

MAY/JUNE 2011

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

# OUR DAILY BREAD

*The Power of the Spirit*



# Prayer

*Fire of the Spirit,  
life of the lives of creatures,  
spiral of charity, light of clarity,  
taste of sweetness to sinners,  
be with us and hear us . . .  
Composer of all things,  
light of all the risen,  
key of salvation,  
release from the dark prison,  
hope of all unions,  
scope of chastities,  
joy in the glory,  
strong honor,  
be with us and near us.*

- St. Hildegard of Bingen, 12th century

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Dear Readers,

There's no denying the power of the Holy Spirit.

God speaks his loving truth to us in so many ways: sometimes with a still, small voice, a nudge of intuition, or a passing thought; at other times with a mighty shout, a firm word of rebuke, an "Ah ha!" moment, or the insight of another person.

However the Lord makes his presence known, it is then up to us to run with it, to respond to the wisdom we've received and put it to use. God, in his infinite love, created us to be free, enabled us to make mistakes as well as wise choices (not, of course, that it's always easy to recognize which is which!). Fortunately for us, God understands completely. Not only did he create us, he became one of us in Jesus Christ. He's walked the road we walk, to the umpteenth degree. And he still walks with us, in each and every moment. May you know the peace, courage, and freedom of the Holy Spirit, this day and every day.

Many blessings,

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

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# MAY 1 LISTENING TO GOD'S WILL

Mr. Rodrigo Marcus

## 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days, the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

## Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

## Sermon

We all know the difference between listening and *listening*. We use the first type when we are getting ready for work in the morning, listening to the radio or the TV, maybe conversing with our partner, while perhaps making breakfast or getting dressed or all of the above!

But then there's the other type, when we really listen. We find ourselves focused in the moment and empathetic with one another. The September 11 tragedy is a good example of a time when we found ourselves listening with the fullness of ourselves; we felt the pain and loss either directly or indirectly and experienced it in our bodies. When we listen

with full awareness in the moment, the quality of listening becomes a quality of loving. And when we listen to God, or more specifically, listen to God's will for us, we can cultivate a more satisfying and loving experience of life.

Often when we think of God's will, we capitalize the word Will and put it out of reach on a pedestal. For example, we're familiar with the words from the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done." But perhaps we are not sure what exactly this "will" is that we are asking be done. The opposite of this involves belittling God's will, which happens when we expect God to align His will with ours. You might have come across someone who was saying something like, "Oh, God, help me win the lottery! Please!"

What I would like to explore is neither of these, but instead a type of listening that is more intimate and connecting. By cultivating a deeper listening attitude, we can experience our own will in a purer way. In this way we can connect with God's will. Saying it more directly, God's will is our highest expression of love and truth in every moment of our lives. How can it be anything else? How can God wish for us anything but His own qualities of love and truth? And how can God wish for us something different from who we are, different from our own character? His will is in line with the highest understanding we have of ourselves. We can be sure that when we express the most loving and truthful actions possible, He is guiding us in becoming more loving, patient, sensitive, and charitable.

I found a wonderful expression of this idea from Jeffrey Gaines, who is the president of Spiritual Directors International. He writes: "God will not give us what we want, like some genie in a lamp. No, God does not work this way. But when we are attentive to what makes our *souls shimmer* and our *spirits dance*, we are actually doing God's will for us, which is our heart's desire, for it is God's desire for us." Think of how Mozart would have felt had he chosen a career as a store clerk. He might have done very well at it. But by following his highest will, he must have felt the dancing of his spirit, and we benefited from this too, from his highest expression of who he believed himself to be.

Listening to what makes our hearts sing requires a combination of presence and patience. It demands our full awareness of the subtle feelings and intuitions that stir within. Many of you probably already have ways in which you listen to God—praying, meditating, or contemplation, or maybe other methods like writing in a journal, walking in nature, reading Scripture,

talking with a spiritual director, or listening to your dreams. Emanuel Swedenborg wrote that everything is but a portal into the divine. We all have the opportunity to find the portal through which we each personally connect with God. Swedenborg found that one of his favorite ways of listening to Him was through his dreams.

With our minds endlessly chasing thought after thought each day and our feelings doing the same, we rarely spend the time needed to quiet our minds and listen to what God might want to say to us. Listening to God requires that we be present to where we are in the moment, become aware of what we are thinking and feeling, and then, in a way, rise above all these things. When I was a kid, during prayers I would bring my hands together and *talk to* God. There's nothing wrong with that. But as an adult, instead of petitioning God, I try to be open to *communing with* God. In other words, after talking with God, maybe we can listen with an open heart. Even if we don't "hear" anything, God knows we are honoring that time with Him, that we are leaving the door open for Him to come in. Perhaps he is there and we just can't hear him. As we find in our reading from the Book of Revelation, Christ is knocking at our doors—my door, your door, the president's door, Osama bin Laden's door. The Lord is calling each of us to open the door to our hearts and our minds. If we are sensitive enough to hear Him knocking, to hear His voice, and if we choose to open the door, He will make Himself at home inside our hearts. His presence will help us discern truth more clearly and express love more sensitively and courageously in our lives. That's His desire, and that's our hearts' highest desire.

I recently came across a good example of deep listening through contemplation. Two months ago I was watching a PBS program in which Bill Moyers was talking with Sister Wendy, the famous British connoisseur of fine art. She shared with him her way of opening up and sensitively listening to a painting. It's a technique that we can use to listen intuitively for that which makes our spirits dance. Sister Wendy spends the necessary time deeply contemplating each painting she wants to experience. For example, if she wants to contemplate a painting by Paul Cézanne, who is one of her favorite artists and, she feels, created sacred art, she will start by looking at the painting for a small period of time, say, twenty minutes. She will listen to her inner reactions welling up. At first, she says, she might see responses from her ego, like her thoughts and feelings about Cézanne's life history. She promptly lets go of these because they are responses of habit and conditioning. Then she goes away and

returns sometime later, possibly hours or days later, to look at the painting again. She repeats this process until she senses her most authentic, purest reaction emerging. Eventually she experiences the most beautiful feeling emanating from her heart, and she knows its authenticity. Opening up this portal to the divine involves letting herself become as open as an innocent child while acknowledging and using her wisdom as an adult. This requires a willingness to be vulnerable, to be honest, and to be changed.

This is a wonderful example of how we too can listen deeply. When we have a big decision, or, for example, a problem with a close friend or family member, we can hold the person in our hearts, contemplate a photo of the person, or write our thoughts and feelings down in a journal. When we do this, it is important to take the necessary time to listen quietly to the responses inside. As we see our reacting feelings and thoughts, we need to be honest and ask ourselves if they convey the highest quality of who we believe ourselves to be as loving and truthful persons. Being honest requires letting go of what is often the ego's desire for control, power, fame, or fortune. If we let go of these things and wait patiently for more authentic feelings to emerge, we can find God's will and our own will meeting in our hearts. From this union we will begin expressing more easily the qualities of love, honesty, sensitivity, charity, and patience with others.

Another style of listening comes from one of the most insightful scientists of the last century, Albert Einstein. He once said, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science." Here is a man who would often take time to experience the mysterious on long walks in nature. He was fond of these walks and used them to relax and to let his mind wander into the realm of the mysterious through his imagination, sparking insights like the one that led to his theory of relativity. We too can often use a walk to get away from our concerns at hand—and a breath of fresh air can open us up to our intuition. This reminds me of the feeling of playtime. When was the last time you felt you were playing? Remember when you were a child and played gleefully with your toys? Those were times when your spirit was dancing; your intentions were pure and open. Well, think of that feeling of play the next time you take a walk. If you find yourself in a park, let the beauty of nature be your portal into the divine. Relax, be playful, and welcome the insights that come.

Let me take a moment to mention a few thoughts about free will. Once you have an insight, you still need to decide whether that insight is aligned with your

highest understanding of who you believe yourself to be. Emanuel Swedenborg frequently identifies our need to use our God-given faculties of mind and heart to discern the quality of love and truth within each of our statements, actions, or decisions. Love and truth must work together. If we neglect the quality of our love, we can rationalize the truth of anything we want. For example, look at our culture's recent history and see how a reliance on rationalized truth without love is threatening the ecology of the earth. So listen, and then discern.

I'd like to share with you a personal story that conveys the notion of listening with presence and patience. A few years ago my employer asked me to go out to a customer's site, to learn how to administer new telephone equipment, and then to train the customer in using it. However, my company did not want the customer to know that I had never used this equipment before. Well, I accepted, thinking it would be easy enough given my familiarity with similar gear. Unfortunately, when I went on site a few hours early, I saw that very little had been prepared. As I attempted to set up the equipment, the customer continually asked for my assistance in other areas, which slowly ate away at our time. It came down to the last hour, and I began to panic. I began to pray. I communicated to the Lord my highest intention for both the customer and myself, and then I let it go. Oddly enough, I didn't feel concerned about the outcome, and felt a peaceful sense of being present. Whenever I felt myself starting to worry, I just repeated my prayer, and released it into God's hands, knowing that I was doing the best I could.

And then something happened. With about a half hour left, the customer contact came rushing up to me asking if it would be OK to postpone the training to the following hour. Apparently, one of their critical servers had crashed, and they were working feverishly to get it back up. My prayer had been answered, though not in a way convenient to all parties involved, and I had enough time to learn what I needed.

Now, I'm not saying my prayer caused the server to go down. Who knows how God works? If not the server, maybe it would have been an urgent conference call with the boss, or maybe an unforeseen schedule conflict, or maybe . . . nothing at all. If it all came to a head and I fell flat on my face, I would have been ready for that too. We just don't know what's going to happen, and that's part of trusting God. I was listening as best I could in that moment, but my will to control the situation was stressing me out.

Trusting in God's will, however, allowed me to relax in the present, and allowed both of our wills to come together.

This reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, from St. Ignatius. He says: "Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God." When we are acting out our highest will and trusting that God is guiding the outcome, we feel a sense of peace.

Sometimes when we find ourselves frustrated in our understanding or feelings of a situation, perhaps we're trying too hard. A quote from a book by James Finley expresses this beautifully. He writes:

"How does an apple ripen? It just sits in the sun. A small green apple cannot ripen in the night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes, and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy beside its small green counterparts. . . . The birth of the true self takes place in God's time. We must wait for God, we must be awake; we must trust in His hidden action within us."

The ripening of an apple is a wonderful metaphor for letting go and trusting God when we feel we aren't getting clarity in our lives, even when we're doing our best to listen. It requires patience and trust. Some of us recently heard about this in the sermon from Dr. Wilson van Dusen, who is a psychologist, a Swedenborgian scholar, and a mystic. He shared that sometimes after asking a deep spiritual question of the divine, he does not receive an answer for several days or longer. He explained that during that time he knew he was being realigned internally by the Lord, that he was not able to receive an answer given his understanding at the time. He now knows to trust this process and that he can wait patiently and sensitively; the answer will eventually come. Maybe, while *we* are waiting patiently for months or even years, God is realigning us.

Also, there may be times when we think we are not discerning our highest will. Or we may not be happy with the fruits of the actions that we might initially have thought were best for us. In these cases, we must ask ourselves what we were expecting. We all have limits to our patience. But again and again, God will ask us to let go of our fears and our expectations. Whenever you feel impatient, take time to listen, and to discern your highest intention. And when you recognize the voice of the Lord behind the knocking door, call out in your heart like Samuel, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Amen.

## Monday, May 2

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When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn." *I Kings 2:1-3*

That "the way" means doctrine is clear from the meaning of "a way." "A way" in the Word is used in reference to truths, because truths lead to good and go forth from good. *Arcana Coelestia n. 2234*

## Tuesday, May 3

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Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

*I Kings 3:3-4*

[Solomon] represents the Lord's kingdom or the Church with all forms of religion in the whole world. For the Church established with the nation of Israel and Judah was a representative Church, and therefore all the judgments and statutes of that Church represented the spiritual things of the Church, which are its internals. *Divine Providence 245.5*

## Wednesday, May 4

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At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today."

*I Kings 3:5-6*

Each of us is born with the ability to understand truths even at the deepest level where angels of the third heaven live. As our human discernment climbs up on a continuum around the two higher levels, it receives the light of wisdom.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 258*

## Thursday, May 5

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"And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" *I Kings 3:7-9*

The reason we do not become rational to the highest degree we are capable of is that our love, which is a matter of our intent, cannot be raised up in the same way as our wisdom, which is a matter of our discernment. *Ibid.*

## Friday, May 6

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It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you." *I Kings 3:10-12*

The earthly mind, being the envelope and vessel of the higher levels of the human mind, is reactive. If the higher levels are not opened, it acts against them; whereas if they are opened, it acts with them. I explained in the last section that since the earthly mind is on the last level, it surrounds and encloses the spiritual mind and the heavenly mind, which are on higher levels. *Divine Love and Wisdom n. 260*

## Saturday, May 7

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"I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life." *I Kings 3:13-14*

If the spiritual mind is open, then the action and reaction of the earthly mind are reversed. The spiritual mind is acting from above or within, and as it does so it is working through whatever in the earthly mind is amenable, whether it comes from within or from the outside. *Divine Love and Wisdom n. 263*

# MAY 8 MOTHER'S DAY

Rev. Louis A. Dole

## Isaiah 66:5-13

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Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name's sake have said, "Let the Lord be glorified, so that we may see your joy"; but it is they who shall be put to shame. Listen, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, dealing retribution to his enemies! Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children. Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her—that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom. For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

## Revelation 21:1-7, 9-10, 22-27

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Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## Psalm 113

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Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord.  
Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore.  
From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised.  
The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.  
Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?  
He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.  
He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord!

## Sermon

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*"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you: and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." (Isaiah 56:13)*

Quite generally throughout our land the second Sunday in May has come to be observed as Mothers' Day. In the book of Revelation the church is pictured as the bride, the Lamb's wife, the spiritual mother by whom we are born again. All who are regenerated are born of the church as their spiritual mother.

The word "church" has several meanings. It may mean the church building, or it may mean the teachings for which the church stands, or it may be used of the people who accept and seek to live according to these teachings. In the twenty-first



chapter of Revelation we read, "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The church as the holy city is the church as to its system of truth, and as the bride, the Lamb's wife, it is the carrying out of this body of truth in life.

In this latter sense the church is our spiritual mother, the means by which the truths of the Word are brought forth and handed down from generation to generation. It is this function that gives it permanence, as it is the means by which the human race is drawn into unity. The church has outlived many vanished nations and empires, and through it comes nourishment and healing for the world, as it is faithful to the Lord who is the Word. There has always been a church, for it underlies every orderly form of society among men.

The very life of the church is to bear and nurture children. We become children of our Heavenly Father by learning and keeping His commandments. Re-generation, rebirth, implies truth from the Word as truly as birth in this world implies a mother. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

We are all familiar with the care of a mother for her children, how she teaches them to walk and provides for their needs according to their different stages of development and the varying circumstances and conditions they may encounter. The church is the kingdom of the Lord in the minds and hearts of men. It is the Lord's kingdom in this world. It is the means by which individuals and societies are formed into true human beings and societies.

People do not make a true society; and neither do their surroundings or their institutions, except as they receive the life that goes forth from the Lord. So it is that the angels do not make heaven, nor the beauty of their surroundings. It is the love and wisdom of the Lord operating in the souls of the angels that make heaven. The same is true of the church. It is the kingdom of the Lord on earth. It is the life of the Lord in each and every one of its members. It is His wisdom enlightening their minds, and His love received in their hearts, that forms men into a body in which the Lord is the life. The church in a particular sense is the life of God in the individual soul. In a universal sense it is that life received by a larger number in whom love to the Lord and the neighbor governs the life. This is the meaning of the Lord's words, "If I am the vine, ye are the branches." He did not say to His

disciples, "Ye are the vine," but "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."

And what John saw in his vision was not a church builded by men on earth, but the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And John heard a great voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

This is true not in some vague and mysterious sense, but in a very practical way. Whether we recognize it or not, it is the Lord who gives us life and sustains us from moment to moment. It is He who keeps us in the power to choose the good and refuse the evil. This is not any virtue that can be ascribed to us, for "thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

*Whether we  
recognize it or  
not, it is the Lord  
who gives us life  
and sustains us.*

The Lord through the church constantly operates for our salvation, but in such a way as to leave us in freedom. This constant operation of the Lord's providence does not come to our manifest perception, because if it did, it would take away our freedom and the feeling that our life is our own and we could not build up strength of character. Yet if we seek to learn and do the Lord's will, we are given some perception of His constant care over us and provision for us. Then shall we be given a sense of tranquility and peace in times of trial, and we shall feel that the everlasting arms are underneath, holding us up and protecting us. We cannot have such experiences unless we believe in the Lord and His Word but, whether we believe much or little, the fact remains that we do not live from ourselves, and that whatever life and power we have is from the Lord.

Dependence upon the Lord is the only sure foundation for a good life. We soon pass out from the protection of our natural parents, but we need never and should never pass out of the protection of the holy city. Let us think what the world would be if there were not the Word and the church through which knowledge of the Lord and of His purposes were not kept alive.

# Daily Meditations

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Our first birth is of natural parents. Our second birth is a spiritual birth, of the Lord and His church. The Lord is our Father in the highest degree, and the church our spiritual mother. So she is pictured in Scripture as a woman clothed with the sun, her head crowned with stars and the moon under her feet. She is the means by which the Lord forms us into His children. So she is called in Scripture the bride, the Lamb's wife.

This church takes upon itself an outward form or organization, just as the soul clothes itself with a body; and it is a true church to the extent that it looks to the Lord and serves Him.

We are born again by learning about the Lord and acting not from regard of self but from the principles of our religion. The second birth is regeneration: to have born in the heart love for the imperishable riches of the spirit. So the Psalmist prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The new heart is the new spiritual man, whose Father is the Lord and whose mother is the church.

By the second birth we are endowed with new thoughts and desires. We become altogether different people. The desire to advance self is changed into the desire to help others, the desire for power and honors to the desire to serve. Anger and revenge are turned into compassion and mercy. Instead of being envious and jealous of others, we take delight in their good fortune and well being.

It is recorded that in days of old men inquired of each other, when they met after long separation, not after their physical health, as we do now, but of their spiritual welfare. So our concern for the church should be not so much for its external growth and well-being, but that its vision of the truth may be clear and that it may be ever increasing in its desire to be led by the Lord. So will the church on earth become the great agency for human rebirth, growth, and development, and the medium of communication with the Lord and with His church in the heavens.

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Spiritual comfort is the satisfaction and joy one feels when he acquires spiritual truth and directs his life by it. "Ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Amen.

## Prayer

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Be not far from us, O God, and in your mercy guide our footsteps, that we wander not far from you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

- Eric Milner-White, Daily Prayer, 1941

## Monday, May 9

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The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. *Genesis 21:1-5*

The soul is the Being itself of man, and the sensitive or corporeal faculty is its coming forth, for the former comes forth in the latter. *Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 2621*

## Tuesday, May 10

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Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. *Genesis 21:6-8*

It is known that a man cannot be regenerated until adult age, because he then for the first time has the full exercise of reason and judgment, and thus can receive good and truth from the Lord.

*Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 2636.2*

## Wednesday, May 11

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But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." *Genesis 21:9-13*

The more one is confirmed in [looking to the Lord], the more is he led into the light of truth respecting these things, till at last he believes that all good and all truth are from the Lord. *Arcana Coelestia n. 2657.5*

**Thursday, May 12**

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So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

*Genesis 21:14-16*

They who are being reformed are reduced into ignorance even to despair, and then they have comfort and enlightenment; for the light of truth from the Lord cannot flow into the persuasive which is from man's own; for this is of such a nature as to extinguish that light. *Arcana Coelestia n. 2682.2*

**Friday, May 13**

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And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." *Genesis 21:17-18*

Those who have been in vastation or desolation there, after being comforted by the hope of help, are elevated by the Lord into heaven, thus from a state of shade which is a state of ignorance, into a state of light which is a state of enlightenment and of the refreshment therefrom, thus into a joy that affects their inmosts. *Arcana Coelestia n. 2699.2*

**Saturday, May 14**

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Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. *Genesis 21:19-21*

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. *Arcana Coelestia n. 2701*

**REBIRTH**  
Rev. Erwin Reddekopp

**15** MAY

**Genesis 1:26-31**

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Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**John 3:1-8**

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Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

## **Revelation 21:1-5**

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Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

## **True Christian Religion 574**

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All reason shows that man must be regenerated, for he is born into evils of every kind derived from his parents; and these evils have their seat in his natural man, which of itself is diametrically opposed to the spiritual man. Nevertheless man is born for heaven; although he does not enter heaven unless he becomes spiritual, and he can become spiritual only by means of regeneration. From this it follows of necessity that the natural man with its lusts must be subdued, subjugated, and inverted, and that otherwise man cannot approach a single step toward heaven, but sinks deeper and deeper into hell. Who cannot see this, if he believes that he has been born into evils of every kind and acknowledges the existence and contrariety of good and evil, and believes in a life after death, a hell and a heaven, and that evil is what constitutes hell and good is what constitutes heaven?

Viewed in himself the natural man in no way differs in his nature from the nature of beasts. Like them he is wild; but it is as to his will that he is such; in understanding he differs from beasts, in that the understanding can be elevated above the lusts of the will, and not only see but also moderate them; and for this reason man is able to think from understanding, and speak from thought, which beasts cannot do. What man is by birth, and what he would be if not regenerated, can be seen from fierce animals of every kind; that he would be a tiger, a panther, a leopard, a wild hog, a scorpion, a tarantula, a viper, a crocodile, and so on; consequently if he were not transformed by regeneration into a sheep, what would he be but a devil among devils in hell? And in that state, if not restrained by civil laws, would not men from innate

ferocity rush upon one another and slaughter each other, and plunder each other even of the last scrap of clothing? . . . External morality is required, for the sake of covering up their internals; and it does that.

## **Sermon**

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In everything of nature, particularly in the vegetable kingdom, we witness the principle of rebirth. As a former farmer, growing up on the prairies and seeding crops in the spring, we seeded the various grains, hoping each year for a bumper crop. That often did not happen, because of drought, hail, or grasshoppers. But each year we tried. We had to.

Well, in any case, we watched the process of the grain coming up, maturing, ripening, and then being harvested. That was the cycle. The seed that had been put into the ground had rotted away in order to produce new grain. Jesus told a parable about this process too. Now, in John 3, he gives us another parable about rebirth, this in respect to human beings. He said, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus wonders how this can be, asking if it is necessary to crawl back into his mothers' womb and be born again. Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being . . . born from above." We understand this statement in light of New Church teaching about the three Rs, namely, repentance, reformation, and regeneration. Without these processes we cannot see the kingdom of God.

This matter of rebirth has always been a relevant topic for me.

Let us consider the matter of the translation with respect to the correspondences of this matter of "rebirth." The New Revised Standard Version translates the words of Jesus as "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born . . . from above." Now note this statement from Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* 576: "The new birth or creation is effected by the Lord alone through charity and faith as the two means of man co-operating." It must be perfectly clear, then, that it is the Lord alone through whom salvation or rebirth comes, but it must be with a person's unforced participation. There can be no salvation just from mercy or love on the part of our Lord Jesus. We must act in perfect freedom according to our understanding. Yes, and the matter and process of regenerating is an ongoing process, even to eternity. Each step along with way or each plateau we achieve is described by the days of creation in the

Genesis account. Few people, Swedenborg says, even reach the third day of creation here in this life. But the start has to be made here, as is expressed by the statement about the evening and the morning, when there was light, was the first day. It is at that stage that regeneration begins, which shows how important it is to be enlightened from the Word—or, in other words, to have our understanding raised into the light of heaven rather than just be occupied by all the material baggage of each day.

At this point it is useful, I believe, to share with you this passage from the book *True Christian Religion* 586: "That a person can be regenerated gradually may be illustrated by each and all things that come into existence in the natural world. A tree cannot reach its full worth in a day, but there is first growth from the seed, then from the root and then from the shoot, which becomes the trunk, and from this go forth branches and leaves and finally blossoms and fruit." Rebirth and regeneration don't happen suddenly or overnight. We all have a lot of soul searching to do—yes, and a lot of pruning and weeding. It reminds me of planting two cherry trees when Lisa and I moved to the Okanagoan valley of British Columbia. They have been mature for some time now, with lots of cherries each year. But last year we had lots of worms. Why? Because I didn't spray properly. But why should there be fruit flies and worms? That's how insidious and subtle a lot of temptations are.

Well, we may say that we should keep our gardens and orchards clean of weeds and insects so that spraying would not be necessary. In the same way, if we are going to have our own personal lives be useful and fruitful we will need to do a lot of examination, a lot of spiritual pruning and weeding.

We are all destined and born for heaven, and as far as our loving creator is concerned (if we can put it that way), we are, ideally, a "heaven in least form." And we know that the Lord's heaven on earth is the Church. That doesn't mean, obviously, a particular church denomination or organization. But we do have church organizations, including ours, which are subject to the same wiles and insidious temptations from the hells as a human being can be subjected to. So then a church as well as the individual must go through continual states of rebirth. A church, organizationally, cannot be a church without people. Therefore, it does seem clear that the state and quality of the church, so far as we can judge from externals, is of the same

general quality as the individual. If this is the case, then, judging by numbers, our church organization, both internationally and locally, must be in rather poor shape. But I really do not think that such is the case or that it is that simple. It is quite possible that in the matter of rebirth some part of the church organization must die in order to produce or bring into fruition something new and better, something more effective as a means of helping people in their own personal rebirth and regeneration. What that will be is a continuing challenge for us and for those who come after us.

The book of Revelation tells us about the New Jerusalem, a new church which, we have been told, is to follow the first Christian church, or to be the Christian church renewed. I believe this without a doubt. I also believe that there has to be, at least for some time, a natural organization made up of people like us, whose job it will be to assume the role of disciples or apostles of the New Age. This is our challenge. Are we up to it? The Lord alone knows that. As we all, I hope, regenerate and are being "born from above," we will gain new incentives and new energy and strength to do what our predecessors did before us. Who knows? Their inspiration and influence from the spiritual world may be with us today. Amen.

## *Rebirth and regeneration don't happen suddenly or overnight.*

### **Prayer**

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Let nothing disturb or dismay us, O God,  
for all things are passing and you alone are unchanging.

Teach us that all things are wrought in patience  
and that those who possess you lack nothing  
and that our sufficiency is in you alone.

- *St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

Living God, you have given us a living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Grant that we, being risen with him, may seek the things which are above, and be made partakers of the life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- *Eric Milner-White, Daily Prayer, 1941*

# Daily Meditations

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## Monday, May 16

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Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." *John 12:20-23*

The Divine assumed the Human, that is, united itself to it, as a soul to its body, so that they were not two, but one Person. *Doctrine of the Lord n. 35.2*

## Tuesday, May 17

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"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."

*John 12:24-26*

In the Lord's sight the church is seen as a single man, and this larger man must pass through his stages of life like an individual, that is to say, from infancy to youth, from this to manhood, and finally to old age; and then, when he dies, he will rise again.

*True Christian Religion n. 762*

## Wednesday, May 18

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"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." *John 12:27-28*

That it is the truth of faith by means of which man is regenerated, consequently by means of which sins are removed; and because the faith of truth is from the Lord, it is the Lord Himself who effects this.

*Arcana Coelestia n. 9937.8*

## Thursday, May 19

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The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. *John 12:29-33*

The Lord imputes good to every man and evil to none; consequently He does not condemn anyone to hell, but so far as man follows raises all to heaven.

*True Christian Religion n. 652*

## Friday, May 20

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Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." *John 12:35-36a*

As the Lord in the heavens is Divine truth, and the Divine truth there is light, so in the Word He is called Light, likewise all truth is from Him.

*Heaven and Hell n. 129*

## Saturday, May 21

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Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."

*John 12:44-47*

The Lord and His Father are one as soul and body are one; God the Father descended from heaven and assumed the Human to redeem and save men; and His Human is what is called the Son sent into the world.

*Conjugal Love n. 118*

# ARE YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

Ms. Eli Dale

Mark 1:21-28

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They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

## Sermon

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*“. . . Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”*

The demon speaks to Jesus, confronts Jesus, challenges Jesus, and Jesus replies, "Shut up! Get out!"

The demon cannot even respond, "Are you talkin' t' ME?" With unnecessary theatrics, it convulses its host and departs. Would that casting out demons were so easy for the rest of us!

In understanding this Scripture lesson, the first hurdle we must get over is that, as twenty-first-century readers, we are disinclined to believe in demons. The demons of the Bible can be explained—explained away—with modern medical substitutions. We would say today that the boy in Matthew 17 who “. . . has seizures . . . and often falls into the fire or into the water” has epilepsy. The man in this story might be diagnosed with schizophrenia. And notwithstanding our more sanitized terms to label these conditions, Jesus still healed them! Yes, we are too modern to believe in demons. They are the stuff of fairy tales, along with the monsters under our beds.

So you might be interested in reading Wilson van Dusen's essay "The Presence of Spirits in Madness" (see van Dusen, *The Presence of Other Worlds*, Chrysalis Books). While working in a California state mental hospital as a clinical psychologist, dealing with patients who were bothered by hallucinations, he decided to interview the hallucinations. He discovered two "orders" of voices. One category consists of frequently reported "lower-order" voices, which Van Dusen describes as "similar to drunken bums at a bar who like to tease and torment just for the fun of it": endlessly talkative, extremely limited in powers of reason and experience, and irreligious or antireligious (pp. 120-122). The other category consists of more rarely reported "higher-order" voices, which seldom speak and are "symbolic, religious, supportive, and genuinely instructive" (p. 123). He even found these latter voices to be "potentially . . . therapeutic" (p. 135).

You might protest, "But these people were in a mental hospital. What has that got to do with us?" That sounds remarkably like the very thing the demon said to Jesus: "What do you want with us?" I'll let van Dusen answer the question.

"It appears that psychotics, alienated from their own feelings and inner processes, find these processes represented around them in a different form [than do the mentally healthy] . . . [O]ver and over I had the impression that [hallucinations] represented unknown potentials in the patient. The hell side illustrated personal faults, blindness, and stupidity. The heaven side represented higher, unused gifts . . . They appear to be unrealized, un-lived-out potentials, spilling out to confuse the environment . . . In a sense, these people seemed to have too much unused, unrecognized unconscious, which lived anyway and confused their environment . . .

"My guess is that Swedenborg systematically explored the same worlds that psychotic patients find themselves thrust into, and these worlds are heaven and hell, the worlds beyond this one, inside this one . . . Swedenborg said that we all have spirits with us; they are part of the foundation and energy of mental processes. [Van Dusen gives a brief description of what these processes would be like for the "normal" mind, hell being the experience of temptation and heaven the contemplation of higher qualities.] Most mental experience is participated in by spirits who don't know themselves as anything other than your own feelings. Honed down to this fine level, the only thing left that is really yours is the struggle

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to choose. Those who aren't choosing are going the way the spiritual winds blow. *So the pitiful picture of the hallucinated psychotic is really an exaggerated picture of everyone's situation.*" (pp. 137-138)

What has the demon in this story got to do with us? Everything. Swedenborg does not just say we are "accompanied" by spirits; he asserts that we have our very lives through their presence. People are recipient vessels of life. To the extent that we bend our affections toward self-serving greed and power, we receive a hellish life. To the extent that we bend our affections toward loves that leave the world a better place, we receive heavenly life. Swedenborg finds two salient characteristics in evil spirits: he calls them "insane" and "stupid." When Jesus shouted "Shut up! Get out!" at the *demon*, he emptied the *person* of the insane and the stupid. He tipped over the cup and dumped out the contents so that the man could receive a better life.

Right there, in the synagogue, at the holy center, at the core of our beliefs, yes, we too hold to some harebrained life doctrine that contributes to deranged behavior. ***If you can't shout "Get out!" at your demon, at least try singing "Come in" to the divine healer.*** How many times have you said, "I will never treat my kids *that way*" and then turned around and done exactly what you said you'd never do? How many times have you promised to hold your temper and then lost it? How many times have you promised that next year you will remember your anniversary and then forgotten it? How many opportunities have you missed because of some gnawing idea that says, "People will think you're foolish if you do that"? How many friends have you missed making because somewhere inside you wear a label of unworthiness? What activities have you kept yourself from trying because you were afraid of failure? How many times have you said, "Oh, no! Not again!?" Those are demons!

In our story, the demon recognizes and speaks directly to Jesus. "What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" Every time we do one of those "oh, no!" things, it is the demon speaking up. And don't we usually holler at ourselves? "Oh, what a stupid idiot I am for doing that again!" Consider Jesus' holler instead. Next time a bad habit overtakes you (again), try shouting, "Shut up! Get out!"

I realize this might be a little intimidating to implement. Let me try a variation on the theme. Years ago, I read a story in *Guidedposts* about a woman who

had some horrible thing happen to her, like a stroke or multiple sclerosis. The doctors were not encouraging. But rather than either accept defeat or go on the warpath to defeat her condition, she accepted her *blessings*. She did not deny her disabled condition (as Jesus did not deny or avoid the demon in the man), but she made a choice (remember Van Dusen's saying that choice is all we really have?) to look to Jesus. The part of her story I remember is this: she could not stand up very well, but she still wanted to keep her house. So she sat in a chair and mopped the floor. And as she mopped the floor, she said, "Thank you, Jesus, for mopping the floor with me." She focused on welcoming the savior in her holy center, in her personal synagogue. She invited divinity to do everything with her. She fully recovered. She amazed doctors. She allowed her faith to shout, "Shut up! Get out!" at her demon by filling herself with the divine and the divine will to wholeness. If you can't shout "Get out!" at your demon, at least try singing "Come in" to the divine healer.

The exorcism that Jesus performs on the man in the synagogue is bracketed this way: "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority." And then, after the demon departs, "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!" The words *teaching*, *amazed*, and *authority* surround this event.

What do we let ourselves learn? What life doctrine do we study? That the rich get richer and the poor poorer; that might makes right; that nice guys finish last; that you can't fight city hall; that women's work is only worth 76 cents to a man's dollar; that heaven is for later? What lessons are we learning and who is our teacher?

At Jesus' teaching, the people were amazed. They were amazed at the exorcism, too. So what? Don't settle for being amazed—be transformed. Marveling at divine authority is not as fruitful as living under it.

Divine authority is based in truth and order. Jesus' authority was not like the scribes', whose authority was based in quoting other scholars and forming conservative opinions. Jesus quotes divine intent. His authority is personal and radical. And I mean radical in both ways. He colors outside the lines; he is outrageous. The Christ is not about an order for our lives based on insane doctrines like "nice guys finish last" any more than it is about the "alienation from



feelings and inner processes" that produces mental derangement. The non-psychotic can happily label the psychotic mind as "disordered." What about your own mind? How is its order? Could it use a radical overhaul? The Lord also calls us back to our roots. Our roots are divine, and the Lord invites us to reclaim the truth of our image and likeness of God rather than settle for stupid demons.

Demons exist at all levels. We have personal demons, but we also have societal, national, and global demons. And we have church demons. And we bear responsibility for shouting at any and all of them, "Shut up! Get out!" (And we will hear them respond, "You talkin' to ME?") The thing is, no one really likes to admit to having demons. We try to pretend those demons aren't talking right out loud. We forget our divine teachings. We fail to claim our own authority to shout, "Shut up! Get out!" Or sometimes we mistake the demon for a person and shout "Shut up! Get out!" at another human being, thinking the person is what is bothering us.

Whether you have ever shouted "Shut up! Get out!" at another person or someone has shouted it at you, I'm sure you recall the yucky feelings that resulted. The only authority that casts out demons is the one that can distinguish the hellish spirit from the cherished, redeemable person. But it is an authority that we tap into, because the divine creator never leaves our holy center—along with those spirits we incline to, God's presence is always in the life we receive. By allying ourselves with truth and order, we too can defeat evil and falsity.

But beware: casting out demons is disruptive. "The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." It's tempting to avoid being an exorcist because of the convulsions it will cause. And sometimes casting out demons has limited effect—some people will stand around being amazed at the show but will not get the message of the teaching. Nevertheless, when we look at the core of what comes out of amazing, authoritative teaching, someone stands to be freed of a demon.

Not everyone who shouts in your direction is shouting *at* you. It could be the Christ shouting *in favor of* you. The Holy One of God loves you enough to shout the demons right out of you—over and over. Blessed be the Lord!

## **Prayers**

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In the name of Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, and powerful in the holy authority of the One who

created us, we confidently undertake to repulse the attacks and deceits of the devils.

God arises;

His enemies are scattered, and those who hate Him flee before Him.

As smoke is driven away, so are they driven; as wax melts before the fire, so the wicked perish at the presence of God.

Behold the Cross of the Lord; flee, bands of enemies! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the offspring of David, hath conquered.

May Thy mercy, Lord, descend upon us, as great as our hope in Thee.

Begone, demon, inventor and master of all deceit, enemy of man's salvation.

Give place to Christ, in Whom you have found none of your works; give place to the one holy Lord, who loved this world before the beginning and will love it forevermore.

Stoop beneath the all-powerful hand of God; tremble and flee when we invoke the holy and terrible name of Jesus, this name which causes hell to tremble; this name to which the virtues, powers, and dominations of heaven are humbly submissive; this name which the cherubim and seraphim praise unceasingly, repeating: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the God of Hosts."

O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto Thee.

- *Prayer of exorcism (adapted)*

Lord, give us grace to hold to you when all is weariness and fear and sin abounds within, without,

When love itself is tested by the doubt that love is false, or dead within the soul,

When every act brings new confusion, new distress, new opportunities, new misunderstandings,

And every thought new accusation.

Lord, give us grace, that we may know that in the darkness pressing round it is the mist of sin that hides your face,

That you are there, and you do know we love you still,

And our dependence and endurance in your will is still our gift of love.

- *Father Gilbert Shaw, 1886-1967*

# Daily Meditations

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## Monday, May 23

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When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. *Hosea 11:1-2*

Hunger in the spiritual world or in heaven is not hunger for food, because the angels do not feed upon material food, which is for the body that man carries about in the world; but it is hunger for such food as nourishes their minds. *Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 5576*

## Tuesday, May 24

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Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

*Hosea 11:3-4*

That to those who conquer in temptations will be given the delight of heavenly love from the Divine Human of the Lord is evident from the signification of "him that overcometh" as being those who conquer in temptations. *Apocalypse Explained n. 146*

## Wednesday, May 25

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They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. *Hosea 11:5-7*

When the natural of man is separated from his spiritual, which is effected chiefly by the love of self, then from the evils of that love falsities flow forth, for every falsity is from an evil, for the falsity is the protector of the evil, and the evil of the will takes form in the understanding by means of the ideas of the thought, and these ideas are called falsities.

*Apocalypse Explained n. 654*

## Thursday, May 26

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How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

*Hosea 11:8*

If people who lived good lives and believed the right things were not saved, and God could freely save or condemn on a whim anyone he wanted to, people who perished could justly accuse God of lacking mercy and compassion or even of being vicious.

*True Christian Religion n. 341*

## Friday, May 27

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I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west.

*Hosea 11:9-10*

Since heaven comes from the human race, then, and since heaven is living with the Lord forever, it follows that this was the Lord's goal for creation. Further, since this was the goal of creation, it is the goal of the Lord's divine providence. *Divine Providence n. 27.2*

## Saturday, May 28

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They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One. *Hosea 11:11-12*

I explained in *Divine Love and Wisdom* 404-405 how love unites itself to wisdom, specifically through a desire for knowing that gives rise to a desire for what is true, a desire for discerning that gives rise to a desire to grasp what is true, and a desire to see what we know and discern that gives rise to thought. The Lord flows into these desires, which are branches of the love of every individual's life; and angels accept that inflow in their perception of what is true and in their thinking.

*Divine Providence n. 283*

# A WILLINGNESS TO BELIEVE

Rev. F. Robert Tafel

## John 20:19-29

On the evening of the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were . . . Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!" When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. . . . Now Thomas (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 in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Eight days later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 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 believe."

## *Spiritual Diary #468*

No one ought to be persuaded about truth in a moment... [so] that there is no doubt left, because the truth so impressed becomes persuasive truth, and is devoid of extension; and it is also devoid of what is yielding.... Hence it is that as soon as any truth is presented ... before good spirits by manifest experience, there is presently afterwards presented something opposite, which caused dubiousness. Thus it is given them to think and consider whether it is so, and to collect reasons, and so bring that truth rationally into their minds....

## *Arcana Coelestia #2568*

There are those who are in doubt before they deny, and there are those who are in doubt before they affirm. Those in doubt before they deny, are those who incline to a life of evil. When that life sways them, they deny things spiritual and celestial to the extent that they think of them. But those in doubt before they affirm, are those who incline to a life of good. When they suffer themselves to be turned to this life by the Lord, they then affirm things spiritual and celestial to the extent that they think of them.

## Sermon

Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus had appeared a week earlier after the resurrection.

So they told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." It is this insistence upon sensory evidence for confirmation of Jesus' resurrection that differentiates Thomas. After all, the rest of the disciples doubted Jesus' resurrection at first, too. But when the other disciples saw Jesus and heard his greeting, and when Jesus showed them his hands and his side, they were glad.

Thomas wasn't there when all this took place; he was absent for some reason when Jesus mysteriously and suddenly appeared in their midst while they were behind barred doors. So because Thomas required physical confirmation of Jesus' resurrection, he earned the dubious distinction of being forever the archetypal figure of one who lacks faith. And if by "lacking faith" is meant not believing blindly what others say, Thomas is guilty as charged.

But Thomas was not so very different from the rest; he simply asked that he might have the same experience the others had had of seeing and touching the Lord. "Seeing is believing!" Or so Thomas thought. "Let me see, and then I shall believe!" And touching, he felt, would provide even more proof of the miracle his fellow disciples spoke about. To ground one's belief in physical sensory experience is simply to be natural-minded.

The most important point here is that Jesus did not condemn this quality. Rather, he gave Thomas the chance to exercise it and simply said, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 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 believe."

We can be glad that Thomas was the way he was: that he was able and willing to articulate his need to see and his desire to actually touch the Lord before he would believe he had risen. That is, we can be glad so long as we do not believe in external authority (for example, the testimony of others) alone for our religious beliefs.

We can be glad for Thomas's perspective because Thomas was not so very different from men and

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women of every generation who simply do not wish to be taken in or deceived. In fact, I'll bet there is a little bit of Thomas in each of us.

Emanuel Swedenborg, in his concept of biblical correspondences, states that all the people, events, and things in the Biblical narrative represent spiritual realities within each of us. In this view of the bible, the disciples represent the spectrum of guiding principles from affection and love we have for the Lord and for living a useful life.

Specifically, Thomas represents the sincere element of doubt that precedes belief, the spiritual need to see clearly and understand a matter before being willing to confirm it as a matter of belief. In short, doubt signifies a willingness to believe.

From our reading from Swedenborg:

“There are those who are in doubt before they deny, and there are those who are in doubt before they affirm. Those in doubt before they deny are those who incline to a life of evil. When that life sways them, they deny things spiritual and celestial to the extent that they think of them. But those in doubt before they affirm are those who incline to a life of good. When they suffer themselves to be turned to this life by the Lord, they then affirm things spiritual and celestial to the extent that they think of them.” (*Arcana Coelestia* # 2568)

The desire to see in order to believe that Thomas so clearly represents is a basic and necessary element of our spirit. Jesus recognized this and did not hesitate to show himself to Thomas. Jesus did not hesitate to give physical confirmation of his resurrection. He did not hesitate to show people—to show us—how to believe. He did and does so even while challenging people toward a more believing stance. Because things are never exactly as they seem to be, we are, on occasion, misled into believing what we think we see.

For this reason, Jesus also kept endeavoring to help his disciples see another way, another side of life, an element we might call “the believing of seeing.” It is a believing that takes place prior to seeing—we believe first, and therefore see. It is a mental imagery process that many of us have experienced, a process that often occurred in people healed by Jesus. Jesus said many times, “According to your faith, be it done to you.” He sought to nurture and strengthen this ability to believe and then see.

Near the beginning of John’s gospel (4:46-54) we are told about an official whose son was ill. Jesus told him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” He wanted Jesus actually to visit his son in order to heal him. But Jesus showed him another way: he sent the official on his way and healed the boy without visiting him. To shift the official’s thinking, Jesus sought to move him to accept and believe Jesus’ promise, to change from the “seeing of believing” to the believing of seeing. To Thomas and to all who will hear, Jesus now declares, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29).

You may recall a man named Nicodemus who came to Jesus in the middle of the night (so as not to be seen, for he was an important official and did not wish to jeopardize his position). Jesus declared that one had to be born anew to enter God’s kingdom, which confused Nicodemus. So Jesus continued, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit” (John 3:1-8).

Spiritual realities, such as love, matters of belief, and one’s relation to God, cannot be seen or tested by our physical senses. It is pointless to try. Yet love is no less real simply because it cannot be seen. For love can be felt and shown. Love can be manifested and experienced.

Our trust and faith in the Lord can be experienced, felt, demonstrated. The Lord invites us to obtain practical proof of his presence in our lives by recognizing our need for his sustaining presence and by turning to him for guidance and insight to help us follow his principles in our daily natural life in this physical world. Jesus invites us to know him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Let our response be like that of Thomas: “My Lord and my God!”

### **Prayer**

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I did not know you, my Lord, because I still desired to know and delight in things. Well and good if all things change, Lord God, provided we are rooted in you. If I go everywhere with you, my God, everywhere things will happen as I desire for your sake.

- St. John of the Cross, 1542-1591

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## Monday, May 30

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. *Psalm 65:1*

The faith of the new heaven and the new church in universal form is this: The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, came into the world to gain control over the hells and to glorify his own human nature.

*True Christian Religion n. 2*

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## Tuesday, May 31

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.  
Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. *Psalm 65:2-4*

The very essence and soul of everything in a comprehensive theology is the acknowledgment of God [arising] from a concept of him. Therefore it is necessary to begin with the oneness of God. *Ibid. 5*

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## Wednesday, June 1

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips  
when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;  
for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. *Psalm 65:5-7*

We are led by the Lord through an inflow and taught by being enlightened. The reason we are led by the Lord through an inflow is that both the being led and the flowing in are connected to our love and volition. The reason we are taught by the Lord by being enlightened is that being taught and being enlightened are properly connected with our wisdom and discernment. *Divine Providence n. 165*

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## Thursday, June 2

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;  
for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. *Psalm 24:1-2*

Everything in the universe was created by the divine love and wisdom of the Divine-Human One. The universe, from beginning to end and from first to last, is so full of divine love and wisdom that you could call it divine love and wisdom in an image.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 52*

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## Friday, June 3

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?  
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.  
They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.  
Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Psalm 24:3-6*

Sound reason tells us that everyone is predestined to heaven and no one to hell. We are all born human, which means that we have the image of God within us. The image of God within us is our ability to discern what is true and to do what is good.

*Divine Providence 322*

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## Saturday, June 4

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. *Psalm 24:7-10*

The Lord alone is the God of heaven and earth; they therefore who do not directly approach Him, cannot see the way to heaven, nor can they find the door, and if haply they are permitted to approach it, it is shut, and if they knock it is not opened.

*Apocalypse Revealed n. 176*

**Matthew 17:14-20**

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When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

**Sermon**

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*I tell you in truth, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move. Matthew 17:2*

Surely any serious biblical literalists would have to admit that neither they nor anyone else has "faith like a grain of mustard seed," and surely also we should be glad that this is the case. Imagine how chaotic it would be if every Sunday the faithful were called to demonstrate their faith! It is one thing to have people handling snakes and drinking strychnine, as some in fact do. A few do die, but that affects only them and those close to them; and interestingly, these occasional deaths are not interpreted as caused by a lack of faith. The basic explanation is that it in the Lord's sight it was time for this individual to die and to receive the blessing of eternal life. No such reasoning, though, explains the lack of mountain movers. To the best of my very limited knowledge, this "test of faith" is simply ignored.

This is unfortunate, because it betrays a tendency to choose the texts that we can live with and ignore the ones that trouble us, which is obviously no way to treat a book we regard as a revelation. It happens all the time, of course, as when people cite the biblical requirement of the death penalty for murder on the one hand but ignore the biblical requirement of the death penalty for the child who curses father or mother on the other. Let's face it: the Bible is not

only inconsistent; it sometimes says things that defy credibility. It also says things of surpassing beauty and wisdom and has been the inspiration and guide for some of the finest lives ever lived.

The problem, our theology tells us, is not so much with the Bible itself as with the way we read it. Specifically, literalism is only one way of reading it, and if we choose that way, we need to be honest enough to recognize that this is our own choice and be willing to take responsibility for it.

In fact, literalism is a relative latecomer on the scene. For centuries, the universal assumption was that divine revelation had depths of meaning far beyond the letter. If we look at the examples of fulfillment of prophecy in the Gospel of Matthew, for example, we find that none of the prophecies is fulfilled literally. From the early church fathers through the Middle Ages, immense and disciplined energy was devoted to understanding the deeper meanings of the language of God. In fact, the exclusive focus on the plain, literal sense came to the fore only with Luther and grew out of his need to find a clear authority greater than that of the Roman Catholic church and its tradition.

The gospel evidence is that Jesus was not a biblical literalist. In his first "sermon" in the synagogue at Capernaum, he read the opening verses of Isaiah 61, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted . . ." and then said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21). But Isaiah's words were not a prophecy of things to come. They were a statement of Isaiah's own divine commission. Or we might turn to the end of Luke, where Jesus was talking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). "Moses" is the Torah, the Pentateuch—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—and there is nothing in their literal sense about Jesus or the Messiah.

Jesus' favorite form of teaching was not literal commentary but fiction, parable. He could talk of plucking out the offending eye or cutting off the offending hand—and again, it is hard to believe that no literalist has ever had a roving eye or a roaming hand. No, the only way to understand his sayings and stories consistently is to see them as outward expressions of inner principles. It is not really the roving eye that offends, it is the sexual desire that directs the eye to rove, and that desire is what must be directly addressed. When we see that other person

as nothing but a hunk or a hottie, we are denying that he or she is essentially a child of God, and this is a direct violation of the second great commandment.

In this spirit, then, what might our text be trying to tell us? "I tell you in truth, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." There are two main differences between a mountain and a mustard seed. The one that first comes to mind, the one that makes nonsense out of any literal reading of the statement, is the immense difference in size. The other is at least as immense, though—the seed is alive and the mountain is not. Given a clear field of competition and enough millennia, the seed would in fact conquer the mountain, multiplying geometrically, covering the surface, devouring its soil, breaking down its rocks to make more soil. The mountain's only resistance would be completely passive.

If we then apply these ratios to the realm of faith, Jesus is saying that the smallest bit of truly living faith can overcome what seems to be an overwhelmingly large dead weight. It is then up to us to bring this down to specifics, and the easiest way to do this is to identify what it is within us that constantly discourages us, constantly weighs us down. It may be a tendency toward resentment of those who don't appreciate us or of responsibilities that we didn't ask for. It may be envy of those who seem unfairly privileged. It may focus on money or sex or food or alcohol or control. Each of us has some such "dark side," and everyone's dark side is distinctive, unique.

The common feature is the recurrent discouragement, the feeling that we'll never get over this. We've resisted the feelings, but they keep coming back. It is the feeling so clearly pictured in the Greek legend of Sisyphus, condemned to keep rolling a huge stone up a mountain only to have it roll back down again just as he was nearing the top.

If that is the mountain, then, there is some urgency to identifying the mustard seed that can move it, and if we turn to the contrast between the lifelessness of the mountain and the vitality of the seed, there is one obvious candidate: a true, living recognition that the Lord is life, or perhaps even better, that life is the Lord.

This is a tiny statement—in English, four words, all of one syllable—but it goes straight to the heart of the matter, to the difference between life and death. It is a

simple statement, but plant it in our minds, let it take root and grow, and its effects are out of all proportion to its simplicity. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, the smallest seed of all, but one that could grow to be a tree big enough for birds to nest in its branches. The ramifications of this principle are immense, and the very word "ramification" is from a Latin word meaning "making branches."

What are some of these branches? Perhaps the trunk itself is most clearly identified in the first principle of Alcoholics Anonymous, the recognition of our own powerlessness. In and of ourselves, we are simply not alive. The only thing that is alive in us is the presence of the Lord. It is this recognition that has enabled countless "hopeless" alcoholics to lead lives of sobriety. It is this mustard seed that has moved their mountain.

Clearly, though, this is not merely an intellectual comprehension of a theological principle. This is a conviction based on personal experience, the contrast between the painful experience of total defeat and the miraculous experience of deliverance. It calls to mind the statement of the man whose sight had been restored by Jesus. He could not answer the theological questions of the scribes. He could only say, "This I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

That fundamental fact, that trunk of the tree, can reach out and touch every facet of our lives. It can give us a whole new sense of proportion. There is a rabbinical maxim that says it very nicely: "Everyone should have an overcoat with two pockets. In one there is a slip of paper that says, 'I am nothing but dust and ashes.' In the other there is a slip that says, 'For me the world was created.'" Whatever we are, and sometimes we seem to be not very much, we are inexpressibly dear to the Lord.

Another way of saying it is "I matter; but 'I' doesn't matter." We matter to each other. Think of how it feels to walk into a room where people have been waiting for you and are spontaneously glad to see you. Contrast that with walking into a room where for any reason at all you are not welcome. Imagine a life composed entirely of one kind of experience or the other. We not only matter to each other, we are absolutely essential to each other. "For me, the world was created."

Few attitudes more surely make us unwelcome, though, than a sense of self-importance. That "I"

***The "I" of self-importance is nothing but dust and ashes, the dead weight that drags us down.***

is one we would do well to forget, the “I” that is constantly saying, “Look at me. Look what a good job I’m doing. Look how special I am.” No, that “I” is nothing but dust and ashes. This is the futility of the whole business of spiritual scorekeeping, of credit and blame.

It is may be nothing but dust and ashes, but it can seem like an immense pile of dust and ashes—in fact, like a mountain. This sense of ownership, of self-importance, *is* the essence of the mountain that needs to be moved. It is the dead weight that drags us down, dead because in claiming to be alive in and of itself it denies the source of its life.

“If only we believed the way things *really* are,” Swedenborg wrote, “we would not take credit for the good we do or blame for the wrong” (*Heaven and Hell* 302). Instead, by claiming ownership of ourselves, we make ourselves guilty of the wrong and spoil the good with self-righteousness. That is a major branch of the tree that grows from the mustard seed. Another is the recognition that the same holds true for everyone in the world. Another is that the recognition that because of that inflowing life each of us is in process, that where we are headed is in many ways more important than where we happen to be.

Once we are relieved of the dead weight of self-importance, everything looks different. Everything *feels* different. We find ourselves for the first time truly free simply to be responsible. This is the easy yoke, the light burden that the Lord promises to those who labor and are heavy laden if they do that one simple thing—come to him.

## Prayers

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Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning, I go to and fro without knowing what to do and in great despair. Like the inescapable shadow which follows me, the dead weight of sin haunts me. Graciously look upon me, Lord. Thy love is my refuge.

- from *India*

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee: for behold, Thou wert within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that Thou hast made. Thou wert with me, and I was not with Thee. I was kept from Thee by all those things, yet had they not been in Thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to me to break open my deafness: and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my

blindness. Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.

- *St. Augustine, 354-450*

Take not, O Lord, our literal sense.

Lord, in thy great, unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

- *C.S. Lewis, 1989-1963*

Take my life and let it be

Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days,

Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move

At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing,

Always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be

Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,

Not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use

Every pow’r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,

It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is Thine own,

It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour

At Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself and I will be

Ever, only, all for Thee.

- *Frances R. Havergal, 1874*



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# Daily Meditations

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## Monday, June 6

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

*Psalm 139:1-3*

There is one human God who is the source of everything. All the elements of human reason unite in, and in a sense center on, the fact that a single God is the Creator of the universe.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 23*

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## Tuesday, June 7

Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it. *Psalm 139:4-6*

Our very ability to think rationally is not our own property. It is a property of God within us. Human rationality in general depends on this fact, and this general property causes our reason more or less spontaneously to see the oneness of God. *Ibid.*

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## Wednesday, June 8

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

*Psalm 139:7-10*

If you gather together everything you know, focus your mind's insight on it, and look through it carefully from some spiritual height to discover what is common to everything, the only conclusion you can draw is that it is love and wisdom. These two are essential to every aspect of our life. *Divine Love and Wisdom n. 28*

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## Thursday, June 9

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is  
as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you. *Psalm 139:11-12*

We cannot say that it is reality and manifestation derived from itself, because that would involve a beginning, a beginning from something else that had within it some intrinsic reality and manifestation; while true reality and its manifestation in and of itself exists from eternity. Then too, true reality and manifestation in and of itself is uncreated; and nothing that has been created can exist except from something uncreated.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 44*

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## Friday, June 10

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

*Psalm 139:13-15*

The only source of nature's functions is life, and the only source of their sequence and pattern is love and wisdom. Forms, though, are vessels of functions. This means that if we look only at forms, no trace is visible of the life in nature, let alone of love and wisdom, and therefore of God. *Divine Love and Wisdom n. 46*

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## Saturday, June 11

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you. . . .  
Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.

*Psalm 139:17-18, 23-24*

Divine love and wisdom cannot fail to be and to be manifested in others that it has created. The hallmark of love is not loving ourselves but loving others and being united to them through love.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 47*

# JUN 12 ON NOT SPEAKING FOR ONESELF

Ms. Leah Grace Goodwin

## Sermon

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### Ezekiel 37:1-14

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The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

### John 16:13-15

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When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, the first birthday of the Christian church. It is the third most important feast in the Christian calendar after Easter and Christmas, and for good reason: Pentecost was the day, fifty days after the feast of the Passover, after the Resurrection, after Jesus' ascension into heaven, that his followers got the sense that maybe they hadn't imagined the whole thing after all. Pentecost was the day that the disciples received the Holy Spirit, the breath and clarity and truth of God.

The Holy Spirit, we are given to understand, is the presence of the Lord with the church in the world—"the church" meaning the church on every level of magnitude, from our individual spiritual lives, to the church community, to the world. Swedenborg tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Divine Truth that finds its source in Divine Love, the breath of God at work in us, "that enlightens us, and flows into us, when we are being reformed and regenerated."

The Holy Spirit is *powerful*. I am frequently awed, when reading Scripture, watching the news, or puttering around in daily life, by the way in which God, through the Holy Spirit, gives people the ability—the power, or hope, or eloquence—to do things they could not otherwise have done.

And here's something worth noting: The Spirit—the life-giving breath of God, the hand of God, the Lord's presence with us—does not speak for itself.

We hear this in the Gospel of John: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears... The Spirit will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14)

Paul tells us of the same thing: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness...and God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints"—that's us—"according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27, selected).

It's not that the Holy Spirit belongs to the Father and to the Lord Jesus—it's *one with* the Father and the Lord Jesus. The Spirit does not need to speak for itself, or from itself, because the Spirit is God. God's goodness and wisdom are completely one. Divine truth speaks what Divine love gives it the will to speak. The Holy Spirit, Divine truth, gives form to the desire that Divine love whispers—tenderly, fiercely, joyfully—in its ear. God, you see, always speaks the truth in love. The Spirit can intercede for the saints—

for us—precisely because it is the expression of the Lord’s will.

And so today, I want to talk about the virtues of not speaking for oneself.

I want to be clear. When I talk about “speaking for oneself,” I do not refer to self-expression, or self-defense, or finding one’s own voice in the world. All these acts are crucial to our humanity, and they are crucial in respecting others.

When I talk about “speaking for oneself,” I am referring, really, to speaking from oneself—speaking from what Swedenborg called the proprium, or what is our own. By “speaking for oneself” I mean speaking (or acting, for that matter) under the impression that we are the ones coming up with the great ideas, that we are the source of our own life.

But we are not the source of our own life. Swedenborg tells us that “Whatever is living within us comes from the Lord’s life...we are organs of life.” When we speak for, or from, ourselves, we limit severely the life of our speech. Our words become at best boring and irrelevant, at worst arrogant, dishonest, even hateful and death-dealing.

Our reading from Ezekiel this morning illustrates, in dramatic fashion, the power of speaking from the spirit.

Ezekiel is brought, in a vision, to a valley full of bones. “They were,” he notes, “very dry.” And God wants him to bring life from these bones.

*Prophesy to these bones, mortal, and tell them that I will open up the heavens and breathe my life into them. Prophesy to these slain, to this multitude who lie here without spiritual life, without hope.*

Ezekiel doesn’t speak for himself. He speaks the words that the Lord gives him to speak. It is because he speaks from God’s script, and not his own, that a vast boneyard becomes a valley filled with the living. “Prophesy to these bones,” says the Lord, and prophesy Ezekiel does.

What happens next is downright astonishing: “Suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them.”

But there is, as yet, no breath in them. There is no Spirit, no life.

And so Ezekiel does as God tells him, one more time: “I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.”

Ezekiel, mortal, son of man, raises the dead. Not only that, he gives life to the dead: “their breath comes into them.” By speaking from his true source of life, speaking from the Spirit, he is empowered to do that which only God can do: he gives the Spirit to another, to a vast multitude. He gives life to the house of Israel.

It’s not easy, getting out of one’s own spiritual way, speaking from the Spirit—and it surely isn’t often a recipe for fame and glory. Frequently it gets us into trouble. Speaking from the Spirit is an act of obedience, a spiritual discipline.

And it’s an act that makes us human, that gives us real life beyond just physical existence. Swedenborg tells us that “when this flows into a person’s good which he seems to himself to will and perform from his own, the good is then made alive, and from the good the truth also; and out of the dry bones a human being is made.”

So this is the question I put to you:

What happens if we do not speak for, or from, ourselves? What happens when, like Ezekiel, we listen to the Holy Spirit, and speak with God’s words, from God’s script?

What happens if you and I speak, not from our propriums, not from ourselves or from what we understand to be our own resources of intelligence and love, but from our true source of life? What happens when we get out of our own way and allow ourselves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s life within us?

Left to our own devices, we are a not much worth talking about: Swedenborg tells us, remember, that “a person’s proprium is something altogether dead, though it has the appearance to that person of being something; indeed it appears to be everything. Whatever is living within us comes from the Lord’s life; and if this were to leave us, we would fall down dead as a stone.”

But add the Holy Spirit, and we become much more. If we speak not for ourselves, but listen for God’s truth, take in God’s breath, we become inspiring. We become the conduit for endless life and illumination in others, if only we speak from the Lord. In other words, we bring life to the dead.

“The hand of the Lord came upon me,” says Ezekiel, “and he brought me out in the spirit of the Lord...and I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into those dry bones, and they lived.”

Amen.

# Daily Meditations

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## Monday, June 13

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Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. *Exodus 3:1-2*

That the Lord appears to everyone according to his quality, is evident from the fact that the Lord appears to those who are in the inmost or third heaven as a sun, from which proceeds ineffable light, because those who are there are in the good of love to the Lord.

*Arcana Coelestia n. 6832.2*

## Tuesday, June 14

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Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

*Exodus 3:3-6*

This shows how the case is with the sense of the letter of the Word relatively to the internal sense; and that the contents of the sense of the letter are of such a nature as to accommodate themselves to the apprehension of the simple, who believe only as it appears. *Ibid. 6839*

## Wednesday, June 15

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Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." *Exodus 3:7-10*

The delights of the loves of self and of the world take away all belief about the life after death. These persons are perpetually immersed in falsities. *Ibid n. 6853*

## Thursday, June 16

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But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." *Exodus 3:11-14*

The Divine truth proceeding from the Lord is the veriest reality, and such a reality that all things have come forth from it, and all things subsist from it; for whatever proceeds from the Lord is the veriest reality in the universe; and such is the Divine truth, which is called the "Word," through which all things were made. *Ibid. n. 6880*

## Friday, June 17

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But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." *Exodus 4:10-12*

Every man's quality is known from his love; for love is the being of the life of everyone, from it springing the veriest life itself; such therefore as the love is with a man, such is the man. *Ibid. n. 6872.2*

## Saturday, June 18

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But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do." *Exodus 4:13-16a*

The Divine truth proceeding immediately from the Lord's Divine Human cannot be heard and perceived by any man, nor even by an angel. Therefore in order that it may be heard and perceived, there must be mediation, which mediation is effected through heaven, and afterward through the angels and spirits with the man. *Ibid n. 6996*

# OUR "NEW" CHURCH

Rev. Eric Hoffman

## Haggai 2:1-9

In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

## Revelation 21:10-14, 22-27

And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## Sermon

# 19 JUN

Today is the convergence of many holidays. Not only do we celebrate Father's Day today, but people in Uruguay are celebrating Artigas Day, which commemorates the 1764 birthday of General Jose Gervasio Artigas, the "father of Uruguay." It is also Independence Day in Kuwait, Labour Day in Trinidad and Tobago, and "Righting Day" in Algeria (I have no idea what "Righting Day" commemorates). In Texas, as well as in many other parts of the country, this is "Juneteenth," a holiday that honors the historical end of slavery in the United States in 1862. Many communities are having Juneteenth festivals today, including a rather large one in Minneapolis.

It was rather difficult to decide which holiday to speak to this morning. I must, however, offer my apologies to those of us from Algeria, Kuwait, the Caribbean, and Uruguay, since I will not be addressing your holidays. I will address Father's Day only in passing. I'd like to address another holiday that falls on June 19<sup>th</sup>—one that perhaps not many of you are aware of but is a sort of special holiday for Swedenborgians throughout the world. It is called "The New Evangel," and our own 1950 Bow of Worship (p.210) define it as

"...a special New Church festival commemorating the inauguration of a new age, in which the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ shall be seen as 'the God visible in whom is the invisible'; it brings to us as an incentive the knowledge that we have innumerable allies on the spiritual plane of life where the Lord's purpose continues to be carried into greater fulfilment [sic]."

Many Swedenborgian churches don't recognize June 19<sup>th</sup> as any more or less special than any other day. The case is probably different in other Swedenborgian denominations around the world (did you know that there is more than one?). In the minds of those who began the recognition of this holiday, The New Evangel was an affirmation that "The New Church" is destined to flourish while all the other "less-informed" churches will eventually die out. If we were to be true to the original intent of The New Evangel, then it seems to be a very presumptuous holiday.

Still, it is an occasion worthy of our attention if the New Church is understood in the way Swedenborg intended. He mentions the term "New Church" frequently in the books that he wrote, and it becomes clear to the serious reader that he's not talking about an organization. "The New Church" is not a building

used for worship, and it's not a constitution and bylaws. "The New Church" is a new awareness. It defines an enlightened spirituality. Let me share with you a portion of the *Arcana Coelestia*:

"The reason the interior things of the Word are now being opened is that at this day the church is vastated so greatly—that is, is so devoid of faith and love—that although people know and understand, still they do not acknowledge, and still less, believe; except a few, who are in the life of good and . . . who can be instructed, and with whom a New Church is to be instituted." (*Arcana Coelestia* 3898.3)

Now, it's easy to read this and believe that what it calls for is the formation of the institution, as our church's founding fathers certainly did in London back in 1789 when the first "Swedenborgian" church was formed. But collecting a few people under one roof and calling it "The New Church" doesn't make it so. Scripture relates that the "New Church" or the "New Jerusalem" is realized only as a result of a long and deliberate journey.

It wasn't a city that descended in John's vision; it was a foundation upon which one can build a life. And the New Jerusalem doesn't descend just once, but once for each and every person in which the light of the Divine is kindled and illuminates the love and wisdom that is created in each one of us. I'm sure you understand that a person can sit in the pews for a lifetime of Sundays without ever experiencing the miracle of a new awareness. It takes more than that.

As a fourth-year student in seminary, I was asked to write a paper on the early history of this denomination. I chose to focus on one of our founding fathers, an Anglican minister by the name of John Clowes. This was a man who was a reader of Swedenborg when the books were literally hot off the printing press, and who disagreed with the other founding fathers who insisted that a separate church should be formed. I struggled with the same questions Clowes did, knowing that Swedenborg wrote not to instigate yet another schism in Christianity, but to write for all people who took the practice of inclusive Christianity seriously. Working all this out, I consulted a friend of mine—a Swedenborgian minister—and told her that I didn't think the "New Church" organization we have inherited was the "New Church" that Swedenborg wrote about. She agreed with me.

"Do you want to know where the 'New Church' is?" she asked. "It's in the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. It's in Codependents Anonymous, and Overeater's Anonymous, and the Adult Children of Alcoholics support groups." These are people, she explained, who deliberately come together to help and support each other in their efforts to change their lives because they know that if they do not address the addiction and the helplessness and the hell in their lives, they will die. These are people who have realized that if they continue along as they have, there will be a price to pay that they cannot afford. These are people who have decided to take their lives seriously. That is the kind of Christianity that Swedenborg encouraged—a community where people come to be with each other, finding mutual support, for the purpose of rising above the nonsense in their lives and growing closer to the healing presence of the Divine. The "New Church" is found in people who realize that their continued separation from God will lead to spiritual death.

The Holy City descends into our lives to show us how God is present to us and to create within every one of us a New Church—a new understanding of the breadth and depth and wondrous beauty of the Divine. Please note that there is no temple, no institution, in the Holy City, but that God is equally present throughout. We become part of the "New Church" only when we can perceive the gentle and loving guidance of the Lord, and when we respond to creation with the same love the Lord shows us.

We have been invited to the Holy City, but we have not attained it yet. The Swedenborgian Church often refers to itself as the Church of the New Jerusalem, but that is a name that must be earned. We can celebrate this "New Evangel," but let it be a commemoration not of something that has happened already, but rather a recommitment to our potential as a community, to our spiritual inheritance of heaven's goodness and truth. The prophet Haggai addressed a people that were losing hope—an attitude I've perceived more than once in our Swedenborgian Church. He tells them, and tells us, that as long as we remain centered in love and wisdom the Lord will bring splendor to this house. Amen.

*We have been  
invited to the  
Holy City, but we  
have not attained  
it yet.*

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## Monday, June 20

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.

*Ephesians 3:1-4*

It is a great mystery that the whole angelic heaven has been so formed as to correspond completely to a human being, as a whole and as to its single parts, and all its members, and that this greatest human being was completely corrupted by falls, so that lower things were dominating over higher ones. Thence came the necessity that Jesus Christ should come into the world and should conquer the devil, and thereby restore order, and thus be the One and Only Human Being to whom the Universe related. *Spiritual Experiences n. 488*

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## Tuesday, June 21

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. *Ephesians 3:5-7*

As the Gentiles are in ignorance, and are free from stumbling blocks [or difficulties], they are in a better state for the reception of truths than those who are of the church; and all those among them who are in the good of life receive truths easily.

*Arcana Coelestia n. 2986*

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## Wednesday, June 22

Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. *Ephesians 3:8-10*

Eternal ends have to do with spiritual honors and riches, which are those of love and wisdom, in heaven.

*Divine Providence n. 216.2*

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## Thursday, June 23

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory. *Ephesians 3:11-13*

The grand purpose, or the purpose of all elements of creation, is an eternal union of the Creator with the created universe. This does not happen unless there are subjects in which his divinity can be at home, so to speak, subjects in which it can dwell and abide.

*Divine Love and Wisdom n. 170*

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## Friday, June 24

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

*Ephesians 3:14-17*

Everyone in general assesses forms based on their essences and not the reverse. The will is the essence. Thought is the form. No one can assign any value to the form except the value it derives from its essence. The essence, then, is what is truly valued, and not the form. *True Christian Religion n. 660*

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## Saturday, June 25

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. *Ephesians 3:18-21*

Places and spaces in the Word mean matters that involve state-distances, for instance, length, breadth, height, and depth... In heaven... where thinking does not involve space, people understand length as a state of good and breadth as a state of truth, while height is their difference in regard to level. *Heaven and Hell n. 97*

**Revelation 22: 1-5**

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Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

**Sermon**

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What keeps religion going? Surely this is something worth wondering about. It came into our world from beyond the hills of time. It was there, farther back than history can remember. And it brought us to this church today.

When we dig into the remains of ancient civilizations, we find its marks, unmistakably: an image, an altar, mystic symbols, sacred vessels, the ruins of a sanctuary. The many forms it has taken through the ages sometimes were crude, at other times elaborate and surprisingly perceptive. But it would seem that wherever man has been, and wherever human life is, there is evidence of a faith, a cultus, a belief, an attempt to reach out into the invisible for protection, guidance or favor, enlightenment, or sheer adoration. And here we are today, at worship, playing a part in the same unfolding drama.

What, then, is that mysterious, disturbing factor in the very nature of man that makes him look up and seek both completion and fulfillment above himself? That fills him with a sense of awe and sets him on the quest for life's meaning? That leads him to acknowledge dependence on and accountability to a power greater than his own? That tells him that he ought to think, to will, to do, nay, even to be otherwise than his natural inclinations dictate? And

that will not leave him alone till he has learned to relate himself to it?

What is that power that, in the course of time, appears to have drawn him to itself, and fashioned him, in countless instances, from the beast into manhood as we know it at its best—let us say, from the caveman to an Albert Schweitzer, the self-effacing “ten-talent man” of our generation?

Surely if this has taken place there is something personal at the core of that relatedness, on both sides. In that power there must be something human, even if it be superhuman. Man cannot respond to, nor speak with, nor love what he has no kinship with, what is not in some measure like him. We may well be supercilious about primitive religion and say that man created in his own image the god or gods he worshipped. It is so to a large extent. Yet it was so because, in the first place and although man did not know it, God had created him in his image and likeness. Could God have done otherwise?

So for man, that power has never been “It” but “Thou.” It has been as intimate as all that from the beginning. And when the crude ideas of outward human shape disappeared, personalness remained an integral part of man's sense of God. Intimacy remained also, and man's response was purified, empowered, and made real in the measure in which he learned not to take it for granted.

At last, with the coming of Christ, the men who were closest to him became convinced that this personal God had shown himself to us in the limitations of our nature. In him they saw human life as it should be when it is truly lived. In him they found a living answer to the meaning of life itself: that we should grow like him, attain the full stature of our manhood in his image and likeness—and this through our learning to love one another as he has first loved us, and so does love us still. Such was the beginning of the Christian religion. And with it the intimacy grew. Though returned to his Fatherhood they felt that he, the God-Man, was alive in them and they in him.

In him they saw that truth that is eternal and that through the ages had been struggling to make itself known: that he is a God of love, and that he lives in us, yearning for nothing more than that we should make ourselves hospitable to him and let him fashion us into the spiritual persons we ought to become, not only individually, but in all our human relationships. Thus Paul exclaims, “I live, and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” That is what Christianity means. Or, listen to what one of the early fathers of the church,



Saint Augustine, has to say: "That which is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and there never was a time when it did not exist, from the planting of the human race until Christ came in the flesh. At that time the true religion that already existed began to be called Christianity."

What keeps religion going, then? It is not our theologies, nor the intellectual scaffoldings by which we seek to reach the divine. It is not rituals, nor ecclesiastical hierarchies, nor institutional machinery. These are but means to an end, forms that may come and go. But it is the response of the heart that, for all men, at all times, remains the same. It is the experience of God, in commitment to him, on the part of the humble. And in this, the initiative is not theirs, as they well know, but the Lord's.

What keeps religion going is that unseen, strange power of his love and truth, pouring itself out continually, pressing on us to be received, urgent to make itself known, to find a welcome within us. Then, when it meets a response, something happens in the depths of a man's life. An insignificant nobody, on his knees, begins to hold converse with the eternal. He becomes a new man. He begins to count as he forgets himself, overcomes his lower nature by the strength that is given him, and determines to match his life more and more with that of the Master. His life becomes meaningful in that it is related to God's purpose throughout the ages. Through him, God becomes real in the world and much else is changed besides him, wherever he may reach. Through him, and through many like him, twice-born men, the life-giving power of God's love continues to make itself felt and to heal the hurts and the disorders of mankind. With him God's truth marches on.

And what is true of individuals is also true of the church. For the church is alive only in the measure in which God is alive in its members. It is their corporate response to him. Swedenborg would agree with Augustine, for instance, that the fundamental truths of the Christian religion have been in existence and have been true from the beginning of the human race. But he would add that man's insight into them has only been gradual and at times very dim. He would agree, again, that the real life of the church has been its understanding and practice of love. But then he would point out that there have been long periods when, by and large, the love that Christ came to disclose in its fullness was sadly lacking.

Great religious eras, which he sometimes calls churches, have for instance, in the past, succeeded one another. They have begun with great promise,

gathered momentum, and for a while borne fruit, only to wither and die. The same has been true of many churches and many revival movements within the Christian church. What is remarkable, however, is that despite its internal conflicts and many divisions, the Christian church itself never died. Unlike other human institutions, it has survived and outlived civilizations, kingdoms and empires, wars and persecution, and died in appearance only to be born again. The new church that Swedenborg was hailing in advance, the church of this new age, is naught else but Christianity reborn, given new light, a new will to be one in the practice of love by its Lord.

But whence this power of inner renewal? In his writings, Clement of Alexandria compares the church to a great river. "Sometimes it flows," he says, "with impetuosity through a narrow channel. Sometimes it spreads like a flood. Sometimes it divides into several streams. Sometimes again it seems to disappear underground only to reappear at some distance farther." But John, who sees the same image in the vision of our text, takes us into it more inwardly. He takes us to the source of that life-giving stream.

"And he showed me," he says, "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." From God himself, a God who cared enough to be man—which is what is meant by "the throne of God and of the Lamb"—is that continual influx of power and love and truth for human life that has never been without a witness among men, and that cannot be defeated. "Clear as crystal." Now it is possible for men to be aware of their kinship with God; to see God in Christ both risen and glorified; to know that he lives in them, and be caught up and empowered by all that is implied in his Divine Humanity.

For if we, in our turn, care enough, there is in the God-Man, through us, the power to make this a better world, where wars will become a thing of the past and man's inhumanity to man be replaced by true brotherhood. "The river of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb": that is the central fact and force at work in the fashioning of this new age. Through this clearer understanding of him, God comes closer to men, and the more urgent becomes our challenge to make this a more humane world, in his image and likeness.

The church in whom he lives, the church that is called his body, the church reborn and made anew for the task, as a willing instrument of his purpose, needs your fuller and more complete commitment to him. The church in whom you can become a

receiver and transmitter of that life-giving stream; the church in whom you are an heir to the ages, one with religion's glorious past, one in the fellowship of heaven, one with all who worship God now, through all the world, one with the generations yet unborn, awaits your decision.

So John adds, "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him that heareth, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Are we athirst enough for that?

## Prayer

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We bless you that we were made to love, as the stars were made to shine.

Grant that such love may never die within us,

But being daily rekindled in our souls, may burn in our hearts and forever renew our whole being.

This we ask through Christ our Lord.

- Florence Allshorn (1887-1950)

# Daily Meditations

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## Monday, June 27

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Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue."

*II Samuel 23:1-3*

The Holy Spirit is the divine truth, and also the divine virtue and operation proceeding from the one God, in whom is the divine Trinity, thus from the Lord God the Savior. *True Christian Religion n. 139*

## Tuesday, June 28

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"The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?" *II Samuel 23:4-5*

The Holy Spirit, strictly speaking, signifies the Divine Truth, thus also the Word; and in this sense the Lord Himself is also the Holy Spirit. Since, however, in the Church at this day the Holy Spirit is regarded as the Divine Operation, which in reality is justification, therefore this is here assumed to be the Holy Spirit.

*Ibid.*

## Wednesday, June 29

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"But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot."

*II Samuel 23:6-7*

Who does not know that mercy cannot be infused into cruelty, innocence into revenge, love into hatred, concord into discord? This would be like mingling heaven and hell. *True Christian Religion n. 642*

## Thursday, June 30

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Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,  
O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.  
When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. *Psalms 65:1-3*

I have also heard from heaven that the Lord forgives every man his sins, and never punishes for them, and does not even impute them, because He is Love itself and Good itself; nevertheless, that sins are not wiped out on this account, for that can only be done by repentance. Since then He told Peter that he should forgive until seventy times, what will not the Lord do?

*True Christianity n. 409*

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,  
O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the  
ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.  
By your strength you established the mountains; you  
are girded with might.  
Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by  
your signs; you make the gateways of the morning  
and the evening shout for joy. *Psalms 65:5-6,8*

Those things which are best and purest, thus which  
are more perfect than the rest, are in the inmost; those  
which proceed thence toward the exteriors are less  
perfect according to the degree of removal from the  
inmost things. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9666.2*

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water; you provide the  
people with grain, for so you have prepared it.  
You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.  
You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon  
tracks overflow with richness. *Psalms 65:9-11*

The teachings of the church, which are full of good  
and truth, have all that is needed to nourish the soul.  
These truths continually produce new truths.  
*adapted from Apocalypse Explained n. 644.17*

# Our Daily Bread

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**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.

*Our Daily Bread* is a ministry of the  
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**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.

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