

Swedenborg on Spiritual Life

God



Swedenborg explains that God is the source of all life. The universe and everything within it, including living things and all human beings, is kept in existence by a continual flow of life from God into creation. God is within creation and all forms of life mirror God's nature, which Swedenborg describes as Love and Wisdom. These work together to create life, like the warmth and light of the sun combining to sustain life in the world.

Creation

Swedenborg shows that everything in creation is an illustration of our spiritual growth and development. He calls this 'the law of correspondence' in which natural things such as rocks, clouds, rivers, plants and animals describe various aspects of our inner spiritual life and activity. The physical world comes into existence from the spiritual realm, the dimension of life into which we all pass and continue to live after death.

Life's Purpose

Swedenborg tells us that we are all created to live for ever. We experience life as our own, so that we are free to make choices between good and evil, right and wrong. We are all created for heaven but are also born with tendencies to be selfish. In this life we inevitably develop our life's main delight which is either to live in harmony with others and to serve the good of the whole, or to live self-centredly and dominate others. We choose one or other of these loves, which Swedenborg describes as the states of heaven and of hell.

Men and Women

Swedenborg is emphatic regarding the equality of the sexes; any suggestion of subserviency is contrary to the Divine laws of creation. Men and women are different - physically and mentally. Swedenborg explains that the differences are not accidental but have a spiritual cause emanating from the duality within creation - love and wisdom. In essence, men tend to express their life through wisdom driven by an inner love whereas women express their life in love driven by wisdom. Modern psychological studies are bearing this out. Our natures are complementary at all levels which is why a relationship between a man and a woman, with each working unselfishly for the other, will result in the deepest form of happiness and bonding with productive results.

Spiritual Growth

Swedenborg explains that the purpose of life in this world is to lead us to change self-love gradually into a love for others, the heavenly love. The key for this transformation is a life which is based on use and service. In being useful and in receiving the friendship and help of others, we come to appreciate life and begin to acknowledge God in a new, fulfilling way. This pattern of new life goes beyond religions and belief systems and is a universal process in which everyone who lives by what they believe are prepared for eternal life.

Life After Death

Swedenborg claims he was given the opportunity to experience the dying process whilst remaining fully conscious in this realm. This showed him that when we die, we immediately enter the spiritual world, the dimension of life after this one. In general, the experience of life in the spiritual world is similar to life here, except that the environment of the spiritual world becomes a true reflection of the delights and desires of the people who are there. In the first stages of the afterlife, our true delight, chosen in this life, gradually emerges and reveals itself clearly. When this process is complete, we will naturally gravitate towards others of similar delights and enter either the state of heaven or of hell.

Angels

Swedenborg presents a very clear view that angels are not a separate creation of God but are beings who have gone through a life and development similar to ours. In this sense, we are all potential angels. Angels influence our inner life - our thoughts and feelings - seeking to strengthen and protect us, countering evil spirits who endeavour to weaken and confuse us. All inhabitants of the spiritual world, whether angelic or demonic, seek to bring us into the same love and life that they have and enjoy.

Revelation

God seeks to reveal the truth to humankind so that we all will always be in connection with our origin and potential. Revelation from God is given through creation, ancient myths, dreams, and most perfectly through sacred scriptures. In the world's scriptures, such as the Bible, the central truths about God, eternity and life are enshrined but in symbolic forms which describe the spiritual processes of life in images to which we can relate at our own level.

Jesus Christ

According to Swedenborg, Christ was God, not another person along with God, who lived here as a man having a Divine soul (unlike our human soul). His earth-life was a mission to prevent evil from taking hold in human minds and to guarantee our spiritual freewill and choice. Swedenborg's view of the incarnation is linked closely to our need to be able to relate to a personal and present God who understands human life because he has been here.

Spiritual Ages

Like so many of the world's religions and philosophies, Swedenborg describes how the state of humanity has changed from its original condition. The first people, living in the 'golden age', had direct perception of spiritual life and felt themselves to be in the Divine flow of life. Over many generations, the sensation of life changed to one of self-sufficiency resulting in decline of the original state and a subsequent series of lesser spiritual states in which rituals replaced true perception. Even so, Swedenborg describes the foresight of God and the provision for maintaining an essential awareness of spiritual life.

Religion

While expressing his ideas in Christian terms, Swedenborg respects the validity of all the world's religions. Each genuine religion, while differing outwardly, inwardly concurs and presents the universal truths of God. It is not a matter of which belief is the most accurate, but of the way in which a religion teaches a way of life. For Swedenborg, the essentials of religion are to acknowledge the Divine Creator and to live a life based upon the commandments of God.