

Swedenborg And Revelation Concerning Life After Death

Hello. I'm Ian Arnold and this is the Swedenborg Program. Thank you for joining me. I wish you good and worthwhile reading. Certainly it will be my aim to make it so.

Pause a moment with me, will you, and consider carefully these words. "It's not a matter of belief or opinion. I know beyond doubt that there is a life after death". These are words not of some eminent churchman placing all his faith in Scripture teaching on the subject; they are not, the words, either, of someone caught in an argument and defiantly stating a position; they are the words of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, world-renowned for her work with the terminally ill and dying and whose techniques and approach with these people, are now widely followed. I stress the point that Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is a doctor, not a minister or a theologian. And it is important to realise that her conviction about the reality of the life after death is not something that was with her from the beginning and about which she went collecting evidence. Rather, and as it were, uninvited, evidence began to accumulate before her eyes which she felt she could no longer ignore and which led to such unequivocal conviction about it. As she tells the story, an awareness of the possibility of on-going life grew on her, in the early stages as the result of her contact, while a young doctor in Switzerland, with aged patients, near death, who spoke of people who had predeceased them, as if they were with them. "In those days" writes Dr. Kubler-Ross, "we presumed that the patients were hallucinating because many times they were on drugs or were psychotic. But I knew that many of my elderly patients were not psychotic or drugged. They would talk to someone I could not see and then turn around and very cogently address me. So I asked myself, what could they see or hear that I could not see or hear?"

Since that time patients, in near-death situations, or patients revived from clinical death, have spoken to Dr. Kubler-Ross of people waiting for them. They have described communication with people in the spiritual world "through a non-verbal, instantaneous reading of thoughts". They have reported encounters with an overpowering "being of light" who radiates, they said, "love, acceptance and warmth". And they have been surprised at their sense of "wholeness" despite withdrawal from the natural body. A brush with death that it has been for them, the great majority talk of it as a beautiful thing and they are no longer afraid to die.

You may well be aware of the fact that Dr. Kubler-Ross is not the only renowned researcher in this field. In 1976 Dr. Raymond Moody of the University of Virginia Hospital in America published his best-seller, *"Life after Life"*. In that book Dr. Moody describes the results of his research with over one hundred patients who had clinically died and been revived. What deeply impressed him was the remarkable similarity of the experiences which those people had and which they 'came back' to tell. Once again, and this is important, Dr. Moody didn't go out to collect evidence in support of a conviction he already had, that there is a life after death. Like Dr. Kubler-Ross, evidence kept piling up which he could not ignore. "What has amazed me" he wrote, "since the beginning of my interest are the great similarities in the reports, despite the fact that they come from people of highly varied religions, social and educational backgrounds. By the time I entered medical school in 1972 I had collected a sizable number of these experiences and I began mentioning the informal study I had been doing to some of my medical acquaintances. Eventually, a friend of mine talked me into giving a report to a medical society, and other public talks followed. Again, I found that after every talk someone would come up to tell me of an experience of his own". (pages 15 & 16, "Life after Life").

Right at the beginning of his book Dr. Moody stresses that he does not set forth his findings as proof of the existence of a life after death. And he refused to draw any conclusions. "I am left" he writes "not with conclusions or evidence or proofs, but with something much less definite - feelings, questions, analogies, puzzling facts to be explained." Much of the second part of the book is devoted to an examination of parallels, or teaching on the life after death, both in ancient and esoteric writings and literature, among these being the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm in 1688. In his time he became a highly-respected scientist and philosopher and held his own with the best of them. The fact that he tends not to be remembered in those capacities, either as a scientist or a philosopher, is as much due to the fact that he himself came to see his life in different terms and as having a different purpose. At the age of 57 he abandoned a comfortable job on the Board which controlled Sweden's mining industry, and, while not withdrawing from the world, he devoted the large part of the rest of his life to writing a series of books which radically challenged the major assumptions of the Church's thinking and teaching and redefined basic Christian concepts and beliefs.

What is undoubtedly the best-known of Swedenborg's writings is his book, "*Heaven and Hell*" ("Heaven and its wonders and Hell" he called it "from things heard and seen.") This remarkable book, is he claimed, an eye-witness account of the life which awaits us all when we die. Unconscious as, for the most part, we are of the spiritual world while we are here, Swedenborg describe his unusual experience whereby he was frequently, day after day, and sometimes for hours at a time, brought into a conscious awareness of the spiritual world. He wrote in the Preface to the book,

"Today's Churchman knows almost nothing about heaven, hell, or his own life after death, even though this is all described in the Bible. It has gone so far that even many people born in the Church deny these things and ask in their hearts, 'Has anyone come back and told us?' To prevent so negative an attitude from infecting and corrupting people of simple heart and simple faith, it has been made possible for me to be right with angels and talk with them as person to person. So now I may describe heaven and hell from what I have seen and heard, hoping for the enlightenment of ignorance and the dispersion of disbelief by this means." *Heaven and Hell*

The book, "*Heaven and Hell*", has been described as the most comprehensive description of the life after death ever given to mankind. And though it has stirred controversy since it was first written, yet in the way it quietly and rationally unfolds the life to come, it has been of enormous help and inspiration to many. One of the most widely acclaimed women of our age, the late Dr. Helen Keller, wrote, and I quote:

"There is an exquisitely quieting and soothing power in the thoughts of Swedenborg for people of my temperament. I hope I shall be able in my book to radiate the spiritual illumination that came to me when I read with my own fingers (Swedenborg's) "*Heaven and Hell* . . . For the first time immortality put on intelligibility for me, and earth wore new curves of loveliness and significance."

Much of what Drs. Kubler-Ross and Moody uncovered in their research bears striking similarities to the different things said in the book, "*Heaven and Hell*". Swedenborg is emphatic that though the body dies the person as such does not. "Man is said to die" he wrote, "but still he does not die. He is only separated from the material body which had served him for use in the world, but which can no longer be of any use to him; for

man himself lives". ("Heaven and Hell" 445). Very much in accordance with what their patients had told Drs. Kubler-Ross and Moody, there is much about the experience of death which is warm and re-assuring. It's interesting that at the time of their experience many of the patients hadn't wanted to come back, so beautiful was it. Those same patients described communication with people during the experience which was, as we saw earlier, "through a non-verbal, instantaneous reading of thoughts", just as Swedenborg describes it. They also spoke of having a body, even though they were separated from their physical bodies. And this is important. The popular idea of the spirit is of something shapeless or formless, a wisp of wind, disembodied. But that's not so. In the spiritual world people are as much in possession of a body as they are here, with limbs and organs, hopes and interests, talents and faculties, just as they have here.

"It has been proved to me by manifold experience that when man passes from the natural world into the spiritual world, as he does when he dies, he carries with him all his things, that is, those things that belong to him as a man, except his earthly body. For when a man enters the spiritual world or the life after death, he is in a body as he was in the world, with no apparent difference, since he neither sees nor feels any difference. But his body is spiritual, and thus separated or purified from all that is earthly.... Moreover, the spirit man rejoices in every sense, both external and internal, that he enjoyed in the world; he sees as before, he hears and speaks as before, smells and tastes, and when touched, he feels the touch as before; he also strives, desires, longs for, thinks, reflects, is affected, loves, wills, as before....

In a word, when a man passes from one life into the other, or from one world into the other, it is like passing from one place into another, carrying with him all things that he possess in himself as a man." *Heaven and Hell* 461.

Perhaps, by now, you are trying to reconcile what has been said with what is written in the Bible on the subject. If so, make sure you read the next transcript. Because that's what I will be looking at - The Bible and life after death.

Transcript of The Swedenborg Programme – Number 1.

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