

# SHUNNING EVILS AS SINS

(The Importance of Self Examination)

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## Introduction

This booklet contains specially selected quotations from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). He was educated at the University of Upsala, Sweden, where he was a brilliant student. Among other accomplishments, he became a mining engineer, a mathematician and a physicist, as well as a highly regarded exponent of the physical sciences. He wrote many papers and publications on a great variety of subjects, all of which were well received by the intellectuals of his day. He was also famous for many other achievements, such as the construction of docks and canals, a new method of finding longitude, the motion of the earth and planets and directions for discovering veins of metallic ores. He was a great philosopher and his theories of the origin of matter and the nature of magnetic forces created great interest among his contemporaries. He also achieved many other important things — in short he was a genius of such a calibre as this world has rarely seen.

All the achievements mentioned so far, however, were only a prelude to the main work of his life, for, in the whole course of his scientific studies the piety and simple faith received through early home influence remained with him and seemed to be strengthened as his knowledge increased. In fact, all this time he was being prepared by the Lord for the special work he was to produce later in his life — the writing and publishing of his theological works, a series of remarkable books now known quite simply as "the Writings". From 1745 to the end of his life, Swedenborg devoted himself entirely to theology.

That is a very brief description of this remarkable man. For a much more comprehensive account of his life and work, two excellent books are recommended. They are: Swedenborg, Life & Teaching by George Trobridge and An Introduction to Swedenborg's Religious Thought by J. H. Spalding.

At the commencement of his first and greatest theological work, *Arcana Coelestia* or *Heavenly Secrets* (1749-1956) he wrote: "By the Divine mercy of the Lord, it has been granted me now for some years to be constantly and continuously in the company of spirits and angels, hearing them speak and speaking with them in turn. In this way it has been given me to hear and see the wonderful things which are in the other life and which have never before come to the knowledge of any man, nor entered into his ideas. I have been instructed there in regard to the different kinds of spirits; the state of souls after death; Hell or the lamentable state of the unfaithful; Heaven, or the most happy state of the faithful, and especially concerning the doctrine of faith, which is acknowledged in the universal Heaven."

In a letter to a friend in 1766 Swedenborg wrote: "Why, from being a philosopher have I been chosen? The cause has been so that the spiritual things now being revealed may be taught and understood naturally and rationally, for spiritual truths have a correspondence with natural truths. For this reason I was introduced by the Lord, first into the natural sciences and thus prepared, and in fact from the year 1710 to 1744, when Heaven was opened to me."

So Swedenborg became the Lord's revelator through the Writings. In this way the Lord has drawn aside the veil and mystery of life after death, the world of spirits and heaven and hell, as well as many other wonderful teachings and revelations now given to the world for the first time. The Church formed as a result of these Divine disclosures is called *The New Church* or *The Church of the New Jerusalem*. This booklet is devoted to some of these teachings in regard to shunning evils as sins and the importance of self-examination. All the quotations concern these vital themes. (Bold type appearing in text is my own emphasis.)

In this age of the permissive society, where anything goes, all the important values of conduct and beliefs, which have been the accepted norm for centuries, have been swept aside as being completely outmoded and worthless and have been replaced by a spurious philosophy of atheism, egoism, self-love, arrogance, intolerance, and a belief in man's supremacy in all things. This has had most unfortunate repercussions on the lives of many people. For instance, this new philosophy teaches that God is a myth, fostered by the clergy to keep the common people in order. The Bible is rejected as a collection of unreal drivel, written by self-deluded fanatics, who allowed their imagination to run riot. They say there is no life after death, and when you die that is the end of you, and that all belief in eternal life has been eliminated by man's emancipation, also that man is a free agent to do as he pleases and is accountable to no one for his actions. This decadent philosophy is reflected in much of the literature, art, and drama of today, and especially in many of the films now being produced — the more outrageous they are the more money they make.

Then they say there is no such thing as sin and that we should make the most of our sensual opportunities (irrespective of how degrading or perverse they may be) while we are here, as that is the only chance we will get. And so we find people who accept this vile philosophy as the enlightened thinking of modern man, indulging in sins of all kinds with impunity. These include such evils as adultery, rape, incest, homosexuality, drug addiction, excessive use of alcohol, terrorism, dishonesty, perversity, avarice, contempt and indifference toward others, utter selfishness, leading to all forms of self-indulgence, as well as cynicism and scoffing at all forms of decency and charity. So blasé and indifferent have people become at human suffering that their feelings have become completely blunted and can only be roused by things which happen in their own personal lives.

Are these people really so spiritually blind that they imagine they can deliberately flout God's laws and live a life steeped in evil, and get away with it? As they don't believe in eternal life, they never give a thought about what is going to happen to them after physical death. They say the soul is nonexistent. But what a tremendous shock awaits them when, after death, they find they are going to live on to eternity, in hell.

It is to enable people to realize these important truths, that this booklet has been written. The Lord said: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8: 36-37). The Writings disclose that, after physical death on this earth, our souls are translated to the world of spirits, where we are given an indestructible body in human form. Eventually the external man is removed and the internal man is revealed for all to see. It is then that the

real nature of the person is manifested, whether good or evil, according to the life and intentions each person has demonstrated on earth. There can then be no deception or hypocrisy, and the person is exposed either as a potential angel, or potential devil, thus indicating whether he will go to either heaven or hell, as there is nowhere else for him to go. These are the only two realms in the spiritual world to which people can go, and each one of us will finish up in one or the other, for all eternity.

This is why it is of the utmost importance for us to examine ourselves and to shun the evils thus revealed in this life. It will be too late to do this after we leave this earth, as our eternal life depends upon our conduct and intentions in this life. This is why the quotations in this booklet are of such vital significance to each one of us. If you read them with a sincere desire for reformation and regeneration, the Lord will show you how you can apply them to your own life, and give you the strength, willingness and power to overcome your evils through Him; but you must co-operate with Him by first shunning your evils, in order that He may win the victory for you. As the Writings point out, the Lord's victories are over the hells, and they always attack (often very subtly) at your weakest point, their one aim being to drag you down to their own filthy level, in thought, word and deed. So as you study these revealing quotations ask the Lord to show you in what particular way they apply to you personally. You will be surprised at what this can do for your spiritual life.

Each book of the Writings is divided into numbered portions for easy reference. The quotations are divided into seven sections and the name of the book from which they are taken is given at the head of each section, with each quotation followed by its particular portion number. A list of the Writings will be found at the end of the booklet.

## **1. The General Teaching**

Quotations from — "**The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine**". (159-169)

If we want to be saved, we must confess our sins and repent. Confessing sins is to recognize things that are evil, see them within ourselves, acknowledge them, accept that we are at fault, and condemn ourselves because of them. When this is done in the presence of God, it is confessing our sins. After we have confessed our sins in this way and have prayed for forgiveness with a humble heart, repenting is to stop doing them and to lead a new life that follows the principles of caring and faith. If all we do is make a blanket acknowledgment that we are sinners and declare ourselves guilty of all evils but without examining ourselves—that is, seeing our own particular evils—we are making some kind of confession, but not a confession that leads to repentance. Since we do not know what our evils are, we live the same way afterward as before. If we are leading a life of caring and faith we repent every day. We reflect on the evils in ourselves, acknowledge them, take precautions against them, and pray to the Lord for help. You see, on our own we are constantly falling down, but the Lord is constantly raising us up and leading us toward goodness. This is our state if we devote our lives to doing good. If we spend our lives doing evil, then too we are constantly falling down and the Lord is constantly lifting us up, but the result is only that we are steered away from falling into those most serious evils to which we instinctively tend with all our might.

If we are practicing self-examination in order to repent, it is important that we examine our thoughts and the intentions of our will, and note what we would do if we could get away with it—that is, if we had no fear of the law or of losing our reputation, our job, or our wealth. Our evils live in our will; that is the source of all the evil things we do physically. Therefore if we do not search out evils in our thoughts and our will, we will be unable to repent, because afterward we will have the same thoughts and intentions as we had before; and intending evils is the same as doing them. This therefore is what self-examination entails

Saying that we repent but not changing the way we live is no repentance at all. Our sins are not forgiven when we say we repent; they are forgiven when we change our lives. Our sins are of course constantly being forgiven by the Lord, because he is mercy itself. Nevertheless, despite what we may think about how our sins are forgiven, they actually still cling to us and are not put aside from us unless we live by the precepts of true faith. As we live by these precepts our sins are put aside, and as our sins are put aside they are forgiven.

People believe that when our sins are forgiven they are washed away or rinsed off the way dirt is rinsed off with water. However, our sins are not washed away; they are just put aside. That is, we are held back from doing them when we are kept focused by the Lord on doing what is good; and when we are focused on doing good it seems as though our sins are gone and therefore as though they have been washed away. Further, the more we have been reformed, the more capable we are of focusing on doing what is good; how we are reformed will be explained in the treatment of regeneration that follows. If we think that our sins are forgiven in any other way, we are sadly mistaken

Some signs that our sins have been forgiven (that is, put aside) are the following: we sense a pleasure in worshiping God for God's sake and in helping our neighbor for our neighbor's sake, which means in doing good for its own sake and in speaking truth for its own sake. We do not want credit for our caring or our faith. We reject and turn our backs on evils like enmity, hatred, vindictiveness, adultery, and even the very thoughts that go along with intentions in such directions.

In contrast, some signs that our sins have not been forgiven (that is, put aside) are the following: we worship God but not for God's sake, we help our neighbor but not for our neighbor's sake, which means that we do not do good for its own sake or speak truth for its own sake but for self-serving and worldly reasons. We want credit for what we do. We do not find evils like enmity, hatred, vindictiveness, and adultery at all distasteful, and entertain these evils in our thoughts with a complete lack of restraint.

When we repent in a state of freedom, it works; when we repent under duress, it does not. The following are states of duress: a state of sickness, a state of mental depression because of misfortune, a state in which death seems imminent, as well as any state of fear that robs us of the use of reason. Sometimes people who are evil and are in a state of duress do things that are good and make promises to repent, but when they find themselves in a state of freedom they return to their old life of evil. It is different for people who are good.

After we have examined ourselves, acknowledged our sins, and repented of them, we must for the rest of our lives remain constant in our devotion to doing what is good. If instead we backslide into our former evil life and embrace it again, then we commit profanation because we are then joining evil and goodness together. <sup>1</sup> This makes our latter state worse than our former one, according to the Lord's words:

When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it wanders through dry places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, "I will go back to my house, the house I left. " When the spirit comes and finds the house empty, swept, and decorated for it, then it goes and recruits seven other spirits worse than itself, and they come in and live there, and the latter times of that person become worse than the first. ([Matthew 12:43, 44, 45](#))

## **2. The Teaching As it Relates to Life**

### **Quotations from — "Doctrine of Life"**

If we think and speak devoutly but do not turn our backs on evil deeds because they are sins, our devout thoughts and words are not devout. This is because we are not in the Lord. For example, if we attend church regularly, listen reverently to the sermons, read the Word and religious literature, take the Holy Supper, offer our prayers every day, and give a great deal of thought to God and salvation, if we think nothing of evils that are sins - fraud, for example, or adultery, hatred, blasphemy, and the like - then the only devout thought and speech we are capable of is thought and speech that inwardly are not devout at all, because we ourselves with all our evils are within them. We are not aware of this when these acts are happening, but our evils are still in there and are hiding from our sight. It is like a spring whose waters are impure from their source.

At those times our devotional practices are nothing but a routine that has become habitual; or we are thinking highly of ourselves; or we are hypocritical. They do rise up toward heaven, yes, but along the way they turn back and come down the way smoke does in the air. (25)

I have been granted the opportunity to see and hear many people after their deaths listing their good works and their devotional practices along the lines of those just mentioned in [24](#), [25](#), plus some others as

well. I also saw that some of them had lamps but no oil, and when they were asked whether they had turned their backs on evil deeds because they are sins it turned out that they had not. So they were told that they were evil, and later I saw them going into caves where there were other evil people like themselves. (26)

Even if we are well informed and insightful, if we do not turn our backs on evil deeds because they are sins, we are not wise. This too is for the reason just given [21, 24-25], that our wisdom comes from ourselves and not from the Lord. For example, if we know the theology of our church right down to the last detail and know how to support it on the basis of the Word and of reason; if we know the theologies of all the churches through the ages, along with the edicts of all the councils; in fact, if we know truths and see and understand them as well - if, for example, we know what faith is, what caring is, what piety is, what repentance and the forgiveness of sins are, what regeneration is, what baptism and the Holy Supper are, what the Lord is and what redemption and salvation are - we still are not wise unless we turn our backs on evils because they are sins. These are lifeless pieces of information, because they involve only our power of understanding and not at the same time our power of willing. Things like this perish in the course of time for the reasons given in 15 above. After death we ourselves actually discard them because they do not agree with the love that belongs to our will.

All the same, these pieces of information are absolutely necessary because they tell us how we are to behave; and when we do them they come to life for us, but not before. (27)

The truth is that none of us can on our own do anything good that is really good; but it is outrageous to use this principle to destroy all the good and caring actions done by people who turn away from evils because they are sins. Using this principle in this way is in fact diametrically opposed to the Word, which mandates what we are to do; it is contrary to the commandments of love for the Lord and love for our neighbor on which depend all the Law and the Prophets [Matthew 22:40]; and it is to demean and subvert everything that has to do with religion. Everyone knows that religion means doing what is good and that we are all going to be judged according to our deeds.

We are all by nature capable of turning away from evils with apparent autonomy because of the Lord's power, if we pray for that power; and what we then do is good that comes from the Lord. (31)

To the Extent That We Turn Our Backs on All Kinds of Killing Because They Are Sins, We Have Love for Our Neighbor

ALL kinds of killing means all kinds of hostility, hatred, and vengefulness, which yearn for murder. Killing lies hidden within such attitudes like fire that smolders beneath the ashes. That is exactly what hellfire is. It is why we say that people are on fire with hatred and burning for vengeance. These are types of killing in an earthly sense; but in a spiritual sense "killing" means all of the many and varied ways of killing and destroying people's souls. Then in the highest sense it means harboring hatred for the Lord.

These three kinds of killing align and are united, since anyone who intends the physical murder of someone in this world intends the murder of that individual's soul after death and intends the murder of the Lord, actually burning with hatred against him and wanting to eradicate his name. (67)

Now, since what is evil and what is good are two opposite things, like hell and heaven or like the Devil and the Lord, it follows that if we turn our backs on something evil as a sin we come into something good that is the opposite of that evil. The goodness that is opposite to the evil meant by killing is loving our neighbor." Since this goodness and that evil are opposites, it follows that the latter is repelled by the former. Two opposites cannot be one, as heaven and hell cannot be one. If they did, it would be like that lukewarm state described in the Book of Revelation as follows:

*I know that you are neither cold nor hot. It would have been better if you were cold or hot; but since you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16)*

(70-71)

Understood on an earthly level, the adultery named in the sixth commandment means not only acts of fornication but also lecherous behavior, lewd conversation, and filthy thoughts. Understood on a spiritual

level, though, adultery means polluting what is good in the Word and distorting what is true in it, while understood on the highest level it means denying the divine nature of the Lord and profaning the Word. These are "all kinds of adultery."

On the basis of rational light, earthly-minded people can know that "adultery" also means lecherous behavior, lewd conversation, and filthy thoughts, but not that adultery means polluting what is good in the Word and distorting what is true in it, and certainly not that it means denying the divine nature of the Lord and profaning the Word. So they do not know that adultery is so evil that it can be called the height of wickedness. This is because anyone who is intent on earthly adultery is also intent on spiritual adultery, and the reverse. This will be shown in a separate booklet on marriage. But in fact, people whose faith and way of life do not lead them to regard adultery as a sin are engaged in the totality of adultery at every moment. (74)

In earthly terms, "theft" means not only theft and robbery but also cheating and taking other people's assets by some pretext. Spiritually understood, though, "theft" means depriving others of the truths of their faith and good actions motivated by their caring, while in the highest sense it means taking from the Lord what is properly his and claiming it for ourselves - that is, claiming righteousness and worth for ourselves. These are "all kinds of theft" and like "all kinds of adultery" and "all kinds of killing," they too are united. They are united because one is within the other. (80)

"Honesty" also means integrity, fairness, faithfulness, and morality. On our own, we cannot be devoted to these so as to love them for what they are, for their own sakes, but if we turn our backs on deception, guile, and trickery as sins, we have a devotion to these virtues that comes not from ourselves but from the Lord. This applies to priests, administrators, judges, merchants, and laborers - to all of us then, in our various roles and tasks. (83)

It is generally thought nowadays that being saved is a matter of believing one thing or another that the church teaches, and that being saved is not a matter of obeying the Ten Commandments in particular - not killing, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness; and it is said in a wider sense that the focus should not be on deeds but on faith that comes from God. However, to the extent that we are caught up in evils we do not have faith. Consult your reason and you will clearly see that no killer, adulterer, thief, or false witness can have faith while he or she is caught up in such cravings. You will also clearly see that we cannot dispel these cravings in any other way than by our being unwilling to act on them because they are sins - that is, because they are hellish and diabolical. So if people think that being saved is a matter of believing one thing or another that the church teaches, while at the same time they remain people of this kind, they cannot help being foolish. This is according to what the Lord says in [Matthew 7:26](#).

This is how Jeremiah describes this kind of church:

*Stand in the gate of the house of Jehovah and proclaim this word there: "Thus says Jehovah Sabaoth, the God of Israel: 'Make your ways and your deeds good. Do not put your trust in lying words, saying, "The temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah are these." Are you going to steal, kill, commit adultery, and tell lies under oath, and then come and stand before me in this house that bears my name and say, "We are delivered" when you are doing these abominations? Has this house become a robbers' cave? Indeed, behold, I have seen it, ' says Jehovah." (Jeremiah 7:2-4, 9-11) (91)*

When we battle against what is evil, we cannot help but fight using what seems to be our own strength, because if we are not using what seems to be our own strength, we are not doing battle. We are standing there like an automaton, seeing nothing and doing nothing, while constantly thinking on the basis of evil and in favor of it, not against it.

However, we need to be quite clear about the fact that it is the Lord alone who is fighting within us against the evils, that it only seems as though we are using our own strength for the battle, and that the Lord wants it to seem like that because if it does not, no battle occurs, so there is no reformation either. (96)



This battle is hard only if we have given free rein to our cravings and indulged in them deliberately, or if we have stubbornly rejected the holy principles of the Word and the church. Otherwise, it is not hard. We need only resist evils in our intentions once a week or twice a month and we will notice a change. (97)

Even so, there are many people in Christian churches who teach that it is faith alone that saves, and living a good life or doing what is good has nothing to do with it. They even go so far as to teach that living an evil life or doing what is evil does not damn those who have been justified by faith alone, because they are in God and in grace. Strange as it may seem, though, despite the fact that this is what they teach, they still have an acknowledgment (which comes from that widespread perception bestowed by heaven) that people are saved if they live a good life and damned if they live an evil life. We can see this acknowledgment in the prayer that is read to people who are taking the Holy Supper in churches in Britain and in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark. It is common knowledge that there are people in these countries who teach faith alone. The prayer that is read in Britain to people taking the sacrament of the Supper is the following:

*The way and means to be received as worthy partakers of that Holy Table [the Holy Supper] is, first, to examine your lives and conversations [dealings with others] by the rule of God's commandments, and wherever you shall perceive yourselves to have offended either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life; and if you shall perceive your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your neighbors, then you shall reconcile yourselves to them, being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the utmost of your power, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other, and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you, as you would have forgiveness of your offences from God's hand; for otherwise the receiving of the Holy Communion does nothing else but increase your damnation. Therefore if any of you be a blasphemer of God, or a hinderer or slanderer of his Word, or an adulterer, or be in malice or envy or in any other grievous crime, repent of your sins, or else do not come to the Holy Table; lest after the taking of that Holy Sacrament the Devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction of both body and soul.* (4 and 5)

The reason religion is all about how we live is that after death we all are our own life. It remains the same for us as it was in the world and does not change. An evil life cannot be altered into a good one or a good life into an evil one, because they are opposites, and alteration into something opposite is extinction. So because they are opposites, a good life is called life and an evil life is called death.

That is why religion is all about how we live and why the way to live is to do good. (8)

### **3. The Teaching As it Relates to Genuine Charity**

Quotations from — "Charity"

"Take anyone you like, servant, farmer, workman, ship captain, or merchant, providing only he has something rational, and tell him only that he who hates evil does good, and all of them will see it clearly. And, inasmuch as they know that all good is from God, tell them that in so far as a man hates evil because it is against God, he does good from God, and they will see it. But say the same things to someone who has confirmed himself in faith alone, and accordingly at the same time in the idea that no one can do good from himself, and he will not see it; for false things have closed his rational sight or understanding, but not that of the others." (202)

*"A man is born to the end that he may become 'a Charity'; but he cannot become a charity unless he constantly does the goods of use to the neighbour from affection and its delight. Unless constant uses are done, a break in the continuity is brought about; and during this interval he may turn aside in all loves and the lustings therefrom, and thus not only be discontinuing his charity, but also get drawn away from uses. In this way the charity perishes, by reason of its opposites, and he serves two masters. (Matt 6: 24)*

"It is possible, indeed, for a man to do the good of use from an affection of glory, honour, and gain, and from the delights of these; but in that case he is not a charity, but a lusting; thus he is not a form of

heaven, but a form of hell. Even in hell everyone is compelled to do good work; but not from an affection of it; he is compelled to do it." (154-157)

"Every man who looks to the Lord and shuns evils as sins becomes a form of charity, providing he honestly, justly and faithfully carries out the work of his occupation or employment. This follows on upon the law, that a man is born in order to become a charity, and he cannot achieve this unless he constantly does the good of use from affection and delight. Therefore, when a man honestly, justly and faithfully carries out the work of his occupation or employment from affection and its delight, he is continually in the good of use, not only towards the community or state, but also towards particular sections thereof and towards private individuals. But he cannot do this unless he looks to the Lord and shuns evils as sins; for, the 'first' of charity is to look to the Lord and to shun evils as sins, and the 'second' of charity is to do goods. Moreover, the goods he does are the goods of use he is doing every day; and when he is not doing them, he has it in mind to do them.

"There is an interior affection abiding inwardly, and desiring it. It is owing to this that, all the time, from morning to evening, from year to year, from his earliest age to the end of his life, he is in the good of use. He cannot otherwise become a form of charity, that is, a receptacle of it." (158)

"Benefactions of charity are all the goods which a man who is a charity does, in freedom, outside the scope of his occupation. No one is saved by means of these benefactions, but by means of the charity out of which they are done, and therefore, which is in them. These benefactions are outside the man, and everyone is saved according to the quality of the good or charity in him. Very many after death, who in the world had thought about their own salvation, seeing then that they are alive, and hearing that heaven and hell do exist, make a great parade of having done good works, given to the poor, helped the needy, and made contributions to pious uses. But it is said to them: 'From what motive did you do those things? Did you shun evils as sins? Did you give them any consideration?'

"Some of them reply that they had faith. But it is said: 'If you did not give any consideration to evils as sins in yourselves, how could you have faith? Faith and evil do not go together.' So inquiry is made into what their life had been in their occupation, whether they had done the uses of their occupation for the sake of renown, position, and gain, as the principal goods, thus for the sake of themselves, or whether they had done them for the sake of the neighbour. They reply that they have made no such distinction. To this the reply is made: 'If you had looked to God and shunned evils as sins, then these two things would be distinct of themselves, because the Lord distinguishes them'; and that in so far as they had not done this, they had acted from evil and not from good. Everyone's very affection is communicated in the spiritual world, and its nature displayed; and such as he is in respect of his affection, such are all things proceeding from him. In this way he is led to the society of his affection.

"If those who place charity only in the good actions or good deeds they do, have not charity in themselves, they are interiorly conjoining themselves with the infernal and externally conjoining themselves with the heavenly. But after death, everyone is deprived of his exterior, and is left to his interior." (184-186)

"A man may be doing good, which he believes to be of charity, and all the while not be shunning evil; and yet every evil is contrary to charity. It is evident that to shun evil and to do Christian good are two distinct things; for there are people who do every good of charity from piety, and thinking about eternal life, and all the while they do not know that hating, bearing revenge, committing whoredom, (lewdness etc.) plundering and injuring, slandering, and so bearing false witness, and many other things are to be shunned.

"There are judges who live piously, and yet do not count it a sin to make their judgments on a basis of friendship, relationship, or with a view to honour and gain; and even if they do know they are evils, they confirm themselves in the belief that they are not. So also do others. Briefly, there are two distinct things, shunning evils as sins, and doing Christian good. He who shuns evils as sins does Christian goods, but they who do good and do not shun evils as sins, do not do any Christian good; for evil is contrary to charity, and is therefore to be abolished first before the good which anyone does is accompanied with charity. No one is able to do good and also evil. Every good that in itself is good proceeds from the interior will. From this will, evil is removed by repentance." (20-21)



"In so far as a man does not shun evils as sins, he remains in them. Man was created into the image and likeness of God, and made so that he might be a recipient of the Lord's love and wisdom. But, because he did not want to be a recipient, but wanted to be actual love and wisdom, and thus like God, he consequently inverted his form, and so turned away his affections and thoughts from the Lord to himself, and so began to love, even to worship, himself more than the Lord. In this way he estranged himself from the Lord, and looked backwards away from Him, thereby perverting the image and likeness of God in himself, and making it into an image and likeness of hell.

"This is signified by his eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By the serpent which he obeyed is signified the sensual, which is the ultimate of the natural man, and its lusts. The sensual, because it exists in the world, and admits there from the objects it desires, loves the things of the world; and, if it is allowed to rule, it draws the mind away from the objects of heaven, which are goods of love and truths of wisdom, in themselves Divine. This is the origin of man being, in respect of his proprium (self-hood), nothing but evil, and of his being born into it from parents. But means have been provided by the Lord, so that he may not perish on account of this; and these are, to look to the Lord and acknowledge that every good of love and every truth of wisdom is from Him, and nothing from man himself. In this way man inverts his form, turning away from himself and turning round to the Lord; thus he returns to the state into which he was created — that he might be a recipient of good and truth from the Lord, not from himself at all.

"Man's proprium having, by this inversion, become evil on-ly, there is the other means of recovering the image of God, by shunning evils as sins. For if a man does not shun evils as sins, but only shuns them as hurtful, he is still not looking to the Lord, but to himself, and so continues in a perverted state. When, however, he shuns evils as sins, he is also shunning them because they are against the Lord and contrary to His Divine laws; and then he beseeches the Lord for help and power to resist them; and this power, when besought, is never denied. It is by these two means that a man is purified from his innate evils. Consequently, if he does not adopt these two means, he remains such as he was born. He cannot be purified from evils if he only looks to God and prays, for in that case he believes, after having prayed, either that he is entirely without sins, or that they have been remitted, by which he understands that they have been taken away. But in that case, he still remains in them; and to remain in them is to increase them; for they are like a disease that eats away everything round about it and brings death." (204)

#### **4. The Teaching As it Relates to the Divine Providence**

##### **Quotations from — "Divine Providence"**

No explanation is necessary to see that we need to be led away from our evils in order to be reformed, since if we are given to evil in this world, we will be given to evil after we leave this world. This means that if our evil is not set aside in this world, it cannot be set aside afterwards. The tree lies where it falls; and so too our life retains its basic quality when we die. We are all judged according to our deeds. It is not that these deeds are tallied up but that we return to them and behave the same. Death is a continuation of life, with the difference that then we cannot be reformed. (277b)

Evils cannot be set aside unless they come to light. This does not mean that we have to act out our evils in order to bring them to light but that we need to look carefully not only at our actions but also at our thoughts, at what we would do if it were not for our fear of the laws and of ill repute. We need to look especially at which evils we see as permissible in our spirit and do not regard as sins, for eventually we do them.

It is for this self-examination that we have been given discernment, a discernment separate from our volition, so that we can know, discern, and recognize what is good and what is evil. It is also so that we can see what the real nature of our volition is--that is, what we love and what we desire. It is to enable us to see this that our discernment has been given both higher and lower thought processes, both more inward and more outward thought processes. It is so that we can use the higher or more inward thoughts to see what our volition is up to in our lower or outer thoughts. We see this the way we see our face in a mirror; and when we see and recognize what a sin is, then if we want to and ask the Lord for help, we can stop

intending it, abstain from it, and later act against it. If we cannot go through this process easily, we can still make it happen by trying to go through it so that finally we reject that evil and detest it. Then for the first time we actually sense and feel that evil is evil and good is good.

This is what it means to examine ourselves, to see and acknowledge our evils, and to confess them and then refrain from them. (278)

They are people who confess that they are guilty of all sins but do not look for any single sin in themselves. They say, "I am a sinner! I was born in sins; there is no soundness in me from head to toe! I am nothing but evil! Gracious God, look on me with favor, forgive me, purify me, save me, make me walk in purity, in the way of the righteous," and the like. Yet they do not look into themselves and therefore do not identify any particular evil; and no one who does not identify an evil can abstain from it, let alone fight against it. They think that they are clean and washed after these confessions when in fact they are unclean and unwashed from their heads to the soles of their feet. This blanket confession is nothing but a lullaby that leads finally to blindness. It is like some grand generalization with no details, which is actually nothing. (278b)

There is a previously unrecognized reason why evils could not be set aside apart from this examination, this bringing to light, this recognition, this confession, and this resistance. I have already mentioned [62, 65, 217] that heaven overall is arranged in communities according to [people's desires for what is good, and that hell overall is arranged in communities according to] desires for what is evil that are opposite to those desires for what is good. As to our spirits, each of us is in some community--in a heavenly one when our good desires are in control, and in a hellish one when our evil desires are in control. We are unaware of this while we are living in this world, but in spirit that is where we are. We could not go on living otherwise, and that is how the Lord is guiding us.

If we are in a hellish community, the only way the Lord can lead us out is under the laws of his divine providence. One of them says that we must see that we are there, must want to get out, and must ourselves make an effort with what seems to be our own strength. We can do this while we are in this world but not after death. Then we stay forever in the community we joined in this world. This is why we need to examine ourselves, see and acknowledge our sins, repent, and remain constant for the rest of our lives.

Surely anyone can see simply on the basis of reason that our compulsions and the gratifications they offer shut the door firmly in the Lord's face, and that they cannot be ousted by the Lord as long as we ourselves keep that door closed and throw our weight against it from the other side to keep it from opening. The Lord's words in the Book of Revelation show that we ourselves need to open the door:

*Here I am, standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to them and dine with them, and they with me. (Revelation 3:20)*

[3] We can see from this that the closeness of our union with the Lord depends on the extent to which we abstain from evils as coming from the devil and as blocking the Lord's entry. We can see that the union is closest for people who loathe these evils as though they were actually foul and fiery devils, since evil and the devil are one and the same, just as malicious falsity and Satan are one and the same. As a result, just as the Lord's inflow is into a love for what is good and its desires and through these into our perceptions and thoughts (which derive all their truth from the fact that they stem from goodness we are engaged in), so the inflow of the devil or hell is into a love for what is evil and its desires--its compulsions--and through these into our perceptions and thoughts, which derive all their falsity from the fact that they stem from what is evil. (33:3)

None of this could happen if it did not seem to us that we think autonomously and manage our lives autonomously. I have already given ample evidence that we would not be human if it did not seem to us that we lived on our own and that we therefore thought, intended, spoke, and acted on our own [71-99, 174, 176]. It follows from this that unless we seemed to be managing everything that has to do with our occupations and our lives by our own prudence, we could not be led and managed by divine providence. It would be as though we stood there with our hands hanging limp, mouths open, eyes closed, holding our breath and waiting for something to flow into us. In this way we would divest ourselves of

everything human, which we get from the sense and feeling that we live, think, intend, speak, and act on our own; and as we did so, we would also divest ourselves of those two abilities called freedom and rationality by which we are differentiated from animals. Earlier in this work and also in *Divine Love and Wisdom* I have explained that if it were not for this appearance we would be incapable of receptivity and reciprocity, and therefore of immortality.

So if you want to be led by divine providence, use your prudence as a servant and employee who faithfully manages the employer's assets. Prudence is the "talent" that was given to servants for business purposes, with an accounting required ([Luke 19:13-25](#); [Matthew 25:14-31](#)).

Prudence itself seems to be something we possess, and we believe that it is, as long as we keep that deadliest enemy of God and divine providence, love for ourselves, shut in. It lives in the depths of each one of us from birth. If we do not recognize it--and it does not want to be recognized--then it lives in perfect safety and guards the door to prevent us from opening it so the Lord can evict it.

We open the door by abstaining from evils as sins, apparently on our own, but admitting that it is being done by the Lord. This is the kind of prudence with which the divine providence can cooperate. (210)

Is there anyone who cannot see from that inherent ability called rationality that one particular thing is good and useful to society while another thing is bad and harmful? Justice, for example, and honesty and marital fidelity are useful to society, while injustice, dishonesty, and sex with other people's spouses are harmful to society. This means that evil acts are intrinsically damaging, while good acts are intrinsically beneficial. Is there anyone, then, who cannot incorporate this into rational thought, given the will to do so?

We do have rationality, and we do have freedom. Our rationality and freedom are uncovered, brought to light, and used judiciously, and they enable us to perceive and to act, to the extent that we abstain from our inner evils with these goals in mind. To the extent that we do, we turn toward those good acts the way one friend turns to another.

This enables us--again using that ability of ours called rationality--to make decisions about the good qualities that are useful to society in the spiritual world and the evil qualities that are harmful there. All we have to do is to see sins as the evil ones and good, thoughtful acts as the good ones. Again, we can incorporate this into our rational thought if we want to, because we do have rationality and freedom. Our rationality and freedom are uncovered, brought to light, and used judiciously, and they enable us to perceive and to act, to the extent that we abstain from these evils as sins. To the extent that we do, we turn toward good, thoughtful deeds the way one neighbor turns lovingly toward another.

Now, since the Lord wants whatever we do freely and rationally to seem to be ours, for the sake of our acceptance and union, it follows that we can intend things rationally because they involve our eternal happiness and that with a strength we have asked for from the Lord, we can do them. (77)

There are a great many people who do not know that they are involved in evil because they do not do evil things outwardly. They are afraid of civil laws and of losing their reputations, so by habitual practice they have trained themselves to avoid evil deeds as harmful both to their reputations and to their purses. However, if they do not avoid evil deeds on religious grounds, because they are sins and are in conflict with God, then the cravings for evils and their pleasures are still there within them like foul water that is dammed up and stagnant. They might examine their thoughts and intentions and discover these compulsions if they only knew what sins were.

A great many people who have settled on faith divorced from charity are like this. Since they believe that the law does not condemn them, they pay no attention to sins. They even doubt whether there are such things as sins. If there are, they are not sins in God's sight, because they have been pardoned.

Natural moralists are like this as well, people who believe that everything depends on our civic and moral life and its vigilance and nothing on divine providence. People are like this too who take great care to cultivate a reputation and a name for decency and honesty for the sake of position or profit. After death, though, people like this who have had no use for religion become spirits that embody their compulsions.

They look absolutely human to themselves, but from a distance they look like images of Priapus to others. They see everything in darkness and nothing in light, like owls. (117)

## 5. The Teaching Confirmed and Illustrated in

Quotations from — "True Christian Religion".

Evil and good cannot coexist; the more evil is removed, the more good is focused on and felt. This is the case because all who are in the spiritual world have a field of their particular love emanating around them. This field spreads all around and has an effect on others. It creates feelings of harmony or antipathy. These fields separate the good from the evil.

The fact that evil has to be removed before goodness is recognized, perceived, and loved could be compared with many situations that are possible in our world; for example, the following: Suppose someone keeps a leopard and a panther in an apartment and, as the one who feeds them, is able to live safely with them. No one else can visit unless their owner first removes these wild animals.

Guests invited to the table of the king and queen would not forget to wash their faces and hands before attending. No bridegroom goes into the bedroom with his bride after the wedding without first washing himself all over and putting on a wedding garment. Anyone must first purify ore with fire and remove slag before getting pure gold or silver. Everyone separates the tares or weeds from the harvested wheat before taking it into the barn. Everyone removes the beards from harvested barley with threshing tools before bringing it home.

Everyone cooks some of the juice out of raw meat before it becomes edible and is set on the table. Everyone knocks the grubs and caterpillars off the leaves of trees in the garden to prevent them from devouring the leaves and causing a loss of fruit. Everyone removes garbage from the house and the front entrance and cleans up those areas, especially when expecting a visit from a prince or the prince's daughter to whom one is engaged. Does any man love a young woman and propose to marry her if she is riddled with malignancies or covered all over with pustules and varicose veins, no matter how much she puts makeup on her face, wears gorgeous clothing, and makes an effort to be attractive by saying nice things and paying compliments?

The need for us to purify ourselves from evils, and not to wait for the Lord to do it without our participation, is like a servant coming in with his face and clothes covered in soot and dung, approaching his master, and saying, "Lord, wash me." Surely his master would tell him, "You foolish servant! What are you saying? Look, there is the water, the soap, and a towel. Don't you have hands? Don't they work? Wash yourself!"

The Lord God is going to say, "The means of being purified come from me. Your willingness and your power come from me. Therefore use these gifts and endowments of mine as your own and you will be purified." And so on.

The need for the outer self to be cleansed, but to be cleansed through the inner self, is something that the Lord teaches in Matthew chapter 23 from beginning to end. (331)

This change can be illustrated by the following comparison. Before repentance, we are like a desert, inhabited by terrifying wild creatures, dragons, eagle-owls, screech owls, vipers, and bloodletting snakes; in the clumps of bushes in that desert there are the owls and wild beasts of the desert [mentioned in the Bible], and satyrs are dancing [Isaiah 13:21]. After these creatures have been expelled by human work and effort, however, that desert can be plowed and cultivated into fields, and these can be planted with oats, beans, and flax, and later on with barley and wheat.

This can also be compared to the wickedness that is abundant and dominant in humankind. If evildoers were not chastised and punished with whippings and death, no city would survive; no nation would last. In effect, each one of us is society itself in its smallest form. If we do not treat ourselves in a spiritual way as evildoers are treated by the larger society in an earthly way, we are going to be chastised and punished

after death; and this will continue until out of sheer fear of further punishment we stop doing evil, even if we can never be compelled to do what is good out of love for it. (531)

True repentance is examining not only the actions of our life but also the intentions of our will.

The reason why true repentance is to examine not only the actions of our life but also the intentions of our will is that our intellect and our will produce our actions. We speak from our thought and we act from our will; therefore our speech is our thought speaking, and our action is our will acting. Since this is the origin of what we say and do, it is clear without a doubt that it is these two faculties that commit the sin when our body sins.

It is in fact possible for us to repent of evil things we have done through our bodies but still think about evil and will it. This is like cutting down the trunk of a bad type of tree but leaving its root still in the ground; the same bad tree grows up from the root again and also spreads itself around. There is a different outcome when the root is pulled up, though; and this is what happens within us when we explore the intentions of our will and lay our evils aside through repentance.

We explore the intentions of our will by exploring our thoughts. Our intentions reveal themselves in our thoughts - for example, when we contemplate, will, and intend acts of revenge, adultery, theft, or false witness, or entertain desires for those things. This applies as well to acts of blasphemy against God, against the holy Word, and against the church, and so on.

If we keep our minds focused on these issues, and explore whether we would do such things if no fear of the law or concern for our reputation stood in the way, and if after this exploration we decide that we do not will those things, because they are sins, then we are practicing a repentance that is true and deep. This is even more the case when we are feeling delight in those evils and are free to do them, but at that moment we resist and abstain. If we practice this over and over, then when our evils come back we sense our delight in them as something unpleasant, and in time we condemn them to hell. This is the meaning of these words of the Lord: "Any who try to find their soul will lose it, and any who lose their soul for my sake, will find it" ([Matthew 10:39](#)).

People who remove evils from their will through this type of repentance are like those who in time pulled up the weeds that had been sown by the Devil in their field, allowing seeds planted by the Lord God the Savior to gain free ground and to sprout for the harvest ([Matthew 13:25-30](#)). (532)

## **6. How Man Co-operates with the Lord**

Quotations from — "**Apocalypse Explained**"

So far as man shuns evils, and turns away from them because they are sins, and thinks about heaven, his salvation and eternal life, so far he is adopted by the Lord, and conjoined to heaven, and so far he is endowed with spiritual affection, which is such that he not only wishes to know truths, but also to understand them, and to will and do them.

Thus is man reformed by the Lord; and so far as he then knows and understands truths and wills and does them, so far he becomes a new man, that is, a regenerate man, and thus becomes an angel of heaven, and has a heavenly love and life. (837: 6 & 7)

It has been shown already that every man is his love, and that the love and life of man make one and are one. It shall now be shown that a man's faith is such as his love or life is, also that a man's faith is according to his works. It has been shown above that works contain in themselves all things of man's love and life, since works are their products and effects, and are the ultimates in which all things prior coexist. For this reason angels of the third heaven know what the quality of a man is by the tone of his speech, also by his step, by the touch of the hand, by the action of the body, by his exultation, and by many other things, which are acts. That a man is known in the third heaven by such things is not known in the world, because man believes that there is nothing in such things but mere motion; when yet the life of his mind produces these actions by means of the life of his body; and both of these lives, with everything pertaining to them, concur in the production of these acts, from which it follows that they manifest themselves in them. Since,



then, a man's life goes forth into works, and manifests itself in them, it follows that his faith does the same; for faith is the acknowledgment that a thing is so, and acknowledgment is of the thought and at the same time of the will; and as will and thought produce action by means of the life of the body, so also faith is manifested in works as to its quality. And yet nothing is acknowledged to be so in thought, will, and work together, except what pertains to man's love and life, for it is his love and life that acknowledge; which shows that as faith is such as man's love and life are, so it is such as his works are.

By works all things are meant that a man does, speaks, and writes, whether great and many or little and few; as whatever an officer does in his office, or whatever a priest does in his, or a merchant in his, or a servant in his; all such works, whether little or great, are good when they are done from the Lord with man, and are evil when they are done by the man himself; thus they are good so far as man shuns evils because they are sins against God, and they are evil so far as he does not shun evils. It is similar with faith; such as his works are such is his faith, for these make one like thought and speech or like will and action. Man supposes that even if he lives wickedly he can still have faith, at least to believe that there is a God, that the Lord is the Savior of the world, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that the Word is holy. But I can affirm that if he does not shun evils because they are sins, and then look to the Lord, he does not at all believe these things; since they are not of his life and love, but only of his memory and knowledge; and they do not come to be of his life and love until he fights against evils and overcomes them. This has been made clear to me by the state of many after death who supposed that they had believed at least that there is a God, and that the Lord is the Savior of the world, and other like things; and yet such as had lived wickedly had not believed. (839)

"To follow the Lord is to be led by Him, and not by oneself; and no other can be led by the Lord, except him who is not led by himself; and everyone is led by himself who does not shun evils because they are opposed to the Word and thus to God, consequently because they are sins and from hell. Everyone who does not thus shun and turn away from evils is led by himself. The reason is that the evil which is in man hereditarily constitutes his life because it is his proprium (his own?), and before the evils of his proprium are removed, he does everything from them, thus of himself. But it is otherwise when evils are removed, which is done when he shuns them because they are infernal. Then the Lord enters with truths and goods from heaven and leads him. The main cause of this is that every man is his own love; and a man as to his spirit, which lives after death, is nothing but the affection which is of his love; and all evil is from his love and thus belongs to his love. Thus it follows that a man's love or affection can be reformed only by spiritually shunning and turning away from evils, and this is a shunning and turning away from them because they are infernal. From these things it is now evident what it means 'to follow the Lord withersoever He goes'." (864:6)

"I know that many think in their hearts that no one can shun evils of himself because man is born in sins, and therefore has no power from himself to shun them. But let such people know that everyone who thinks in his heart that there is a God, that the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, that the Word is from Him, and consequently holy, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that there is a life after death, is able to shun them. But he who despises these things and rejects them from his mind is not able, and certainly not he who denies them. For who can think that anything is a sin against God, when he does not think of God? And who can shun evils as sins, when he thinks nothing of heaven or hell and of the life after death? Such a man does not know what sin is. Man is placed in the midst between heaven and hell. From heaven goods continually inflow and from hell evils. And because he is in the midst, man has freedom to think what is good or to think what is evil. The Lord never takes away this freedom from anyone, for it constitutes his life, and is the means by which he is reformed. Therefore, so far as a man from this freedom thinks of shunning evils because they are sins and prays to the Lord for help, so far the Lord removes them and gives man the power to desist from them as if of himself, and then to shun them." (936:2)

"It must be observed that every man who commences the spiritual life because he desires to be saved, fears sins on account of the punishments of hell; but afterwards on account of the sin itself, because it is horrible in itself; and at last on account of the truth and good which he loves, thus for the sake of the Lord.



For so far as anyone loves truth and good, thus loves the Lord, to that extent he is averse to their opposite, which is evil.

"From these things it is clear that whoever believes in the Lord shuns evils as sins, and on the other hand, that whoever shuns evils as sins also believes. Therefore to shun evils as sins is the sign of faith." (936:4)

"When a man shuns evils as sins, he then daily learns what a good work is, and the love of doing good and the love of knowing truths for the sake of good, grow with him. For so far as he knows truths, so far he can perform works more fully and more wisely, thus his works become more truly good. Cease therefore, to inquire in yourself: 'What are the good works that I shall do, or what good shall I do that I may receive eternal life?' Only abstain from evils as sins, and look to the Lord, and He will teach and lead you." (979:2)

## 7. The Vital Importance of Co-operation

More Quotations from — "**Divine Providence**".

Since we do have an inside and an outside, since both of them need to be reformed if we ourselves are to be reformed, and since we cannot be reformed unless we look into ourselves, see and admit what is wrong with us, and then refrain from doing it, it follows that it is not just the outside that needs to be looked into but the inside as well. If only the outside is looked into, then all we see is what we have actually done--we have not killed anyone or committed adultery or stolen anything or perjured ourselves, and so on. That is, we look into our physical evils but not into our spiritual ones. However, we do need to look into the evils of our spirit in order to be reformed, since we live as spirits after death and all the evils in our spirits are still there. The only way to look into our spirits is to pay attention to what we are thinking and especially to what we are striving for, since what we are striving for is what we have in mind because of our intentions. That is where our evils have their origin and their roots, in their compulsions and pleasures; and unless we see and acknowledge them we are still caught up in them even though we may not act on them outwardly. We can see from the following words of the Lord that thinking on the basis of our intentions is both intending and doing:

*If anyone has looked at someone else's wife so as to lust for her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)* (152)

I have often been struck by the fact that even though the whole Christian world recognizes that evils are to be avoided as sins and that otherwise they are not forgiven, even though Christians recognize that if sins are not forgiven there is no salvation, still there is scarcely one in a thousand who actually knows this for a fact. I have made inquiries in the spiritual world and found that this is true. Everyone in the Christian world is aware of it because of the prayers that are read to people who come to the Holy Supper, because these things are very clearly stated then; yet when you ask whether people know this for a fact, they say that they do not now and did not in the past. This is because they have not thought about it, most of them thinking only about faith and about salvation because of their faith alone.

I have also been struck by the fact that faith alone closes the eyes so completely that when people who are convinced of it read the Word, they do not see anything that it says about love, caring, and doing. It is as though they painted a coating of faith over the whole Word like someone who paints a manuscript over with crimson so that nothing shows through from underneath; and if anything does show through, it is swallowed up by faith and becomes identified with it. (153)

Doubts about divine providence may be raised by observing the widespread ignorance of the fact that we go on living as individuals after death, and also observing that this has not been disclosed before. The reason for this ignorance is that deep inside everyone who does not abstain from evils as sins there is a secret belief that we do not go on living after death and that therefore it does not matter whether you say that we go right on living after death or that we are resurrected on the day of the Last Judgment. If some belief in resurrection does occur, people say to themselves, "I am no worse than anyone else. Whether I go to hell or to heaven, I will have plenty of company."

But everyone who has any religion at all has an instinctive realization that we do live as individuals after death. The belief that we live as souls and not as individuals is not held by any people except those who

have been deluded by their own intelligence. The following observations show that everyone who has any religion at all has this instinctive realization that we live as individuals after death. (274)

It is hard for us to tell the difference because we do not know whether we are being led by the devil or by the Lord. When we are being led by the devil, we are helpful for the sake of ourselves and the world, but when we are being led by the Lord, we are being helpful for the sake of the Lord and heaven. All the people whose helpfulness comes from the Lord are people who are abstaining from evils as sins, while all the people whose helpfulness comes from the devil are people who are not abstaining from evils as sins. Evil comes from the devil, but service, or doing good, comes from the Lord. This is the only way to tell the difference. They look alike outwardly, but their inward form is completely different. One is like a golden object that has slag inside, while the other is like a golden object that is pure gold all the way through. One is like a piece of artificial fruit that looks outwardly like fruit from a tree but actually is colored wax with powder or tar inside, while the other is like fine fruit, appealingly delicious and fragrant, with its seeds within. (215:13)

We are all given the means of amending our lives after death, if we can. The Lord teaches and leads us through angels, and since by then we know that we are living after death and that heaven and hell are real, we accept truths at first. However, if we have not believed in God and abstained from evils as sins in the world, before long we develop a distaste for truths and back away. If we have professed these principles orally but not at heart, we are like the foolish young women who had lamps but no oil. They begged others for oil and went off to buy some, but still they were not admitted to the wedding [[Matthew 25:1-13](#)]. The lamps mean the truths that our faith discloses and the oil means the good effects of our caring.

This shows that under divine providence everyone can be saved, and that it is our own fault if we are not saved. (328:9)

Our life is not breathed into us in an instant but is formed gradually, and is reformed as we abstain from evils as sins--specifically, as we see what is a sin, recognize it, admit it, and then do not intend it, and therefore refrain from it, and also as we know the means that relate to knowing God. By these two means our life is formed and reformed, and they cannot just be poured into us in an instant. Our inherited evil, which is essentially hellish, has to be banished first, and goodness, which is essentially heavenly, planted in its stead. Because of our inherited evil we are like owls as to our discernment and snakes as to our volition, while if we have been reformed we are like doves as to our discernment and sheep as to our volition. This means that instant reformation and consequent salvation would be like the instant transformation of an owl into a dove and a snake into a sheep. Can anyone who knows anything about human life fail to see that this could not happen unless the nature of the owl and the snake were taken away and the nature of the dove and the sheep implanted? (338:9)

## Conclusion

Having read the foregoing quotations, how do you feel about them? Have they made you think? Have you asked yourself how they could be of benefit to you in your own life? You will notice all through the quotations how the importance is stressed, that it is not enough to admire and agree with what they say — you have to apply them to your own life. The Lord said: *'He that hears these saying of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock'* (Matt. 7:14). We are also told that the Lord only stands at the door (of our hearts) and knocks, and that it is up to us to open the door and welcome Him inside (Rev. 3:20).

We have it in our power to do this of our own free will, as the Lord will never compel us to do anything. When He wrote the wonderful books of the Writings through Swedenborg, His main objective was to lead us from evil to good. In order to achieve this, He has shown us the importance of self-examination, so that we may search out the evils to which we are prone and see them as sins against Him, calling upon Him as we do so, to come in and win the victory for us over these hellish evils. As we do this, He can then lead us to reformation and regeneration.

The Writings point out that all evils originate in hell, and never from the Lord, who is the very essence and source of all love and wisdom, and whose one great aim is to lead us to salvation and eternal life. It is a

grave mistake to under-estimate the powers of hell. It is only when we come to understand the unbelievable hideous cruelty, vile malice and deep hatred of the hells toward mankind, that we can appreciate the real nature of the wicked spirits who come to tempt and infest us. This is plainly shown in Arcana Coelestia paragraph no. 1820 which reads: "As few know how the case is with temptations it may here be briefly explained. Evil spirits fight only against those things which the man loves; the more ardently he loves them, the more fiercely do they wage the combat. It is evil genii who fight against the things that pertain to the affection of goods and evil spirits that fight against those which pertain to the affection of truth. As soon as they notice even the smallest thing that a man loves, or perceive as it were by scent what is delightful and dear to him, they forthwith assault it and endeavour to destroy it, and thereby to destroy the whole man, for man's life consists in his loves. Nothing is more delightful to them than to destroy a man in this way, nor would they desist even to eternity, unless they were driven away by the Lord. Those spirits who are malignant and crafty insinuate themselves into man's very loves by flattering them, and thus bring the man among themselves; and presently, when they have brought him in they attempt to destroy his loves, and thereby murder the man, and this in a thousand ways that cannot be comprehended.

"Nor do they wage the combat simply by reasoning against things good and true, because such combats are of no account, for if they were vanquished a thousand times, they would still persist, since reasonings against goods and truths can never be wanting. But they pervert the good and truth and inflame with a certain fire of cupidity and persuasion so that the man does not know otherwise than that he is in similar cupidity and persuasion. At the same time they enkindle these with delight which they snatch from the man's delight in something else, and in this way they most deceitfully infest and afflict him. They do this with so much skill, by leading him from one thing to another, that if the Lord did not aid him, the man would never know but that the case was really so."

The Writings also show that these vile spirits, after leading the man to evils of all kinds, accuse him and also torture him by dredging up all his evils and falsities, enlarging and exaggerating them out of all proportion, thus causing the man to be filled with anxiety and despair. This is the sort of thing they delight in doing. A great deal more could be said about this subject, but sufficient has been explained to put us on our guard against such hellish attacks. When doubts, despair and fears assail us, it is well to remember what the Lord Himself has accomplished. When He came down to earth and put on the human form with all the frailties it involved, He permitted the hells to attack Him with their full Venom, ferocity and hatred, and endured and overcame all the temptations with which they infest mankind. All these He completely overcame in the human form, thus conquering the hells forever and making it possible for us, as we shun our evils as sins against Him, to call upon Him to conquer them for us. When we do this, as temptations beset us from the hells, He will always come to our aid and win the victory for us. His great love will never fail us. He has already conquered the hells for all eternity in the human form and they dare not raise a finger against Him. In no other way could this tremendous victory over evil have been achieved. Only God Himself could have done this and it could only be done through His Divine Human.

His great love for us and the temptations He endured for our sake are borne out in Arcana Coelestia 1820 which reads further:

The nature of a person's temptations is as the nature of his loves. They also show the nature of the Lord's temptations, that these were the most dreadful of all, for as is the intensity of the love so is the dreadfulness of the temptations. The Lord's love - a most ardent love - was the salvation of the whole human race; it was therefore a total affection for good and affection for truth in the highest degree. Against these all the hells contended, employing the most malicious forms of guile and venom, but the Lord nevertheless conquered them all by His own power.

So let us take heart and rejoice in the fact that victory over evils has been made possible by, and through the Lord, our greatest Saviour, Redeemer and Creator, whose love for us is infinite and eternal. Let us remember that He is continually at work, in each one of us, leading us from evil to good, always with our eternal life in view. We are not alone in our struggles against temptations; He is ever present, encouraging, guiding, protecting and strengthening us with ceaseless love and patience in our battles against evils.

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)"*

In the spiritual world where we all arrive after death, no one asks what our faith has been or what our beliefs have been, only what our life has been, whether we are one kind of person or another. They know that the quality of our faith and the quality of our beliefs depend on the quality of our life, because life constructs a belief system for itself and constructs a faith for itself. (Divine Providence 101).

## **Books of the "Writings"**

Arcana Coelestia (12 vols)  
True Christian Religion (2 vols)  
The New Jerusalem & Its Heavenly Doctrine  
Heaven & Hell  
Apocalypse Explained (6 vols)  
Divine Love & Wisdom  
Divine Providence  
The Four Doctrines  
(Doctrines of the Lord, Sacred Scripture, Life & Faith)  
Conjugal Love  
Intercourse of Soul & Body  
The Last Judgment  
Apocalypse Revealed (2 vols)  
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Coronis  
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Earths in the Universe  
Compendium of Swedenborg's Theological Works  
De Verbo (Concerning the Word)