



The Creatress

Birrell Walsh, PhD



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I was raised in Catholicism, a religion where God and all the priests were male, yes. But more people spent time with a rosary clutched in their hand than prayed before the crucifix. The presence of Mary was everywhere.

I remember the story of Mrs Guarnaschelli, who was praying in the sanctuary when she heard the voice of Jesus. “Mrs Guarnaschelli,” he said, until she interrupted him. “You’ll have to wait a moment, Lord. I’m talking to your mother.”

Later, with Tantric Buddhists I again found women, as Tara, Prajnaparamita, Kuan Yin.

I mention this because Swedenborg followed his Lutheran ancestors in largely emphasizing the male and ignoring the female in his understanding of divinity. Not in his understanding of angels, for which we can be grateful. And he did often use neuter, genderless words like “Divinum” in his theology. Largely, I said, “largely” There is one passage in which it is very different. In it Swedenborg almost shyly speaks of God as “the creatress,” and gives us a practice.

Divine Love and Wisdom §33 (NCE)

All human feelings and thoughts arise from the divine love and wisdom that constitute the very essence that is God. The feelings arise from divine love and the thoughts from divine wisdom. Further, every single bit of our being is nothing but feeling and thought. These two are like the springs of everything that is alive in us.

They are the source of all our life experiences of delight and enchantment, the delight from the prompting of our love and the enchantment from our consequent thought.

Since we have been created to be recipients, then, and since we are recipients to the extent that we love God and are wise because of our love for God (that is, the extent to which we are moved by what comes from God and think as a result of that feeling), it therefore follows that the divine essence, the Creatress, is divine love and wisdom.¹

Latin has a grammar with genders, and sometimes the gender of one word can force another to take on that same gender. It is not so in this case, George Dole said in his note 31 to *DLW*. Swedenborg could have as easily used the word “Creator.” Instead he said “Creatress.”²

What might that mean?

¹ Swedenborg, Emanuel, and George F. Dole. *Divine Love and Wisdom*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

² Ibid.

Genesis 1: 27: (KJV)

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*³

We know from Genesis that humanity was created in the image of God, and that both male and female are in that image and always have been. But a careful scholar might ask - it fair to Swedenborg to take this one quotation and rely on it? And will it grow, until there is some sense of balance in male and female presence in this tradition?

Matthew 13: 31 - 33 (NIV)

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."⁴

The New Testament speaks of small things becoming great, in their time. The mustard seed grows. The yeast leavens a wheelbarrow's worth of flour. Small things grow. Let it be so for us.

Is this an attempt to replace the male language of Lord and Father? No, not for me. It is to make available to us, based on Swedenborg's own words faithfully translated, an image of God that may nourish us. The male words are to remain present, for those who love them. It is an "and" thing, not an "or" thing. I do not think the God "who cannot even frown" will be annoyed by our having more choices.

I think it is also a very individual thing. For some people it is simply easier to open to an image of God who is a woman. The choice of God-as-female is to enable more of us to accept the divinity. That "and-ness" is part of the generosity of the Holy, it seems to me. There is a Sufi tradition that God under the name Ar-Rab al Alamein, the Nourisher of All the Worlds, turns to each being a face that is for them specifically, and gives them what their temperament needs. Those who are comfortable with femaleness can turn to the Creatress. Those who prefer the male can turn to God-as-Lord. And both will be received. As Swedenborg says in *Heaven and Hell* §18,

"For love is receptive of each and all things that are in harmony with it; it longs for them, seeks them, and drinks them in as it were spontaneously, for it desires unceasingly to be enriched and perfected by them."

³ *Holy Bible: King James Version*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.

⁴ *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

As in the afterlife, as Swedenborg tells us about it, what we love is available to us. God provides dark clothing for Puritans, and bright clothing for revelers; and he offers to us the face of God we can most easily accept.

The Practice, What is the Practice?

Swedenborg did not believe in creation from nothing. For him, God created the universe out of God - as a woman creates a child, from her own substance. It is not something that ends with birth. For Swedenborg we are forever attached to God, receiving. That is what we are made for. Not just to be receivers - Swedenborg says it in a way that underlines the current, present-ness of it. We are created to be *receiving*. Our only choice is whether to accept what is offered to us, or to refuse it.

What is it that is offered? From these two paragraphs in *Divine Love and Wisdom*, we get a sense of it: delight and enchantment are offered. They come to us like the milk of our mother, and they are better food than anything artificial.

But what is our part? What is the practice implicit in this text? The emphasis in today's readings is on receiving, on allowing the Divine to enter us. Our practice is receptivity. It is a lifelong practice, different for each of us. There are as many faces of feminine divinity as there are of male. India teaches this and the ancient Greek *Hymn to Isis* says so -

*All mortals who live on the boundless earth,
Thracians, Greeks and Barbarians,
Express Your fair Name, a Name greatly honoured among all, but
Each speaks in his own language.⁵*

I think this section of *Divine Love and Wisdom* invites us to turn toward the Sun of divine essence.

At the end of Graeco-Roman times, Proclus was one of the last pagan philosophers. He regarded the sky-blue heliotrope as praying because it always turned to look towards its Source.

In *The Priestly Art* Proclus said:

"It sings the praise of the leader of the divine order to which it belongs, spiritual praises, and praise which can be apprehended by reason, touch and feeling. And since the heliotrope is also

⁵ Vanderlip, Vera Frederika. *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis*. Toronto: A.M. Hakkert, 1972

*moved toward that to which it readily opens, if anyone hears it striking the air as it moves about, he perceives in the sound that it offers to the king the kind of hymn that a plant can sing.*⁶

If we follow the energy-fountain across the sky, with attention and receptivity to what is given, then, maybe that is our offering to the Creatress. We provide a place for her to come, and she seeks that. In *True Christianity* §766 Swedenborg says “*urget et instat ut recipiatur*” “She urges and presses that she be received” with a text whose subject could be translated with “he” or “she.”

The benefits of this opening to the Creatress seems to be many:

Heaven and Hell §522 says “*qui caelum in se recipit, is in caelum venit*” “Whoever accepts heaven [into himself] enters heaven.”⁷ By accepting heaven, we come into heaven.

There is a promise that we will be carried to our goal.

“*Quod illi qui recipiunt, per infinitas ambages sicut per maeandros ferantur ad sua loca.*”
“Those who receive are conducted to their places through an infinite maze of winding paths.”⁸
-*Divine Providence* §164:6

In *Heaven and Hell* §15, Swedenborg uses male language to say the most curious thing: “In heaven loving the Lord does not mean loving Him in respect to His person, but it means loving the good that is from Him.” Swedenborg here uses the idea of being *moved* by the Good and thinking from the moved-ness. The Good affects us as do the rays of the sun.

Please, help us to understand if this is what Swedenborg is saying. One loves the Creatress by loving what comes from her. What come are delight and enchantment. One loves the Creatress by turning toward these. One takes them as the gift that the Creatress, the Divine Essence, intends for us. They are light and rain for the flower.

The practice for me is like locating the sun on a cool day, and sitting so it can warm me. One acts like the heliotrope. So far, that is what I notice - an unspeaking warmth coming into my upper body, comfortable, comforting, bringing no new commandments. One of God’s many faces is turned to us, and we sit in the sunshine of the Creatress, being eased and warmed.

⁶ Chlup, Radek. *Proclus - an Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

⁷ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Heaven and Hell*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

⁸ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Divine Providence*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

A Prayer:

Creatrix, who make us out of yourself so we can love and know, first of all, thank you. And as you pour us forth with all our various loves into this curious and meandering world, you cannot ever be far away. And as we go home, to whom could we go but you, to abide with you as we always do? We are made to be receiving. May we receive you, and pass you on. Oh you of so many names, thank you.