who have been or are being regenerated. But in the wider sense by the Lord's kingdom is meant the good and truth that proceed from His Divine and His Divine Human. In this sense the Lord Himself and all that is from Him is His Kingdom (AC §26276). The Divine of the Lord is within everyone both the good and the evil. We can see this in the following passages from *True Christian Religion* §70:

“Since man was created a form of Divine order, God is in him; but so far as a man lives according to Divine order, God is fully in him. If, however, he does not live according to Divine order, God is still in him, but in the highest regions of his soul, affording him the power to understand what is true and to will what is good, that is, the ability to understand and the inclination to love.”<sup>3</sup>

(Let me repeat that using a different translation, because it is key to understanding that the divine dwells within everyone::

“Now, because we have been created as forms of the divine design, God is in us. But this is true only to the extent that we fully follow the divine design in the way we live. When we do not follow that design in the way we live, God is still in us, but is only in the highest parts of us, making it possible for us to understand what is true and intend what is good.”<sup>4</sup>

To continue with the passage from *True Christian Religion*:

“But so far as a man lives contrary to order, he closes the lower regions of his mind or spirit, and prevents God from coming down and filling those lower regions with His presence; thus God is in him, but he is not in God. It is a general law in heaven that God is in every man, evil as well as good, but that a man is not in God unless he lives according to order. For the Lord says in John 15:4: ‘He wills that man should be in Him, and that He should be in man.’ The

<sup>2</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. Translated by John F. Potts. New York. Swedenborg Foundation. 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christian Religion*. Translated by William C. Dick. London. Swedenborg Society, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan F. Rose. West Chester. Swedenborg Foundation. 2010.

absence of God from a man is no more possible than the absence from the earth of the sun with its heat and light.”

To rephrase this: It is no more possible for God to be absent from us than it is for the sun (through its heat and light) to be absent from our earth. How is it possible that the Divine of the Lord can dwell within everyone, the good as well as the evil? It is possible because the Divine of the Lord in its essence is Love. It is a love that goes out into every created thing. And the Lord’s love is so strong that He can love us even when we do not love Him, He can love us even when we do not love each other, He can love us even we do not love ourselves. His love gives life. From Him, from His love, we live.

The Divine of the Lord indeed dwells within all of us. But this Divine presence of the Lord within us does not mean that we are Divine. The fact that we have life from the presence of the Divine within us does not mean that we are life or that we have any ownership of that Divine within us. Let’s use an example:

It has been commonly said that we are made of star dust. This is said because it is now thought that all the more complex elements were created by the intense pressure and heat present within stars. The basic elements or atoms were fused together in various ways to make the more complex atoms or elements. So all the atoms and elements within our bodies came from stars. But even though our physical bodies may be made out of the stuff of stars, that does not make us stars.

The Divine of the Lord is within us. The kingdom of God is within you. The Lord abides within us. Yet, we are not Divine. In the *Doctrine of Life* §102 we read that “the Lord dwells in what it is his own with man.”<sup>5</sup> Within each of us, within the very core of our souls, there is a dwelling place of the Lord within us. It is not our dwelling place within us, it is His dwelling place within us. As *True Christian Religion* §70 expressed it, this place is in the highest regions of our soul.

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<sup>5</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Doctrine of Life*. Translated by John F. Potts. New York. Swedenborg Foundation. 1854.

What is the implication for us of knowing this? Yes, God is in us -- -- but we may not be in God. God is present within us at the inmost level, since things on this inmost level are of His Divine design. But below this inmost level, God's presence takes the form of an ongoing struggle with things that oppose that indwelling Divine order.

It is the Lord's desire not only that He dwells within us, but that we, of our own free will, choose to dwell within Him. Thus he asks us to abide in Him. In His Word he tells us how to do this. So we read in John:

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:4, 2, 10)

Amen.

## **Suggested Readings**

Luke 17:5-10, 20-21

John 15:1-10

Emanuel Swedenborg: *Life / Faith* §102