

JUNE/JULY 2010

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD

ENCOUNTERING
GOD



Prayers

O Lord our God,
you rule over all things and you accomplish all things
and you never remove your hands from your works,
nor ever shall.

Guide us, we pray, with the power with which,
in your wisdom,
you loved and made all things in the beginning.

- *Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)*

Lord of Love,
whatever we own, may we reverence it for your glory;
whatever we do, may we undertake it for your sake;
and whatever we are, may we live for your praise.

- *Hugh of Lincoln (1135-1200)*

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.

ISSN: 1056-3296 • Volume 62, Number 4 • June/July 2010

Published by the Swedenborgian Church

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter, Editors

43 Hobart Square, Whitman, MA 02382

ourdailybreadmag@gmail.com • (781) 447-4901

www.odb-online.com

Issued under the auspices of the

Council of Ministers of the Swedenborgian Church

USA & Canada: US \$15/year

Dear Readers,

As you can see, *Our Daily Bread* has a new format. The recent economic situation, together with our desire to use planetary resources responsibly, have led us to streamline our production and mailing systems by switching to a bimonthly format. We appreciate your patience during the interruption in our production. Most importantly, we believe that our new look and delivery schedule offer a better resource to our readers. We welcome your feedback.

This June/July issue focuses on encountering the divine. The diverse perspectives offered by the sermons herein point to the myriad forms a brush with the Lord can take. Interacting with another person, immersing oneself in nature, reading scripture, praying, reminiscing, even grieving: through these methods and countless others, God's constant presence with and within us (a presence we all too often forget) becomes evident. At such times, we suddenly feel the eddies and flows of divine providence as it flows around us, carrying us toward the fulfillment of our full humanity and our angelic destiny. As Julian of Norwich wrote of God in her book *Showings*, "You never remove your hands from your works, nor ever shall."

Mysticism may seem strange and esoteric, but at its heart it consists simply of a person's experiences with the divine. However we may encounter the Lord's power in our lives, we are all mystics.

Many blessings,

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

In This Issue

The Word of God Became a Human Being.3

Rev. Dr. William R. Woofenden

Providence7

Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey

The Two Tasks of Being Human.10

Rev. Andrew D. Stinson

Our Choice?14

Rev. Dr. George F. Dole

Listening, Not Just Hearing18

Rev. Julian Duckworth

Thomas and the Lord.22

Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen

The Prismatic Paraclete.25

Leah Grace Goodwin

The Deeper Truth.29

Rev. Eric Hoffman



The Word of God Became a Human Being

Rev. Dr. William R. Woofenden

Rev. Dr. William Woofenden has served as both a pastor and a professor. He is now retired and living in Maine.

6 JUN

Isaiah 55

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning

with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

In just a few words, the opening of the Gospel of John states the basis of the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. It starts by saying that in the beginning the Word (or Logos) was, was with God, and was God. This Word—this divine essence, this wisdom of God—became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. This is how God conclusively made himself known.

The Sacred Scriptures state that in very ancient times God revealed himself directly to people. Later, God approached humanity through seers and prophets, and at length by means of a written Word. With the coming of the Christ into the world, the record of that coming was added to the written Word—a new testament or covenant added to the old. Thus the continuing presence of the Lord among us was assured. Today, if anyone asks us, "Where can the Lord be found? Where can his voice be heard?" our answer can be, "In his Word."

For the Lord so designed his Word that he is eternally present through it, speaking to everyone in his or her own language, not according to a person's intellectual or social standing, but according to the person's state of life and real desire for truth. Every one of us, therefore, can read the Bible believing that it is the Lord himself speaking to us personally, the living voice of the living God. Whenever we do read the Word in this way, divine power flows into our souls.

This wondrous truth is stated in the words of Isaiah. Speaking for the Lord, the prophet wrote, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).

Those who read God’s Word believing this, even though they may not understand everything they read, do find the Lord in his Word, do get enlightenment on their path of life and strength to meet life as it comes, as well as comfort in times of sorrow and doubt, and complete assurance that life is eternal.

Many today, unfortunately, do not have this degree of belief in the Bible. Many think of it not as God speaking here and now to his people, but as merely the history of humanity’s search for God—and this perspective seals up the book. No matter how highly trained intellectually we may be, if we think of the Bible only as the record of the spiritual experiences and insights of people of long ago, the essential holiness of the written word remains hidden from us. Even though we may marvel at the accounts of God’s past mercies toward his children, the sense of immediacy is missing. The Bible becomes not God talking to us now, every day, but—at best—the record of how God once spoke to people and of how they once understood what he said.

A further risk of viewing the Bible in this way is that it gives the illusion that the principles stated in it are subject to human judgment. For example, if we find in the Bible things with which we disagree, we can simply say either that those who wrote it were mistaken or that what they wrote is no longer relevant.

I’m not talking about non-Christian critics of the Bible; my concern is that this attitude, I have found, prevails largely with people who are professing Christians, both clergy and laity. Let me cite just one example. In the introduction to his book *The Bible in the Church*, Robert M. Grant (a seminary professor) states:

“In past ages it has often been thought necessary to justify every doctrine of the church by explicit or implicit statements of scripture. And yet the scriptures are usually addressed to specific occasions to meet specific needs. The universal and permanent meaning of many passages of scripture does not seem to have been intended by its authors.”

Dr. Grant is not alone in this point of view. I would hazard that it is the prevailing point of view among modern Christian scholars. And wherever this attitude prevails,

the Bible is perforce considered to be subject to human limitations, to mistakes of human memory, to imperfections of human insight and interpretation. When this attitude dominates, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to find the Lord in his Word.

Our church holds as one of its tenets of faith that we believe in the holiness of the Word. Therefore we believe and teach that the Sacred Scriptures contain the actual Word of God and that the Bible differs from all other books because it is uniquely a repository of divine truth. We further believe and teach that the Bible differs from all other books in that it has levels of meaning within the literal sense, and it is ultimately these inner levels that we seek to know, for they are all based on divine wisdom and are fully adaptable to all people in all states and stages of life. It is also for this reason that we are not too concerned about the presence of “textual problems” or “textual errors” in the Bible.

The Bible, under divine providence, is without question the repository of divine truth, the Word of the Lord, in its inner meanings.

I should note at this point that I do not wish to give the impression that I believe that the Bible has come down to us in its present form completely free from human error. There are textual problems in the Bible. There are also a good many puzzling words and passages that have baffled many people. I certainly admit that there are some that baffle me. At the present moment, if asked, I would admit that I believe there probably are some mistakes in the literal text of the Bible due to human error somewhere along the line. But there I would draw the line. For I do not believe there are any really significant errors—certainly none that could in any way deter us from finding the underlying truth we need for life if we honestly seek it. I can say this because I believe with absolute assurance that the Bible, under divine providence, is so constructed and preserved that it is without question the repository of divine truth, the Word of the Lord, in its inner meanings. This concept is fully developed in our church’s teachings, but we cannot explore it in depth here.

Swedenborgians may possibly stand alone in the world in being able to say with conviction that we believe the Bible is essentially a spiritual book, concerned uniquely with revealing spiritual truths, even though for the most part, at first glance, it would appear to be describing only natural or worldly things, despite many supernatural overtones.

The great mistake down through the ages, according to this view, has been the tendency to judge the Bible only by what it outwardly appears to be. The Bible itself warns us of this danger. Turning again to words from Isaiah, we read, “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens

are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8).

What I understand this to mean is that one needs to rise above mere literalism in order to find in this age the message of God for us. The apostle Paul anticipated this necessity when he wrote to the Christians at Corinth, “There is no question of our being qualified in ourselves; we cannot claim anything as our own. The qualification we have comes from God; it is he who has qualified us to dispense his new covenant—a covenant expressed not in a written document, but in a spiritual bond; for the written law condemns to death, but the spirit gives life. . . . To this very day, every time the law of Moses is read, a veil lies over the minds of the hearers. However, as Scripture says of Moses, when one turns to the Lord the veil is removed” (2 Corinthians 3:5, 6, 15, 16).

One might ask at this point, however, quite properly: Why in the world is there “a veil”? Why is so much of the Bible written in such a way that the spiritual meaning is seldom immediately evident? There are several good reasons. One is that it is written this way so that it will not compel belief. Faith or belief must be free. Another is that being written in the way that it is, the Bible is able to reach people in every state of life, to reach the evil as well as the good, the zealous as well as the merely tolerant, and all shades in between. Still another reason is so that it may hide deeper levels of truth from those who would reject or profane the truth if they saw it more clearly. Truth is likened to a two-edged sword, which will help those who use it properly but injure those who use it wrongly. In this sense, the written code or letter of scripture serves as a guard to protect those who need protection.

There is a striking parallel between the present-day fact that so few people recognize at first glance the inner spirituality of the Bible, and the historical fact that so few recognized the Lord as the Word made flesh when he came into the world as the babe of Bethlehem. At that time, he came into the world in such an unpretentious way that it is really not surprising that only a few recognized who he was. He could not make known the real truth about himself even to his closest disciples—at least not at first. He had to grow in their estimation gradually, becoming in turn their Wonderful Counselor, then their God-Hero, then their Father Forever, and finally their Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), before any deeper realities could be revealed to them.

The same is true for each one of us today. When, for instance, we first seriously consider the astounding claim of the evangelist, that “the Word of God became a human being, and lived among us,” it should not seem surprising if we do not grasp immediately the full import of this awe-inspiring declaration. We, in a sense, must go through

the same process of mental growth that Jesus’ personal followers went through almost two millennia ago.

Recall that at one point, well into his time of public ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16). This reply could only have been made by a close personal follower of the Lord, who in turn said that it had been revealed to Peter by the Father in heaven.

This great truth cannot be seen simply as the result of our sense impressions. Human experience alone cannot reveal it. The truth of the holiness of the written Word of God, and the truth that the Word of God became a human being and lived among us, cannot be seen and acknowledged by mere

Belief in the Lord and his Word must enter as divine light through the interior levels of our souls.

human wisdom grounded in human will. Belief in the Lord and his Word must come to us from God out of heaven, entering as divine light through the interior levels of our souls. This can only come about if there is a genuine desire in our hearts really to know Christ—and only as we acknowledge that we do not live from ourselves, that we are utterly incapable by ourselves of knowing what is true or of doing what is right. It is only as we affirm this attitude in life that our minds and hearts can become open to divine instruction.

Then, as we read the Word with this sense of awe and wonder, the Lord can come to us, reveal himself to us, and enable us to acknowledge him in heart and mind.

I want to close by quoting again from the opening of the Gospel of John; but now I purposely quote from what I presume is for most of us an unfamiliar translation. As we listen again to these words in a less familiar guise, let each of us ponder long and hard to see whether we can say from the depths of our hearts that we believe, in full affirmation, those wondrous words:

“At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God, and existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life, and this life was the light of humankind. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. . . . That was the true light that shines on everyone as he comes into the world. He came into the world—the world he had created—and the world failed to recognize him. He came into his own creation, and his own people would not accept him. Yet wherever people did accept him, he gave them power to become children of God... So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendor, full of grace and truth.” Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, June 7

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. *Genesis 3:22-24*

Without a revelation from the divine, man cannot know anything concerning eternal life, nor even anything concerning God, and still less concerning love to and faith in him; for man is born into mere ignorance, and must therefore learn everything from worldly things, from which he must form his understanding. *NJHD #249*

Tuesday, June 8

Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. *Numbers 20:10-11*

Not a single word, nor even a single iota can be omitted in the sense of the letter of the Word, without an interruption in the internal sense, and therefore, by the Divine Providence of the Lord, the Word has been preserved so entire as to every word and every point. Innumerable things are contained in every particular of the Word; and in every expression. *NJHD #260*

Wednesday, June 9

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. *Exodus 14:19*

The Word is written by correspondences, and thus by representatives. The Word, as to its literal sense, is written by mere correspondences, thus by such things as represent and signify spiritual things which relate to heaven and the church. This was done for the sake of the internal sense, which is contained in every part. *NJHD #261*

Thursday, June 10

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. *John 1:1-14*

The Lord is the Word. The Word in its inmost sense treats only of the Lord, and describes all the states of the glorification of his human, that is, of its union with the Divine itself; and likewise all the states of the subjugation of the hells, and of the ordination of all things therein and in the heavens. Thus the Lord's whole life in the world is described. *NJHD #263*

Friday, June 11

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." *John 14:6-7*

The conjunction of the Lord with man is effected through the Word by means of the internal sense. Conjunction is effected by each and all things of the Word, and the Word is therefore more wonderful than all other writings. Since the Word has been written, the Lord thereby speaks with men. *NJHD #265*

Saturday, June 12

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress. *Isaiah 65:17-19*

They who have been delighted with the Word in the other life receive the heat of heaven, wherein is celestial love, according to the quality and quantity of their delight from love. *NJHD #265*



Providence

Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey

The late Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey was a professor at the Swedenborg School of Religion and Urbana University.

13 JUN

Isaiah 40: 1-4, 9-11, 21, 28-29

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

Luke 9:1-2

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

The topic for the first week at Fryeburg this summer [1999] was "Holy Disasters." And so I found myself talking about the Exile, when Judah was conquered and deported to Babylon. For the people this was truly a disaster. They lost their land; their homes; their most holy place, the temple in Jerusalem, where the presence of God could be found and known; their king; their existence as a nation among the nations of the world.

We know some of their reactions from the Book of Lamentations: "It's not fair! Our fathers sinned. They were warned by the prophets—and now we are suffering. It's not fair. God has forgotten his own people. Doesn't he care? Maybe the Babylonians are right that they hold the power of this world. Maybe our God is not able. Maybe the gods with their armies *are* the power."

It is in this context that the Second Isaiah was able to hear the Word of God. In this context the Word came for the first time in history that there is only one God, of all people, of all creation, of all history.

"The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth... He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength... they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength... they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint..."

"I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God." (45:5)

In this context the prophet could hear that God does care, that he comes to redeem his people.

"Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him... He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."

He comes to bring salvation, and not punishment. His redemption is so far beyond our concepts of reward and punishment that he is willing to accept suffering in order to accomplish the redemption. The one who served him in the world was the one who suffered and then made intercession for the transgressors (53:12).

In this context came the understanding of the Word of God as present with the people anywhere, in any culture, not requiring a church building or a temple of any kind, ready to be read and studied to bring anyone, anywhere, into the presence of God.

The nation Israel was destroyed, deported, in an act of violence, and through God's providence came to an amazing new understanding of God. We in our world are confronted with acts of violence of all kinds, and I have been thinking about the message of Isaiah and the providence of God. The violence is not only in the outer world. Babylon is our enemy too—in other words, "those who pervert the goods

and truths of the church for the sake of their own dominion and their own gain,” “all who want to domineer through religion” and “take pride in their own intelligence.”

Israel did not go into exile alone. The providence of God was with them to bring them to a new understanding of the nature of God’s power and purpose: the one infinite God of all creation, whose purpose is redemptive love. We are not alone. I think it is time that we become open to God’s providence for us.

I believe that the one infinite God of redemptive love came in the life of Jesus to bring life and healing to all who would receive it. I believe the Kingdom of God came in the life of Jesus and comes now to each of us, to every living creature, as we know ourselves as part of God’s creation, receivers of the gift of life.

Jesus sent out the disciples to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal—not to punish, but to heal.

When we see the violence in ourselves and in our world, I believe we have a choice. We can go on in the same old framework: “Why doesn’t God step in to punish the wicked? What can I do to please God so that I won’t get punished? What force can we use to stop the violence, what force against force?” Or we can turn and be open to the presence and power of new and larger life.

I read and am moved by the words of the Dalai Lama, a man who has made the choice to turn from force and

punishment to knowing the power of infinite divine compassion, the source of Life itself, the Source of our life.

Jesus sent out his disciples to witness to the Kingdom of God and to heal. Let us, secure in the Lord’s providence, do just that.

Let us pray:

Lord, as we face the violence in our world, we thank you that we are not alone in our response to it, that your providence is with us, to know you are present here and now in the power of new creation, to know you as the one infinite God, to know your Love in us. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

Right: A line drawing of the Urbana Swedenborgian Church, where Rev. Dr. Harvey was pastor.

Below: The Swedenborg School of Religion at its 48 Sargent Street, Newton, MA location, where Rev. Dr. Harvey taught and was a student.



Monday, June 14

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble

and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Psalm 107:1-3

We are not human because of our faces and bodies but because of the goodness of our love and the truths of our wisdom; and since this is what makes us human, we are also whatever is true and good about us, our own love and our own wisdom. Apart from these, we are not human. The Lord, though, is what is essentially true and essentially good, or love itself and wisdom itself. *Divine Providence #172.4*

Tuesday, June 15

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town;

hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted within them.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; *Psalm 107:4-6*

The Lord cannot rid us of the evils in our outer nature without our help. In all Christian churches the accepted teaching is that before we come to take Holy Communion we should examine ourselves, see and admit our sins, and repent by refraining from them and rejecting them because they come from the devil. Otherwise our sins are not forgiven, and we are damned. *Divine Providence #114.4*

Wednesday, June 16

He led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things. *Psalm 107:7-9*

It is the unceasing effort of the Lord's divine providence to unite us to himself and himself to us in order to give us the joys of eternal life; and this can happen only to the extent that our evils and their compulsions are banished. *Divine Providence #123.7*

Thursday, June 17

Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons,

for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with no one to help. *Psalm 107:10-12*

We need to banish the evils from our outer nature in apparent autonomy... First, there is no way we can abstain from evils as sins so as to turn against them inwardly unless we engage in struggles against them. Second, we are to abstain from evils as sins and struggle against them in apparent autonomy. Third, if we abstain from evils for any other reason than that they are sins, we are not really abstaining from them. We are only preventing them from being visible in the world. *Divine Providence #118*

Friday, June 18

Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction;

they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; *Psalm 107:17-19*

Our discernment and its thought processes are the outside of our life, while our volition and its desire is the inside of our life. This means that healing only our discernment would be curing nothing but the symptoms. The deeper malignance, closed in and with no way out, would first devour what was nearest to it and then what was farther away until finally everything was dying. *Divine Providence #282*

Saturday, June 19

but he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks.

The upright see it and are glad; and all wickedness stops its mouth.

Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

Psalm 107:41-43

In the Lord, divine love is a property of divine wisdom and divine wisdom is a property of divine love. Divine love and wisdom cannot fail to be and to be manifested in others that it has created.

Divine Providence #1

JUN 20 The Two Tasks of Being Human

Rev. Andrew D. Stinson



The Rev. Mjr. Andrew Stinson is a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserves and a pastoral care coordinator at Pen Bay Healthcare.

Isaiah 57:15-21

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made.

Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry; I struck them, I hid and was angry; but they kept turning back to their own ways. I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will lead them and repay them with comfort, creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them. But the wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

John 15:9-1

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

True Christian Religion 126

The Lord had two purposes in coming into the world, redemption and the glorification of His Human; and by these He saved both men and angels. These two purposes are quite distinct, but still they are combined in effecting salvation. The nature of redemption was shown in the preceding paragraphs to be a battle against the hells, their subjugation and afterwards the ordering of the heavens.

Glorification, however, is the uniting of the Lord's Human with His Father's Divine. This took place by stages and was completed by His passion on the cross. For every person ought ... to approach God, and the more nearly one does so, the more closely does God on His side enter... The reason why the actual union was fully achieved by the passion on the cross is that it was the last temptation which the Lord underwent in the world; and temptations create a link. In temptation it looks as if a person is left to himself, but one is not, since God is then most closely present... and secretly gives one support. When therefore anyone is victorious over temptation, one is most inwardly linked with God.

I am starting a garden this year.

Few other metaphors are more often used in both Swedenborg's writings and Jesus' gospels than that of the garden and gardening in relation to the cultivation of our own souls. It appears so often because it is such a beautiful image of what it is to work at the task of being a human being, created by God in the image of God, coming into our angelic nature.

Our *True Christian Religion* reading for this morning points out two things that the Lord came into the world to do—two very distinct tasks that God coming into the world had to accomplish to reconnect humanity with the divine. These are the tasks of glorification and redemption, and though they are the Lord's tasks, they are also our tasks. If we think about the incarnation of Christ as laying down the path that every human being follows in their spiritual development, then these two tasks not only were Jesus' to do two thousand years ago, but are also ours to do now, in our own lives, so that we might bring divinity into time and space. That's how we bring the joy, the love, the creativity that is within us into being in our own lives. The goal: that we might become truly human and give way to the highest of our own angelic nature.

We hear a lot of talk about what it is to be human, and I am offended by most of it. Usually when people talk about human nature they are not talking about something good. "Oh, it's just human nature" is used as a refrain to

excuse our shortcomings, not to explain our magnanimous motives. We use it to excuse greed and suffering and short-sightedness and cruelty. But greed and cruelty and short-sightedness are not part of our human nature, they are part of our base nature—the nature that would have us always lose our life in our own smallness, instead of keeping our eyes on the greatness of love for which we are born. To be human is to be able to step into something higher than our smallness, something higher than our pain and suffering and greed. To be builders of worlds and of beauty, to be bearers of kindness when we have no good reason to open ourselves to the abundance of life becoming—all this is to be human. It is to be born for greater things than simple, natural wants and greed. Our human nature is not our downfall, but our very salvation. It is the salvation that Jesus comes into this world to share with us through the act of living. And that happens with these two tasks of glorification and redemption.

I started this morning with the image of the garden because it is a great way to begin to understand these two tasks—to grasp what it means to open up to the redemption and glorification in our lives.

When we look at our redemption, we look at tending the garden of our own soul. Yesterday I tilled soil that had not been tilled for maybe five years. It gave me a whole new respect for the sodbusters of the Midwest, because my poor little tractor was working overtime to reclaim this space. Our own souls are not so different. To get the most out of this life, we must claim it. We must redeem it for a new purpose. In my garden, the soil was there, growing weeds and grass, but it could and should have been yielding so much more. And so we have to till our own soil. We have to decide what we will permit to grow and what we will weed out, what loves we want to cultivate in our life and what loves we seek to remove. What beliefs will we allow to take root, and what beliefs will we challenge? Redeeming our lives means examining the geography of our own souls. Just as Jesus redeemed the world by living in and through it and plucking out the destructive elements that would destroy humanity as a whole, we are called to pluck out the elements that would destroy our own humanity.

But redemption is only one part of the task. Not only are we called to redeem our lives, not only must our souls be cleared and the grass and thistles that would choke out our goodness be pulled up, but we are also called to glorify them as well—to plant the seeds placed within us and harvest their fruit.

Our human nature is not our downfall, but our very salvation.

You see, there are seeds placed in you. We call them loves. There are loves that are tiny and loves that are huge and loves that are everywhere in between, and they come to the fore in our wanting, in what we desire. It is in our loves, in the depths of our hearts, that we are called to bring forward our loves. Writing the great American novel, loving our families well, being useful to any and all around us comes not through self-abnegation, but through self-fulfillment, through loving the ride of this grand adventure that God has given us in this life. Through filling our cup and letting the love of living flow over to all who would meet us. Through reaping from the garden the best fruits and letting the juice run down our faces and the faces of all those who would eat of those fruits. There are seeds of love inside you that are the salvation of the world, that are about the honest and spectacular enjoyment of this life.

As in Jesus' ministry, we are called to our own party at the wedding at Cana or our own dinner party with friends (otherwise known as the Last Supper). We are called to glorify, to make sacred, every moment of our days, not in some holier-than-thou, sanctimonious way but by getting greasy and grimy in the living of life and the enjoyment of bringing the seeds that dwell in our hearts into greatness in the world. In the words of Mother Theresa, "We need do no great things, only small things with great love."

If we think about the formation of the Christian church itself, the "rock" on which the church is built is Peter. Peter corresponds to the heart. The truth may set us free, but it is our loves that God works with—as imperfect and corrupt as they are (and I am talking about my heart, not yours), as corrupt as our wanting may be, as self-interested as our desires may be, it is through these loves that God's love incarnates and comes into the world. It is through our loves that we follow Jesus' commandment to "love one another."

It is my belief that one of the great problems with the church in America today is that it refuses to live in this tension. Christianity is either about our redemption or about our glorification, with no possibility that our lives might be best lived in the balance of this tension.

In the evangelical and conservative traditions, Christianity is often all about our "sinfulness," about how broken or corrupt we are and how we need to redeem our lives through Christ by tending constantly to our own submission and the rejection of any desire that is "impure." Traditions with this focus are masters at clearing the field, but often they never permit the seeds that live within a soul

to be cultivated, and so they leave the land barren. On the other hand, sometimes the liberal church is so ready to proclaim God's love for the world that it is unwilling and even unable to distinguish between the plants that nourish and the plants that would choke out the very goodness of our souls. But honestly, it is not just the church's problem. The problem is really our own.

This is the journey to which we are called: to clear space for the loves of our souls, and then to allow, within that space, the passions of our hearts to grow and heaven to be made manifest. Each of us, depending up on how we are wired or our God-given talents and abilities, will struggle more with one aspect of the journey than the other. Some of us will struggle to claim and clear the ground, separating out that which is growing and that which is actually good, taking responsibility for the internal geography that is ours. For others, the great task will be allowing God's love to take hold in our life and to know joy and blessing beyond what we could ever imagine—to permit passions and dreams that we may have been told were unrealistic or unwise to sprout and grow, and to harvest the sweetness of what it is to be alive in love.

Whatever our challenge, we are called to move into our full humanity with the divinity that lies within us. The best way this was ever understood appears in today's gospel lesson, when Jesus commands us, "Love one another as I have loved you."

This is the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, in which Hutus slaughtered almost a million of their Tutsi countrymen within 28 days. While that country still faces many challenges, one of the amazing things is how well Rwanda is doing. It is, by all reports, now one of the safest and most orderly countries in Africa. It is still a land scarred by violence, but things are getting better. Things are healing. In the capital of Kigali there was a sign that once was riddled with machine gun bullets, showing a large picture of a Guinness beer with a caption that said, "The power of love." That sign has been replaced with a placard that says, "Pay taxes. Build Rwanda. Be proud." A reporter from the *New Yorker*, comparing the country with past visits, said, "It was normal, which was extraordinary." While Rwanda is a far cry from a place without scars or violence, Hutus and Tutsis are living together in peace. They have been walking the long road of healing and reconciliation, and there is "a near universal agreement [about] the possibility of peace."

Brothers and sisters, if this possibility of transformation exists in Rwanda, a place scarred with more violence and pain than many of us could ever imagine, it exists in our

hearts and minds and communities right here and now. It exists in the cultivation of the ground of our own soul and the blossoming of the fruits of our own spirit. It exists in the redemption of our lives and the glorification that can unfold. It is my hope that you will seek to walk this road and hear Jesus' words to "Love one another as I have loved you." Get your hands dirty in the garden of your own soul, and let sprout the seeds of joy that are, and will be, the very foundation of heaven and the salvation of the world. Amen.

Prayer

Jesus, love of all loving,
in the ploughed-up earth of our lives
you come to plant the seed of faith.
A small seed at first,
faith can become within us
one of the most unmistakable Gospel realities.
It keeps alive the inexhaustible goodness of the
human heart.

- *Brother Roger of Taizé*

Monday, June 23

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. *Matthew 13:18-19*

Everything we adopt and justify becomes virtually a permanent part of us. Many people think that we cannot see any truth except as we can support it with data, but this is not so. In matters that are purely rational, moral, and spiritual, truths can be seen simply in their own light provided a decent education has made us rational, moral, and spiritual individuals. *Divine Providence #317.3*

Tuesday, June 22

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. *Matthew 13:20-21*

Evil spirits [have been shown truths by angels]. Then they understood everything like angels and admitted that they were true and that they understood everything. However, the moment they turned back toward the love proper to their own intentions, they did not understand anything and said just the opposite. *Heaven and Hell #455*

Wednesday, June 23

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. *Matthew 13:22*

People who were immersed in false notions because of their malice could understand and could therefore be rational, but they did not want to. The reason they did not want to was that they loved false notions more than true ones because the former supported the evil pursuits they were engaged in. *Heaven and Hell #455*

Thursday, June 24

But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. *Matthew 13:23*

Every sane person has the capability of receiving wisdom from the Lord, that is, of increasing for ever the number of truths of which wisdom is composed. He has also the capability of receiving love, that is, of making the various kinds of good, of which love is composed, bear fruit, likewise for ever. *True Christian Religion #718*

Friday, June 25

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. *Genesis 1:11*

The man who is being regenerated is at first of such a quality that he supposes the good which he does, and the truth which he speaks, to be from himself, when in reality all good and all truth are from the Lord, so that whosoever supposes them to be from himself has not as yet the life of true faith, which nevertheless he may afterwards receive. *Arcana Coelestia #29*

Saturday, June 26

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." *Matthew 13:31-32*

Unless one knows the nature of the Word, he can have no idea that there is an infinity in every least particular of it, that is, that it contains things innumerable, which not even angels can exhaust. Each thing in it may be likened to a seed that is capable of growing up from the ground to a great tree and producing an abundance of seeds. *True Christian Religion #290*



Rev. Dr. Dole is the pastor of the Swedenborgian Church in Bath, Maine. He is also a professor at The Swedenborgian House of Studies in Berkeley, CA.

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Revelation 20:7-15

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and

small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Divine Providence 191-2

Our own prudence is nothing. It only seems to be something, as it should.

I have stated that if people believe on the basis of appearances that human prudence accounts for everything, the only way to convince them is with reasonings based on deeper investigation, reasonings that must be drawn from the realm of causes. So to make these reasonings drawn from the realm of causes clear to the discerning mind, I need to present them in their proper sequence, which will be as follows.

1. All our thoughts arise from impulses of our life’s love, and there are no thoughts whatever that arise from any other source.
2. Only the Lord knows the impulses of our life’s love.
3. The Lord guides the impulses of our life’s love by his divine providence, and with them guides the thoughts that give rise to our prudence.
4. By his divine providence, the Lord gathers the impulses of the whole human race into a single form, which is a human form.
5. Heaven and hell, which come from the human race, are in this kind of form.
6. People who acknowledge only physical nature and human prudence constitute hell, while people who acknowledge God and divine providence constitute heaven.

7. None of this could happen if it did not seem to us that we think autonomously and manage our lives autonomously.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:12

This is the seventh in the intermittent series of efforts to put the basic teachings of our church into sound bites. The previous six have been “There is no wrath of God,” “The Lord is good to all,” “The Lord our God is one,” “We worship the risen Lord,” “No, love is not blind,” and “There is inner meaning in the Word.” This morning, we will be looking at one of the most divisive issues in the history of Christian doctrine, one on which our own theology takes a very definite and paradoxical position, which we might summarize by saying “It really seems to be up to us.”

In the Christian church, this issue is framed as a tension between law and grace. Advocates of the law say that we are saved by obeying the commandments. Advocates of grace say that we are saved by the mercy of the Lord. Advocates of the law say that theories of grace lead to human irresponsibility, and advocates of grace say that theories of the law lead to self-righteousness. Both parties can quote scripture in abundance because scripture says both things. Paul, in the letter to the Romans, says, “Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of god, they are now justified by his grace as a gift . . . For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Romans 2:23-24, 28). But the epistle of James says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24).

This is not an exclusively religious or theological concern. About the time I was in college, a rather unorthodox scholar named Pitrim A. Sorokin set for himself the task of investigating the possibility of altruism. Is it possible for anyone to do anything that is truly unselfish? Obviously, we can do things for other people at real cost to ourselves, but to what extent are we doing it to appease our own consciences, so that we can feel good about ourselves?

Sorokin’s work never gained much currency, and I was then and am now familiar with it only from a few third-hand

descriptions of it. My recollection is that he did conclude that altruism was possible, but I have no knowledge of the basis of that conclusion.

There can be no doubt whatever about the insistence of our own theology that we ourselves must make the choice between heaven and hell. “Everyone is predestined to heaven” (*Divine Providence* 329) in the very real sense that we are all designed and created for heaven; but not everyone fulfills that destiny. This means that we are capable of becoming unselfish, because “being in heaven” is essentially having heavenly attitudes. It is caring about each other.

Each one of us knows from personal experience and from the observation of others that we do have ideals and that we do all too often fail to live up to them. We seem quite sure that we are capable of being better than we are. That is, we seem to know ourselves to be responsible; and in fact, our whole societal fabric is based on this kind of assumption. Our courts of law hold us responsible for our words and our actions; and the only way we can try to claim any real exemption from that responsibility is to plead insanity.

Our first scripture reading gives one of the most vivid images of this sense of responsibility. “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). The theme carries over into the first chapter of the next book of the Bible, Joshua, with its injunctions to “Be strong and courageous” in the first chapter (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9) and the covenant ceremony at its close, where Joshua says to the assembled people, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

The other side of the picture, the side that focuses on grace, also has ample biblical support. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus’ words about how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven; the disciples’ question as to who, then, can be saved; and the answer that what is impossible for us is possible for God (Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27, Luke 18:27). We are told that “no one can receive anything unless it is given from heaven” (John 3:27). Or we might simply turn to the Lord’s words at the close of Matthew’s gospel: “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). That does not leave much for us.

“Being in heaven” is essentially having heavenly attitudes. It is caring about each other.

There is certainly a tension between these two views, between “law” on the one hand and “grace” on the other. The most common way it is expressed in our theology is in one very simple little phrase, “as if of ourselves”—my search program tells me that it occurs four hundred and seventy-two times in the works that Swedenborg himself published. We are supposed to do what is good and refrain from what is evil “as if of ourselves,” and yet we are to acknowledge that this is “from the Lord.”

It is put very bluntly the first time the phrase occurs: “There is no way that we can do what is good and turn to the Lord on our own. This must be done by angels; and the angels themselves cannot do it, only the Lord. Still, we can do it as if of ourselves” (*Secrets of Heaven* 233). Then, in *Divine Love and Wisdom* (§425), we find the nub of the problem expressed:

“Since our whole sense is that we are thinking truth on our own and doing what is good on our own, though, it is quite clear that we ought to think what is true as if on our own and do what is good as if on our own. That is, if we do not believe this then we either do not think what is true or do what is good and therefore have no religion, or we think what is true and do what is good on our own and thereby claim as our own what is actually divine.”

Our third lesson puts the same tension together in a slightly different way. “Our own prudence is nothing. It only seems to be something, as it should” (*Divine Providence* 191). The passage goes on, as we have heard, to state quite unequivocally that we really do not know where our thoughts and feelings are coming from. The Lord does know, and is overseeing all the inner processes that are beyond both our perception and our comprehension.

Where does this leave us? Perhaps the simplest way of expressing it would be to say that it calls us to do the best we can from day to day and to stop pretending that we really know what is going on. We are finite creatures, and no matter how much we learn, our understanding will never get any closer to infinity. Or to put it another way, we never, in this life or the next, perceive things as they really, really are. In doctrinal terms, we never get beyond “appearances” (see especially *Secrets of Heaven* 3207:3).

This means that in spiritual matters, we can never “tell it like it is.” We can only tell it the way we see it, and to claim that we are telling it like it is is to claim for ourselves what is Divine. If we stop there, though, we can use it as

a license for irresponsibility, to forget about thinking what is true and doing what is good, leaving us with no religion at all. It is marvelously freeing to realize that we can do our very best to think what is true and do what is good and leave everything else up to the Lord.

Another way of saying much the same thing is to say that we can learn not to take ourselves with such ultimate seriousness. There was a sports columnist some years ago who advised the manager of the Red Sox to take a particular player out into the open, show him the sun, and explain very clearly and carefully to the ballplayer that he actually was not the center of the solar system. Physically, of course, we do perceive the world as stretching out around us on all sides, so we do perceive ourselves as the center of the universe. We need to get over that illusion.

For me, Helen Keller answered the question as concisely and precisely as anyone when she wrote, “There is joy in self-forgetfulness.” This offers an answer to Sorokin’s dilemma. It says that we are capable of altruism because we are capable of enjoying what we do without thinking about our enjoyment. Further, because we have some sensitivity to each other’s feelings, we can find pleasure in the pleasure of others.

Certainly one trap that must be avoided at all costs is the belief that doing good is not really good if we find pleasure in it. That would condemn us to an eternity of masochism. In a way, the very possibility of altruism rests in the fact that the higher and purer the good, the deeper and greater the joy. When we do things “of ourselves,” that is, when we are thinking about ourselves in what we do, we open the door to anxiety, envy, resentment, and ultimately despair. When we relax and do what we should because it is there to do and it is good to do it, when we focus on the doing and not on ourselves, we take a step out of slavery into freedom.

We do live “as if,” and that is O.K. Our prudence does seem to matter, and it should. But the angel on our shoulder is constantly whispering, “There is joy in self-forgetfulness. Don’t take yourself so seriously.” We would do well to listen. Amen.

Prayer

O God, thy arm was here;

And not to us, but to thy arm alone, ascribe we all.

- William Shakespeare, Henry V

Monday, June 28

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." *Isaiah 35:3-4*

It is said that "God opens the eyes" when He opens the interior sight or understanding; which is effected by an influx into man's rational, or rather into the spiritual of his rational. This is done by the way of the soul, or the internal way, unknown to the man. This influx is his state of enlightenment, in which the truths which he hears or reads are confirmed to him by a kind of perception interiorly within his intellectual. *Arcana Coelestia #2701*

Tuesday, June 29

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; *Isaiah 35:5-6*

In the Word, a "wilderness" signifies what is little inhabited and cultivated, and also signifies what is not at all inhabited and cultivated, and is thus used in a twofold sense... Where it signifies what is not inhabited or cultivated at all, or where there are no habitations, folds of flocks, pastures, or waters, it signifies those who are in vastation as to good and in desolation as to truth. *Arcana Coelestia #2708:2*

Wednesday, June 30

the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. *Isaiah 35:7*

The Lord also flows in out of the higher or interior parts, and opens the spiritual mind, and imparts to it the affection of truth; and the spiritual affection of truth is the very life of heaven with man. This life is what the Lord insinuates into man by means of truths. *Apocalypse Explained #483*

Thursday, July 1

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. *Isaiah 35:8*

That "way" denotes truth is from the appearance in the spiritual world, where also there are ways and paths; and in the cities, there appear streets and avenues, and spirits go nowhere else than to those with whom they are consociated by love. From this it is that the quality of the spirits there in regard to truth is known from the way in which they go; for all truth leads to its own love, because that is called truth which confirms what is loved. *Arcana Coelestia #10422*

Friday, July 2

No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. *Isaiah 35:9*

"To redeem" signifies to deliver and to make free, and, in reference to the Lord, to deliver and free from hell, and thus to set apart and conjoin to Himself. *Apocalypse Explained #328.8*

Saturday, July 3

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. *Isaiah 35:10*

There is said to be a marriage of the Lord and the church, and in consequence of good and truth, in every particular of the Word, because where there is a marriage of the Lord and the church there is also a marriage of good and truth, since the latter is from the former. *True Christian Religion #249*

Readers of the Word who pay attention to it can see that there are dual expressions in the Word that seem like repetitions of the same thing; as, for example, brother and companion, poor and needy, waste and wilderness, void and emptiness, foe and enemy, sin and iniquity, anger and wrath, nation and people, joy and gladness. *True Christian Religion #249*

4 Listening, Not Just Hearing

Rev. Julian Duckworth



Rev. Duckworth is the minister of the Roseville New Church in Sydney, Australia.

Mark 7:1-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

Then he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban’ (that is, an offering to God)— then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.”

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery,

avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Arcana Coelestia #2380

In the spiritual world those in either good or evil are separated so that good itself is not invaded by spheres of wrong thinking or selfish desires, and so that evil itself is no longer troubled by pangs of conscience. But in this life, where both are still together, what is evil is rendered harmless with those who are led by good. This is done by angels with people, who deflect any wrong thinking or feeling the moment it comes and however it comes. They bend it towards some good or some truth that is leading the person. When a person has an active conscience by which good becomes known, they are very unwilling to move from what is just and fair and good and true because these are what conscience builds up and what this person realises. Such people also wish good to their neighbour without any repayment to themselves, even if the person is being unfriendly to them. When good is flowing in a person, it becomes protected whether they have any religion or not. Those who don’t are led by conscience; those who do worship the Lord and gladly listen to and carry out the things the Lord teaches.

Right now I’m talking and you, well, you are listening. So let’s start with exactly that. Whatever I am saying is in some way a message, an appeal for us to realise that spiritual things, good things, and things having to do with God are real—and they’re important. I might explain things or remind you of certain ideas or hold your attention with a nice little illustration here and there, but really I am promoting goodness and God, because for me the two are one and the same thing.

And you? You have to listen to this if you’ve come to church, unless you go out, opt out, switch off, or disagree. But if I’m good at what I’m doing, you won’t do that. You’ll trust me. You’ll say, “That’s right.” You’ll join in and come alongside. And you will do that not because you’re a captive

audience, but because this Godness and goodness is part of you like it's part of me. And I'd be doing that for you too, if we swapped places.

This is what happens when we find ourselves listening properly. Listening is much more than just hearing words. Listening means being involved, sort of leaning forward. In fact, the word "list-en-ing" means exactly that. When a ship is sinking, it takes in water and it lists—it leans over to one side. Well, we're not sinking—at least I hope we're not—but I do hope we are listing and listening. In the Bible, there is ever such a lot about commanding and hearing. God commands and instructs the people to hear these commands. They usually don't. They've heard them, but they don't obey them. And I guess that fits us quite a bit of the time. We've heard God's commands but they haven't made a difference; we haven't picked them up. So in the Bible, God also uses another word—no, not "listen," but close. God says, "Heed my words." Think about what heeding means. It's active, not passive. It means listening and doing something with it.

I want you to do something. I want you to change the model we find in the Bible's literal sense. Stop thinking about it as God up there or over there commanding, and the people hearing it and listening—or maybe not. Instead, think of it as God speaking inside you as the voice of truth, and whether or not anything is happening as a result. If you do that, if you make that switch, it's ever so much more real. It becomes a matter of what we call "conscience," and if you have any vestige at all of anything good inside of you, which we all do, then this conscience becomes touchpaper. So, there's the divine prompt on the inside commanding our attention, and there's also a whole lot of angelic help and supervision as they deflect wrong thinking, put a cap on selfish feelings, bridle the thought that "I can't be like that because I'm such a bad person," or whatever else they need to do inside us. You and I have only got to feel we want to be part of this stuff about goodness—which is us listing, bending, listening—and we will trigger off all the help in the world, except it's actually the spiritual world.

Let me tell you something about the conference I was at last week. Four days of it! Ever such a lot of talking. Ever such a lot of words. Ever such a lot of insistence, and sometimes resistance. But what happened was that at some point in the middle, we all started listening, and so we got the breakthrough we all needed and wanted. And somebody there put it really well. They said, "Each

of us has a choice. We can hear everything that's being said and realise that there are several different points of view and each one's legitimate. That's fine, but it doesn't do anything. Or we can start listening, and when I listen—when I really listen—I move across the room and I think from where you are and what you're saying, and then I get a new perspective. And things will start changing." And they did. Doing that took us all into the opportunity to see a way through, because we'd listened, not just heard. And I was reminded of a wonderful quote: "Those who listen don't fight, and those who fight don't listen." What a model. What a change.

But there was also something else—and you can make of this what you will. On the difficult day, my beautiful daughter came and joined us for lunch, and brought the two most beautiful grandchildren in the whole world along. And everybody said "Hello!" and watched us being dad, daughter, grandpa, grandchildren. And maybe the watching became a kind of listening, but from the inside. It was a melting moment. Hannah gave me a Father's Day present, a book of ambigrams. Take a word, turn it upside down—same word. Clever graphics. Really good. But it's not just artwork. It's the same word, but the meaning changes; it transforms and morphs into another meaning.

So I opened up the book, and the first word—would you believe?—was "polarised"—not meaning the sunglasses but the situation we sometimes find ourselves in. The designer had placed two different definitions of polarised on the page. Same word, different meanings. Here they are: "Polarised: having moved to positions of the greatest possible divergence." (Well, we know all about that.) So I turned the book upside down and saw the graphic just as before, but read the other definition: "Polarised: having opposite properties and thus being balanced at the ends of a scale." The same word with an utterly different but still accurate meaning, depending on which one you're going to make yours and work with.

All this at lunch on the difficult day. And it just stopped being difficult from then on. We listened and came closer.

Here's my take, my theology about listening. God's not outside us, but inside. We're not on the receiving end down here—as in, "Can you hear me? Are you even listening?" We are given the respect and opportunity to participate in what God is presenting inside us. We can take part or we can refuse to take part. That's the crunch. And what I think goes on is something like this. God is everywhere, and of

*Listening is more
than hearing words.
Listening means being
involved, leaning
forward.*

course there's only one God—just realise and accept that for the moment. And the God in one person (let's call that person Peter) starts consulting the God in the other person (let's call that person Stephen, but it could be Peter's wife Becky or anybody else) and comparing notes. And you can imagine the conversation.

“Mission Control here. Peter seems to be having some problems. He's feeling it's all up to him. How is it over there with you guys?”

“Well,” says God in Stephen, “Stephen's got this thing that Peter wants everything his own way and is being controlling. We know Peter isn't choosing to be like that, of course, and it's from way back, from that heredity we put together.”

“Well,” says God in Peter, “I think Peter's ready for a bit of self-realisation. I'll turn that up a couple of notches and give Peter a blast. Not too much though, just enough for him to get the idea. He'll handle it pretty well, I know. What about you and Stephen?”

“OK, as I see it, Stephen needs recognition. I'll do two things. I'll work with Mandy, she's good, and I'll press a couple of positive memories for Stephen. It'll come good. We already know that but they don't. Catch you back in infinity.”

Something like that. But down here. . . no, out here, Peter and Stephen, who've been eyeballing each other, suddenly find they're seeing each other like they never did before. Peter actually lets slip that he can't do something very well and Stephen sees it's exactly what he's good at. And so on.

Listening is more than hearing. Listening means moving to a new place. Listening involves taking note of your conscience, which comes from Mission Control. Listening requires realising that other people share the same predicaments and potentials we do, and that if you listen hard enough, you'll pick that up. We all have antennae, and they're there for good reason. We can listen to each other. We can listen to ourselves. And then we can begin to listen to Mission Control. Here are five quotes to hear but also listen to, so take one of them away and make it yours.

“Knowledge speaks, truth registers, wisdom listens.”

“A good listener is always popular and after a while knows something.”

“Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going over it all over and over again.”

“Listening is magnetic: the friend who listens to us is the one we move towards.”

“If we disagree, then let's listen so that at least we will know what we're disagreeing over.”

Finally, Jesus' own words: “Listen and understand: nothing that comes into a person from outside can defile him. Only what comes from inside a person defiles him. If you have ears to hear, then hear.”

Amen.

Prayer

O God, who by your son Jesus Christ has set up on earth a kingdom of holiness, to measure its strength against all others: make faith to prevail over fear, and righteousness over force, and truth over the lie, and love and concord over all things; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

- *War Prayers*, King's College, Cambridge

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 5

I said, "I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence."

I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse, *Psalms 39:1-2*

Saying that God allows something to happen does not mean that he wants it to happen but that he cannot prevent it because of his goal, which is our salvation.

Divine Providence #234

Tuesday, July 6

my heart became hot within me. While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:

"Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

Psalms 39:3-4

We may rest the case simply on the fact that all the laws of divine providence are aimed at our reformation, and therefore at our salvation, which means inverting the hellish state into which we are born into its opposite, a heavenly state. This can be done only gradually as we move away from evil and its pleasure and move into what is good and its pleasure.

Divine Providence #279.4b

Wednesday, July 7

"You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath.

Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather. *Psalms 39:5-6*

The Lord forgives everyone's sins. He does not accuse us or keep score. However, he cannot take our sins away except by the laws of his divine providence; for when Peter asked him how many times he should forgive someone who had sinned against him, whether seven was enough, he said that Peter should forgive not seven times but seventy times seven times (Matthew 18:21, 22). What does this tell us about the Lord, who is mercy itself? *Divine Providence #279.9*

Thursday, July 8

"And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.

Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool. *Psalms 39:7-8*

The purpose of letting us think about our evils even to the point of intending them is so that they can be displaced by civic, moral, and spiritual principles. This happens when we consider that something is in opposition to what is lawful and fair, what is sincere and decent... The Lord heals the love of our volition by these three sets of principles as means, using our fears at first but our loves later. *Divine Providence #283*

Friday, July 9

"I am silent; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it.

Remove your stroke from me; I am worn down by the blows of your hand.

You chastise mortals in punishment for sin, consuming like a moth what is dear to them; surely everyone is a mere breath." *Psalms 39:9-11*

Now since it is a law of divine providence that we can act freely and rationally (that is, availing ourselves of the two abilities called freedom and rationality), and since it is also a law of divine providence that whatever we do seems to be done by us and therefore to be ours, and since we can infer from these laws that evils have to be permitted, it follows that we can misuse these abilities. *Divine Providence #286*

Saturday, July 10

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears.

Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more." *Psalms 39:12-13*

Within each of us, good and evil alike, there are two abilities. One of them makes up our discernment and the other our volition. The ability that makes up our discernment is our ability to differentiate and think, so we call it "rationality." *Divine Providence #285*

11 Thomas and the Lord

Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen



Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen is the pastor of the Church of the New Jerusalem in Pretty Prairie, Kansas.

John 20:19-29

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

As we heard from the scripture passage in John, the tomb is empty, and the disciples are in disbelief and feeling scared—scared that they might be persecuted as the Lord was, maybe even scared that others might consider them to be responsible for removing Jesus’ body from the tomb. Still, they were gathered together, bound by their devotion to the Lord. Because of their fear, we read, they have locked themselves inside a house.

It is at this moment that the Lord made his first appearance to the disciples after his death and resurrection. After entering their presence, the Lord showed them his hands and side; after this, the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

I find it striking that the disciples needed some confirmation that it was indeed the Lord there among them. Despite all the miracles they had witnessed and the foreknowledge they possessed about the Lord’s intended return, imagine the disbelief that spontaneously arose at the sight of Jesus, whom they knew to be dead.

What better sign to convince the disciples than his wounds? Jesus’ marks were proof of his identity. And they convinced the disciples, for they were overjoyed. Which makes me wonder—what are the characteristics by which we convince others that we really are ourselves? Putting the physical aside, we all have marks. Some are us are known for our good tempers, or perhaps quite the opposite. Some of us are known for our sense of humor. Something makes people certain that it is us, beyond all question, and could not possibly be anyone else. Christ showed them his hands and his side, and by that they knew it was he. But what about Thomas?

Most of us here probably know Thomas as the doubter. In fact, his name means “twin,” which might in fact allude to his dual nature as the one who believes at certain times yet doubts at others.

Thomas was not with the disciples on that first evening. After hearing of the return of Jesus from his fellow disciples he does not rejoice with his friends, as we might expect; rather, he responds with pessimism: “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” Not only did Thomas want to see the very thing the disciples had witnessed, but he also wanted to feel its reality.

It is easy to be hard on Thomas, for he not only refuses to accept the word of the other disciples, but also demands a sign. We might wonder, however, whether if we had been in his position we would have argued as he argued. Was his request to examine Jesus’ wounds with his hands wrong? Thomas may just have been incredibly honest—not wanting to be rushed into believing what he wanted to believe. Furthermore, for days on end after Jesus’ first appearance, nothing further had happened, and with that, no doubt, Thomas grew more and more confirmed in his rejection of the wild rumors.

But as we know from the story, Jesus visits them again, a week later. This time Thomas is present. Jesus was always extremely perceptive while alive on earth; here, too, the Lord knows exactly what it is that Thomas needs and wants in order to believe. He says to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Let's talk about this last line—"Stop doubting and believe." In the original Greek, the verb "believe" in this sentence is actually more closely translated as "to be; to show one's self." How curious! Just as Thomas is asking the Lord to show himself, the Lord is asking the same of Thomas; each is asking the other to show himself.

The Lord invites Thomas to touch his wounds and thereby to lay down his doubts. We never actually find out whether Thomas needed the extra confirmation or not—in fact, whole traditions have grown out of this passage, some arguing that Thomas did not actually need to touch the Lord's wounds to believe, others arguing that he did. Regardless, Thomas is a believer by the end of the passage. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaims.

What is this story about? I think it is about faith and signs. When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," we might get the feeling that it is rather pathetic to ask the Lord for a sign, or to feel the need for a sign, especially since faith generally carries with it a feeling of transcendence—faith is supposed to transcend the need for physical evidence. This is what makes Thomas rather forlorn in the eyes of many—he couldn't believe the testimony of his friends, and he needed tangible evidence. He needed signs. But it's interesting to note that the Gospels are full of signs. The disciples, gathered together that first evening without Thomas, also needed a sign. They believed before Thomas demanded his proof, but only because the Lord had already appeared before them, showing his wounds. Without these appearances, or the Lord's appearance in the form of a human at all, for that matter, the Christian church would never even have gotten off the ground. The invisible divine made visible in the form of the resurrected Jesus was most surely a miraculous sign. In the Swedenborgian understanding of the Lord, Jesus is divine love and truth brought into a dark world. Perhaps we could say that Thomas, like many of us, was simply reaching out for evidence of that love and truth, looking to bring light and peace to his soul.

Signs help us in our faith journey. Signs of the Lord's continued love and care for creation are visible all around us—I think this evidence is displayed in the very beauty of the earth, and in the love and joy that can come from relationships. The Lord realizes that we need these kinds of signs, for the Lord knows each one of us intimately. As the psalmist says, "O Lord, you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely."

Because of this, one of the most beautiful parts of this story is that it shows that the Lord is willing to meet us wherever we are, helping us to find the divine, no matter what or where our faith is. We can see this in the

Swedenborgian doctrine of appearances. This doctrine states that the Lord is ultimate Truth, with a capital T; we, as finite beings, cannot grasp the truth in the way that God can. The Lord gives us only so much truth as we can take—in other words, we never have within our grasp the full truth, only an appearance of it. As we grow, we continue to gain some truth, little by little; we might compare it to walking up a steep San Francisco hill. We take just one small step at a time, but we can make progress. In this way, the Lord is always meeting us where we are and providing us with what we need.

The idea that the Lord is always with us and meeting us where we are is wonderfully comforting, and yet we are challenged to deepen our faith, to create a new faith—moving from a faith that asks for signs to one that internally acknowledges truth. The visible is called upon to lead us to the invisible. The Swedenborgian theologian Bruce tells us that there are two kinds of evidence of the Divine—the external and internal. External evidence of the Divine may be found in tradition, miracles, and testimony of the senses, which is where we find Thomas (and perhaps some part of ourselves) in the first part of the story. The second kind of evidence of the Divine is internal, when we find truth bringing light and peace to the soul. Here we find Thomas in the last part of our story.

In the life of the disciples, only one type of true faith was possible, a belief that arose from the visible presence of the Lord; but the new presence of Jesus in the Spirit requires a new type of faith. It is easy to be faithful when there is physical evidence to prove it. The disciples had the honor of knowing the Lord personally and seeing him as resurrected. We have no such opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh.

However, each of us is able to touch a bit of truth. We may not see the same things, but the Lord meets us where we are. For some, it is in the teachings of the Buddha; for others, the marvel of creation itself is enough. Each of us is given something to reach out to and feel. As we confirm our truths, we can take the next step—but that cannot happen without that doubting Thomas part of ourselves.

This week, take some time to reflect on this question: What love and truth are we reaching out to touch in our lives? Where do we reach out and touch the Lord's love and truth each day?

Prayer

Dearest Lord, let us be mindful of the truth you provide in our lives, that we would learn how to take one step closer to you, and thus strengthen and deepen our faith in you. Amen.

The Lord is always with us, meeting us where we are, and yet we are challenged to deepen our faith. The visible leads us to the invisible.

Monday, July 12

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals shall be of one piece with it; *Exodus 25:31*

Love in its first origin is nothing else than fire and flame from the Lord as a sun. It is the fire or flame of this sun which gives the being of life to every man; and it is the vital fire itself which fills the interiors of man with heat, as can be seen from love, for in proportion as love increases with man, he grows warm, and in proportion as love decreases, he grows cold. *Arcana Coelestia #6832:6*

Tuesday, July 13

and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. *Exodus 25:32&33*

“Three reeds of the lampstand out of the one side thereof, and three reeds of the lampstand out of the other side thereof.” That hereby is signified fullness in respect to good and truth, is evident from the signification of “three” as being what is full; from the signification of “the reeds of the lampstand,” as being truths from good and the consequent power; and from the signification of “out of the one side, and out of the other side,” as being from good and the derivative truth. *Arcana Coelestia #9556*

Wednesday, July 14

On the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its calyxes and petals. *Exodus 25:34*

“Three almond-shaped cups.” That this signifies fullness in respect to memory-knowledges from good is evident from the signification of “three” as being what is full; from the signification of “cups,” as being memory-truths that are from the good of charity (n. 5120); and from the signification of “almonds,” as being the goods of life that correspond to the truths of interior natural good. *Arcana Coelestia #9557*

Thursday, July 15

There shall be a calyx of one piece with it under the first pair of branches, a calyx of one piece with it under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one piece with it under the last pair of branches—so for the six branches that go out of the lampstand. *Exodus 25:35*

That [the above reading] signifies the memory-knowledge of good for all the several truths, is evident from the signification of “a pomegranate” as being memory-knowledge of good; and from the signification of the “reeds” as being truths from good. Its being said three times signifies everything, and in the internal sense complete conjunction; for by “three” is signified what is complete; and by “two” is signified conjunction. *Arcana Coelestia #9565*

Friday, July 16

Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one hammered piece of pure gold. *Exodus 25:36*

Good is the source of truths, and truths from good are the source of memory-knowledges. So is the one derived and produced from the other. Nevertheless good is everything in its products and derivatives, because these are from good. The case herein is like that with end, cause, and effect. *Arcana Coelestia #9568*

Saturday, July 17

You shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. *Exodus 25:37*

The light of the celestial kingdom, that is, of the inmost heaven, does not appear as light, but as flame; the reason being that the good of love reigns in this heaven, and in heaven the good of love is presented to view as flame. But in the Lord’s spiritual kingdom, which is the middle or second heaven, there is a light which immeasurably surpasses the light of the world, and yet it appears bright white, for the reason that in this heaven there reigns the truth of faith from the good of charity; and in heaven the truth of faith from this good is presented to view as a bright white light.

Arcana Coelestia #9570



The Prismatic Paraclete

Leah Grace Goodwin

Leah Goodwin is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and an editor of Our Daily Bread.

18^{JUL}

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

John 14:8-18, 25-27

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever 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 is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

”If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him

nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

”I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

”I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and

smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

"Now the whole earth had one language and the same words."

On the list entitled "Things That Are No Longer True," this statement from our Genesis reading this morning ranks right up there.

Taken literally, it is certainly not true. At last count, it was estimated that anywhere from 4,000 to over 10,000 languages are currently spoken on this planet.

And, in the inner sense, it is no longer true, either. To have "one language and the same words" correspondentially means that there is one doctrine, a single belief system, both in general and in particulars. Not to have a single doctrine or belief system is certainly not a bad thing—diversity within harmony is, after all, the source of heaven's perfection.

But diversity without harmony has deadly and tragic effects. The events of the past couple of years—actually, the last several millennia—but most painfully in recent memory, the days and months and years since September 11, 2001, seem firmly to support the account we heard this morning about the Tower of Babel. The world, as far as the morning news would have us believe, has no common language, no shared beliefs that seem to matter enough for us to strive for them together. It has no hope for unity, and we are all, indeed, "scattered abroad" over the earth, without common truths or mutual love.

Two thousand years ago, which is where our reading from Acts finds us this morning, the situation didn't look much better. Even at the height of the Roman Empire, which linked more than half the known world together under a single system of domination, there was no single common language. And so the followers of Jesus find themselves gathered together, just after Jesus' ascension, in Jerusalem, huddled in a little group that did share a language—the dialect of a little podunk province called Galilee.

Something holy—or untoward, or socially inappropriate, depending on one's perspective—happened next. "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

What happened? What alchemy took place that allowed a tiny, probably unnoticed group of religious believers to speak to so many people, and so effectively? I should point out that, suspicions and snide comments about inebriation aside, the display of polyglottalism worked. Many of those who heard the disciples' teachings, and who understood them in their own language, were touched deeply—"cut to the heart"—and found truth for themselves in Jesus' teachings.

What happened, I think, is simply this: the disciples did as Jesus asked. They kept his commandment. They tried their best to love one another as he had loved them, even in the lonely days after his ascension, and so the Paraclete, the Comforter, came to them. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Divine Truth that dwells within all of us, came welling up out of them. They became prisms of divine truth.

Swedenborg tells us that "the human being is not life, but an organ that receives life from God, [and that] that we are images of God—recipient vessels of life from God—to the extent that we love wisdom, or to the extent that wisdom embosomed in love dwells within us..." He also says that "the acceptance of life's inflow from God depends on the state of love and wisdom within the individual. We can look

for an explanation of this concept in prisms and raindrops, which give rise to rainbows depending on the incidence, refraction, and therefore the reception of light. It is like this with the human mind in relation to the spiritual light that comes from the Lord as the sun, and flows in constantly, but is received in different ways."

The divine loving truth that flows from God is so pure and complete, in other words, that no individual can take it wholly into himself without shaping that truth and expressing it in his own way. And the more an individual taps into the divine truth of God, the more he or she is shaped by the working of divine truth, the more truly him- or herself that person becomes. For this prism remains itself, keeps its integrity, is a whole crystal, not only despite, but because it refracts light through itself. A prism, like these followers of Jesus, needs light to be what it is. And we humans, like all the rest of creation, need divine truth both to express who we are and to communicate freely with each other.

But how, even knowing that we are merely vessels of life from God, are we to achieve what the disciples did? How are we to find the "one language and same words"—the commonality, the sympathy of spirit, the rich and diverse reversal of Babel—that the disciples so eloquently put to the task of God's command to love? How are we, in the midst of different languages, competing priorities, separate visions and sorrows and doubts, to create the diverse harmony of heaven on earth? Where is our Pentecost?

We express God's truth in our own ways... The more we tap into the divine truth of God, the more truly ourselves we become.

Henri Nouwen, who made the dramatic shift from a solitary and competitive life of religious intellectualism at Harvard to a profoundly different life working in community with the mentally disabled, has this to say about the freedom that comes when we root our being in relationship with God:

“We cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Our leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus... Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. But when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and true witnesses without being manipulative.”

It is when we love another, when we truly and really LOVE one another—not despite our eccentricities and extravagances and annoying habits, but because of them, because they remind us of the unique and precious image of God in which we are all created—that we become most truly ourselves. “The Holy Spirit,” says Swedenborg, “is the truest reality.” The Holy Spirit, the divine truth bound up inseparably with divine love, is the realest real thing there is. We are its vessels, and because we are finite we cannot accept its infinity entirely—we can only, like that prism, accept and refract the Holy Spirit. Each one of us makes a particular and unique dwelling place for the divine truth that flows into us.

I do not want to suggest that it is easy to be a vessel for the Paraclete. It is not, and I am sure has never been, a cakewalk to let the let the radiance of God’s divine truth dwell freely within and shower its infinite spectrum of light through the prisms of our souls. It can be incredibly difficult to speak our truths in another’s language, to “turn toward them and unite with them” as angels do when they speak to us. Perhaps it is hardest of all really to hear another speak to us, especially when a good chunk of our minds thinks that what they have to say is irrelevant, witless, ill-grounded, or just plain wrong. And there is, of course, a balance to be struck between generosity of spirit and passivity. But it is possible.

We may “know the Spirit” that abides within us, as Jesus assures us we do—but it takes faith and vision and more than a smidgen of courage to realize that this Spirit is, as Swedenborg tells us, the “realest of the real,” that this Spirit is what made each of us and preserves us and creates us anew every day. The “Comforter” is not always

a comfortable thing to make space for in our competitive world. “My peace I give to you,” says Jesus. But he also adds a caveat: “I do not give to you as the world gives.” We are not to root ourselves in the world, to look to the world for the peace and freedom that come from Jesus.

Two thousand years ago, God spoke, quite loudly and with a great deal of dramatic style, to the little backwater, bedraggled, recently bereft band of Jesus-following Galileans who had gathered together in Jerusalem to celebrate a holiday. Their sudden polyglottalism was not a parlor trick, nor was it, I think, a display of God’s dominating power over puppet-like humanity. Note well: the Galileans who spoke the truth so clearly and showed love so transparently to so many people that day were not necessarily gathered to preach about their risen Lord,

We need not be afraid. We have only to open ourselves to the Spirit, to receive and shimmer with its light.

or to witness to his mighty deeds. They were simply together, and apparently the Holy Spirit, that infinite divine truth that is always with all of us, found their hearts open and trusting, willing to refract the pure white light of the Spirit’s truth into prismatic rainbows. Those Jesus-followers looked within, to the root of their life, to the Holy Spirit. As a result, they, like the angels, were able to “turn toward and unite with” the company of strangers and enemies around them, and see them for who they really were—friends, comrades, the Lord himself. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they were freed to speak their truths in other languages without fear of losing themselves, to embrace diversity and rejoice in its harmony.

We—all of us, each one of us, in every place we call home—can do it, too. For, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Divine and Loving Truth of God, is with us always. We need not be afraid. We have only to open ourselves to the Spirit, to receive and shimmer with its light. Then, as Amanda Wright puts it, we can “make whole the earth by seeding it with heaven.”

Prayer

Lord, you have written your word on our hearts; you have made our bodies your dwelling place and our lives the mouthpiece for your Holy Spirit. Set us on fire with your love, that we might turn that love outward and transform the world. Give us courageous, humble, open spirits, that we might proclaim your gospel, that we might be radiant prisms of your loving truth, that we might use the comfort you have given us to comfort and heal and make new the world. Amen.

Monday, July 19

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" *Psalm 122:1*

It is called "The Faith of the New Heaven and the New Church" because heaven, where angels are, and the Church, in which men are, act as one like the internal and the external with man. Hence it is that the member of the Church who is in the good of love from the truths of faith, and in the truths of faith from the good of love, is an angel of heaven as to the interiors of his mind. Thus he enters into heaven after death, and there enjoys happiness according to the degree in which those principles are united in him. It should therefore be known that this faith in its summary form is the index and gateway of the new heaven now being formed by the Lord.

Tuesday, July 20

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. *Psalm 122:2-3*

A New Church is instituted by the Lord. For the Lord provides that there shall always be a Church on earth because through the Church there is a conjunction of the Lord with the human race, and of heaven with the world. For there the Lord is known, and Divine truths are there through which man has conjunction. *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine #5*

Wednesday, July 21

To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. *Psalm 122:4*

[From a spiritual experience] "It is not for me to say, whether the eminent examples of charity which you have presented in order, are inspired by spiritual charity or not; but I can say what the spiritual that ought to be in them, must be, that they may be natural forms of spiritual charity. The spiritual itself of these is this, that they be done with judgment from a love of justice; that is, that in the exercise of charity man should see clearly whether he is acting from justice, and this he sees from judgment. *True Christian Religion #459:14*

Thursday, July 22

For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. *Psalm 122:5*

"Therefore are they before the throne of God" signifies that for this reason they are conjoined to the Lord. This is evident from the signification of "are before the throne of God," as being to be conjoined to the Lord. (That conjunction with the Lord is signified by "standing around the throne of God," may be seen above, n. 462; and the like is signified by "are before the throne of God.") "Before the throne of God" means before the Lord, for the Lord was upon the throne, as is said in verse 17 following, "The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them."

Apocalypse Explained #477

Friday, July 23

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers." *Psalm 122:6-7*

By "peace" are signified all things in their aggregate which are from the Lord, and thence all things of heaven and the church, and the happiness of life in them; these are of peace in the highest or inmost sense. It follows therefore that "peace" is charity, spiritual security, and internal rest; for when man is in the Lord, he is in peace with his neighbor, which is charity; in protection against the hells, which is spiritual security; and when he is in peace with his neighbor, and in protection against the hells, he is in internal rest from evils and falsities. *Apocalypse Revealed #306*

Saturday, July 24

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. *Psalm 122:8-9*

The Lord's kingdom is the neighbor that is to be loved in the highest degree, because the Lord's kingdom means the church throughout the world...; also heaven is meant by it; consequently he who loves the Lord's kingdom loves all in the whole world who acknowledge the Lord and have faith in Him and charity towards the neighbor; and he loves also all in heaven. *True Christian Religion #416*



The Deeper Truth

Rev. Eric Hoffman

Rev. Eric Hoffman is the pastor of the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

25 JUL

Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

John 2: 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

You know, as full of beauty as this world is which surrounds us, it is a wonder that anyone could forget that God is present in our lives in the most loving way. On the other hand, it's not so hard to believe, given all of the injustices and stress and tragedies we have to contend with in this world. I think everyone gets overwhelmed from time to time, and angry and depressed over things that happen. God's glory is not always obvious to us. Sometimes it takes quite a bit of reflection to recognize God's providence in the events of our lives.

I believe life is meant to be this way, filled with things to make us stop and think, accented with challenges that push us to our limits and encourage us to find new ways of thinking and new ways of coping. Consider what life would be like if the answer to every problem was simply handed to us on a silver platter—if the key to every obstacle was given without our ever having to expend any effort at all.

Actually, there's a part of me that doesn't think that sounds all that terrible, but providing easy answers to difficult questions would not be an act of love on God's part because it would interfere with our spiritual freedom to choose our own way in life—and exercising that choice is what teaches us better than anything. Freedom of choice is what powers our development as spiritual entities. Getting there may not always seem like half the fun, but it is the point of our existence. I think this is especially true of the Word.

Now before I explain that any further, I'd like to lay a little Swedenborg on you for the sake of clarification: The tome that we find sitting on our altar is a Bible, otherwise known as "scripture." It is composed of paper upon which is printed, in ink, words, which were written and compiled by human beings over the course of several centuries.

"The Word" is something deeper. The Word is nothing less than divine truth expressed in love, and it has been in existence for eternity. The Bible is our clearest expression of the Word, and for that reason deserves our respect, but it is important to remember that a Bible is the Word in the same way that a picture of a cube is a cube. We've all seen two-dimensional representations of a cube that we can refer to as a cube, but which nonetheless fall one dimension short of being an actual cube. In much the same way, the Bible is a lower or more concrete expression of a higher

reality and a deeper truth. Swedenborg maintained that even though the Bible has been rewritten and reorganized many times throughout history, the Word has remained present in it so that we can discern and receive it. However, hearing the deeper truths is not always easy.

For example, let's take a look at how Swedenborg uncovered deeper meaning in the story of the wedding feast at Cana. This is how Anita Dole sums up the story in her *Bible Study Notes*:

“The scene was in Galilee, symbol of the plane of outward conduct, and the place was Cana. Cana means “reedy.” Reeds are the symbol of the simplest and most elementary truths. There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the Lord, His disciples, and Mary were invited. Marriage always pictures the union of good and truth—a time when our desire and our understanding agree as to what we are to do. So this scene pictures a person who wants to do right in his outward life and has learned and obeyed at least the simple precepts of the Word, and who recognizes the Lord and wants His presence. The disciples here picture the means by which the Lord reaches out into the various fields of thought and desire in us, and Mary pictures the church. These were all present at the wedding. And there were six waterpots and plenty of water to fill them all to the brim. The waterpots, like all containers in the Word, picture general doctrines we have in our minds, and six pictures the orderly steps in the development of a good life—we may here go back in our minds to the six days of creation. The water is the truths with which these doctrines may be filled if we apply ourselves to studying them as the Lord commands us to do. The Lord's words to Mary, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee?’ are not a rebuke or a refusal. A more literal translation of the Greek is ‘Woman, what [belongs] to me and to thee?’ The Lord was merely pointing out that the power he exercised did not come from the heredity He assumed through Mary.

“The Lord gave two commands: ‘Fill the waterpots with water,’ and ‘Draw out now.’ We are not to be satisfied with merely knowing our doctrines in a general way; we are to learn all the truth we can possibly ‘hold.’ And then we are to use this truth in our lives and to do our best to give it to others. And it is in this drawing out that the ‘water’ is turned into the best ‘wine’—spiritual truth which will delight our souls more than anything we have tasted before.”

Does this make sense to anyone? Does it reveal something to you that you hadn't seen before? If it does,

that's fantastic! Go out and use this new insight in the context of your own life. If it doesn't, or if you disagree with what you've heard, that's fine too. Read the story again and reflect on what it communicates to you. The whole idea is to look deeper than the literal sense of the words on the page and be inspired by the deeper truths. Knowing the Bible stories is great, but the Bible doesn't become the Word until we receive and apply its deeper truths, whatever they may be.

And remember, those inspirations may not come easily, but don't let that discourage you from trying, because some of them might. It is within every person's ability to receive the Word, not only from the Bible, but also from all the beauty of the earth around us, for the Word is written throughout creation, just waiting to be recognized and appreciated. If we can just get past the chaos and the hardships to reclaim our natural enthusiasm in the face of life's challenges, we will be rewarded—we will become enlightened. The Lord has seen to that.

The Bible doesn't become the Word until we receive and apply its deeper truths, whatever they may be.

Prayer

Your Word, O God, is eternal, and it fills this world with beauty. As we gather in this place, we pray that you will always lift us to your heart and inspire us with your spirit, as you have inspired the psalmists and the prophets. In weakness they were made strong, in sorrow they found solace, in health they were not dismayed. We pray that you will give us similar insights and understanding, even and especially in the dark night of our soul.

Open our eyes so that we may read your Word in this age, and let our hearts be present and involved in the issues and events of our time, so that we may learn from them what we need to know. Speak to your people, O Lord, a living Word, so that its music can touch with hope and joy each secret sorrow of the earth and we may be enlightened by your ever present glory, now and forevermore. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, July 26

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants." *Revelation 19:1-2*

To "commit adultery," as mentioned in the... commandment, means not only to commit whoredom, but also to do obscene things, to speak lascivious things, and to think about filthy things. But in the spiritual sense to "commit adultery" means to adulterate the goods of the Word, and to falsify its truths. *Doctrine of the Lord #74*

Tuesday, July 27

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great." *Revelation 19:4-5*

"Falling down before God" means to act from inmost affection, which is called humiliation of heart; this precedes worship, which is an act of the lips. *Apocalypse Explained #1206*

Wednesday, July 28

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." *Revelation 19:6*

In the heavens there are angels that are in truths and angels that are in goods. The angels that are in truths are called spiritual angels, and those that are in goods are called celestial angels. From this heaven is divided into two kingdoms, the spiritual and the celestial kingdoms. In the spiritual kingdom are all that are in truths, and in the celestial kingdom are all that are in goods. *Apocalypse Explained #1215*

Thursday, July 29

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. *Revelation 19:7-8*

Those who have been regenerated by the Divine truth of faith walk in heaven in raiment of white linen, and are called spiritual angels; but those who have been regenerated by the Divine good of love walk in purple raiment, and are called celestial angels. *True Christian Religion #686*

Friday, July 30

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." *Revelation 19:9*

That in the supreme sense the paschal lamb is the Lord is well known; for the passover signified the Lord's glorification, that is, the putting on of the Divine in respect to the Human; and in the representative sense it signifies man's regeneration; and the paschal lamb signifies that which is the essential of regeneration, namely, innocence; for no one can be regenerated except by means of the charity in which there is innocence. *Arcana Coelestia #3994.6*

Saturday, July 31

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." *Revelation 19:10*

From his saying that he must not be adored because he is only an angel, who is a servant of the Lord the same as men are, it is evident that merely a perception from him of the Divine is meant. But the essence of the matter is that when the Lord sends angels to men, as He did to the prophets, He fills them with His Divine and thus moves them to speak. Then the angel that is sent speaks from the Lord and not from himself; but as soon as he has spoken he returns into himself and then knows that he is only an angel. *Apocalypse Explained # 1228*

Our Beliefs in Brief:

- God is pure love, pure wisdom, and pure creative power.
- God became human in Jesus Christ and dwells with us.
- The Bible is God's Word, and has many levels of meaning.
- God loves and saves people of all religions.

Our Daily Bread Subscription Form

- New Subscription (\$15 per year, U.S. dollars)
 Renewal (\$15 per year, U.S. dollars)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State/Province, Zip Code, Country _____

\$ _____ is enclosed for a subscription for _____ years.

I would like to make a donation to *Our Daily Bread*. \$ _____

- Please send me information about the Swedenborgian Church.

Please make checks payable to: The Swedenborgian Church
and mail to:

Leah Goodwin, Editor, *Our Daily Bread*
43 Hobart Square, Whitman, MA 02382

The Swedenborgian Church bases its teachings on the Bible as illuminated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and theologian. Swedenborg envisioned a new Christianity coming into being that was revitalized by the Spirit of the Lord.

We believe that there is one God, known by many names. We worship Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God, who made himself known to us through his life as the divine human Jesus of Nazareth, and whom we continue to know through his Holy Spirit, which operates through and around us.

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and that in its pages we find two parallel stories: the account of people, places, and events; and within that account a spiritual reflection of our individual and corporate journeys. The Bible, with its infinite depth of meaning, is truly a living Word, guiding us as we strive to make ourselves temples for the Lord by loving and serving others. We believe that, above all, "all religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord's presence and leading, and to facilitate their spiritual well-being. We invite you to participate with others who are seeking to deepen their inner life and pursue their spiritual journey.

Invitation

You are invited to use *Our Daily Bread* as a source of inspiration and as a guide for personal meditation and reflection. It is also a resource for home, small group, and church worship. Each issue has a theme, with weekly sermons focusing on various aspects of that theme. Daily meditations provide food for thought throughout the week.

Our Daily Bread has been published by the Swedenborgian Church since December 1949. May you be fed with spiritual nourishment as the Lord gives us this day our daily bread.

All Returns to:
Leah Goodwin, Editor
43 Hobart Square
Whitman, MA 02382

