

Creation in Six Days

The Genesis account of creation is examined in depth
and is shown to have a spiritual meaning

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The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. So said the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6

No other part of the Bible has been killed more by the letter than its opening page, the first chapter of the book of Genesis. The arguments are still going on between the fundamentalists who are sincerely trying to protect the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the sceptic who rightly maintains that the creation of the world took longer than 6 days.

Neither side is aware that over 200 years ago, long before the controversy started, a sensible explanation which can satisfy honour on both sides, came from the pen of the eminent Swedish scientist and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg. This essay is based on that explanation as given in the work *Arcana Caelestia*, Heavenly Secrets.

Now one thing ought to be obvious the Bible is not an inspired textbook of geology. It is not concerned with the things which a man can observe and classify for himself. The inspiration of the Bible lies in the fact that it addresses itself to man's spirit.

Yet the nature outside of us reflects, or 'corresponds, to the nature within us, so that it is perfectly possible to describe human character by using symbols from the outer world. Words like dark, warm, fox, swine, empty, brilliant are self explanatory when applied to a person. Still they are more than apt phrases. There can be real darkness, or warmth, or foxiness within a personality.

The proper subject of the Bible is MAN, who is also described as the earth which receives seeds to become either fruitful or barren. The whole story of creation is our own story and it is true to every person at every age.

FIRST DAY

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Gen 1:1,2

These words describe your beginning, since every person can only develop by following a series of orderly steps. A child must crawl, then stand up, then walk and finally run. Each step develops the necessary muscles and balance and control before the next can be attempted. It is the same with our mind which is at first empty, or *in the dark* before it is brought into the light of self awareness by the sense impressions from the outside world.

Fascinating as this development is, since it is common to all of us, the story in Genesis is more amazing still when we discover that it describes just as precisely the process of man's spiritual birth that is his rebirth or regeneration.

It is possible for a man to live on the social and material plane alone; interested in the things of the world and getting the pleasures they offer. But such a person is spiritually devoid of any sense of goodness, since he only calls *good* what pleases him. If someone says, *We've had a good time*, you do not automatically assume he was engaged in philanthropic activities. He might have just beaten up a football supporter from the opposing team. Equally, such a person is *empty* of any awareness of truth as an absolute concept. We have all heard the arguments that truth is purely relative and that at any age we can decide what it is going to be. Such subjective opinions have yet to discover the real truth. Yet God's mercy hovers over every person who is in such a dark, chaotic state and like a *broody* hen calls man under the protective wings of Providence.

There is a sense of longing for gentleness and peaceful security within us. A vestigial child-like desire to be drawn back into the secure embrace where all fear and anxiety are taken away. And this longing can be exploited by those who offer easy solutions while they take control of people's lives. But progress is something that we must attain by our own effort and freedom.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Gen 1:3,4

Since *seeing the light* is the first experience of our rebirth, it is a very moving experience. For some it is as gentle as the dawn of a new day, for others, overwhelming like a flash of lightning. But however it comes to us, it is our first realization that there is some higher truth which shows that life has another dimension which towers over man's opinionated pronouncements. It is perceived that there is a wisdom which rules universally in creation and that a Divine presence guides our lives. Such concepts are quickly separated from the purely materialistic and subjective visualisation of human destiny which ends in the grave. The difference between such light and the former darkness is a complete turning of direction, this is why it is often called *conversion*. But conversion is not the goal, but the first step on our spiritual journey.

SECOND DAY

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." And God called the expanse Heaven. Gen 1:6,8

How can water be divided from water? Yet, ocean currents are separated by temperature and density. Britain is tempered by the Gulf Stream. While it is not easy to visualise the description of the second day, it can surely be grasped that as soon as a person has seen the light of higher truth, he is *plunged or immersed* in a deep, personal controversy. It becomes imperative to separate ideas and attitudes which are purely worldly and selfish from those which recognize a Divine presence and purpose in life. When the concept of our own immortality hits us with all its implications; everything has to be reconsidered. We are faced with a responsibility to God and not merely to ourselves. We can no longer continue to call everything true simply because it justifies our desires. This is why the first stages of the spiritual life are concerned with separations and divisions. Higher and lower things have to be recognised. Above all, the realization that there is a *heaven* within us which is the most wonderful part of our personality, the close-to-God part, brings a sense of quickening joy. As Jesus said, "*Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*"

THIRD DAY

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. Let the earth, the tender grass to sprout forth, the herb yielding seed, the fruit tree bearing fruit after its kind. Gen 1:9-13

It can be seen that up to now, creation has not been very productive, but rather introspective, concerned with sorting itself out; light and darkness, higher and lower waters. One more separation takes place: the wet from the dry, or the seas from the land.

The beginning of our spiritual journey is at first more intellectual than practical as new knowledges flood in. It takes time to absorb these ideas, so there is need to read, study and ask questions. The waters of truth are certainly *gathered*!

But the third stage of the development urges us to have our feet more firmly on the ground and to plant these new concepts into our daily life. What is religion for unless it changes human lives for the better? Just as the vegetable kingdom is the foundation of the life cycle in nature, so are our first attempts to lead a good life the basis of any further development. Ideas are not enough. There must be some solid results.

Yet how suitable is the expression *tender grass*! In the beginning we are still very unsure how to put forward these first tentative works of charity. But as we gain confidence we see how kindness reproduces itself, it is *seed-bearing*.

Such are the first joyful experiences which show us that we can lead a different life: motivated by kindness, mercy and fairness. Such actions do have a life of their own and grow from small deeds into mighty acts.

Jesus spoke of man as a good tree bearing good fruits, or a corrupt tree. Mat 7:15-20, Luke 6:43-45. This correspondence of man to nature appears on every page of the Bible and is consistent throughout. Vegetation for example is firmly rooted in the ground. Our first actions of the spirit are similarly rooted in our self awareness. It does seem at this stage that all the good we do is achieved by our own effort and sacrifice. We are not yet able to let our actions go free without holding on to them and looking for thanks and recognition which are not only pleasing, but necessary in the beginner. Just as a child needs constant encouragement and reward.

FOURTH DAY

And God said, Let there be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And God made two great luminaries, the greater luminary to rule the day and the lesser luminary to rule the night; and the stars. Gen 1:14,16

What could demonstrate more clearly that we are dealing with spiritual and not natural history, since how could vegetation grow and multiply without the warmth of the sun? The fact is that up to now it has been a cold creation. Our first spiritual progress is intellectual and we are very conscious of our own efforts and the results in praise or rebuffs which they bring. But if we press on a surprising thing happens: a realization dawns on us that we don't actually do anything from our own strength or thinking. All comes from the Divine source of Love (which is spiritual heat) and Wisdom (which is spiritual light). These are represented by the sun, here seen as the source of new form of life. When we realize that the power within us is from God who is acting through us, a great sense of freedom and a marvellous warmth is added to our life. Nor do we look for any credit or merit from our actions. We can now let them go without waiting for some returns.

Without me you can do nothing, John 15: 5, Said Jesus Christ, the incarnate God to us. It may take us a long time to realize it, but when we do our creation makes a great leap forward with the warmth of new love and energy.

But why the greater and lesser lights?

Because in our progress we shall always experience ups and downs as exaltation may give way to depression and sadness. When we are filled with love, it is easy to feel God's presence within us, but what are we to do in states of temptation and uncertainty the dark nights of our personality? The moon and the stars are the symbols of our faith and knowledge which can still plot the way when in the cool night of despair we lose the joyful awareness of God's nearness. But with faith to fortify us, we can hold on until the morning. It would therefore be a mistake to believe that the spiritually advancing person has no more temptations or trials to face but they have been provided for.

FIFTH DAY

And God said, Let, the waters bring forth abundantly the creeping thing, the living soul; and let the bird fly above the earth. Gen 1:20

The fourth day marked a real breakthrough, almost a second conversion from a lower to a higher plane in which the conjunction with the Divine Life is not just a matter of knowledge, but reality:

We are, because God is. (Divine Providence 46)

Our life is His life, and infinite in its outpouring through the unique personality which we have been given. And so living creatures come into being. Their beginning in again in the watery element, since every new development starts with the stirring of the waters, which are the truths and knowledges collected in our intellectual consciousness. The truths give the first guidance and enlightenment, for how can we progress unless we have a vision of a new pattern in the mind?

So sea creatures and then birds come into being. Creatures with a real living soul, since we are more alive than we have ever been before. And what freedom they bring with them since they can swim and fly in every direction. Do we not at times longingly follow the magnificent flight of birds with our eyes? That longing has its purpose because the man of living faith really can fly upwards and have an entirely new

vision of the whole of creation below him. When after death we become aware of our spiritual body which is obedient to our will, we shall be able to project ourselves with greater ease than the birds, but they are here to remind us of our dormant abilities and unrestricted freedom of the spirit.

SIXTH DAY

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living soul after its kind; the beast, and the moving thing, and the wild animal of the earth, after its kind: and it was so.

And God said, Let us make man into our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the bird of the heavens, and over the beast, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. Gen 1:24,26

The mystical meaning or correspondence of all things in the world with the spiritual world or heaven was well understood in ancient times. Animals particularly were seen to be the symbol and form of human characteristics. When man declined spiritually, instead of seeing the animals as a reminder to offer innocence, charity and purity in his service to God, he offered and sacrificed lambs, calves and doves instead. He regarded some animals as "sacred". Worship became centred on the external rituals and not the inner qualities which are living.

The Bible describes and so preserves these outward rituals from an age which was external and so could only represent the form instead of perceive the reality behind it. But that deeper reality is now understood in the New Church since the knowledge of correspondences was revealed to Swedenborg who fully describes it in his Writings. It shows that we are in a constant living relationship with the spiritual world which is flowing into this world in order that it can be manifested. We can see this clearly in our own experience. Our spiritual endeavours, feelings and thoughts, are constantly pressing us to express them in gesture, action or speech. The invisible becomes visible!

The animal sacrifices of old are no longer binding or even desirable today, but the obligation to come to terms with our own nature is of course essential. The spiritual man must attain control over everything within himself and must also become a channel of the purest, gentlest and useful affections which mark him as truly human.

So much goodwill is felt today by nature's conservationist for rare species and for a more humane treatment of animals. This is a wonderful development of our sensitivities and is surely a forerunner of a deeper realization that there are many species of kindness, of concern, of gentle strength within us which are just as worthy of preservation and regeneration. Why, for example, should we allow the lamb like innocence of childhood to become extinct as we grow older?

The spiritual man as he reaches the pinnacle of his own creation, his sixth day, is not only full of gentleness and love (represented by the clean animals which were acceptable in sacrifice), but he also controls the wild and fierce passions which are within him with a mastery which disarms them. Surely the letter could never find fulfilment in the following prophecy:

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (kidneys). The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas. Isaiah 11: 5-6,9

But the spirit of this prophecy is describing what all of us are capable of attaining: self control and integrity when the fierce within us is no longer fierce, only strong. Our sexuality is no longer the cause of unfaithfulness, adultery and rape but only of love within marriage. Our temper no longer the cause of anger but of tremendous concern.

To be truly human, and so a perfect image and likeness of God, is not to be emasculated of strengths and passions, but it is to use them creatively in the stream of the Divine purposes, and so for the good of mankind instead of the service of self. It is to choose the power of love instead of the love of power.

The seventh day, the day of peace and rest will only come when we have spiritually disarmed what is harmful within our character and act as individual channels of God's love and wisdom. Thus the spiritual, personal creation is completed.

The whole essay is based on the first chapter of Emanuel Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia* (Heavenly Secrets) from which some extracts are given on the following pages.

6. The six days, or periods are so many successive states of the regeneration of man, are in general as follows.

7. The **first** state is that which precedes, including both the state from infancy, and that immediately before regeneration. This is called *a void, emptiness and thick darkness*. And the first motion, which is the Lord's mercy, is *the Spirit of God moving upon the faces of the waters*.

8. The **second** state is when a distinction is made between those things that are of the Lord, and those that are proper to man. The things that are the Lord's are called in the Word *remains*, and here are especially cognitions of faith, which have been learned from infancy, and which are stored up, and are not manifested until the man comes into this state. At the present day this state seldom exists without temptation, misfortune, or sorrow, by which the things of the body and the world, that is, such as are proper to man, are brought into quiescence, as it were to die. Thus the things that belong to the external man are separated from those that belong to the internal man. In the internal man are the remains, stored up by the Lord unto this time, and for this use.

9. The **third** state is that of repentance, in which the man, from his internal man, speaks piously and devoutly, and brings forth goods, like works of charity, but which nevertheless, are inanimate, because he thinks from himself. These goods are called the *tender grass*, and also the *herb yielding seed*, and afterwards the *tree bearing fruit*.

10. The **fourth** state is when the man is affected with love, and illuminated by faith. He indeed previously discoursed piously, and brought forth goods, but he did so in consequence of the temptation and straightness under which he laboured, and not from faith and charity; wherefore faith and charity are now enkindled in his internal man, and are called two *lights*.

11. The **fifth** state is when the man speaks from faith, and thereby confirms himself in truth and good: the things then produced by him are animate, and are called the *fish of the sea*, and the *birds of the heavens*.

12. The **sixth** state is when, from faith, and thence from love, he speaks what is true, and does what is good: the things which he then brings forth are called the *living soul* and the *beast*. And as he then begins to act at once and together from both faith and love, he becomes a spiritual man, who is called an *image*. His spiritual life is delighted and sustained by such things as belong to the cognitions of faith, and to works of charity, which are called his *food*; and his natural life is delighted and sustained by those which belong to the body and the senses; whence a combat arises, until love reigns, and he becomes a celestial man.

13. Those who are being regenerated do not all arrive at this state. The greatest part, at this day, attain only the first state; some only the second; others the third, fourth, or fifth; few the sixth; and scarcely any one the seventh.

Verse 20. *And God said, Let the waters cause to creep forth the creeping thing, the living soul; and let fowl fly above the earth upon the faces of the expanse of the heavens*. After the great lights have been kindled and placed in the internal man, and the external receives light from them, then the man first begins to live. Heretofore he can scarcely be said to have lived, inasmuch as the good which he did he supposed that he did of himself, and the truth which he spoke that he spoke of himself; and since man of himself is dead, and there is in him nothing but what is evil and false, therefore whatsoever he produces from himself is not alive, insomuch that he cannot, from himself, do good that in itself is good. That man cannot even

think what is good, nor will what is good, consequently, cannot do what is good, except from the Lord, must be plain to everyone from the doctrine of faith, for the Lord says in Matthew 13:37

He that sows the good seed is the Son of man.

Nor can any good come except from the real Fountain of good, which is One only, as He says in Luke 18:19

None is good save One, God.

Nevertheless, when the Lord is resuscitating man to life, that is, regenerating him, He permits him at first to suppose that he does what is good and speaks what is true from himself, for at that time he is incapable of conceiving otherwise, nor can he in any other way be led to believe, and afterwards to perceive, that all good and truth are from the Lord alone. While man is thinking in such a way his truths and goods are compared to the *tender grass*, and also to the *herb yielding seed*, and lastly to the *tree hearing fruit*, all of which are inanimate; but now that he is vivified by love and faith, and believes that the Lord works all the good that he does and all the truth that he speaks, he is compared first to the *creeping things of the water*, and to the *fowls which fly above the earth*, and also to *beasts*, which are all animate things, and are called *living souls*.