

The relationship between the Spiritual and the Natural worlds and its impact on us. Part 2.

I drew attention last week to the teaching given in Swedenborg's Theological works that the two worlds, the spiritual and the natural, are interdependent. Heaven, as we saw is not some place at some great distance across the sky. Hell is not way way, down in the bowels of the earth, as was once so solemnly asserted. The spiritual world, which includes both heaven and hell, is no more nor less than another dimension of consciousness. We are already, unconsciously, and as to our spirit, living in the spiritual world. When we die we become conscious of what we are presently unconscious of and lose consciousness of this world. We don't in fact "go" anywhere. That's how amazingly close the spiritual world is. And it brings home to us just how close the two worlds are.

"It must be known", wrote Swedenborg, "that the natural world comes into existence and continues in existence from the spiritual world, precisely like an effect from its effecting cause". (*Heaven and Hell* 89). And in another place: "The spiritual world in which are the Heavens and the Hells, cannot be separated from the natural world; thus Angels and people in the spiritual world cannot be separated from people on earth; for they are consociated and conjoined; for as to the thoughts of his understanding and the affections of his will, every person is in the spiritual world; thus is together with the Angels of Heaven on the one side, and with evilly disposed people from hell on the other". (*Apocalypse Explained* 1207).

It was very much this particular aspect of things, this constant, but unconscious association we have with both good and evilly disposed people in the spiritual world; which I spoke about in my talk a week ago. We are, mostly, if not nearly always unconscious of the association. As well, those who so associate with us are, for their part, mostly unconscious of the association also. What is astonishing is the way the Lord controls the association so that we become aware of the influence from those on either side, both those from heaven and those from hell, in equal measure. In fact, it is because of the control the Lord exercises that we are in free will and have the ability to choose between each of the influences reaching us, whether to accept the one or give into the other.

The association referred to has all sorts of practical implications for us. Our changes of mood, the fact that memories are awakened for no apparent reason, this is due to the activity of our spiritual associates. They are also the cause, and I'm talking now about the evilly disposed associates with us, why the most unwelcome, sometimes even horrible, thoughts cross our minds. We wonder how such ideas can come to us. Well, here's the explanation. They are also capable, it should be added, of bringing with them a proneness to accidents and mistakes. We get out of bed and stub our toe, then spill our coffee at breakfast and say, "It's going to be one of those days!" Why is it going to be 'one of those days'? The thing is that for some unaccountable reason we are particularly open and receptive to a sphere of misfortune which certain evilly disposed spiritual associates bring with them.

"Certain of the evilly disposed in the spiritual world", we read, "know how to produce a sphere giving rise to misfortunes". (*Arcana Caelestia* 6493). "There has often happened to me", Swedenborg wrote in another place, "slight misfortunes, and it was afterwards shown that they happened because such evilly disposed associates were present and also because their sphere prevailed against the sphere which is from Heaven". (*Spiritual Diary* 4562) It might be helpful to comment at this stage that though things start off as if it is going to be 'one of those days' yet it doesn't have to be. We can break the association and remove ourselves from the sphere which is causing our slips, errors, mistakes, or misfortunes. There is nothing predetermined about the day's events. It doesn't have to be 'one of those days', if we make up our minds it is not going to be.

There is another practical point which is usefully commented on at this point. When we are being troubled by a particular sphere, troubled by nauseating thoughts, troubled over the memory of something that has happened; when peace and perhaps sleep seem far from us, we can break away from that sphere and invite the much more peaceful and peace giving sphere of heaven, by reading the Word of God which, when read on earth, sincerely and lovingly, acts like a magnet to attract it.

Other things come out of the association between the spiritual and the natural worlds, and the interaction between them, one of which I now would like to move on to, and this is the question of sickness and disease. A lot of it, of course, we bring on ourselves. We invite sickness by overeating, eating the wrong foods, insufficient care of ourselves, inadequate clothing, driving ourselves when we are tired and already under pressure, and that sort of thing. At the same time there is a great deal of

sickness which comes on people uninvited and through no fault of their own. There is no need to go into detail. We all know how this is. The thing is, can we account for it? Is there any explanation for it? People resign themselves to what they talk of as being "fate", where such things are concerned. But we can do better than this. It will not make a sickness or disease more bearable. But, maybe, if we can understand the causes of these things, we can and will resolve the effort which will eliminate them. As we shall see, there is a collective responsibility involved here and a collective effort which is required.

We have been talking about spheres which originate in the spiritual world, both in heaven and in hell, and as those spheres affect us, even to the extent of making us accident prone one day when we are not on another. It's also influences from the spiritual world which are the causes of our changes of mood, full of optimism and happy about things one day, gloomy and in despair about the same things another day.

Those same spheres, which affect us mentally, also have an impact at the level of our bodies and where our health and well being, or our sickness and bodily distress is concerned. It sounds almost unbelievable at first and yet it gets back here, also, to the interaction between the spiritual and natural worlds, the spiritual world, the world of causes, having its impact on the natural world, the world of effects. These are spheres constantly reaching this world, and having an impact here, from the spiritual world. They affect us mentally. They also affect us bodily and where our physical well being and health is concerned.

"Heaven.... holds all things in connection and safely; hell, being opposite, destroys and severs all things". (*Arcana Caelestia* 5713). Here again we are told that the sphere reaching this world from the evilly disposed in the spiritual world produces "precisely such things as are perceived by the sense in disease". (*Spiritual Diary* 4648) .

Some sicknesses and diseases we bring on ourselves. And when we do, "at once an unclean sphere corresponding to the disease itself adjoins itself, and is present as a fomenting cause." (*Arcana Caelestia* 5715). Swedenborg was at one time aware of the presence of evilly disposed people in the spiritual world whose sphere brought on actual heaviness and pain. It ceased as soon as they were removed. (ibid).

It is, I suggest, useful to pick up what was quoted a moment ago that "Heaven holds all things in connection and safety" in this world. "Hell, being opposite, destroys and severs all things". (*Arcana Caelestia* 5713). This lies at the very heart of things. The influence and activity of Heaven as it touches upon life in this world is entirely consistent with the Lord's order here and His desires and purposes for us. Heaven's influences are all directed to human happiness; to our mental and bodily health. Hell's influences work against this. Those influences are opposite to the Lord's order. Those influences are anti-human happiness and destructive of healthy minds and healthy bodies.

Whether in the case of sicknesses and diseases we bring upon ourselves, and diseases which come upon us uninvited, their origin and cause lies with the hells. And what is important to remember is that we share a collective responsibility in opening the way by means of which spheres and influences from hell are able to reach this world and have an impact here, sometimes an utterly devastating impact. Insofar as we harbour jealousy and resentment; cherish thoughts of self glory and personal grandeur; covet that which does not belong to us; are unfaithful, if only in intention, to the sanctity of marriage and the vows we have made in respect of marriage; indeed, insofar as we invite evil to find a home in our hearts and lives; we are helping keep open the door through which evil influences and spheres from hell can reach this world.

Conversely, and though it may seem to be only to the minutest extent, insofar as we reject evil from our lives; we are making it possible for heaven's influences to have a greater impact here.

If man on earth had never allowed evil access here, "we would", we read, "be without disease; and would only increase to the last of old age and when the body could no longer minister to its spirit, he would pass without disease out of his earthly body into such a body as the angels have." (*Arcana Caelestia* 5726). That would have been, and would be, of course, the ideal.

Where there is sickness, brought on by ourselves or entirely uninvited, the Lord is close at hand to bring healing, if healing there is to be, and to work with us that the experience may serve the interests of our eternal well being and happiness.

The Swedenborg Programme – Number 56.

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