

# INTRODUCING SWEDENBORG'S DIVINE PROVIDENCE

## Introduction

One of the areas with which people often struggle when they reflect on life is the question or problem of human suffering in the light of a loving God.

To this can be added the widely-experienced phenomenon in life of apparent coincidences and synchronicity prompting the question of whether events happen by chance or from higher design and purpose.

The book ***Divine Providence*** by Emanuel Swedenborg, published in 1764, is one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of the ever-recurring question of suffering and evil. The believer and the unbeliever often ask, "If there is a God, how can He allow suffering on such a vast scale?"

Swedenborg quietly sets out to explain the Divine point of view which he was led to see due to the depth of his enlightenment within the realms of the unseen spiritual world. This is indicated in the full title of the book, "*The Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Providence*".

A scientist by training and practical experience, his book is not unlike a textbook setting down the orderly laws by which God governs and regulates the whole of creation and each human mind in particular. Everything is foreseen and provided, and there is no such thing as chance. A clear distinction is maintained between Divine foresight and predestination given that each person has free will.

A further truth which Swedenborg explains is that of our personal freedom, which is the source of our humanity. Unless we are free and rational, we are not truly human. This Divine gift of freedom and reason is maintained in each person at all costs. At the same time the power of evil constantly tries to undermine and destroy it. This conflict between good and evil is the underlying struggle in every person, whatever form it may take.

## Content of Book and Reading Approach

- A careful examination of the opening Table of Contents will show the logical plan of the work.
- *What providence is*
- *The goal of providence*
- *The focus of providence*
- *Providence and its laws*
- *Human freedom and reason*
- *Divine providence and human prudence*
- *Why evil is permitted*
- *Divine providence is for evil people and good people alike*

- *Everyone can be reformed; there is no such thing as predestination*

God's constancy in operation according to His own laws of love and wisdom are the assurance of eternal safety and the foundations for our trust. We can rely on God who has no chosen favourites on whom to lavish an extra portion of mercy while denying it to others. His love goes out to all equally but it is received differently by every individual person.

This is the basis of our personal responsibility and freedom: that we can choose to accept the best that God holds out to us and reject the worst within ourselves.

The following paragraphs (not pages) give an excellent idea of the depth and beauty of Swedenborg's thought:

<i>The purpose of creation</i>	27
<i>To be free ...</i>	42-43
<i>God's view of things</i>	52-53
<i>Freedom and love make one</i>	73
<i>What you will be asked after death</i>	101
<i>Entering the stream of Providence</i>	186
<i>Why God operates secretly</i>	211
<i>The love into which we are created</i>	275

## Relevance Today

Today, when humankind is beginning to admit that it cannot find the solution to its many problems, the given reason why this book was written is very thought-provoking -

*These truths are now revealed in order that what belongs to the Lord may be ascribed to Him, and we may stop claiming credit for what is not ours.(70)*

Whilst its essential focus is universal, **Divine Providence** is still highly practical at the personal level. Swedenborg demonstrates how we can put aside negative attitudes and behaviours allowing positive thought and action to come in and replace them. It is through this ongoing process of our freely making choices concerning negative or positive approaches to life, and developing a conscience in keeping with a motivation for good, that the Lord can achieve his goal for us - a life in heaven.

## Helen Keller's review

Helen Keller was named by Time magazine as among the most influential people of the twentieth century. Her courageous character allowed her to triumph over the limitations imposed by sight and hearing disabilities. She wrote of **Divine Providence** in her book **Light in My Darkness**:

*Swedenborg's Divine Providence powerfully elucidates the truth that God created the universe because of his infinite need to give life and joy. The futility and hollowness of belief in a remote, unapproachable deity is shown in many a passage of that comforting work. Swedenborg writes that "the Lord's divine providence has for its object a heaven from the human race . . ." That is the whole of the Divine Providence . . . In the vicissitudes of our lives, therefore, the*

*Divine Providence looks not to temporal blessings only, but chiefly to our eternal welfare and happiness . . . God leaves us free to use or abuse . . . always he guards the right of everyone to act in freedom according to reason; for liberty and rationality are his primary means for the regeneration of mankind and tokens of his gift of immortality.*

## Quotations

***The goal of Providence*** From paragraph 123

“It is the constant goal of the Lord’s providence to unite a person with the Lord and to unite the Lord with the person so that all the joys of eternal life can be given by the Lord and received by the person. This goal can only be achieved by removing any evil loves and delights that are with the person.”

***The extent of Providence*** From paragraph 202

“Every time a person’s mind or state changes it produces changes in what follows afterwards, and it is like this even to eternity. It is just like an arrow that is shot from a bow which, if it made the slightest deviation from the target when it was being aimed, would end up being shot wide over a great distance. It would be just like this if the Lord did not lead the states and minds of people every fraction of every moment.”

## Availability of the Book

Paper back - translation only

Deluxe\* paperback

Deluxe\* hardback

\*Deluxe versions include an introduction to key ideas, study notes and index

## Brochures in this Series:

### INTRODUCING SWEDENBORG’S

**Divine Providence**

**Divine Love and Wisdom**

**Four Doctrines**

**Heaven and Hell**

**Marriage Love**

**True Christianity**

The Swedenborg Association of Australia also issues a small booklet titled Heavenly Secrets which introduces Swedenborg’s major work “Arcana Caelestia”.

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