

For Heaven's Sake!

Forty-six variants on the theme: how to react to the conditions of life on earth in such a way as to prepare oneself for life in the kingdom of heaven

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Preface

"The Lord's Divine Providence has for its end a heaven of angels from the human race." - *Swedenborg*

When my grandfather died in the early twenties, a number of his books were dumped upon our household, including a leather bound set of the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Though I was only in my teens, these old tomes fascinated me, at first for their antiquarian interest, but afterwards because of the extraordinary nature of their contents.

Swedenborg (who was born in Stockholm in 1688 and died in London in 1772) claimed that during the last twenty-eight years of his life he had had his inner consciousness opened by the Lord into the Spiritual World, so that he could live with angels and spirits like one of them, visiting with them in their homes, conversing with them, and sharing their love and wisdom to a very high degree.

I discussed the matter excitedly with my father, and we concluded that, since there was no hint of insanity in these works, here was obviously a case of "either - or." *Either* Swedenborg's claims were basically true (even literally true) *or* he must have possessed the most vivid imagination of anyone who had ever lived! Now, according to my reading, Swedenborg had in all other areas a rather prosaic imagination. He was conspicuous as a trained observer in the scientific field, with monumental works to his credit in mineralogy, cosmology, anatomy and physiology, which displayed a marvellous power of inductive reasoning from empirical data, but little if any of the kind of creative imagination which one associates with Dante, Milton or Blake.

As I read on, I became more and more convinced of the value of these formidable volumes. In fact, they changed the course of my thinking and of my life, leading me in the end to enter the ministry of the "Church of the New Jerusalem" or "New Church" which bases its beliefs on Swedenborg's theological and philosophical works.

My object in writing "For Heaven's Sake!" has not been specifically to promulgate Swedenborg's doctrines, although the insights the book contains have been developed within the framework of his theological system. My sole purpose has been to help the reader in his spiritual growth. I have therefore drawn very largely on my own forty years' experience as a pastor, in England, South Africa and the U.S.A. Each chapter is complete in itself, and can be read separately, as for instance when you are in bed before dropping off to sleep; but there is a general sequence of thought throughout the whole book. I have not hesitated to repeat the main points over and over again, to drive them home; in fact, the volume could be regarded as "forty-six variations on a theme," the theme being: *How to react to the conditions of life on earth, in such a way as to prepare oneself for life in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Brian Kingslake

1. "For Heaven's Sake!"

People who read the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg very soon find themselves judging everything from the point of view of the spiritual world and the life after death. He was able to convince us that we shall all be there in our own eternity in the not-too-far-distant future; and then we shall be regarding our temporary life spent on this earth in rather a different way from what most of us tend to do here and now. Actually that was the reason why the Lord opened Swedenborg's inner vision and gave him this broader and deeper consciousness; it was just so that he could help us to obtain a truer perspective on life here and now.

Some years ago, the main focus of the Christian ministry was on the Social Gospel. The church existed, it was supposed, for the sole purpose of improving conditions of life in this world. If a minister so much as mentioned the life after death, he was almost made to feel ashamed of himself! He was regarded as a cop-out, evading the real issues of this real material world, by talk of a happy but unreal land, far, far away, where everything would be O.K. Karl Marx called religion "The opiate of the poor," and it is regrettably true that many members of the upper class regarded religion in that light, promising the working classes "pie in the sky when you die," so as to keep them content. Even spiritually minded people have adopted this attitude, saying: "We don't believe in hell (how could our loving heavenly Father torture His own children?); and if there is a heaven, with rewards offered for well-doing on earth, why not leave it as a pleasant surprise for those who qualify?" "One world at a time," people were saying; "If there is a future life, we shall know all about it when we get there. It does not concern us here and now." The Chinese sage Confucius seems to have held this view, five hundred years before Christ. We are told that there was only one thing which made the old philosopher lose his cool, and that was if he was asked about a life after death.

Well, Swedenborg's own experiences in the other world, and his reports on the people he met there and their way of living, make most of these speculations sound rather ridiculous. Actually, many spirits who had confirmed themselves, while on earth, that there was no continuation of life after death, still believe this, even though they may have been living in the spiritual world for hundreds of years, as measured by earthly time. Their idea of a future life was that it would be entirely different from the life on earth: sitting on clouds and playing a harp, or being pitch-forked into a fire by horned devils. Some of the spirits Swedenborg met were still waiting for the "last day," when the trumpet would sound and the dead would rise from the graves and be carried up on high, to be judged before the Great White Throne. Since this had not happened, they assumed they were not yet dead!

I think that an exclusive concern for the Social Gospel has been abandoned somewhat by the churches in recent years, especially since experience has proved that better living conditions do not necessarily produce better people, as used to be thought. There are corruptions in an affluent society, even among the elite, just as much as there are in the city slums, or under conditions of extreme poverty such as we find in undeveloped countries. The churches are now realizing that social improvement is not the answer, but what is needed is a national conscience which concerns itself with spiritual values; a change of motivation, from expedience ("What profit do I get out of it?") to dedication ("How can I best serve the Lord, and extend the kingdom of heaven in our midst?")

So the questions arise: What is the kingdom of heaven? What are its values? How would a society function if its members wholeheartedly adopted those values? And here Swedenborg makes his invaluable contribution, by showing us in detail how people are living in heaven; and, by contrast, how they are living in hell. For, as he explains, death does not introduce any new element. All it does is to strip a man of his externals, together with his physical body. The man himself continues to live as before, but now he is more essentially himself, motivated and governed by his "Ruling Love," the dominant love he developed during his life on earth. To die is only like leaving school and going out into the world. Death is an important stage in our development, of course; but it is only a stage. In this respect it is like birth; there is a continuity from the foetus to the living child. So, after a life of trial and error and experimentation and innumerable choices in this physical world, we pass on by another birth, as it were, into the life of eternity in the spiritual world, a much more real world (not less real) than the one in which we are living here.

It is for this final life in eternity that God has been preparing us from the beginning. I can imagine Him thinking: "I should like to have a society of human beings who are perfectly happy together, loving

one another and loving Me. They must be active, busily occupied. There must be arts and sciences among them, to stretch their minds and imagination; there must be joy and dancing and all kinds of self-expression. Each individual must be a self-conscious person, an *ego*; and they must love one another as from themselves, and love Me (God) as from themselves. They must be *mature* people, so secure on their own feet that they have no need to think about themselves but can devote their attention entirely to loving and serving one another."

Such creatures are what we call the angels in heaven: not paragons of virtue, just ordinary folk who love the Lord their God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbour as themselves. Angels can be defined as "fully developed people"; though there is always plenty of room for further development to eternity. They are the graduates from the school of life. The angels are not a separate creation, exempt from human frailties and needs; every one of them was once in this world, or on some other planet. Only when we have grasped this idea of the on-goingness of life, from conception in the womb, through birth into this world, and then through death and rebirth into eternity - only then can we rightly assess conditions here on earth, this little section of the whole process, a few hours (as it were) during which we must prepare ourselves for the next and vastly more important stage. Life here must be lived, in fact, "*for Heaven's sake.*"

A good example of this changed attitude came up the other day when a lady was saying how difficult she found it to believe in God when she drove in her car through the city slums and saw the kids playing among the broken bottles and garbage and rats, in derelict abandoned property. She said she couldn't believe in a God who would allow such things. One answer is that God has appointed human agents to work for Him on the physical plane, and one of His agents is the City Council. A more reasonable thing for the lady to say would be: "I find it difficult to believe in the existence of a Department of Housing and Urban Development when I see these awful slums. Can one believe in a Garbage Disposal Agency?" It's *people* who are responsible, I guess, rather than God. But actually, as a Swedenborgian, I look at the whole subject from a different perspective altogether. I ask: "Are these ghastly slums succeeding in turning out angels?" I know, of course, that they are turning out a certain proportion of *criminals*, but then, so are the affluent suburbs! Isn't it possible that at least some of these kids, playing happily together amid the garbage and broken bottles, will end up as angels in heaven? It is a "low-quality school," granted; and we should do all in our power to improve it as a school or training ground; but even very bad and ill-equipped schools have produced fine men and women. Did Abraham Lincoln attend Yale or Harvard? This is not to say it isn't a good thing to attend Yale or Harvard if your parents can afford it; but there are other ways of getting a good education than attending an ivy-league college. So there are other ways of learning the techniques of heavenly living (that is to say, the techniques of loving God and the neighbour) than by growing up in a pleasant, respectable, upper-class neighbourhood in the suburbs.

Must we, then, renounce the Social Gospel altogether? Of course not! Jesus Himself told us to give to the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and the prisoners in our jails; in other words, to improve the conditions of society, especially for the destitute and needy. But, strangely enough, His stress seems always to have been on the good effect such charitable action had on the do-er rather than on the poor and needy themselves. For example, Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all he had and give to the poor, not primarily that the poor should be benefited, but that the rich young ruler should inherit eternal life! One of the reasons why the Lord allows suffering in the world is so that we can learn compassion. Probably the best framework for the development of a heavenly character is a society in which there is a tremendous range of conditions, from poverty to wealth, with a great mixture of races and human types and cultures, good and bad, all thrown together, with as much variety as possible: which, in fact, is what we have here in the U.S.A.

Ever since Plato, politically-minded thinkers have been devising ideal States or Republics. Sir Thomas More called his dream-island "Utopia" (a Greek word meaning "Nowhere" - which to begin with is a discouraging title!). William Morris also had his "News from Nowhere," and Samuel Butler his topsy-turvy satire "Erewhon" ("Nowhere" spelt backwards). Our list of Utopia writers who envisaged an earthly paradise would have to include Karl Marx, though I am thinking rather of men like H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley. They conceive of an ideal State as being not "nowhere" but definitely *Somewhere* - in the near future, when mankind has developed a saner attitude toward himself and the world. Machines will have abolished drudgery; the poor (contrary to our Lord's words) will no longer be with us, for wealth will be distributed evenly; security for all; no slums, everybody happy and content. Unfortunately, however, where universal affluence in a socialist State has to some degree been achieved, the outcome has been disappointing. A sense of personal responsibility has declined, moral standards have eroded. The populace has been trimmed to one pattern, so that there has not been enough variety to produce the healthy tensions which keep life interesting and stimulate creativity. Lack of motivation has led to extreme boredom, which has resulted in an increase of alcoholism, mental disorders, and even suicide. Evidently an easy, comfortable and safe life is not in itself an answer to the question of how best to produce angels for heaven. What we need is not Utopia but the Kingdom of Heaven; and life on earth will only become heavenly when we plan it "for heaven's sake."

Put it this way. Take, for example, a medical school. The purpose of a medical school is to produce physicians and surgeons, right? Now, suppose a well-meaning reformer comes along and sets about turning the medical school into a Utopia. Beautiful premises, comfortable lounges, games facilities and a bar; every student with his own sports car; work reduced to a minimum. All tiresome lectures would, of course, be abolished, and there would be no visits to the hospital, where the students might be embarrassed with the unpleasant sight of sick people. Well, it would be a nice happy and comfortable way of spending one's student years; but such a college would not produce very good doctors! I would rather have a medical school which was not quite so Utopian, where you came into contact with sickness and suffering right from the outset, and learnt how to cope with it, and heal and comfort those in need. The student in such a college will continually be asking himself: "How can I best develop the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to become a good physician or surgeon?"

This, of course, is only an analogy, but I think it throws light on what ought to motivate our whole lives on earth, from childhood through youth and adulthood to old age: "How can I develop the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to become an angel in heaven?" And here a study of Swedenborg's writings is of the utmost practical value, because Swedenborg tells us, more clearly and in greater detail than anyone else, what the qualities of angelhood are, what the life of heaven is like, and what heavenly happiness consists of. Basically, the angels are happy from useful activity, performed on behalf of other people, without thought of reward or even acknowledgment. The heavenly life is an un-self-centred outpouring of skill and talent. We prepare for this in our present life when we discover that we are happiest when we are contributing something to the sum total of happiness of the human race, putting something into the scheme that wasn't there before and perhaps would never be there if we did not put it there.

Another source of happiness for an angel is the increasing number of his intimate friends as the centuries pass, his "spiritual family" as I call it. He can spend eternity getting to know more and more people, at a deeper and deeper level. We can prepare for that also, here and now, by extending our circle of intimate friends, and getting to know each one of them better. Then there is the matter of *sharing*. The angels retain nothing for themselves alone, but share everything with others. Happiness itself can be shared; and when you have hundreds of individuals all trying to share their happiness

with the others, it mounts up almost to bursting point! Then there is marriage love, or "Conjugal Love" as Swedenborg calls it. All the angels, he tells us, are married pairs, the married pair being the unit of the human race. And we know something of the joy of marriage in this world, which so closely resembles the mystical union between the Lord and His Church. So, in the intimacy of our marriages on earth we co-operate with the Lord in His greatest creative work, the conception and rearing of children. This leads up to the highest of all the sources of happiness in heaven: intimacy with the Lord Himself. It is the sphere of the Lord that makes heaven, and angels become what they are by emptying out self and being infilled with His Holy Spirit. Love to the Lord and love to the neighbour are the two requirements for qualification as angels, and Love to the Lord is the more important of the two.

This gives us a clue as to the weakest element in our western culture, the area in which, "for heaven's sake," we should try to improve ourselves. We understand, more or less, what is required under the heading "Love to the neighbour," and when we fall short we realize we have fallen short, and are ashamed. But in the vastly more important area of love to the Lord we are, as a people, sadly lacking, and generally not in the least bit ashamed! We sing the hymn to a fine and stirring tune: "Oh let us blaze Thy truth abroad in every word and deed, that love of man is love of God, of holiness the seed." Well, love of man may be love of God, but very often it isn't; and insofar as God is left out, holiness disappears and we are left with mere humanism, which does not prepare us for heaven. That is where the Social Gospel fails; it defeats its own end by leading people away from God to the humanistic idea that "We ourselves can, and must, put things straight in the world, and we can do it by sociological experimentation and applied technology." Humanism cannot produce the kingdom of Heaven, only an unhappy Utopia. The true source of heavenly happiness is God; and, unless we learn that lesson and approach the Lord as our loving Father, we shall never enter His kingdom or achieve the full joy of a family relationship with Him.

Therefore, if you are honestly seeking to prepare yourself for a happy eternity, you must not only love your neighbour as yourself, but you must love and worship your Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Think of Him continually with joy, thanksgiving and praise; have His image at the back of your mind all the time; let His love permeate your whole being. Then you will be in heaven already.

The Lord created the universe with the object that there should be a heaven of angels from the human race. Cooperate with Him in that purpose, since it involves you. Do all you do "for heaven's sake." Yes, but more important still, do it "for God's sake!"

2. Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory

We are told that the Lord created us so that we might be happy in heaven to eternity. That is the condition to which you can hopefully look forward. God is our heavenly Father, and every father wants his children to be truly happy. Looking back over my own life as a father, I can remember how wonderful it was for my wife and me, when our children were playing happily together; we wanted nothing more. God must experience this feeling to an infinite degree when He gazes down and sees his children happy. But there are, of course, many different kinds of happiness. Some are temporary only, and have a sting in their tail. Others are merely skin deep, with misery underneath. The Lord wants for us the kind of happiness that is genuine, and goes down to the roots of life, and is a never-failing fountain.

I read an account of a visit made to the United States by a Russian poet, who remarked that the Americans "smiled too readily and too much" - the implication being that our happiness is too near the surface. It is like the starter of a car spinning round and round, but the engine doesn't engage!

"Fun" is the word we use for it. The advertisements tell us of "the fun way to clean the house," "The fun way to save \$1,000." In Cleveland, the ordinary bus timetable was called: "Fun Tours of Cleveland." "Going to College is fun." And I even saw an article in a church magazine entitled: "Religion can be fun." Well, if "fun" means what I think it means - an agreeable and amusing way of wasting time, then I don't think religion could ever be fun.

How about *pleasure*? Pleasure also is promised to us in the advertisements, but people are a bit ashamed of the word because pleasure is believed to mean the satisfaction of one's desires, which may be good or may be evil. There are those who find pleasure in watching some person or animal being tortured. Or in taking drugs (so-called "happy dust"). Or in looking at pornographic magazines or "adult movies." No loving father would want such pleasures for his children. True happiness cannot be enjoyed at the expense of other people, nor by one part of our nature at the expense of another part. Such pleasure results in shame, remorse, headaches next morning. We should never participate in any so-called enjoyment which we could not share with Jesus if He were here, or which would not receive His approval. True happiness is creative, not destructive. It works in harmony with God's laws, not against them. It is the ultimate of health and wholeness.

Taking happiness in this sense, Jesus and His disciples seem to have been a happy lot. There was ready laughter on their lips, gaiety in their hearts. So much so that the priests and pharisees were *shocked*. They called Jesus a wine-bibber. They complained that His company was like a wedding party, whereas presumably they thought it should be like a funeral! I can imagine them saying indignantly to Peter and John: "Is Jesus unaware of the political situation? Is he insensitive to the tragedies and sorrows of life? - the undeserved arrest of Jews by the Romans? - innocent people put to death by crucifixion? Doesn't he sympathize with some poor fellow hanging on a cross?" They probably said, as pessimists have been saying down through the ages, "Times were never so bad as they are today." Yet, here were Jesus and His disciples with a song on their lips and joy in their hearts. It didn't seem right!

Well, we know that Jesus did not evade the unpleasant aspects of life. In fact He deliberately identified Himself with the dispossessed, the sick and the poor and the riffraff. He knew all the lineaments of sorrow and suffering. He had no home, no possessions, no honour in the accepted sense, no status with the establishment. One of His most trusted friends betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies, who handed Him over to the Romans, and He himself became "one of those poor fellows hanging on a cross." Yet on the evening before His arrest, when He was tired and dreading the torture He knew He would shortly have to endure, He gave His disciples His final instructions as they sat quaking there, expecting the worst, and then added: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). What did they make of that?

Jesus was joyful, deep down inside Him, because He knew that the terrible agony He was about to be subjected to, would result in the salvation of the human race. It was true that He would have to experience the death-pangs of all those parts of His nature in which He had been consciously living up until that time. This was because they were finite, and so were separating Him from His heavenly Father. But He knew that the destruction of these finite elements would leave Him completely merged with the Divine. And this union of Jesus with the Father was (Swedenborg tells us) the most wonderful and glorious thing that has ever happened since the beginning of history. All the angels of heaven felt it and shared in it, so that there was a tremendous jubilation from one end of heaven to the other. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelations 5:12). Even today, whenever the angels

think of it, they cannot hold themselves back from glorious singing. Our Lord gives His joy to them, so that their joy is full. So, in that dimly-lit upper room in Jerusalem, where the disciples were heavy with gloomy forebodings, Jesus tried to get them to see that a deep and wonderful joy was maturing inside Him, which He could share with them if they would only turn their eyes away from the appalling conditions of their environment, and look to Him as their Lord and their God.

We are living in evil times today (though not nearly so bad as those in which Jesus and His disciples were living). There is war overseas; there are murders and rapes in our cities. The cost of living goes up and up, and we are constantly under threat of destruction from...nuclear bombs. And most of us have personal problems, too, which militate against our enjoyment of life: health problems, financial difficulties, domestic upsets. Why does God allow these things to afflict us if He wants us to be happy? Maybe it is to force us to look inwards, and not be content with things as they are on the surface. If we had our own way in everything, if life went as we should like it to go, and we had an easy time - never a worry or a trouble... don't you think we should rest content in a very superficial kind of happiness, which would leave us immature and spiritually feeble? Would we ever be capable of enjoying the happiness of heaven to eternity, as the Lord wants us to do?

Whether we like to admit it or not, our lower self is in league with hell, and provides an effective barrier between us and heaven. It must be broken down, ground to powder and dispersed. Each one of us must undergo a process of emptying-out, dying unto self; hence the need for temptation combats, trials, tribulations, struggle and loss. The pharisees and followers of John the Baptist were right in insisting that a certain amount of self-discipline and sorrow was an essential ingredient of life. But they were wrong in making it the chief thing! Sorrow and suffering are not what the Lord wants for His children - surely not! - nor is temptation to be entered into for its own sake. It was to counter this idea that Jesus included in the prayer He taught His disciples: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The suffering is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and the end is Heavenly Joy! Suppose you are digging up a garden to plant roses. The digging, the breaking up of the soil, is not a good thing in itself, but you do it for the sake of the *end* - which is the blossoming rose bushes. If struggle and temptation do not lead to joy and peace, they are useless, even bad. "Weeping" is only justified and desirable if "joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

The amount of sorrow we have to endure in order to achieve joy, depends to a large extent on how easily we can let the old self go, with its swollen pride and its hurt feelings and its jealousies and stupid indignations. It depends on how desperately we cling to the external things which seem to give us happiness but don't really. Once we have ceased to look for happiness in the external and ephemeral things of this world (wealth, honours, success, being well thought of, and so on) and begin to develop a taste for the joys of heaven, our temptations will cease to afflict us, and our sufferings will probably come to an end too - or, at any rate, they will no longer trouble us.

In my previous essay I mentioned some of the sources of heavenly happiness. In general it can be said that the Lord's inflowing life is joy itself, insofar as it is received and reciprocated by His children. It must be reciprocated, of course. Among the devils of hell, the inflow of the Lord's life is a source of misery and torture, which He mercifully spares them as far as possible. Even among human beings on earth, unrequited love is sad, even tragic. So the angels of heaven, and men on earth also, are joyful and happy, just to the degree in which they receive and respond to the Lord's life.

To quote Swedenborg, angelic joy consists of "harmonies of innumerable affections, flowing in from the order of heaven. It begins from within, and diffuses itself very softly through all the inmost fibres, which become nothing but joy and delight, so that the senses almost swoon." He goes on to tell how certain good spirits shortly after death wanted to experience heavenly joy before they were fully

prepared for it; their wish was granted, but they were filled with agony, the joy was so intense! Swedenborg then gives us one of those touches of scientific realism, which are almost humorous in their incongruity: "A certain angel enumerated the most universal only of the genera of the joys of the lowest heaven, to about 478; from which we may infer how innumerable must be the species, and that in the lowest heaven only!"

That was in the spiritual world, but there is nothing to prevent us from experiencing many of these genera and species of joy while living on earth. All the great saints seem to have been joyful people, "on top of the world." The Psalms are just bubbling with joy. Simon Peter speaks, in his first Epistle to the newly-formed Christian community, of "Joy unspeakable and full of glory." Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi, with their feet clamped in the painful stocks and heavy chains on their wrists, sang spiritual songs and praises to God so loudly that all the other prisoners heard, and marvelled. Saint Francis and his little friars sang and laughed as they tramped the dusty lanes of Italy in their rags and hunger and absolute poverty; and even today I have never known a deep and mature Christian who does not radiate joy.

If you are not happy in your church, there must be something wrong with you, or with your church, or both. In any case, something should be done about it. And if you are not happy in your life, then the probability is that you are not happy in your religion, for all religion has relation to life. Sweep away the cobwebs! Fling open the shutters! Draw aside the drapes! Let the Lord's love and wisdom suffuse your hearts. Tune into heaven, connect up with heaven, so that the joy of heaven may be in and around you; in your home, in your place of employment, wherever your influence is felt. And when you are removed from this temporary fleeting world at death, leaving behind you every allurements of property and comfort and honour to which the natural man attributes his pleasure, the Lord will say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the JOY of thy Lord."

3. The Gospel of New Beginnings

When my wife and I were in the Holy Land, we saw several high artificial mounds called "tells." There are others scattered all over Syria and Mesopotamia. They are ancient cities which flourished for perhaps thousands of years, but which have long since become extinct. The buildings were of mud brick. When an old house collapsed it would be beaten down, smoothed out, and a new one built on top of it. From time to time invaders would destroy the whole city and lay it level; later, the surviving inhabitants would return and build a new city on top of the old. The level would rise, and the result would be a high, steep-sided mound: a great clay chest containing the whole history of its past. "Why," you may ask, "did they rebuild on top of the old? Why not somewhere else?" The answer is, "For continuity with the past: to preserve the city's identity." This illustrates very clearly to me the way in which we ourselves can, and should, keep continuity with the past and retain our own identity, and yet make new beginnings.

There is a passage in Swedenborg which emphasizes that every smallest thing we do, say, or think, has repercussions which continue to eternity. Causes produce effects, and so one thing follows from another, and you cannot stop it or reverse the process. This is a solemn thought. We are responsible for a whole train of events every time we do anything. Yet, on the other hand, we are told that we can begin again whenever we wish, that the past is done with and can be forgotten, and that the Lord will forgive us and wipe out our sins so that we need not worry about them any more. Is that true? It is true in the sense that a new house can be built on the ruins of an old house. But the old will always

continue to be there and have its effect on its own level. It is this matter of what level you are working on that explains the seeming paradox.

A lady once came to me for counselling. It was a long story. A difficult and unhappy situation had been created. Both she and her husband had made mistakes. She readily admitted her own part in it. Now they were in a mess, and there did not seem to be any way out of it short of suicide. She realized they were paying for their past sins, and it looked as if they would have to go on "paying" for the rest of their lives! I said, "You can always begin again." She said, "How?" I said, "By accepting the situation as it is, repenting of it, paying what must be paid by way of restitution, but at the same time building a new house on a higher level, a higher principle, using the ruins of the old as a foundation." I tried to get over to her the Gospel of New Beginnings, which is the key to the whole of Christianity. You can always make a New Beginning.

In some parts of the world divorce is fashionable. People remarry over and over again, and each new marriage repeats the pattern of the previous ones. That is not "making a new beginning." It is carrying on as in the past. To make a new beginning, you must see that a situation is bad, repent of it, decide to accept it since it cannot be altered, and then, using the experience of the past, you must build anew on a higher plane, nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This concept of various levels of life, one above the other, is typically Swedenborgian and is very helpful in understanding many situations. On every level there is absolute continuity which is completely ruthless, each action leading to its inevitable outcome. You cannot escape it; everything must be paid for, to the utmost penny. If you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind. Is there no hope of forgiveness? Not on that level. But you can step up to a higher level! Then you are no longer bound by the old. You are no longer subject to its laws of cause and effect. You are in a New Beginning and everything before you is fair and hopeful. The old is still there, working itself out according to its own laws, the laws of death. But it no longer has any power over you. You have come under new laws of life.

Take the case of a person in an unhappy marriage, or any other situation which cannot be changed. Take a prisoner who is paying for his past misdeeds in jail. All of us, in fact, are paying for some past misdeeds somehow. But this need not trouble us. We can, at this very moment, start building a new house on a higher level. Jesus said, "Resist not evil." Do not resist it; by-pass it. Say, "I know about it now. How can I learn from it so as to avoid making the same mistakes in the future?"

When I was doing mission work in South Africa, people would sometimes bring their quarrels to me to settle. I would listen to evidence on both sides. Endless wranglings! He said this, the other man said that. And so on, and so on. When I had listened for a long while, I would say, "I have heard enough! It is quite impossible to prove who is in the right and who is in the wrong! Do you want to be friends?" "Yes, Chief!" they would protest. "Then you can be. All you need do is to accept the fact that the other fellow was mean, but still love him! Think that he was to blame in some things, and you were to blame in others. You have got yourselves into a mess. Accept each other for what you are, rotten human beings, but potential sons of God, and build up a new friendship on that basis!" The appeal did not always work, but sometimes it did.

The same principle applied in the case of the man Jesus invited to follow him, who said he could not come because he first wanted to bury his father. I do not think his father was already dead. What the man meant was that he wanted to stay at home until his father was dead, then he would follow Jesus. To which our Lord replied, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." In other words, let the present deadening situation continue as it is. It has no future anyway;

it will end in ruin and ultimate burial. Just step right out of it, and become a joyful citizen of the kingdom of God.

It was the same with the Prodigal Son. Was he told to try to improve his condition in that far country? No, he was to snap right out of it, and go home to his heavenly Father. That does not necessarily mean we have to change our situation in the worldly sense. You might get another job, you might go to another country, but if you took the old pattern of life with you, you would not be any better off.

I once saw a cartoon of a family whose house was haunted by a mischievous ghost or poltergeist, that banged things and slammed doors and upset the milk. Eventually they could take it no longer, and decided to move to another house in the next town. All their furniture was packed into a moving van and off they set. But there was the little ghostie in the moving van, having the time of his life climbing all over the furniture. "We're moving house," he said. Yes, we take our ghosts with us. We should do better to stay where we are, and change the mischievous spirit into an angel.

Do you believe you can make a new beginning in this way? You can! At any time. No matter what your situation, no matter what your problem, no matter how deeply you are involved in past sins and mistakes, no matter how firmly you seem to be in the grip of bad habits, no matter what kind of image you have of yourself and others have of you, our Lord can forgive you and lift you out of it. And you can forgive yourself and start again on a higher level. There will still be much to do, of course. A whole new house must be built, brick by brick and stone by stone. But the Lord will provide the material, and he will be your co-worker. What a wonderful time you will have working alongside of Him, seeing the beautiful new building take shape and form according to His blueprint! Jesus went about the countryside preaching forgiveness for the remission of sins. He began as a carpenter making new tables and chairs. He ended by making new men.

"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," says the Lord, "and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." The Latin for New Beginnings is "Regeneration." Regeneration does not come from below. It comes from above, but it rests on that which is below and glorifies it. So the holy city New Jerusalem does not come from below; it is not built by man. It comes down from God out of heaven, but rests and settles on the top of the hill. It rests on the highest level of the tell, or city mound. Our lower selves are there below - accepted, forgiven and forgotten. The dead have buried their dead. Come into the glorious city New Jerusalem! Become disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, and go, preach the kingdom of God!

4. Being Special

Unlike animals, human beings are self-conscious. We are keenly aware of ourselves as individuals, distinct from every other individual. Each one of us considers himself immensely important; in fact, the most important individual in the universe! I know why we have this feeling; it is because we are children of God. God actually *is* the centre of the universe; and, because our life is really His life in us, we have the feeling that we are God. Of course, with us it is only an appearance; and if we realize it is only an appearance, that's fine. But if we believe it, and act on the assumption that it is true, then we are in for trouble.

There has been a tendency in recent years for ministers to emphasize how important each one of us is in God's sight. This is quite in order. One of the outstanding contributions of Christianity to human thought is the concept of the uniqueness of man and a revelation of the fact that God loves us all as individuals. The trouble comes when we think we are more important than others and deserve preferential treatment. We want to be an only child in the family of God. An only child thinks it is

wonderful to be an only child, since he can get the undivided attention of his parents; his "nose gets put out of joint," as we say, when the next baby comes along. But an only child tends to be selfish and over-demanding, and is therefore miserable. The happiest children are those who lose themselves in the life of a family. Therefore God has placed us in the huge and lively family of mankind. That man is happiest and most fulfilled who is best able to forget his own specialness and uniqueness, and enjoy the specialness and uniqueness of other people.

Take conversation, for example. Many people, in social conversation, have no interest whatever in what the other person is saying. They just wait, patiently or impatiently, until they can get a word in, and then they say, "That's not half so funny as something that happened to me!" - and off they go, happy at last because they are talking about themselves. The worst offenders, whom we call compulsive speakers, do not even wait till the other person has finished, but barge in and go on and on. They are society's greatest bores. It is good and right in conversation to contribute your own experience and ideas, but you should also be prepared to listen with full attention to the other person's.

There is more in this than the making of a good conversationalist. Psychiatrists tell us that many of the mental troubles of their patients arise from too great a concern for their own specialness. It shows itself in a number of different ways. Being insensitive to other people's needs is a common symptom. Also the urge to criticize others, to be contemptuous and scornful, to run them down, thus making oneself more important than they are. Or it can come as self-pity. "No one will ever know what I've been through." "Nobody really understands me." Or, if trouble strikes, as it does to us all, "Why did this happen to *me*?" They ask this as if they expected trouble to come to other people, but not to them, because they are a special case.

Conceit is all too evident in such remarks as, "I am the greatest of all sinners"; but it may also lie concealed within less spectacular claims, such as, "I have nerves," "I'm not as strong as other people," "I'm not so clever or well-educated as you are," "I make a mess of everything." A sense of specialness can lead to the most ridiculous false modesty, as when someone says, "I'm not the kind of person who pushes himself forward. I'm a nobody, nonentity" (and up swells his ego like a balloon!).

Guilt can make us feel special. I knew a woman who was always weeping in penitence for some sin she claimed to have committed many years before. She was hugging the memory of it to her soul. When I assured her that God had forgiven her, she sobbed "But I cannot forgive myself," thus making herself more important than God - which is the last word in being special. Then there is the martyr complex. George Bernard Shaw, in his preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, discusses the psychology of martyrdom, and suggests that the early Christian martyrs may not have been motivated by loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, but merely by a desire to make themselves special. As usual, G.B.S. is being deliberately provocative, perhaps to emphasize his own specialness! - but he has a point here. Indeed the expression "making a martyr of oneself" is no longer used as a compliment. If Aunt Jane makes a martyr of herself, the rest of the family are likely to leave her to it, hoping she will get some satisfaction out of her martyrdom, since nobody else can.

In religion, you get people making a specialty of being saved, or speaking with tongues. In the *Screwtape Letters*, by C. S. Lewis, a senior devil advises his junior to get the man he is trying to damn to join some small select church denomination or esoteric religious group, so that he can be encouraged to look down on everyone else and feel superior!

Our personal prayer life must consist, of course, of a one-to-one relationship with God which nobody else can share. But do let us try to make our worship as un-self-conscious as possible. Let it be God-

centred, not self-centred. Dr. Frank Laubach suggests we word our prayers to include all members of the Lord's family, the entire population of this planet. "Bless all three billion of us" - that is a formula which prevents us from thinking that we, or our church, or our nation and race, are special in any exclusive sense. God is your Father and you are His child; but remember, three billion others are also children of God, and He loves and cares for them all, just as much as He does you. Never think of yourself as being more special than anyone else, for everyone is special. Include yourself in any judgment you make of others, and include others in any judgment you make of yourself. It is better to laugh at yourself, rather than trying to damn yourself or excuse yourself. Do not be pompous, or play up little things. Do not be indignant or easily offended, or make too much of people's opinions of you, good or bad. Just accept yourself for what you are, and accept other people for what they are.

Jesus gave as one of the two Great Commandments that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. This can be expressed the other way round - "We must love ourselves as we love our neighbour." That is to say, we must love and respect and honour our neighbour, seeking the very best for him; and similarly we should love and respect and honour ourselves - not more than other people, but not less. Just as we can and should admire our own gifts, acknowledging in our hearts that they are not really our own gifts but God's in us. Can you do this? It is exceedingly difficult, but not impossible, and is necessary for our spiritual sanity. To "run myself down," in comparison with other people, is just as bad as to "run other people down" in comparison with myself. In either case it is applying a different set of value judgments to others than I apply to myself, which is making me special. The ideal way is to separate your personal feelings from yourself to such a degree that you can think of yourself and treat yourself *objectively*, just as you think of and treat other people. You should criticize yourself by exactly the same standards as you criticize others, and admire in yourself what you admire in others, for everything admirable is from God. To hide your own gifts under a bushel from a false sense of modesty is to insult your Maker who gave them to you. You should make yourself attractive and acceptable to others, just as you want them to be to you (that is the Golden Rule!), and you should develop your various skills and faculties, not to compete with others and make yourself important, but because you have these talents entrusted to you, and you should use them and increase them, and not bury them in the ground.

Our gifts are special, even if we personally are not. So are our opportunities. You are continually being placed by the Lord in certain situations which nobody has ever been in before, and you must act to the best of your ability in each situation. If you do not work that lever at the appropriate moment, or turn on that faucet, or build up that bit of wall, nobody will, and something will be missing from God's plan. It is like a jigsaw puzzle: you are one little bit of that puzzle, unique and absolutely necessary to the finished picture. You know how it spoils the picture if one piece is missing! In that sense you are immensely important, very special, and you should know and realize that you are, while gladly acknowledging that everybody else is equally so.

We learn from Swedenborg that every individual ever born is predestined to heaven, and Jesus Himself said He was going to prepare a mansion for each one of us. If we do not claim it and occupy it, our mansion remains vacant to eternity. Among all the three billion people on earth, and all those who have ever lived since the Creation, there is and can be only one YOU, for the Creator never repeats Himself. You are unique, with your personality and potentials and your experience of life. No other soul in the universe can do or achieve what you can. That is a sobering thought, and also a challenging one. You are responsible for building up God's kingdom in some particular area. The Lord works in the world very largely through people infilled with His Spirit. You should be one of them. There are many others, all equally important; there is no seniority or rivalry or competition between them. But there is only one YOU.

How wonderful life becomes when you can know and accept yourself for what you are: a being whom the Lord considered worth creating and preserving down to this day, and worth trying to make happy to eternity! In that assurance, knowing you are rich and precious in His sight, go forward with your head held high. You will receive honour, maybe, but will immediately hand it over to the Lord to whom it is due. You will receive slights and insults, perhaps; but these will not disturb you, since you know who you are and what you are. And soon your little world will become a colony of heaven. Or, to change the metaphor, your home will be a consulate or embassy - not an embassy of Italy or Nigeria or any nation of this world, but the Embassy of the Kingdom of God. When you die, it will be like going back to the Homeland. The mansion prepared for you will be a palace in the midst of palaces, and you will be one of those princes described by Swedenborg, who rule over a smaller or larger region of heaven, and are given immense honour on account of the uses they perform but do not appropriate one atom of that honour to themselves, being among the humblest people in heaven. They take off their crowns and cast them before the throne of God, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelations 4:11).

5. Your Image of Yourself

I have been reading a very useful book, with the forbidding title of *Psycho-Cybernetics*. Its author, Dr. Maxwell Maltz, is a plastic surgeon. People come to him with facial deformities, extra large ears or noses, birth marks, accident scars. They usually show symptoms of extreme self-consciousness, which manifests itself either as shyness and timidity, or, in reverse, as pushfulness and aggressiveness. He corrects the deformity, trims back the ears or nose, removes the scar tissue by surgery; and usually (not always) there is a corresponding personality change, the patient becoming easier to live with and pleasanter in every way. He wondered why? - and came to the conclusion it was *not* the surgical operation which made the difference, but the changed IMAGE which the patients had of themselves. This has led him to take a new line with his patients, and to try to persuade them to change their image of themselves *without* the surgical operation, accepting their facial abnormalities as attractive to other people rather than repellent; and, if he succeeds, the personality change follows, just as if the operation had actually been performed.

We all have some sort of an image of ourselves and tend to become what we think we are. If we regard ourselves as unlovely, rejected by the world; if we go around saying, "Nobody likes me," then we shall take on that character, and people will really have some reason and excuse for shunning or disliking us. Or you may think of yourself as weak-willed, inadequate, a failure. Psychologists have made quite a study of the failure-image and have found that it inevitably brings failure with it. Similarly, the accident-prone person is always tripping over himself and getting involved in some sort of accident or disaster, because he expects it, and unconsciously plans it. The same applies to catching colds, which some people do continuously all winter and feel very proud of it; it's their "thing." Or you hear them speaking of "my bad back," or "my arthritis," as if it were a specialty, something to boast of. Not that everyone who has an illness comes into this category; but it is an undoubted fact that if we associate any particular kind of illness or disorder with ourselves, and visualize ourselves suffering from it, or if we are especially afraid of it, then we are more likely to get it than someone who ignores it, or does not think of it in connection with himself. Doctors and nurses rarely catch sicknesses from their patients; why? - because their thoughts are positively engaged in trying to help and heal other people, and this gives them immunity.

There is an inner reason for all this. We are living as to our spirits in the spiritual world, surrounded by good spirits or angels on the one hand, and evil spirits on the other, who are all eager to influence us

if we let them. Positive thoughts of outgoing love attract the angels and repel the evil spirits, whereas negative thoughts, especially about ourselves, permit the evil spirits to get a hold over us. Changing the image you have of yourself may lead to a rearrangement of your whole spiritual environment, and with it a corresponding character change or personality shift.

You may be one of those people of whom I have been speaking, secretly obsessed by a sense of weakness, failure, guilt, inadequacy. You may think nobody understands you, nobody likes you. And you may be over-compensating, forming an image of yourself not as you think you are, but as you would like to be. You project yourself as a super-man, a master-being; you are incapable of making a mistake or being at fault; someone else is always to blame if things go wrong. You voice your opinions, whether anyone wants to hear them or not. You must be conspicuous, the centre of attention; you must dominate every situation. This is the ego-image many people have of themselves today. In order to keep up this ridiculous fiction, they have to subject themselves to a great deal of stress and strain, which produces nervous tensions of all sorts and even physical sickness: headaches, stomach ulcers, digestive upsets, gall stones, cancer. And the irony is that they derive absolutely no benefit from it. For the image they are struggling so hard to project is, in fact, a very unattractive image, from everyone else's point of view. Nobody likes it, or admires it, or is impressed by it. If only we could quit boasting, and showing off, and putting on an act, and be simply *ourselves*, people would like us much better, and we should achieve a far greater acceptance in society than we can ever get by struggling for it.

If I were to ask you, "what kind of a person do you like to have as a friend?" - I am sure you would say: Someone with whom you can be *quiet*, with whom you can relax, one who is not always pushing forward his own ideas, or trying to attract attention to himself; someone who is interested in your affairs as well as his own, and is prepared to listen to you as well as have you listen to him. And if it were a question of being either clever or kindly, you would far rather have your friend kindly than clever. Yet the image many of us put out is just the opposite. We try to hide the good and kindly qualities which are developing in us, and which our friends would like so much, and pretend instead to be smart and successful, unscrupulous, aggressive, carrying all before us. And then we wonder why we are not liked!

Taking into account all that I have been saying, wouldn't it be better if we dropped this image-making altogether, and presented ourselves to the world "just as we are, without one plea?" - if we accepted ourselves for what we are, realizing that everybody is different from everybody else, and we are each of us valuable for what we are? - and that there is absolutely no need for us to try to impress anyone, or compare ourselves with anyone, or compete with anyone? Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, if we didn't have the *ability* to deceive or play a role? - if everyone could always see us, just as we are? - if we lived in glass houses, and were transparent right through?

Animals are like that. That is why I like them so much. They live the life God set for them, day by day, without recrimination or guilt for the past, or fears for the future. They are extravert and unself-conscious. They do not suffer from feelings of inadequacy, nor do they have psycho-somatic diseases - which means they are scarcely ever ill at all! They don't suffer from neuroses or alcoholism, nor do they commit suicide. They never *degenerate*... but then, they never *improve*! They are all on a level, and you cannot appeal to the highest, or lowest, in them. You can say to man, "Be a man!" and he is stimulated by this appeal to his better nature; but it would be meaningless to say to a pig, "Be a pig!" for he is a pig already. The world is like a farm. The animals are the stock on the farm. But we are potentially sons and daughters of the Farmer, who is God. So, we alone of God's creatures have been given the power to put on an act, and can have an image of ourselves which is different from

ourselves. We have been given it for the sole purpose that we can become *better* than ourselves; or rather, that we can switch from a lower self to a higher.

Even common sense will tell us that we must be able to dissemble a little bit, if we are to live satisfactorily in the mixed conditions of this world. We are thrown together with people very different from ourselves, some of whom we dislike, some we cannot trust. We have to get along with them. We cannot be telling them all the time what we think of them; in fact, the Bible warns us to keep a guard on our tongue. Being frank and open is not necessarily a virtue. It can be cruelly hurtful; charity often requires that we should conceal our true thoughts and feelings. In some situations, frankness can be misleading, even dangerous; discretion requires that we should not bare our souls to all and sundry. We don't have to wear our hearts on our sleeves. There is a privacy in such things; we are entitled to draw the drapes and protect ourselves behind a reserve.

At death, Swedenborg tells us, this reserve is taken from us. We can no longer play a role; thereafter, we have to appear exactly as we really are. This process of "stripping bare" results immediately in a screening and separation and regrouping of spirits into harmonious communities - "like attracting like." This is the JUDGMENT. To abolish all role-playing here on earth would be to precipitate the Judgment before any of us are ready for it.

But the main reason why we have been given the ability to act a part, is so that we can have an image of ourselves that is better than ourselves, and then *grow into it*. This is the main process of spiritual growth. If we could not do this, there would be no hope for us. But we all can! And the fact that so many of us have such foolish images of ourselves, 'is proof that we can. If you can play the fool, thank God you can also play the angel!

Conversion, of which theologians speak, is nothing but substituting a good image for a bad; and regeneration is simply being re-created into the new image. We put aside the old image, which our ego projected in order to impress people in one way or another, and adopt instead the model of the perfect life of our Lord Jesus Christ. God created mankind in His own image and likeness. We fell. But each of us can get back again. It is said human nature cannot be changed. But of course it can be changed! It was changed for the bad, and it can be changed back again for the good. But the change must first be made in the image we have of ourselves.

Here are some examples of how the change-over of images can work. You find yourself in a situation where you can commit a desired sin without being found out. Under the old image, your ego would say: "You are in luck, boy! Do it, and get away with it!" But, under the new image, you think: "This is not the kind of person I want to be. I want to be in the image and likeness of God. This is not how Jesus would have acted." And so the temptation is broken. Again, someone has hurt you, and the opportunity comes when you can get your own back. Your old ego says: "Go ahead! Get your revenge! Vindicate your honour!" But under the new image you think: "Do I really want to be that kind of a person? Was Jesus that kind of a person? Didn't He tell us to love our enemies, and not try to get even with them? I want to be more like Jesus."

What a relief of tensions when we try to live up to the highest within us, instead of being tied to some fancy image with no reality in it! What an increase of mental energy, mental health, even physical health! But perhaps the greatest reward is, seeing other people open up to us in a new way, as they recognize that the change is taking place in us.

Hypocrisy? Play-acting? Call it what you will! All I know is that this kind of "playing a part" brings us more and more into alignment with the person we are trying to copy... until the very thought of acting ceases. We *are* what we were pretending to be! And as we pass up the steep pathway to

heaven, people looking at us will not see our ego at all. They will only see our likeness to our heavenly Father.

6. Who's Going to Hell?

A lady said to me the other day, "How can any right-minded person believe in hell? Isn't God a loving Father? Would a Father condemn his children to an eternity of suffering, just because they disobeyed him or committed some indiscretion during a brief period of life on earth?" I asked her, "Do you think there is a hell in this world?" She replied, "Oh yes." "And do you think people take their characters over with them into the future life?" "Yes, perhaps they do; but surely God will forgive them and make them good, and take them to heaven in the end!"

This lady is not the only person who has questioned the eternity of the hells. Now, it is a good sign that people are doing this. It is evidence of the growth of a kindly liberalism, which is very much better, and more truly Christian, than gloating over the torture of the damned. Tertullian back in AD 200 believed that one of the principal delights of the angels was to sit on the edge of heaven and look down into hell and watch the dreadful punishment going on there, and realize what they have escaped! We have got a long way from that, thank God. Yet maybe it is a hangover from the old idea of hell as a place of punishment and torture, which has led to this questioning of the permanence of the Ruling Love, which, if evil, takes a man to hell. We must understand that hell is not a place of punishment for evils committed during the earth life, nor is heaven a place of rewards for a man's good deeds. The whole spiritual world is, in fact, a state of fulfillment, where people can be themselves, and live how they want to live, and express themselves freely without inhibition. Those who are consumed with evil loves and passions, with envy, hatred and cruelty, constitute hell; they make hell. Those who love one another tenderly, and wish only good for their neighbour, form heaven. There is misery in hell, certainly; but this arises from the evil nature of the inhabitants. What kind of happiness can you expect from an atmosphere of hatred, jealousy and cruelty? Only in heaven is there true happiness: the inner joy arising from unselfish love given and received.

Viewed in this way, hell is no longer seen as a place of torment into which disobedient souls are thrown by a cruel, implacable God. In fact, our attention is drawn away altogether from hell as a *place*, and we begin to think of it instead as a *state of mind*: the state of mind of those who have congregated there of their own free will. The unpleasant features of hell, referred to by Jesus Christ (the "fire that is never quenched, and the worm that dieth not"): these are caused by the evil desires and false beliefs of the inhabitants of hell, and are not forced upon them as a punishment from God. It is a universal principle governing the spiritual world that everyone there is surrounded by an environment which is a projection of his inner mind. The Lord Himself infinitely desires the salvation of all men. Why, then, does He not raise everyone up into heaven? Because heaven and hell are states of mind which people adopt freely. The only way to get evil spirits up into heaven would be to rob them of their free will, which would be to destroy them as human beings, and this the Lord will not do. Nevertheless there is a perpetual effort proceeding from the Lord to lift every evil spirit out of hell. If an evil spirit repented even in the least degree and wished for something better, the angels in heaven would rejoice, and the Lord would pour salvation upon him. This sometimes happens during the early stages after death, before a man's Ruling Love has entirely taken over. Theoretically, I suppose, any evil spirit could change and reform and become an angel of light, since there is absolute freedom over there. But in practice, as Swedenborg observed, those who have confirmed themselves in evil while on earth *do not want to change, after death, into anything different from what they are*. If you picked them up and put them in heaven, they would kick and scream; in fact, they would writhe in agony, until you put them back among their companions in hell, where they feel at home.

Another idea we must get out of our heads is that those who go to hell after death are a class apart, and have nothing in common with ourselves. We think of them as the murderers and adulterers who get headlines in the newspaper, the scum of our prisons and penitentiaries. We are sorry for them, and would like them to be saved eventually, but it has never occurred to us that we or any of our friends might be among their number. Yet the sobering fact is, that the elements which take a man to hell after death can be present in the hearts of good-living church folk, senators and successful businessmen, just as much as in the hearts of out-and-out criminals. For the Ruling Love which determines our final destiny is a matter of *motivation*; it is a matter of one's attitude toward God and the neighbour; it is a question of whether or not you are immersed in SELF. As someone has truly said: "He who judges everything from the standpoint of self, and considers his own profit in everything he does, is on the threshold of hell already!" And this self-seeking attitude of mind can be found among the rich and successful, just as much as among the failures and the bums, or the criminals who languish in our state prisons. Respectable people conceal their self-seeking motives; but if they are hiding them only for the sake of show, then after death their evils will burst forth. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known." Is it likely, do you think, that anyone who has confirmed himself in selfishness is going to change for the better, just at the point when this selfishness bursts into flame? Is he going to want to change, when he finds he can express himself freely as he is? It is hard enough to change oneself in this world, where we cannot have everything we want; won't it be much more difficult after death, when we can?

Young people on earth can change fairly easily; but the older you become, the more difficult it is. Conversion experiences are rare after fifty, and are usually only temporary at best. Even New Year Resolutions are more difficult to keep as you become set in your ways. I was speaking to an old man on New Year's day. He is a confirmed grumbler, and I suggested that he should make a New Year resolution never to grumble again, but always to look on the bright side of things, and to think and speak positively, not negatively. He agreed, and said O.K., he would never grumble again; he would make a solemn promise. "All the same," he added, "it is difficult *not* to grumble, with the cost of living going up every month (and they are going to raise the rent again), and the dreadful weather we have been having, and I'm not feeling too well, and the war, and the crime in the streets; and..." Well, he had got into the habit of grumbling; it was his life pattern, and I guess he was too old to change. Nevertheless, although change becomes more and more difficult as we grow older, it is never impossible while we are still in this mortal life. For this world of time and space is expressly designed to make change possible. There is a whole mechanism of change built into it. That is why we are placed here on earth, in a state of equilibrium between good and evil, so that we can choose to tip up the scales toward heaven or hell. At death, we pass out of this condition of equilibrium, and commit ourselves wholly to one side or the other. After that, the direction of our lives is determined forever.

What is the mechanism of change? This is a question that has often been asked. How can we change from being evil to being good? Well, to begin with we must understand that everybody on earth, however evil, has some good in him, even if it is only the remains of innocence, gentleness and sweetness left over from his infancy. We have two selves, one bad and one good. Paul speaks in his epistles about our lower self and our higher self, and says there is a battle going on all the time between them. We have two doors, one opening to hell and one to heaven; and through these doors we are visited, in succession, by evil spirits and by angels. These give us an appearance of ever-changing moods, even of temporary personality changes. In fact, it can be said that we are not just two selves, but many; sometimes one facet of our characters is dominant, and sometimes another. These fluctuations of state, or changing moods, are permitted by the Lord so that we can draw from them what we like, and reject what we don't like, and gradually build up our true selves, our Ruling

Love. It is that real self, the absolute "me," that survives death and lives on to eternity in the spiritual world, when all play-acting and temporary moods and externals have fallen away. The relief we shall feel when this takes place must be tremendous... It is like taking off a heavy overcoat and heavy boots, and suddenly finding oneself unencumbered and light as air, able to do anything one likes, and be wherever one wishes; either to plunge into the enjoyments of sin without shame or any prickings of conscience, or to rise up to the highest heaven and taste the blessed nearness of the loving Father. The evil feel no need for self-control, no desire for betterment; on the contrary, now that they can express themselves freely they plunge deeper and deeper into their evils. The good feel no further temptation to evil, but enjoy good only. And so a great separation takes place between the good and the evil, known as the Judgment, and this separation becomes wider and wider to eternity. It is only the ceaseless effort of the loving Father that prevents the evil from destroying themselves utterly.

The conclusion of all this is: If we want to change our Ruling Love for the better, we must do so in this life, here and now. You must take advantage of your good moods, when you have them, and commit yourself so fully to the heavenly life that the bad moods, when they come, are unable to break down what the good moods have built up. Plan your life; determine the kind of person you want to be; get a clear image of yourself as a child of the loving heavenly Father; decide on the order of your values, what is important to you. Pour out love and forgiveness to everybody, even those people whom you do not like. Be gentle and appreciative. This is during the sunshine period. Later, the clouds will cover the sky, and storms sweep over us. Evil spirits will take control, and we shall no longer feel loving goodwill for anyone. Instead, we shall be depressed, self-pitying, irritated, annoyed with ourselves and everybody else and life in general. We shall find ourselves grumbling at everything, like the old gentleman I mentioned who just couldn't stop himself from grumbling! But, during your good moods you will have built up a CONSCIENCE, and through this conscience the Lord will be able to speak to you and remind you of your better days, of the vows you then made. And you will be able to say within your heart: "This depressed, negative, unloving and unlovely person that I am at present is not really *me*. I don't like myself in this present character. The evil spirits are certainly having a ball. Forgive me, Lord, and take them away as soon as you can. And let me return to that other self which was very much more to my liking!" - and then be patient till the dull or stormy weather passes and the sun shines through again.

If someone has been mean to you, try to realize that he or she also has changing moods. You cannot hold other people accountable for everything they do; it was probably the evil spirits who were with them at the time who prompted the snide remark or the unkind attitude shown. Wait patiently, and they, like you, will change for the better later on; then ignore what has passed, act as if it had never been. A good way to help yourself out of a state of depression is to go and do something, preferably something creative, anything that will take your thoughts off yourself and your fancied grievances, and let the Lord restore the waste places. Best of all, go and do something which you know will please the person who has upset you. Anyway, cling on to your good resolutions, even when they no longer seem good or necessary, even when every nerve of your body cries out against them; even when the devils are telling you, "Claim your rights! Stand on your dignity! Enjoy yourself while you can!" and so on. Think of Jacob clinging to the angel through the darkness of the night, and saying, "I will not let you go until you bless me." (Genesis 32:26).

You see, it is possible to get a blessing from all your moods, good and bad, if you draw from them what you need for the building up of a good Ruling Love. And, as your Ruling Love grows stronger, you will find you can get a better control of your moods. You can generate good states of mind, by reading the Bible and books of devotion, by periods of prayer and meditation, which scare the devils away and attract the angels in. We can actually say, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" and hand the

whole situation over to the Lord. Discipline is required for this, as for all matters of self-improvement. Discipline is required for those going out every day to earn their living. They can't say, "Oh, it's raining this morning; I don't think I'll go to work." They know they must go, whether they like it or not, because earning their living is important. Yet, is it more important than building up the life of heaven within themselves? Maybe we are too much influenced by our feelings! Since our feelings and moods are not really our own, but are caused by the visitors, evil as well as good, that swarm in and out of the chambers of our heart, need we take so much notice of them? Feelings are not really very important; they are ephemeral only. The important thing is the Ruling Love, which is developing out of sight fed by what you appropriate to yourself and make your own and confirm in yourself by deliberate choice. This will determine your life forever.

All too soon the time will come when you will be transferred to the spiritual world and your Ruling Love will take over. Don't be afraid that you won't have time to get ready, though, for the Lord will grant you all the time you need. But don't waste it. Determine here and now what kind of person you want to be. Get your values right, according to our Lord's teachings, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Make Jesus your leader, and think all the time what He would have you think and say and do. If you find yourself facing hell, turn away from it at once; and when you find yourself facing heaven, press eagerly forward. Love the brethren. Give yourself to others unstintingly and without thought of recompense or even acknowledgment; and be lovingly grateful and accepting when others give themselves to you. So will there be built up in you, deep down and out of sight, a little heaven of kindness and tenderness and peace, into which you will enter when death removes you from the hurly-burly and confusion of this physical world, with its good and evil, its beauty and its filth. For the final conclusion of the whole matter is: "What you want, deep down (provided you want it strongly enough), that you will get."

7. It's All Too Simple!

One of Swedenborg's basic teachings, if not *the* basic teaching, is that God's purpose in creating the universe was to form a heaven of angels from the human race. Man is predestined to be an angel in heaven. We are children of God, and the normal thing is for us to inherit our rightful place in our Father's household. Kindness, love, unselfishness, peace - all are heavenly qualities. They are *normal*, built into the fabric of the universe by a loving Creator. Health is normal, and the body has a built-in mechanism for keeping itself healthy. We are intended to be good, true, strong and joyful. God's whole effort is in the direction of our happiness on earth and in heaven.

I am emphasizing this, because it is a very different teaching from what was being put out during Swedenborg's lifetime and the early years of the twentieth century. The main emphasis then was on the predestination of the average man to hell! Said the Rev. Thomas Shepherd of New England: "If thou be not of the elect, God shall set Himself against thee as a consuming fire. All the wisdom of God shall be set against thee, to devise torments for thee." Thank God, Christian ministers do not often preach like that today, even if the pendulum has swung rather too far in the other direction, of permissiveness. We have at least worked out something of what is meant by the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In other words, we have got back to the Gospel message, the Good News, as given by Jesus himself, which conveys a confident trust and assurance that God is love. He loves us all, unconditionally. He has prepared a mansion for each one of us in heaven, and, if we do not move into it, it is our fault, not His. "Fear not, little flock," said Jesus, "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Does this seem to make the regenerating life too simple? Well, strange and paradoxical as it may seem, getting to heaven is *too simple* for most of us. We cannot

take life just that easily. And there lies our trouble, and the cause of so much of the trouble in this complex world of today. God's way is too simple!

Take an illustration from swimming. I read somewhere that a newborn baby will float in water, and, if put right side up, will get along fine. Only when the baby gets older and develops a self-consciousness, will it thresh about and sink and drown. To learn to swim, you have to overcome the temptation to try to save yourself. You must trust to the upthrust of the water, making the water your friend, going with it rather than striving against it. You must reduce and simplify your movements to the minimum; then you will progress. It is the same with skating, skiing, riding a bicycle, and any of those skills where balance is required. "Easy does it." What lands us on our back is selfhood, our ego, our determination to control our own destiny. Stop struggling, and just glide along with the swing of things, and you will soon get the hang of it.

The tone-arm of a phonograph has to be set down very gently onto the record so that beautiful music will result. A child is generally too clumsy to do it; he pushes the needle too roughly and sets it skidding across the disc, making a scratch along which it will skid again next time. A child needs months of practice before he gains the self-control to make the simple motion of placing the needle in the groove without all the fumbling around which spoils the music and damages the disc.

On one of our ocean voyages to Africa, my wife and some other ladies were invited by the captain onto the bridge. He asked if she would like to steer the ship. She had to keep the compass needle exactly at so many degrees. As long as the ship was on course, she had nothing to do. But soon it got slightly off course to port, so she spun the wheel to the right to bring her back again. As there was no immediate response, she went on spinning it, and soon the ship was veering to starboard. So she spun the wheel back, much too far; and the great ocean liner began to do a real zig-zag. The children and I were below at the stern, and heard the steering motor going bang-bang-bang, bang-bang-bang-bang, and saw the wake like a great snake, and wondered what was happening. One of the girls said, "I bet it's mummy steering the ship!" Later in the voyage I was invited up onto the bridge. I asked the captain if I could try my hand at steering, but he said, "No, we are too near the coast." We were several hundred miles out, but he was not taking any chances. Not with me! The wonderful thing was, that when *he* steered the ship, he just rested his fingers lightly on the wheel, moved it a few inches occasionally, and the ship kept a perfect course. It was so simple. But one needs a lot of experience and self-mastery to act as simply as that.

Sin means "getting off course." In one version of the Lord's prayer we say, "Forgive us our trespasses." Imagine we are walking along a footpath in the country, and, instead of keeping to the trail, we wander off onto private property. We are *trespassers*. All at once everything goes wrong. The owner shouts at us, sets the dogs on us, fires a gun over our heads to scare us. We try hectically to get back on the trail, trip over some thorns, and fall and cut ourselves. By this time we have lost our sense of direction, and are frantic with apprehension. The thing to do is to stand quietly for a while and let our agitation calm down; then examine the lay of the land to see where the footpath must be; then just go over to it! It is quite simple, really. Then, having got back on the trail, we must stay on it, and not wander off again. In that case, we can be sure that the Lord will forgive us our trespasses.

Now perhaps we can see why things are allowed to harass us. It is to show us we are off course. Troubles and misfortunes are "telling us" something, if we will only listen. They are not punishments for sin; they are warning signals. If we heed them, and get back on course, they have achieved their purpose and can be forgotten. You do not have to worry about them, or feel guilty; just learn your lesson from them, and then forget them. Evil is part of the teaching procedure, just as pain is with

children, to teach them not to play with fire. Evil and sin are only damaging if you concentrate on them, cherish and love them, make them your own, "appropriate them" as Swedenborg would say. Otherwise, they are given to us to teach us to be more simple.

I heard an interesting thing about hypnotism. Under hypnosis people can do amazing things, like lifting great weights or supporting themselves with one finger. A certain champion hand-squeezer could produce several pounds more pressure under hypnosis than he had ever achieved before. How? The answer is that we unconsciously hold ourselves back when in the waking state. We are never completely single-minded. Counter muscles come into play which neutralize the main effort, so that we never get a total result. Under hypnosis, however, everything is put out of action except the muscles called into play by the controlling mind of the hypnotist. And the results are astounding. Do we need hypnotism for this? Might it not be possible to learn to relax the anti-muscles consciously? Yes, it can be done. The Yogis do it. I have seen exercise sheets to train you to do it. But it is difficult to be all that simple. It is far easier to make a muscle work than to stop one from working out of turn. Relaxing is something very few of us can do effectively. We should practice it more.

This applies spiritually too. We love the Lord, yes. But our love to Him is largely neutralized by an excessive love of self. We love the neighbour, but this is neutralized by love of the world. We try to operate all four loves equally, with the result that we go round and round in circles, careering about in a most spectacular manner, but making no headway at all along the road to heaven. People say, "Life today is much more complex than it used to be." And this is true. We rush around doing a hundred and one things which achieve nothing of any value and which actually distract us from the main thing and divert us from the goal toward which we should be traveling. If only we could make it a bit simpler, by ceasing to bother about the accessories, the fussy accretions, the honky-tonk... how much happier we should be! If we could just de-magnetize our ego of its self-love and acquisitiveness, take the tension out of it, relax it, and let the Lord take over! We should find ourselves just floating along without effort, straight toward our heavenly goal.

You were created as a vessel to receive and contain the Lord's love, wisdom and power. Empty yourself of your self-derived contents, and let His life flow in, and miracles will begin to happen. You will be like a car whose carburettor is for the first time giving the correct mixture of gas and air; you will begin to race ahead, as you were designed to do. Or you will be like a camera with its focusing properly adjusted, which suddenly begins to produce beautiful, clear pictures. Physical health improves. Difficulties disappear. Doors open in unexpected places. You are suddenly aware that your heavenly Father is actually doing things for you! Life becomes light and easy. You can achieve far more, without effort, than you did with all that struggling and straining in your own fancied strength. You are now moving with the current, in the direction Providence has set for you. You are in the groove of the disc where the music comes from, not scratching across it and messing it all up.

As I said at the beginning, sin and disease are abnormal, due to a breakdown of the normal. The hells are supporting sin and disease; but the Lord and all His angels are supporting goodness and health. The hells try to introduce a whole lot of extraneous elements, just to complicate and confuse the issue. Do not allow yourself to be confused! Basically the life of religion is entirely simple: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Simple, joy-giving, mind-expanding, leading to security and peace. All "without money and without price." You do not have to pay anything, or even do anything - except take it. "Fear not, little flock," said Jesus. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

8. Shock Tactics

Someone showed me an article about a minister in Texas who refers to Jesus as a cowboy. This seems strange, almost blasphemous; yet, as he points out, the Psalmist calls the Lord a shepherd, and Jesus Himself picked this up and called Himself the Good Shepherd, so it is reasonable to assume that if Palestine had been cattle ranch country instead of sheep country, David would have said: "The Lord is my cowherd, I shall not want"; and cowherd, translated into American, is cowboy! People say, "Oh no! Shepherds are clean and sweet. We've seen pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and His robe has been spotlessly white, and the lamb has lain so gently in His bosom; whereas cowboys are crude and rough and dirty." But in reality such a difference does not exist. I have been on a sheep farm, and the shepherds are crude and rough and dirty, just like cowboys! What we church folk have done, is what we so often do: we have taken a religious concept which once had some direct bearing on the life of the people, and romanticized it into a pleasant kind of thing which is so remote from our everyday life that we need not bother too much about it.

"The Lord is my cowboy, I do not lack." Most of us nowadays, however, are not even stock breeders. Factory workers would have to say, "The Lord is my foreman," and office secretaries, "The Lord is my boss." Such comparisons are not blasphemous. They are justified to the extent that they make religion more real for us. It is time we took Jesus out of the stained glass windows of our cathedrals, out of the sentimental Sunday School wall pictures, out of the "*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea*" kind of hymn, and let Him be here, with us, where the action is. That is not blasphemy! What I call blasphemy is to sentimentalize God out of the hard reality of His being; to make religion a kind of game that can entertain us for a while each week, and even make us feel good, without having any real meaning for us in our lives.

When you die and leave this world, everything you have thought or said or done on earth will be left behind and forgotten, *except* what you have actually assimilated or structured into your character. Religious concepts which are "up there" somewhere, which you feel might be good for somebody else but don't apply to yourself, these will all be stripped away from you. Formal prayers in church services are useless if they do not touch your condition. For years as a child and young man in England I heard the minister pray to the Lord to "ameliorate the temporal conditions of such as are in need," and it never occurred to me that it might mean something! We prayed to be cleansed from our iniquities, to be made righteous, and we used such words as "vouchsafe" and "quicken." No wonder the churches have gained the reputation for being hypocritical! What the rising generation wants, and what we all want, I guess, is a religion so real that it influences everything we think and say and do, that it affects our judgments and priorities, and makes us "God's people" through and through, built up in His image and likeness.

I heard of a minister who staged a kind of theatrical performance during a church service. Just as he started to preach the sermon, someone dressed like a conventional angel walked up the aisle of the church and started removing the Bible from the altar, and, when the minister expostulated, he said "God's orders!" and took the Bible away. Then two other angels came and removed the

candlesticks, saying "God's orders!" and another pair of angels removed the flowers; and when the minister was nearly bursting himself with protest, the voice of God Himself came over the P.A. system, saying that since these objects no longer seemed to mean anything to anyone, they might as well be removed! Of course, later they were put back again. But I have often thought it would be a useful exercise to imagine an angel coming into our lives and removing everything from us which does not serve some use by making us more aware of our Lord and more aware of our neighbour. Because, in the final analysis, nothing is of any value to us unless it helps to increase our love to the Lord, our willingness to submit ourselves to His will, and our love to the neighbour; unless it makes us

more tolerant, more understanding, mellower, kinder, less critical of others, less complacent and comfortable, less egoistic.

One day I shall have to preach a sermon on the "hard sayings" of the gospels, the "nasty things Jesus said," as a friend of mine once put it. Jesus made quite a few scary references to hell fire, gnawing worms, and handing people over to the torturers. Generally speaking we have just waved these aside, because they do not fit in with our sentimentalized image of "Jesus meek and gentle." In some cases, we have not only rendered them completely ineffectual but we have actually twisted them into something quite different from what they originally meant. Take the cross, for example. The cross is an emblem of submission. On the cross Jesus demonstrated His willingness to submit without resistance to the power of evil, even to torture unto death, although He could easily have summoned twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. And He told His disciples that they should likewise take up their cross and follow Him. They should be prepared to suffer shame, indignity, accusations and insults without bitterness or any desire to get their own back or even defend themselves. Which of us is willing to do this, even in a small way? If we suffer unjustly, or are even unjustly accused of anything, we are indignant and rise up in our own defence. Our culture actually requires that we should do so; if we don't, people get angry with us, call us cowardly, weak, despicable. There is nothing that arouses people's savage fury so much as if, when someone is hit, he doesn't cry out or make some attempt to defend himself, but just allows himself to be hit. That is why many of our black brothers turned against Martin Luther King: he wouldn't defend himself. Nor did Jesus, of course, which must have exasperated his torturers, as well as the evil spirits in hell. Nor must we, if we are to take up our cross and act like Jesus. And if you ask, "What would the world become if nobody defended himself?" I can only answer, "Maybe we should at last get an inkling of the meaning of Calvary!" Anyway, our job is only to follow in His footsteps. The ultimate responsibility is His, and we can safely leave it to Him. Unfortunately the world has now completely reversed the significance of the cross. By "taking up the cross" or "starting a crusade" people now mean going out and trying to force their will on somebody else. The crusaders in the Middle Ages tried to wrest the holy places out of the hands of the Arabs and Turks who happened to live in Palestine, thus they were behaving like the Romans who did the crucifying, rather than the Christians who suffered it. We perpetuate the misconception when we sing: "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." It would be more realistic to say: "Onward, *Roman* soldiers," because it was the Romans who carried crosses with them when they marched to war. They needed them to crucify the Christians.

It is true that Jesus did nothing to defend Himself when personally attacked. But He could be an Angry Young Man when occasion demanded it. He was not exactly timid when he called the Pharisees a generation of vipers, whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones! His words cut like a spear - thrust through the complacency of the self-satisfied upper middle classes, who prided themselves on their righteousness but would not lift a finger to help those less fortunate than themselves. He told a story about some of these, who, after death, found themselves accused of maltreating Him, of not feeding Him when He was hungry or giving Him drink when He was thirsty, and not visiting Him when He was sick or in prison. And when, in the story, they indignantly repudiated the accusation, He retorted: "Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have not done it unto me." What a shock to these respectable people, who had expected preferential treatment, to be told by our Lord in the future life, "Go away, I never knew you!"

It was to avoid this after-death shock that Jesus gave us His "hard sayings." He yearned with an infinite compassion to get people to *see* the self-love and love of the world which were corrupting their inner lives like a cancer; for, unless these evils are seen and recognized, there can be no hope of

healing. The people Jesus really lashed out at were the self-complacent "good" people, and His sole purpose was the merciful one, of trying to get them to see, in the light of stark reality, that their goodness was, in many cases, only skin deep. As soon as the padding is torn away, the self-excuse, the evasion, the "I thank God I am not as other men,"... once a soul is laid bare, THEN the Lord's love envelopes it. No matter how corrupt it is, if only it is *real*, the Lord has compassion on it, and yearns over it, and tenderly sets about restoring it. So we get the paradox of the gospels, that Jesus seemed to love the prostitutes and n'er-do-wells and thieves and traitors, better than He loved the God-fearing members of the establishment. What He loved was *people* - real people, genuine people. The first step had to be to tear them open, to strip away the protective layers of pride and pretentiousness and pomposity. That was when He seemed harsh. Once the inner heart was revealed, then the process of healing could begin, and here it was that His love and compassion were so wonderfully displayed. If we want to taste that love and compassion, and be moulded by Him into the shape He wants us to be in, the *first thing* is for us to go to Him *as we really are* - not as we think we ought to be, or as we would like to be, but *as we really are*, with all our faults and failings and impurities. We must say, in the words of the old hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea." Then the Lord can do something for us.

When I was working at a first-aid post in England during the Second World War, I learnt a new word: *necrotic*. It means "dead." The surgeons spoke of removing all "necrotic tissue" from a wound, to enable the wound to heal. Anything in your life that does not help to improve your relations with God and the neighbour is necrotic tissue, which must be cut out if you are to heal up properly. Unfortunately this includes so much which our culture values and regards as most important: our involvement with property and gadgets and accessories and useless toys; our rushing around doing a hundred things which absorb our energies and waste our time and get us nowhere; our personal status, and most of our achievements which make us feel important... these are some of the things which the Lord will want to cut away. But if there is any living flesh in the midst of so much dead matter, any genuine desire for goodness and truth, any growing edge of love to the Lord and other people... how tenderly He cherishes and nurtures it, applying His healing ointment and His balm! "The bruised reed will He not break, and the smoking flax will He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory." The bruised reed - almost broken but not quite; The smoking flax - the wick of an oil lamp, almost extinguished but not quite! Those whose barriers are down in His presence, whose pride is broken, who are on the edge of despair... if only they are real, genuine, no longer pretending, utterly and completely honest before His all-seeing eye... well, when at last you reach this condition, whether in the present life or in the life to come, if there is anything true in you, anything just, anything pure, anything lovely, anything of good report, any virtue or any praise... you'll be all right!

9. Jesus Christ - Redeemer or Psychiatrist?

During the history of the Christian Church, the pendulum has swung back and forth between the extremes of *theology* on the one hand, and *ethics* on the other. By "theology" I mean a theoretical knowledge of God; an understanding of His nature, of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity, and of the Divine and the Human natures of Jesus; an understanding of the Redemption, and of how our Lord's conquest of the hells saved mankind. In short, theology deals with God's part in the process of salvation. By "ethics" I mean man's part in the work; what man must do to qualify for heaven; what is good and what is evil.

The ethical standpoint is undoubtedly the angle most apparent in the Gospels. Jesus said surprisingly little about theology. Most of what He did say comes in the Gospel of John, which was the last book to be written in the whole Bible and only appeared after the Christian Church had spread throughout

the Roman Empire and had begun to crystallize. The most "theological" chapter of all is John 17, which is couched in the form of a dialogue between Jesus' infirm humanity and the Divinity within Him. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy son, that thy son may glorify thee." This is not instruction to the disciples; and as I read it I almost feel embarrassed, as if I were intruding, breaking into the privacy of a personal, agonized prayer.

In the earliest of the Gospels, Mark, we get nothing much even to indicate that Jesus was divine. There is no hint of the Virgin Birth, and, in the original form of Mark's Gospel, there is no account of His appearance to anyone after His death. (The earliest manuscripts end at Mark 16:8.) Matthew and Luke fill in these "theological" aspects of our Lord's life, but still far more stress is laid on His *teachings*. Jesus was telling His disciples how they must order their lives. "A new commandment I give unto you," He said. "The old law said such-and-such; I say this." Most of Matthew and Luke is an extended answer to the question of the rich young ruler: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Someone coming to the Gospels for the first time would be amazed at the richness of the ethical teachings of Jesus; and perhaps even more amazed at how little these teachings seem to have influenced his professed followers!

The apostle Paul had little or no knowledge of these teachings when he wrote his epistles, all of which were completed before the appearance of the Gospels. The epistles would stand more or less as they are, if Jesus had never given any teachings at all! Paul was at loggerheads with the disciples from the beginning. Most of what he eventually learned of the life and teachings of Jesus must have come to him through the researches of his beloved friend Luke, who himself received them at second or third hand. Paul owed his conversion to his traumatic experience on the road to Damascus, where he saw Jesus alive who had been crucified. It was our Lord's resurrection from the dead that) became of absorbing interest to Paul. In it he saw the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah who was to come: the "suffering-one" of Isaiah who should be sacrificed for the people like a lamb at the altar of burnt offerings. Then there was the point that Jesus had allowed Himself to be hung on a cross, which was a kind of tree; and, according to Hebrew law, a dead body must not be hung on a tree overnight (Deuteronomy 21:23). So, by accepting crucifixion, Jesus had, as it were, abrogated the Hebrew law, and had substituted "grace" for obedience to the law. A new religious era had been inaugurated, in which *belief in Jesus* had become the chief thing. Jesus had taken upon Himself the iniquities of us all, offering us forgiveness, cleansing and salvation. All we have to do now, according to Paul, is to accept the salvation freely offered to us through Jesus Christ.

You will see that this process had nothing whatever to do with ethical considerations; it was purely theological. Such ethical teaching as Paul does give has to do with how a Christian should live in a pagan society: whether he should eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols (the only meat available in the markets of most pagan cities); whether Christians should settle their disputes in the pagan law-courts; a slave's duty to his master, a wife's duty to her husband, a man's duty to the civil authorities. How should the Church deal with a back-slider? - with the fornicator and the fallen woman? There is much practical advice on the administration of the Christian establishment, which Paul himself had founded; but very little pure ethics.

The early Christians had the Epistles *and* the Gospels, and seem to have struck a fairly good balance between the two, though heathen ideas like the mortification of the flesh soon crept in and marred the beauty of the picture. But when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, then theology became all-important, and ethics went out of the window! There was a vast ecclesiastical network, and all government officials had to subscribe to the orthodox

beliefs, though it did not much matter how they lived. Heresy hunts became the order of the day, and great doctrinal controversies split the empire, first in one way, then in another. The followers of Arius and the followers of Athanasius fought like cats and dogs, the Arians believing that God was One, and therefore Christ was not fully divine; whereas the Athanasians held that Father, Son and Holy Ghost were three Persons of the Godhead who had existed together from eternity. Bloody battles were fought on this issue; there were assassinations and murders, and pious bishops were hounded into the desert to die miserably of exposure and thirst.

Later the church split between east and west, on the issue of whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone, or from the Father and from the Son. This resulted in the separation of the Greek Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholic Church which has persisted to this day. Then, in the sixth century came the monophysite heresy which split the Orthodox Church in two, north and south. The Monophysites of Egypt believed that Jesus had one nature only, a divine nature, whereas the Orthodox Church of Constantinople believed He had two natures, one human and one divine. This led to the riots which burnt Constantinople to the ground in the reign of Justinian, causing thousands of deaths.

Then, of course, we know about Luther's quarrel with the Pope of Rome who posed as the Vicar of Christ, and how the Protestants broke away from the Catholics; and for a long while the Catholics were torturing and killing the Protestants, and the Protestants were torturing and killing the Catholics, just depending on which side was in power at the time. And all, mind you! in the name of Christian Theology; all with the express purpose of keeping the faith of the Christian Church pure, according to the official interpretation at any given time and place. Since it was assumed that men were saved or damned solely on account of their doctrinal beliefs, torture was justified to force the heretic to say "yes" to a prepared formula; for this, it was supposed, would save him from an eternity of hell, which would be much worse than any torture of the body on earth.

How far the Church had drifted from our Lord's sweet gospel of love! "Judge not," Jesus said, "that ye be not judged; and condemn not, lest ye be condemned." "Blessed are ye, when men shall persecute you for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Taking the long view, we should pity the persecutors rather than their victims; for it is the unforgiving state of mind, condemnation, hatred, mercilessness and cruelty, that make hell; not the subscription to any particular form of theological belief.

Now in this New Age, it is scarcely surprising that the pendulum is swinging back again, away from theology to ethics. Few people have any interest, nowadays, in the niceties of doctrine. The whole stress today is on the *human* side of the process of salvation. In theological seminaries, where young men are preparing for the ministry, the main emphasis is no longer on theology, but on psychology, and many ministers become qualified psychiatrists. They turn to Jesus as the Master Psychiatrist and point out that the Sermon on the Mount contains the most wonderful teachings on psychiatry in existence. "Live according to the teachings of Jesus," they claim, "and all your mental sicknesses will disappear." The whole duty of the Church and its ministry, they believe, is to cure mental sicknesses in the ordinary man and woman. Was Jesus divine? They do not think it matters much, one way or the other. He came on earth to set us a perfect example of how God wants us to live. He also gave us a new set of commandments, which we must try to keep if we are to be His disciples. Always we must be asking ourselves: "What did Jesus say?" What did He say about sex? about war? about poverty and wealth? about race? about competition? about obedience to the secular authority? Even if Jesus didn't *say* anything in particular on some specific question, what can we infer was his attitude from the way in which He behaved?

Now, I think these young ministers have a point; Christianity must try to get back to the teachings of our Lord and Master. Paul himself was a Pharisee; and, although he broke away from Judaism, he inevitably carried something of the Pharisaical attitude into the new religion. And this attitude has persisted until today, so that many people take it for granted that Jesus taught that we must be "good churchmen," respectable, solemn, free of any suspicion of immorality, abiding by the customs and traditions of society, just as the Pharisees did in the time of Christ. Mavericks and non-conformers are disliked by the churches; if not actually thrown out, they are made to feel uncomfortable and unwanted. Yet, of course, Jesus Himself was by any standards a maverick and non-conformer, which was why He was put to death by the Pharisees. So I fear that the whole crust of the Church will have to break before the followers of Christ can get back to the Christian ethic.

How about those of us who subscribe to the doctrines of Swedenborg? Are we much different from the average Christian? Do we accept the theology of Swedenborg but not his ethics? What *is* the Swedenborgian Ethic? Well, of course, Swedenborg accepts the teachings of Jesus Christ as given in the Gospels. He includes the Gospels in his canon of the Word, but not the Epistles of Paul. Swedenborg was the first great teacher in modern times to say: "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good," which is ethical. He was also unique in the fact that he placed so much importance on *motive*. You can do all the good in the world, serving your fellow man, working for peace and racial justice, and so on; but if your motive is selfish it will benefit you spiritually *not at all*. What you do must be inspired by Love to the Lord if it is to have spiritual value, and this involves an interest in theology. So with evils: it is no use shunning evils merely because you want to avoid punishment or scandal, or for health's sake. You must shun evils as sins against God if you are to be cleared of them and forgiven, and this also involves theology.

So we come to the main point I want to make on this subject: we need both theology and ethics! Without theology, ethics soon deteriorates into mere opportunism, because, without a motive of Love to the Lord, our actions tend to revolve around ourselves and our own advantage; and a self-centred ethic soon becomes no ethic at all. It is quite a serious question in the churches today: How long will the Christian ethic survive without the Christian theology? How long can we remain Christian after the "death of God" in our lives? Here the Swedenborgian should lead the world back to a simple but vital understanding of the *Divine Human*: the glorified Jesus Christ who is the One God, in whom are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, - and who is with us always. Jesus was indeed the Divine Redeemer of our fallen race; He restored free will to the world, without which we should be lost souls. But, if we are to be saved, we must co-operate with Him in the process. This is a matter requiring constant vigilance, self-discipline and sincere inner probing, as well as outward obedience to our Lord's commandments of love. We cannot leave it all to Him, as used to be supposed. We cannot ride to heaven on His back; we must walk there with Him, hand-in-hand. Faith alone will not help us. Nor will Charity alone. That pendulum must stop swinging backwards and forwards, and settle somewhere in the middle. Only then can it be said that the New Age has fully dawned.

We need psychiatry in our churches. We need expert counsellors who can meet with people individually, as Jesus did, and help them straighten out their lives. Psychiatry can help us see our evils and penetrate through to our motivation, and burst the bubbles of our illusions. It can help us love the Lord and our neighbour in a more sophisticated way and at greater depth. Psychiatry can be the servant of religion, and a very useful servant; but it must never be accepted as a substitute for religion. If Jesus had been only a teacher and psychiatrist, He would have been forgotten long ago. Nor would Christianity have survived. Christianity is a living religion today, because Jesus is alive today. We can choose the good and reject the evil, only because Jesus is our Redeemer. He is near you at this very moment, with hand outstretched, waiting for you to set forth with Him. It must be a

cooperative effort. You must do your part faithfully and well, and He will do His part. And His part, though it is, in a sense, dependent on our part, is very much bigger than our part! Without Him we can do nothing at all.

Jesus said: "These things have I spoken unto you (this ethical teaching =I have given to you) that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." "Abide in me and I in you. If you abide in me, *and my words abide in you*, you will bring forth much fruit." "If you keep my commandments you shall abide in me." "Because I live, you shall live also."

10. The Law and Grace

The ancient Hebrew religion, as you find it in the first five Books of the Bible, was based on Law and Justice. The main principle by which God was supposed to rule the world was known as the Law of Retribution or Retaliation. God was just, and justice pervaded everything. He rewarded or punished mankind according to the principle: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." What a man did to others came back upon himself. God bargained with man and man had to bargain with God. Those who had the commandments of Moses and lived strictly in accordance with them, would be appropriately rewarded; whereas the gentiles or heathen, who knew nothing of the commandments and therefore did not keep them, would be punished... not because they were morally guilty, but because, in the nature of things, evil actions brought evil consequences. It was an inexorable and merciless law. What you put in, you got out.

Later on, as religious thought developed, doubts began to be raised about this "eternal law of tit for tat." The Prophets began to put forward the suggestion that God might be not only just but also merciful. Now obviously, if God could be merciful and forgive a sinner, the law of retaliation was being broken! Where would be the end of it? God might even end by forgiving the gentiles, and the Jews would lose all the advantage they had gained by their loyalty to the Law of Moses! The strict Pharisees therefore disregarded the more liberal-minded prophets, and appealed only to the Law. "What is written in the Law?" they would ask. "The Law's the thing!" As for the experience of forgiveness, they conceded that God might forgive a repentant sinner in certain circumstances. God's mercy was a "little door" through which it was sometimes possible to wriggle; but the grand system of rewards and punishments was still regarded as the basis of Divine Ethics.

This principle of Retaliation, "measure for measure," did not die with the coming of Christianity. The Puritans who landed at Plymouth Rock imported the concept of Divine Justice into the western hemisphere. "You must work, boy! You must put a lot out, if you want to get a lot back in! You must serve God day and night if you want God to serve and save you." Work became the basis of the Puritan ethic. The worst sin was to try to get something for nothing, whereas it was an admirable virtue to make millions of dollars and amass huge estates as a result of hard work. Well, there is a lot of good in this attitude. It is manly and healthy, and appropriate to life in a pioneer country. And it is quite true that in a negative way there is a kind of tit for tat. Meanness begets meanness, hate begets hate. He who takes the sword, perishes by the sword. Even Jesus said that if we did not acknowledge Him, He would not acknowledge us.

Tolstoy tells a story of a pot of honey in a clearing of a forest. A heavy log hangs on a rope from a high tree branch just over the pot of honey. A bear comes along, sees the honey, and pushes the log aside so that he can eat it. The log swings back and shoves him away. He is annoyed and pushes the log away again, much more violently than before; it swings back, and hits him hard on the snout. He is furious. He takes the log in his forepaws, and throws it away with all his force. "That disposes of that!" he thinks to himself, and settles down to his meal. The log sails up into the air, then reverses its

direction. Down it comes with increasing speed, and deals the bear such a blow that it kills him. The Law of Retaliation!

But that is negative, and operates only for as long as we are in that particular stage of development: an immature stage. Those who are willing to accept God as a loving Father, slip out through the little door of mercy. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way," said Jesus, but it "leadeth unto life." It is the entrance door of heaven.

When Jesus came into the world and began to preach on the grassy hill slopes of Galilee, one of His most startling teachings was the *inadequacy of justice*. In parable after parable, love was shown to be superior to justice. One of the most outrageous of His stories was the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. That shocks many of us today, if we take it at all seriously. Our whole moral, ethical and economic system is challenged by this insistence that an employer has the right to pay the same wage for one hour's work in the vineyard as for a whole day. Again, the prodigal son, who has wasted his substance with riotous living, is received home with rejoicing. Jesus takes Mary's part over against Martha's; and Judas, who objected to a useless waste of money, was reprimanded. Zaccheus, who had swindled his own people, was forgiven just because he said he was sorry; and harlots and wastrels were admitted into the fellowship - just like that! Even Samaritans, who were not Jews at all, received His commendation. No wonder the Pharisees put Him to death! he was turning the whole system of Divine Justice upside down! And, if Jesus came back today and said the same things, most of us would be wanting to do the same, condemning Him as a communist or a hippie.

Since Paul of Tarsus was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, we can well understand the fervour with which he originally persecuted these Nazarenes who were denying the validity of Divine Justice. But Paul "saw the light" on the Damascus Road, and, after a great deal of agonized thought, struggled through the narrow door from the Law to Grace, from Justice to Mercy. To explain the new concept to his Pharisaical friends, Paul told a little allegory about a rich young heir to a fortune who has not come of age. The estate is in the hands of trustees who only give him a modest allowance, and he is taken around by a *pedagogue* - a trusted slave whose job is to control the wild spirits of the lad and teach him good manners. He cannot shake this pedagogue off, and it irks the boy, who feels restricted and frustrated. At last, however, he reaches his majority; now the trustees and pedagogue release him, and he can enter into the freedom of his inheritance. According to Paul, the Mosaic Law is this pedagogue, given to us to keep us in order during our minority, to curb man's wild spirits, to discipline him and punish him according to his deserts, and to teach him habits of hard work. But, with the coming of Christ, we enter the freedom of our inheritance as children of God, and the Law no longer applies to us. As John said: "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." To expound this doctrine of Grace was Paul's main concern, especially in the Epistle to the Romans. It changed Christianity from being a sect of Judaism (a reward given to the Jews for their race-long loyalty to God) into a universal religion, admitting equally Jew and gentile, slave and free, men of all races and colours. For, if God is our Father (as Jesus maintained) then He must love all His children equally, and will not require that they earn or deserve the freedom of His household. A mother will not turn away any of her children from the dinner table. All human beings are admitted without question to the meal table of God's grace, if only they want to come.

Swedenborg carries this idea yet further. He says that when we die and wake up on the other side, no one is going to make an inventory of our good and evil deeds; there will be no balance sheets, no profit and loss account; no court room scene, with a cold inflexible Judge giving verdict of guilty or innocent. This is fortunate indeed, for most of us are worthy of punishment; if we had justice, who could stand? Mercifully, we leave justice behind when we die. We slip out of the treadmill of cause

and effect. External actions and their consequences are for the external world; after death you enter the realm of motive. What you take with you is the "will behind the act," your ruling love. And there, in the eternal world where God reigns supreme, you are given *His Grace* so that you can do precisely what you want to do, you can go wherever your love leads you. If you find you want to live the life of heaven, you are certainly welcome to do so. The prizes are there in a pile; you can help yourself! - no question asked. On the other hand, many who think they have "earned" heaven, who did the right things, fulfilled all the requirements, and lived a life of good works, these expect a *Reward*, but no particular fuss is made of them. They are shown heaven, but find it disappointing. It is not all that attractive. The governing idea of heaven is to make others happy without any thought of recompense, or even acknowledgment. "What benefit is there in helping other people, if nobody knows you have done it? What good do *you* get out of it? If you cannot push yourself forward and feel important, where is the joy of life? What kind of *Reward*, is this, for all one's efforts and sacrifices? Is there no justice anywhere?" So they indignantly leave the sunny slopes of heaven, where their eyes were dazzled anyway, and seek out the company of "right-thinking people like themselves," in the shady nether regions.

Well, you can call this a kind of tit-for-tat if you like. Good produces good and evil produces evil. But this is not the Lord's doing. He treats all His children without discrimination. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). He pours His love and blessing on everyone equally. The sole difference between saint and sinner, angel and devil, arises from the way in which they receive or reject what the Lord is offering them. It is a question of whether the lid of the vessel is open or shut. If we expose ourselves to God, He will fill us with His own life and we shall become angels. If we wrap ourselves up in ourselves in a tight little parcel, not even God can get into us.

It is a perpetual source of astonishment to the angels that they are admitted into the delights of heaven. They do not feel they deserve it. Maybe at first they feel a sense of guilt because no questions are asked about their lives in the world: what church they attended, what political party they belonged to, their police record, and so on. It all seems too easy. They can go just where they like. All the doors are open; they are treated like sons home from school who have the run of their parents' home. What if they are *prodigal sons*? No one seems to mind! Then the joy of heaven suffuses them; they just want to give themselves out in love to the Lord and the neighbour - to make others happy; to give, give, give, wanting nothing again. And that is what heaven is all about.

This concept of heaven and hell is revolutionary, if we really understand its implications. It will make us think quite differently about the aim and purpose of life on earth as a preparation for eternity. It enables us to re-evaluate conventional standards of right and wrong. The Christian definition of sin is implicit in Jesus' statement that the Law and the Prophets revolve around two Great Commandments: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thou shalt love thy neighbour. Anything is a sin to the degree in which it interferes with the development in us of love to the Lord and the neighbour, or cuts us off from God and mankind. When we die, we shall be confronted with Love from the Lord and introduced into the selfless life of heaven: what will be our reaction or response? That is all there is to it! Nothing else really matters. Seen in this perspective, most of the so-called "deadly sins" of medieval theology are seen to be not so deadly after all. On the other hand, a materialistic outlook, or states of mind like complacency, self-righteousness, criticalness and condemnation of others, may take us to hell.

At the top of my list of deadly sins I would place "Egotism," an obsessive interest in self. Not necessarily pride, or love of power, or anything like that, but just complete and fussy absorption in

one's own affairs and feelings and experiences and interests. The egotist talks incessantly about himself and his own concerns, especially his woes and ills; and if the conversation veers round to anything else, he tries to get it back to himself, and, if he fails, then he loses all interest and just sits back thinking of himself until the opportunity comes to start talking about himself again. He is, in fact, perpetually dictating his autobiography (and how boring it can be to those who have heard it all before!) Such a man, when he dies, cannot possibly get into heaven: he would be miserable there. And so I suggest that egotism is a deadly sin, far more damaging than murder, adultery, false witness, drunkenness, and so on, which can be left behind when we die, can be repented of, forgiven and wiped out by the Lord's loving mercy. The egotist may ask, "Where is the justice of it, if I must go to hell when I have done nothing wrong?" The answer is that God does not govern by justice, He governs by grace. Grace is offered to all. Blessed is he that takes it. Cursed is he that is so full of himself and his own concerns that he doesn't even notice that it is being offered to him! As Jesus said dryly, "He has had his reward."

Granted all this to be true, you may well ask what is the use of our daily life in this world, with its high pressure of things to be done, its allurements and temptations, its agonies, cruelty and suffering, its hopes and fears, achievements and failures? Here we are in the grinding mill of cause and effect, and everything we do has repercussions which cannot be evaded. Well, it is like Paul's allegory of the pedagogue slave whose job is to look after the young boy during his minority, reward and punish him, curb his excesses, beat him when necessary, get him into good habits of useful work: with the one overall aim of bringing him up as a gentleman. When the boy reaches maturity and comes of age, the pedagogue retires from the scene. Justice and the Law are no longer required as driving forces. Wealth and power are no longer sought after. Love and grace take over.

This should happen with each one of us, and if it has not happened yet with you, I hope it will do so from now onwards. Stop striving to achieve merit, to earn your way to heaven. You will not be judged by what you do, but by what you are. The Lord loves you infinitely; His grace is sufficient for you. Look towards Him, and His grace will be reflected in you. "Of His fullness shall we all receive, and grace for grace."

11. Freedom

In speaking of *Freedom*, I don't want to get into the muddy field of politics, except to say that political freedom is bound to be partial only. It is impossible for everybody in any kind of society to be entirely free; and often when a... colony is "freed," the first result is that a whole lot of people are thrown into jail! Another point is that, if freedom consists in the ability to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, then obviously it depends partly on what you WANT. That is to say, if you *want* to do what you *can* do, then you are entirely free, even if you cannot do much else. A man who has come to terms with his limitations and is happy in them, is a free man; whereas another, who is always dissatisfied and strives after the unattainable, feels surrounded by prison bars. Take marriage, for example. Here two people, a man and a woman, are tied together for life. If the husband wants to go in one direction, and the wife in another, they are under tension and strain all the time, and feel that the wedding ring is a fetter of slavery. But if they both want to go in the same direction and at the same pace, then nothing hinders them. Together they are as free as the wind!

The next thing I want to say is, that although your freedom is endangered if *someone else* tries to force you to do something, it is not endangered if you try to force yourself. Swedenborg says: "Self-compulsion is perfect freedom." That is to say, if you see something you think you ought to do, and *compel yourself* to do it, you are entirely free, because you are doing what you want to do. Maybe

you don't want it with your lower self, but you do with your higher self. And the more your higher self can rule you, the freer you are. This is not sufficiently recognized by those who argue for a permissive society, and think they ought to be able to do anything they like - just anything! Actually a "permissive" society, without bounds, is much more difficult to live in than one in which life is ordered by accepted rules and taboos; because in a permissive society the responsibility rests with the individual to decide what will really make him happy; and most of our young people are not equipped, by insight or experience, to make such decisions. They would be better off if their freedom were restricted until they had matured sufficiently to be able to "compel themselves." The Epicureans in ancient Rome, who made the search for happiness their goal and were the experts on the subject, found that permissiveness was not the solution to their problem. If they over-ate, they got indigestion; if they over-drunk, they got a headache, which were far from being happy states! And if they had too much sex, sex ceased to give them pleasure. Their conclusion was that moderation and self-control were necessary if you were to enjoy life to the full.

Freedom does not consist in being able to break laws, but in working with them. A motorist can drive freely across a great city, only if he strictly obeys the traffic laws. If he says: "I claim my freedom as an American citizen to drive on the wrong side of the road," he will soon find himself imprisoned in a hospital bed! The astronauts got to the moon only by working with, not against, the laws of science. God has given us the spiritual laws of a happy and fulfilled life, in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount; we must work with these laws, not against them, if we are to achieve satisfaction and contentment. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The next thing to remember is that freedom does not necessarily have to do with *actions*. A polio victim confined to an iron lung can nevertheless enjoy intellectual freedom, freedom to love or hate, freedom to choose between various values, various reactions. Dr. Frankl, the Jewish psychologist, spent some years in a Nazi concentration camp and tells of the ghastly treatment meted out to the inmates with the express purpose of de-humanizing them. *Even there* (he said), so long as you remained sane, you could choose how you would react to the tortures and humiliations, and each person reacted in a different way. In this area of choice, everybody is free. Free will is the determining factor of our lives. It is indeed so important that, when it was in danger of being destroyed from within, by evil spirits from hell, two thousand years ago, God himself came into the world as Jesus Christ to restore it. Without free will, man would not be man.

Swedenborg explains that we derive our free will from the circumstance that we are in a state of equilibrium, or balance, between heaven and hell. Evil spirits are trying to drag us downward, and angels to raise us upward. These forces are immensely powerful, but are so precisely balanced by the Lord that we ourselves can tip, the scales by adding a very little pressure on one side or the other. Thus, every choice we make has repercussions reaching to the remotest limits of heaven or hell: which explains why the angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. In this area of choice, we can side with the devils or the angels; and, however evil we have been in the past, we are free at any moment to change our allegiance and tip the scale down on the side of good. (And, of course, vice versa.) Our choices are not pre-determined by our character, as some psychologists seem to think. No one can tell from your character, however well they know you, how you will choose in any particular situation. On the contrary, your choices form your character. This gets us away from the old idea of predestination. We are what we have chosen to be.

One of the first great thinkers to grapple realistically with this concept of freedom was an ancient Briton named Morgan, who lived in the Fourth Century A.D. and wrote under the Greek name of Pelagius. He denied original sin, said that Adam's fall affected Adam only, and maintained that every

man was entirely free to choose good or evil; and that if a man is to be saved it must be through his own efforts and not just the grace of God. All this seems common sense to us today, but it was appalling heresy in the Fourth Century, and was violently opposed by the Church Fathers, especially the far subtler St. Augustine of North Africa, who said, "NO! Adam's fall made us all slaves to sin! Freedom consists in being born again as children of God, loving God, and becoming aligned with God's will!" We realize today that both Pelagius and Augustine were correct, but they were speaking of two different kinds of freedom. Pelagius was referring to the freedom we all possess in this natural life, arising from our equilibrium between heaven and hell. Augustine was referring to the freedom exercised by the angels in heaven, who are no longer in equilibrium, and cannot choose evil, but don't want to.

Students of Swedenborg are sometimes worried by his teaching that our ruling love is fixed at death and we can no longer change our lot. They protest, "If an evil spirit in hell wishes to reform and become an angel, can't he do it?" The answer is, "Yes, theoretically he could, because in the spiritual world you can do anything you want to do. But in practice spirits never seem to want to change their lot. They are no longer in equilibrium, but have joined the ranks of one side or the other, and are now in such a powerful sphere of good (if in heaven) or evil (if in hell) that they identify themselves with it and never change. However, both angels and evil spirits *feel* entirely free, because they can do whatever they want to do: good, if they are in heaven; evil, if in hell."

But now St. Augustine's insight comes in, that only the angels are truly free. Their desires are in line with the Divine Providence; they want what God wants, and God is in ultimate control. The evil spirits set themselves against God and want to destroy His creation; so, as they can't succeed in this, they feel everlastingly frustrated, and in a perpetual state of indignation - even enjoying it, in a perverted kind of way. They have a "chip on their shoulder," as we say.

Let us see how it works out. The two basic loves of heaven are love to the Lord and love to the neighbour, as Jesus Himself taught us. It is possible for any number of people to love the Lord and each other; the more there are who are doing it, the happier they will be. All are free to express their love in a thousand different ways, and pour themselves out in warm fellowship and mutual felicitations; the happiness wells up and goes on increasing to eternity. This is perfect freedom. Each can enjoy his heart's desire, and is completely fulfilled by doing so. In hell, on the other hand, the basic love is self-love, love of having one's own way, of forcing other people to subservience. This cannot be exercised simultaneously by everyone in a group; it is mutually exclusive. What happens in hell is that one individual gets to the top, by cruelty or cunning, and for a while makes all the others obey him as abject slaves; then he is thrown over and made a slave, as someone else gets to the top. Society is forever bubbling up and down, like boiling porridge. Only one person can be "free" at a time, and he is consumed with apprehension and anxiety lest he should lose his position. All the rest are slaves, because it is logically impossible for more than one to be boss. It is a madhouse scene of mutual mistrust, jealousy and hatred, which Jesus described very vividly as "hell fire and the gnashing of teeth." "He that commiteth sin," he said, "is the bond-slave of sin." Yet the evil spirits are happier in hell than they would be in heaven, for they could not be more free than in hell to exercise the self-love which is their life.

How does all this affect us? Well, you and I will be in heaven or hell one of these days, and, whether we are aware of it or not, we are preparing for that day here and now. We are in the Valley of Decision. Evil is on one side of us, good on the other; and Pelagius was right in maintaining that we are absolutely free to choose one or the other; we are in equilibrium between heaven and hell. Even an excessive *interest* in one side or the other, throws us onto that side. Continual harping on the

theme of crime and violence, and indignation at the present state of the world, links us up with the very evils we are criticizing; whereas turning your mind to good and wholesome things links you up with heaven. "What!" you may say, "Are we not supposed to condemn evil in other people?" My answer would be that "no one, to my knowledge, has given us that responsibility," and criticism of others is a very dangerous game. Remember our Lord's story of the Pharisee and the Publican. "I thank God I am not as other men," said the Pharisee, "extortioners, unjust, adulterers - or even as that Publican over there!" Doubtless the Pharisee's life was blameless; he had kept the commandments from his youth up. Yet it was the Publican, not the Pharisee, who went home justified that day! (Luke 18). Remember this when you see the news on TV or read the newspaper. The whole government is corrupt! There is extortion, injustice and adultery all around us! No doubt about it. However, instead of waxing indignant, like the Pharisee in the parable, and thus increasing our own self-righteousness, let us rather follow the advice of Paul, who said: "Whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report - if there be any virtue or any praise (and you will find plenty, if you look for it) *Think on These Things.*"

Then you will begin to develop these qualities in yourself. Your tastes will change. You will cease to be interested in a number of things which previously interested and excited you. Things which used to irritate and annoy you will now cease to be all that important to you. So will certain other things which you used to want very much but could never get. Other interests will now occupy your attention, interests concerning your relationship with the Lord and other people. A whole new area of life will begin to open up, which Swedenborg calls the spiritual degree of the mind. Of course you will still experience frustrations, but they will never be insurmountable, for you can always draw near to God in prayer, and help other people in some way, even if not in the way you would like. We can always experience a greater freedom in giving ourselves out to others, than in trying to make them give themselves out to us! And this heavenly freedom increases as our spiritual minds are opened to greater and greater depths, until we experience the wonderful feeling of working side by side with the Lord Himself, and sharing something of His infinite power. We are then in the freedom of heaven, as perceived by St. Augustine.

Jesus Christ achieved that freedom while in this world. There never was anyone as free as He was. Even when arrested and condemned to death, He stood there in His bonds, a completely free man. "No man taketh my life from me," he declared, "but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10-18). Because He was perfectly aligned with God, He was absolute Master of His fate. Our freedom will never be so complete as this, but it can ever more closely approximate to it. You don't need edicts from the White House or legislation from Capitol Hill; you don't need freedom marches for this kind of freedom. What you need is self-mastery, and a determination to submit yourself to the laws of life, and align yourself with God's will. "If He shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36).

Do you want to be freed from the shackles and limitations of your past? - from the restrictions of your present situation? - from fear of the future? Freed from the itch of ambition, the poison of jealousy, and the bitterness of not being appreciated? You can be free, here and now! Your fetters are already falling from you! You are a child of God - He loves you. Your circumstances are the best possible for you, at this moment, providing the best possible opportunities for your spiritual growth and development. Wonderful happiness lies ahead of you and is available to you. Hold up your head, and walk boldly forward! "Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword, separate us from the love of Christ? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through *Him* that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor

principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

12. Divine Guidance

As Christians, we are committed to a life of obedience to the Lord. I hope I am right in assuming that you would like to act in every circumstance according to His will. The problem is how to know, clearly and without doubt, what His will is.

One fairly obvious way of discovering His will is to imagine Jesus in our situation and try to think how He would act. It is also illuminating to think how He would be treated in the world today. I know that if He were in South Africa, or even in some parts of the U.S.A., He would be shunned and ignored as an Asian, a non-white... What would be the reaction if He preached the Sermon on the Mount from the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.? Incidentally, I wonder whether Jesus and His disciples, and Paul, would not worship in a synagogue rather than in any Christian church. If Jesus lived in modern America, would He still work as an itinerant preacher with beard and sandals and a band of hippie-like followers, or would He don ecclesiastical dress, write books and appear on TV? This kind of approach is difficult. Jesus lived in such a different culture from ours; it is almost impossible to guess how He would act here. Nor can we be expected to copy the external life patterns of someone living two thousand years ago in the Middle East. Nevertheless we can safely apply to our own situations His standards of love and tolerance and forgiveness and unselfish humility.

I met someone the other day who said he used to be a member of our church. He had been a very active member; but one year, for no reason, he was voted off the committee. He suspected that the minister had turned against him because he had criticized the minister once or twice. Of course he had resigned on the spot, and would never dream of going back again. "Once bitten, twice shy," he said, in a way which made me think he was quite proud of his attitude. Did he stop to ask himself whether Jesus would have gone off in a huff because his feelings were hurt? Yet hurt feelings seem quite common in Christian churches, and nobody apparently thinks it strange.

Sometimes the situation is more complex. During World War II England was fighting for survival, depending for its life upon her young airmen who were bringing down the Nazi invaders. Many conscientious people believed that Jesus Himself would have taken up arms under these circumstances to protect His country, and would have even dropped bombs on Berlin. This was preached from many church pulpits. Yet Jesus Himself lived in a conquered country which was continually staging abortive revolts against Rome, and there is nothing in the record to suggest that He would have taken up arms against anyone, Jew or Roman. It seemed to me at the time that war, even in self-defence, was totally out of keeping with the Christian ethic. I concluded that Jesus would probably have joined one of the medical units: to heal, not to destroy. This conclusion led me and many other ministers to serve at medical posts; it was a deliberate effort to do what we thought Jesus would have done in the circumstances.

However, all this is rather a crude way of determining one's actions, especially as it seems to be based on the assumption that Jesus was a mere man who lived a very good life on earth, long ago. You might equally well ask, What would Socrates do in my position? Confucius? Swedenborg? Lincoln? But Jesus was not just a great and good man; He was God incarnate. After His resurrection from the dead He became completely merged with the Divine, and is with us today, actually within us. It is not His *example* we seek, but His *guidance*. For example, an accountant wants to know whether he should accept this job or that. It would be no use his asking, "What would Jesus do?" Jesus was a carpenter, not an accountant. But he could legitimately ask, "Lord, what would you have

me do?" In any circumstances whatever, we can and should ask the Lord, "What would you have me do?"

Unfortunately, many people only ask this question when they are in a crisis, and then are disappointed at not getting an answer. The channels are blocked with the sediment of years, the faucets have rusted up. Maybe we have attended church regularly, but never until now have we tried to get personally through to God. We have left that to the professional minister or priest. Then the crisis comes, and we cry out to the Lord for help, but there is no reply. It is like fetching an old radio down from the attic which your father left there when you were a child and trying to get some sound out of it. You have to work at it for some time, replace the batteries, clean the contacts, and so on, before it will function properly. Even when we do begin to get results, the answers we receive will not be clear and unambiguous until we have developed much further in our personal spiritual lives.

What does God's voice sound like when it does begin to come through? What language does He speak? English? Latin? Hebrew? For that matter, what language do evil spirits use when they speak to us? They don't use any specific language, but stimulate our evil desires, and draw attention to any false beliefs which we have previously accepted as our own. So with the Lord. He speaks to us through our *conscience*, which we have previously formed from our study of the Bible, and the principles we have adopted for the control of our lives. The trouble is that so many people do not have a conscience; or, if they do, it is so twisted and warped that God simply cannot use it as a means of communication with them. They have built it up from the mores of their society, from novels and the TV. It is a matter of "conscience" with them that they should be successful, aggressive, rich, important, admired. The man who told me he had left the church because he had been dropped from the committee, probably felt it was a matter of conscience that he should not show up there again. He doubtless believed that God Himself had told him to act as he did. But let us beware! There are evil spirits with us all, trying to lead us astray and destroy us. They can make their voices sound very like the voice of God. How can we distinguish between them and Him? It is not always easy, and we can be mistaken at times. One test is, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

If what we feel guided to do is creative and not destructive; if it seems to be in line with the Law of Love (love to the Lord and the neighbour) and the Golden Rule ("Do to others as you would have them do to you"), then it is probably from God and should be acted upon. On the other hand, if it panders to our self-love and self-pity, and tends to make us feel important at the expense of others, then it is probably from hell and should be ignored. "By their fruits ye shall know them." If the memory of something you did in the past makes you gloat and feel condemnatory towards somebody, then it was probably prompted by evil spirits. But if you feel serene and happy over the memory of it, and the richer for it in your spiritual life, then it was probably from God.

Neither God nor the devil can speak to us in a vacuum; they reach us through our own ideas and ideals. If we are full of our own self-importance, God cannot speak to us. But if we want to further some unselfish ideal, though it may be a mistaken one, then the Lord can, and will, speak to us through our unselfishness, and bend and guide us according to His will. It is no use our standing waiting for orders. We must take the initiative and set out along the road. We must do the best we can, according to our lights. Then He will re-direct us where necessary, turn things around and switch them over, so that we may find circumstances becoming quite different from what we expected, and we may end by acting quite differently from what we intended. Afterwards, we shall see and acknowledge that the Lord was guiding us and over-ruling everything for good.

One or two other small points. God cannot guide us to overcome some sin unless, in our higher selves, we want to be free of it. Nor can He heal us of some sickness if we inwardly want to be sick (as

many people do, from escapism or self-pity). Nor can He instruct us on any matter about which we have already made up our minds. The only condition under which we can receive guidance from God is that we should be wanting sincerely and earnestly to do His will.

There are many different ways in which He can make His will known to us. It may come like a flash of illumination while we are reading the Bible. Or it may come when we are reading a novel or the newspaper. How often have I been glancing over some article in a magazine, not thinking consciously about my own situation, when suddenly some word or phrase has hit me. The magazine has dropped on my knee, while my mind has drifted off on a long, long journey; and a stranger has joined me, like on the road to Emmaus, and I have received wonderful enlightenment, so that perhaps I have not wanted to read any more that day! In such a manner can God guide us, if we are ready for it. Or it may happen while we are talking with a friend. The subject under discussion may not seem to have any connection with what is troubling us. Then a certain idea enters the conversation; the Lord touches it, and it comes alive, and we know that it is the complete and perfect answer to our problem. With me it is usually a sense of pressure, as if my Father were edging me this way or that. Sometimes He stops me altogether, with a "*No Road*" sign, or a "*Wrong Way*." Most often He just gently eases me into the track He wants me to follow.

When we have developed a little further, and have made our will His will and His will ours, then He will be able to give us more explicit directions. At last a still small voice will sound over our spiritual radio, saying, "Child, do this!" And if we answer, "Yes Lord!" and do it at once, the voice will come again, clearer and louder. Eventually the channel will be fully open, and we shall have a means of knowing from moment to moment, exactly what the Lord would have us do in every smallest detail of life.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way. Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land."

13. Practicing the Presence of God

When Jesus said, after the resurrection, that He would be with us always, He really meant it. So did Paul when he spoke of the Indwelling Christ. "Christ," he said, "is in you." Swedenborg tells us that we each have a little vessel, high above our consciousness, in which God dwells; he calls it the "human internal," and sometimes refers to it as the "soul." Astounding as it may seem, the Lord who created the universe resides personally in that little vessel within you. If He withdrew for one instant, you would cease to exist. It is because He dwells within you that you are in His image and likeness, a human being and not a mere animal; and it is for the same reason that you will live to eternity. And if you ask me how God, who is controlling the galaxies of the stars and spinning the atoms of nature, can nevertheless be personally present within you and me and every other of His billions of children, I can only reply that He is infinite and therefore outside the limitations of time and space. To be Divine is not a quantity but a quality; whenever and wherever God is present at all, He is present in fullness.

Since the Lord is present within everybody, why are so many people apparently unaware of the fact? Because we all begin our adult lives with the spiritual degree of our minds closed. Only the natural degree is open: the area concerned with self and the world. To be consciously aware of the Lord's presence requires a certain degree of regeneration. Even a saint like Brother Lawrence in the sixteenth century had to "Practice the Presence of God." We must all do so if we are to become spiritually developed.

But how to begin? Perhaps you have already begun, and will think I am being very elementary and obvious; or you may be pleased to have the first steps described. We must all begin by getting

acquainted with the Lord. I do not mean just reading about Jesus in the Gospels, though that is necessary and desirable. I mean getting acquainted with Him personally. The difference is like that between reading about some celebrity, and then actually meeting him and getting to know him as a man.

In the case of Jesus, you can get acquainted with Him first by *faith*. You can even start off with an innocent game of make-believe. You pretend the Lord is with you and chat with Him and pass the time of day, just as you might with a neighbour down the street. Children have lively conversations with perfectly imaginary people whom they believe to be really present. Swedenborg's parents declared that little Emanuel used to converse with angels when a child; but there was nothing remarkable about that - all children do! It is only when you grow up and become "sensible" that you lose the faculty of conversing with someone you cannot actually see. You can recover it with practice, becoming again like a little child. Get over your shyness! Don't be embarrassed by bringing God reverently into conversation, especially with your family. This is a big step for many, but one well worth taking.

To imagine Jesus as an acquaintance with whom you can chat does not presuppose any degree of regeneration or commitment; thus, we can all do it. You do not have to be committed to a neighbour to pass the time of day with him. But if you talk with your neighbour often, and he is an outstanding character, something from him is bound to rub off onto you. You find yourself comparing his standards with your own and imitating him in little ways. Even the expression "Keeping up with the Jones's" has a good side, if you take it right. You want your neighbours and acquaintances to see you at your best. And that is what begins to happen if you "make-believe" that Jesus is with you as an acquaintance.

So your regeneration commences. You start altering the pattern of your life because of what Jesus might think. You find yourself becoming committed to Him, because of the imaginary contacts you had with Him. Then a wonderful thing happens. The relationship ceases to be imaginary and becomes real! From being only a casual acquaintance, Jesus becomes a *friend*. "You are my friend," He says, "if you do whatsoever I command you." Once you have reached this stage, you will begin to become consciously aware of His presence: you will see Him with your inner eye. He will always be by your side. You will discuss your deepest concerns with Him, and He will answer by a sort of pressure in your thoughts, even speaking to you first sometimes and waiting for you to answer. Naturally your own ego will be dominant at the beginning; but as you test out His advice and find it good, and begin to enjoy new depths in life which you had never experienced before, the relationship becomes reversed. The "still small voice" grows into the controlling power of your life.

What a friend we have in Jesus! A divine and wonderful friend! There are many hymns celebrating this new and beautiful relationship. Swedenborg himself used to sing, in Swedish, "Jesus is my best of friends" - it is said to have been his favourite hymn. The spiritual degree of the mind is now open. Later on, as you progress further, the third or *celestial* degree begins to open, the degree of love. Now the Lord appears no longer in the character of a *friend*, and becomes a *lover*, in the purest and highest sense of that much abused word. "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His *lovers* know."

Now it is that He appears to be no longer walking by your side, but actually dwelling within you. He slips into the place of your old ego. You willingly allow Him to take over the controls. He fills your will with His love, until it becomes His will. Your thoughts become a finite version of His thoughts. He strips down your desires and ambitions, and then bends them into alignment with the operation of His Divine Providence. Your hands, your feet, your lips, all the organs of your body, become

responsive to His bidding. Your body is now His body, one of the innumerable bodies in which His Divine Humanity lives and works in this world.

The joy and satisfaction and release of this new arrangement, when He actually takes over your life, is difficult to describe, though all who have submitted to it, even for only brief periods, testify to the wonder of it. You are no longer trying to promote your *self*, but are imbued with the glory of the King of kings. Your own mean little business concern has been taken over by the biggest corporation in the world, the firm that built the universe! From now on, your job is the promotion of the kingdom of God. Your own name will no longer appear on the letterheads, but you will be writing under the royal seal.

The promotion of self, is it such an important thing? When you have succeeded in promoting yourself, you are still no better off. Remember the story of Alexander the Great, who is said to have burst into tears because there were no more countries for him to conquer. The story has no foundation, because in fact when he died he was projecting a campaign of conquest in western Europe. But the point is clear; he would have reached that stage eventually. The promotion of self leads to nothing but heartbreak and disillusionment; whereas, if you work for the promotion of the kingdom of God, with Jesus as your Senior Partner giving all the orders, then you will grow and blossom spiritually. Life will give you deeper satisfaction and peace the older you grow, and you will end up as an angel in one of the higher heavens. That, I am sure, is your heart's desire; but you will never attain it unless you first put yourself in training, by practicing the presence of God.

14. Ego Food

By "ego food" I mean anything that nourishes the ego - the "I" or the "me" within us. It includes flattery, compliments, applause, anything that makes us feel appreciated, admired, loved... or even *hated*, so long as we are noticed and made to feel important. Whatever gives our selfhood a boost is ego food; we lap it up, it is sweet in our mouths, even if it is sometimes bitter afterwards in our stomachs. People do good deeds, but want everyone to know about it; if you thank them a great deal, and compliment them, they are happy. "They have their reward," said Jesus. Maybe they work for the Church or some worthy cause; but if nobody makes a fuss of them and they do not get sufficient acknowledgment, they are touchy and become disgruntled. All they really wanted, apparently, was ego food! It can work in reverse, too; there are those who do not like to be helped or to be given things, because this puts them in an inferior position and so deprives them of ego food. There is also the subtler and more poisonous kind of ego food that comes to us when we criticize other people and put them in the wrong, thus, by implication, putting ourselves in the right. I hope I am not doing that very thing!

There is also the wholesome and digestible ego food of achievement and success, when things go the way we want them to, and we can legitimately take a pride in our accomplishments. A certain amount of this is necessary for our growth and development as human beings, especially in the earlier stages. The child who is never complimented, who feels he can never win approval, remains undeveloped. His selfhood is starved, and can no more be expected to grow satisfactorily than a starved body can grow satisfactorily. Even after we reach adulthood, we still need encouragement and appreciation and a few compliments now and then, to keep up our self-respect and enable us to stand firmly on our two feet with our head in the air. We need to feel we are achieving some of the things that are important to us, that we are making at least a partial success of life. And it is a happy responsibility in any group of friends to "build one another up" in love, and provide the encouragement which is necessary for the healthy nourishment of each other's selfhood.

It is usual in religious circles to condemn the ego (or "proprium" as Swedenborg calls it) as totally vile. True, Swedenborg usually describes it as evil, but in doing so he is always referring to the *contents* of the ego of the *unregenerate man*. After regeneration, it is called the "heavenly proprium." The angels have such an ego; it is filled to the brim with the life of God. The fact is that the ego is a vessel which can hold either evil from hell or good from heaven. You are a vessel with two faucets, and you can choose which of the two you will turn on, or you can turn them both on together in various combinations. To change the metaphor, you are a room with two doors: one will admit angels, and one will admit devils, and you can choose which kind of visitor you will entertain. We are judged good or evil, according to the contents of our ego; for what it contains is our adult responsibility. But we ourselves are nothing more nor less than a vessel with a built-in choice mechanism. Every created object is a vessel of some sort; man is unique in that he alone has the power to choose what he shall contain. He alone has free will.

Please note that I said: "What our ego contains is our adult responsibility." We are not born with a functioning ego. It takes from fifteen to twenty years for the ego to become fully grown. And when at last it does begin to operate, the first choices it makes are unfortunately (as Swedenborg points out) almost wholly evil: that is to say, we start off by pandering to our loves of self and the world. Most of us have to undergo the complete change of orientation known as regeneration before we can be motivated by love to the Lord and love to the neighbour, which constitute heaven.

Would it not be wise, then, to say "no, no, no!" to our young people, pulling them back, hindering them, blocking their movements, frustrating them in every possible way, until they have become regenerated and can be motivated by heavenly loves? That has been tried in various cultures. The Puritans tried it; and in a somewhat different way, so did the Victorians, but without much success. The fact is, if we do not allow our young people a certain latitude to choose evil as well as good, their choice-mechanism will not develop at all, and they will never be able to choose good. In other words, it is a merciful provision of Providence that a great deal of selfishness should be allowed to fill the unregenerate ego, because if the selfishness were forcibly removed, the ego itself would be damaged, and so no further development would be possible. Remember the parable of the tares in the wheat field, which had to be left there until the harvest.

So far I have been speaking of young people; but spiritual immaturity has little to do with our age in years. Throughout most of our lives we need to have something in our ego which gives us joy and satisfaction, or we shall just shrivel up and go sour or bitter, and be good for nothing. In my own case, for instance, I realize that I still need quite a lot of ego food, which is fortunately supplied. I have a wife who backs me up and plenty of good friends who encourage me. Quite a few of the things I have attempted to do have been successful - I have no cause for dissatisfaction. Actually I get an unnecessarily large number of compliments from my dear friends; but I try not to let myself be affected by them too much, because I realize that "enough is enough." I also get some brick bats thrown at me occasionally but they do not knock me off balance. I hope you also feel that you have enough ego food for your wellbeing.

On the other hand, I am not by any means having everything my own way. Many of my ambitions have fallen by the wayside; there are ways in which I have dismally failed. I am often frustrated. But it is interesting to note that most of the things I cannot get, or cannot manage to achieve, are things motivated by love of self and love of the world. In fact, the Lord is helping me to develop spiritually by whittling back my self-motivated desires. Maybe this is a compliment, because it means He can see that I really want it that way. He has taken me at my word on those occasions when I have prayed to Him: "O Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done."

As a man becomes an angel, the nature of his ego changes. It is still a vessel, and there are still two faucets; but the faucet from hell is now permanently shut off. I doubt whether he could turn it on, even if he wanted to; it has rusted up with disuse; but the fact is, he never wants to! He has chosen to align himself permanently with God's will, and so he does not need his own free will any more. His great joy has been to give himself up to the Lord. He is now going with the current, not against it; and his relinquishment of self-determination has produced a blissful state in which all tensions and doubts and difficulties have been resolved. His ego is completely emptied of selfish desires, and is filled instead with the Spirit of God, which overflows all around him. He no longer needs any of what I have called ego food. He can stand confidently on his feet without it, and rejoice in the realization that *he is nothing, God is all*.

We are told in the writings of Swedenborg that the angels do not like to be praised, or even thanked, for the services they render one another. If they allow a single compliment or word of gratitude to touch their hearts, a cloud seems to overshadow them. They feel a dead weight in the stomach, and shiver for a moment, oppressed by the burden of self. Their only desire is to "lend, hoping for nothing again." This poses a dilemma, because every angel loves to praise and compliment his companions, yet none feels comfortable when praised or thanked! The solution is, of course, that as soon as a word of appreciation reaches anyone in heaven, he immediately passes it over to the Lord, to whom it is really due. Thus the angels become channels or conduits of gratitude and praise to God, and everybody is happy. To express it in another way, since the vessel of their selfhood is now empty of self-love and full of the Spirit of God, it is the Lord who is being complimented when an angel is complimented, and it is the Lord who is being loved when an angel is loved. Giving and receiving gifts and services becomes a matter of mutual joy, and the question of whose ego is being fed ceases to arise, for it is on the Lord's behalf that everything is being done.

You and I are not yet angels, I guess; yet we all want to become angels eventually. Heaven is our goal. Love of possessions must eventually give way to love to the neighbour; love of self must give way to love to the Lord. Our hunger for ego food must grow less and less, until we have outgrown the taste for it altogether, just as adults outgrow the taste for candy. When ego food is offered to us, we should accept it graciously, but pass it over to the Lord without swallowing a single crumb of it ourselves.

This is the explanation of the release and gaiety of those who have been reborn as children of the heavenly Father. When Jesus was on earth, the Scribes and Pharisees were shocked at the joyous freedom shown by this little band of disciples, who went about the country like a wedding party. (They were even accused, quite erroneously, of being intoxicated, Acts 2:13.) So would the Puritans and Victorians of a past generation be shocked at the joyous freedom of the mature Christian today. Yet St. Augustine had the idea, back in the fourth century. "Love God," he said, "and do as you please." He was right, because, if you really love God, you will only want to do what pleases Him, for it is God within you who is urging you to it!

The real saints of this world show none of the mealy-mouthed humility and self-abnegation generally expected of church members. They no longer need or want the ego food which this kind of self-righteousness provides. Instead, they glory in God. Paul used the word "boasting"; he "boasted" in Christ. And the Psalmist declared: "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord (Ps. 34:2.). We should not quite use that word "boast" today, but the meaning is clear. So I will end with the story of a missionary who was visiting a new area in Africa. He was sitting with the local pastor, while the villagers entertained them with sports and a violent mock battle. In the heat of the contest was a young man whose bearing and dignity were outstanding. He held his head high, and there was a smile

on his lips while he exerted himself apparently more energetically than anyone else. "Who is that young man in the middle there? He seems to be enjoying himself!" remarked the missionary. "*That,*" came the reply, "*is the son of the Chief.*"

15. Worry and Anxiety

I am not thinking just now of the healthy kind of worrying which is part of the stress and tension of normal living, as when we find ourselves in some perplexing situation and wonder just how we ought to act. I am thinking of the worry and anxiety which people experience when they think of various troubles and disasters which might happen to them or their loved ones at some future time, but which have not yet happened and may never happen. It seems foolish and irrational, but the fact is that most of us experience such fears of the future, some more distressingly than others. They rob us of our sleep at night; or, if we get to sleep and then wake up in the middle of the night, we start thinking of all the terrible things that might happen, and then we can't get to sleep again.

People try to insulate themselves from worry in various ways, according to their temperament. Some plunge into work, in the hope that tremendous and continual activity will prevent them from having to think of the future. Others choose play, immersing themselves in a ceaseless round of amusements and superficialities, from which they dare not let up. Some try to make themselves brave by continual boasting. But such avoidance of confrontation with the spectre of the future does not remove one's worries, it just pushes them underground; and from the subconscious they work outwards, producing unhealthy tensions, physical sickness, and eventual despair.

Note that worrying people usually have a strong and fertile imagination. Unimaginative people don't worry. The unschooled peasant cannot visualize anything worse than what he has actually experienced, and so there is nothing for him to worry about. Animals and birds do not worry, they just take life as it comes. (They are nervous if they see you approaching them, but that is the realistic and sensible worrying which I referred to at the outset.) Worriers about the future are usually people with vivid imaginations, some of whom might make a name for themselves by writing short stories, judging by the way they are able to work out in their minds every little detail of some appalling tragedy that *might* take place! The imagination is a wonderful gift from God, which He has given only to man. It makes us creators in our own finite way. But the same powers of creation which we have inherited from our heavenly Father can be used also for destruction; and that is what the worriers are doing with their wonderful imaginative powers. The basis of all anxious thinking is insecurity, the fear that things might go wrong. Undoubtedly it is true that almost anything might go wrong in this physical universe, where our very lives are dependent on forces we don't fully understand and cannot fully control. We didn't bring ourselves into the world in the first place; we don't really know where we came from, nor how we got here, nor where we are going. There is plenty to worry about, you see, if we are set on worrying. Sometimes we worry about things over which we obviously have no control. We worry about our children, after they are grown up and are living their own lives. People worry about the war in Southeast Asia, about the Middle East situation, the trouble in Ireland. Of course it is right to be deeply concerned over what is happening to our fellow human being everywhere, and we must do what we can to influence the political situation; but beyond that, worrying is a waste of energy. There is a kind of false pride in it - the feeling that we ourselves are so important. Well, the world had to get along somehow before we were born, and it will doubtless get along after we are dead; so just let us leave those things over which we have no control to God. Let God be God!

Since our own influence is so small and the future is so unpredictable, is it any use our trying to plan for the future? Certainly we should try. We are "project oriented" by nature, and much of the interest and joy of life consists in planning various projects, working them through, and hopefully achieving some pre-arranged end. Swedenborg tells us that this is true also of the angels in heaven. Much of their happiness is derived from *projects*; only he doesn't call them projects, he calls them "end, cause, and effect." The angels lose themselves in some particular project and work at it avidly until they have completed it. Then they turn to something else, and so on to eternity. That is what Swedenborg means when he calls heaven "a kingdom of uses." And we know how important it is for us also to have our projects, in our work and in our hobbies: either short-term projects like writing a letter or preparing a meal, or long-term projects like taking a university degree or raising a family. If our projects could never fail or go wrong, we should not enjoy them nearly so much. I have just finished a minor project of framing a picture. I had to cut the glass to fit the frame, which was a delicate and exciting operation, because at any moment the glass might have cracked in the wrong place and everything would have been spoiled. But it would not have been nearly so much fun, I think, if there had been no risk of failure, if success had been predetermined from the outset. Much of our spiritual development comes from our having to deal with materials which may break or go awry, so that we have to exercise caution, and be resourceful and versatile, able to cope with the unexpected, to respond to sudden needs of improvisation. When we can trust ourselves to improvise, much of our worrying ceases. You set out to drive a car across town. You don't know what problems are going to face you on the way, but you don't worry, because you know from past experience that whatever happens you will probably be able to improvise your way through. It is the person who has never learned to improvise who is the worst worrier.

Even if things happen for which we are totally unprepared, we still have the assurance that the Lord is with us, that He has foreseen it, and that His Divine Providence is over everything. When I say that Providence is *over* everything, I do not mean that the Lord necessarily causes it, or even wills it, except in the general sense that the Lord made the universe the way He did, with its built-in laws which operate independently of man. If an earthquake takes place, and the ground opens and swallows up someone's house, this doesn't necessarily mean that the Lord had anything against the owner of the house. What it means is that Lord made the earth as He did make it; He made it very hot and let it cool; and as it cools it contracts, and, being made of the material it is made of, certain tensions are created during contraction which, when they reach sufficient stress, tear the surface apart. Moreover, the Lord must allow some things to go wrong through man's own misuse of his freedom. If He did not permit man to embark on dangerous and destructive projects, man would never learn the difference between good and evil. When the nuclear bomb destroyed Hiroshima, could the Japanese victims have truthfully said: "This is the Lord's doing, we must calmly submit to the ways of His inscrutable Providence?" No! Not everything that happens in the universe is according to the Lord's will. But nevertheless the Divine Providence is *over* everything that happens, in the sense that He knows it is going to happen. He has foreseen it, and He has already planned everything from His side so that the best possible good will come out of it for everybody concerned. And when I say "everybody" I mean every man, woman and child considered as an individual, not just the human race as a whole, or the American nation, or any mass movement; or as we speak of animals and say that the killing off of the weak ones is "good for the species." God loves you personally, however humble you may be. He wants the best for you, even if He does sometimes have to allow things to go wrong for you. However adverse your circumstances, however sick your body, He will see that nothing hurts the real *You*. "You" will come out of it all right! If you open yourself to receive the

blessings He has in store for you, then death itself will not hurt you - it may even in fact be the ultimate cure!

Do you really believe this? - that you, as a person, are safe and secure in His protective care? - that, if you love the Lord, all things are working together for your good? Such an assurance will remove all fear of the future! Plan for the future you must, of course. Do everything reasonable, within your competence, to make things come out well. Say: "This is the project I am working on, Lord, this is how I want it to go. You know already, Lord, whether it will work out or not; and if you know it will not work out, I can trust you to make other and better arrangements for me. Maybe my intentions are wrong, Lord, my plans too self-centred. If so, please show me how to make a better plan, more in line with your will. Thank you, Lord!" Note here that you are using your imagination positively to produce the best possible results; and this can have a powerful influence on the situation, even on the physical level; we don't know precisely how it does, but we know it does. By the same token, the negative use of the imagination can have a powerful adverse effect. This is what worriers don't seem to realize, that by worrying they are actually helping to bring about the troubles or failures or disasters they so greatly fear. Evil spirits from hell are well aware of this, and one of their principal aims is to get you to use your imagination in this dangerous and destructive manner. They nudge us and egg us on, suggesting all sorts of things that might fail or go wrong, trying to persuade us to visualize the expected disaster as if it were actually taking place in all its grizzly details. Such thoughts on our part make it almost impossible for the Lord to help us; they drive away our Guardian Angels, God's messengers to us, and leave us alone in the gloating company of those evil ones whose sole aim is to destroy us, and who have power over us just to the degree to which we are thinking negative thoughts. A sense of *Guilt* or *Failure* is one of the things they insinuate into us; they remind us of all the mistakes we have made: stupid, foolish, idiotic! They make us utterly disappointed in ourselves; we feel we are a mess, on our way to perdition. When the devil carries a man off to hell because of his evils, you can be sure the devil put them in him in the first place, and got him to accept them as his own! The thing to do is to send the devil packing, which you can always do if you want to, in God's name. Remember how Jesus said: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" And we can say the same, if we find our imagination drifting into anxiety and worry, "Get out, you! I don't want any part in you! I am the Lord's child, I am in His keeping! All will be well, all will be very well!" And then, if you are in bed, roll over into another position, make yourself comfortable, relax every muscle (and check up carefully to see that every muscle is relaxed!) ; fix your mind on some Psalm or other passage from God's Word which you know by heart (if your mind wanders, pull it back again!) ; feel yourself in your loving Father's arms, and go off to sleep. In the morning you will wake up thinking: "How ridiculous for me to worry like that over such and such a thing! It will probably never happen. And if it does happen at its very worst, what of it? So what? I am in the Lord's hands! All will be well, all will be very well!"

It isn't only in bed that you can obtain help from the Lord in this matter of worrying. Any time is prayer time; and a habit of "tuning into God's radio channel" during spare moments throughout the day can keep you constantly in the security of His presence and in an atmosphere of peace. Worry can be caused by too much attention to externals; in other words, by putting values in their wrong order. If we saw the correct relative importance of everything in God's eyes, we might not worry nearly so much. It is because of our ego that temporary things, our possessions and our physical bodies, seem so important to us. Place the Lord in the centre of your life, and you will soon find that the only treasure you value is in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupt and where thieves cannot break through nor steal. That is the only safe-deposit with absolute security!

As for the future, why do we think it is so desperately important? It isn't really, you know! Our culture is future-oriented, but we should be much better off if we ceased to bother about it so much. If it were so important, the Lord would let us see it; but He does not do so, because He wants us to live in the "now." He wants us to prepare for Eternity, yes; but Eternity is not in the future, it is a continuous succession of "nows." In our culture we devote so much energy to preparing for the future that we lose all capacity to enjoy the present; and when the future comes for which we have been so anxiously preparing, we are still getting ready for another future, until we die; and then perhaps it is too late. Make all reasonable preparations for the future, of course; but confine your feelings, your emotions, your joys and your sorrows, to the *Present*. Learn to live fully in the present, savour it, give it your full attention, for it is the only little bit of time which, at this moment, is actually yours. Remember what I said about the animals and birds: they never worry, but take life as it comes. And remember what Jesus said, in one of the best-known but least observed passages in all literature, "Take no thought for the morrow (or, be not anxious about tomorrow) for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matthew 6:34). And again: "Take no anxious thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink? or, wherewith shall we be clothed? - for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

16. Jesus in the Boat

Jesus Christ was Son of God and Son of Man. He was divine and human. As a human being, he had to grow up and mature, and suffer limitations, just like any other man. But every now and then, increasingly often as he grew older, his consciousness would slip over, right beyond human ken, and he would do things which no mere man could do.

The incident of the storm on the lake illustrates the two sides of his nature; and, coming as they did in immediate juxtaposition, they seem to have caused his disciples the utmost astonishment. First, there was Jesus the man, tired out, physically and emotionally, from hours of teaching in the tropical heat. As evening came, he desperately needed rest; he must be alone for a while in the peace and quiet of nature. So he asked his fishermen disciples to take him across in one of their sailboats to the other side of the lake. The eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was practically uninhabited, save for a few remote pagan villages. It was bare scrubland, a fringe of the Arabian Desert. There he would be able to enjoy a peaceful night's rest. So weary was he that he lay down to sleep on a cushion in the stern of the ship. Hush! The Master must not be disturbed!

But Nature thought otherwise. The Sea of Galilee is notoriously treacherous. It occupies a deep rift in the mountains running north and south. The winds blowing across it hardly touch it; but if they happen to veer round into the line of the trench, they roar through it as down a funnel: and woe betide any sailboat that doesn't get its sails furled within minutes! The disciples had long experience of these sudden squalls and they were legitimately afraid. It seems to have annoyed them that Jesus was apparently oblivious of the danger, lying there fast asleep despite the whistling of the wind, the battering of the waves, and the water sloshing over the side and rapidly filling the ship. "Master," they cried shaking him perhaps, "carest thou not that we perish?"

Then came the extraordinary transformation. From being a weary human, fast asleep, Jesus rose to his feet and addressed the wind and the waves in a voice of authority and with a commanding gesture: "Peace! Be still!" Instantly the wind ceased to blow, the waves subsided, and there was a great calm. Now the disciples were more afraid than ever, but with a different kind of fear: fear of the

awesome presence of God in their midst, whom even the wind and waves obeyed. And the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

They had already realized that Jesus possessed strange powers. One morning, some months before, after they had fished all night and caught nothing, he had said to them, "Let down your nets"; and when they had done so, against their own judgment, they had taken such a big catch that their nets had broken with the weight! But... to get up and command the wind and the waves, and be obeyed, that was an act of God, not of man! Some months later, according to Matthew, Jesus demonstrated his power over the sea in an even more spectacular manner, by actually *walking on the water*. He urged Peter to walk along with him. Peter set out, but lost his nerve, became afraid and began to sink, at which Jesus had said: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

These fleeting glimpses which the disciples had of Jesus operating from his divine nature, give us some idea of what Jesus is like today. For, after the crucifixion, his human nature, stripped of all limitations, was "united with the Divinity of which it was begotten." Resurrected entire from the sepulchre, body and soul together, Jesus declared to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." He still has the same love and compassion. He still helps his disciples in the same kind of way. He is a partner with us in every enterprise, however hazardous. He is sleeping in the stern of every vessel, however rough the passage.

Sleeping? How can the glorified Lord Jesus, the Divine Jesus as he now is, lie asleep? Well, of course, he cannot sleep now! He has overcome, outgrown, all limitations such as weariness and exhaustion. But he still *appears* to be asleep, until we summon him to our aid, until we say in the depths of our extremity: "Wake up, Lord, and save us, or we perish!" Do you think it would be a good thing, if Jesus were always awake and active in our situation with his divine power, a kind of Prospero, touching everything with his magic wand, so that trouble was barred from us, nothing ever went wrong, we were insulated? We should have a nice easy time, no doubt: carefree, no responsibilities, everything going smoothly; sunshine and blue skies, the lake always calm, and just that soft wind to billow out our sails and carry the ship along without our having to use the oars. (Sounds like a TV commercial!) But, if life were that easy, should we grow or mature? Our selfish ego would go unchecked, and we should just drift sweetly and easily, without resistance, down to hell. We know, in training our children, that if we do everything for them and give them everything they want, satisfying their slightest whim, they grow up selfish little brats. "Spoiled children" we call them, and spoiled they will be! So, Jesus deliberately withholds Himself from us, up to a point. He places us in a state of equilibrium between heaven and hell. We have calm weather followed by squalls. Angels give us words of encouragement, after which He allows evil spirits to insult us. Our moods are like the waves of the sea, ever on the move, up and down. We are seemingly left to our own resources; thus we develop a sense of responsibility. We must caulk our ship so that it does not leak; we must master the techniques of sailing and navigation. We must learn the signs of the weather and how to follow the stars. If Jesus were always available to waft us to our destination by a touch of magic, we should never concern ourselves with any of these things. Life would be much easier, but we should learn nothing. And how dull it would be!

Science and technology are already going far toward making life dull in this way. Take photography, for instance. With the old-fashioned cameras, it used to be a challenge to take a good photograph; and what a joyous sense of achievement when the picture came out well! But with today's automatic cameras which do all the thinking for you, you get a perfect picture every time, and what's the point of that? In the old days on the farm, when water had to be fetched from a stream or a pump, and wood gathered and chopped, and kerosene lamps trimmed, and cows milked by hand, there was

work for everyone in the family, including the children, who consequently felt needed and important. Our teenagers today are bored to death, and go on drugs to relieve the monotony! Boredom is the cause of much of the mal-ease in our contemporary society and is due to the handing over of so many of our tasks, our routine duties, and the minor decisions we used to make, to the automatic machine. Life has become far too safe and easy.

As for the fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee, they have been equipped them with outboard motors, thus abolishing sails and oars. Squalls still cause danger, but the Israeli scientists will doubtless learn eventually how to control the weather, redirecting the winds, carrying the rain into the desert where it is needed, and perhaps pouring a heavy plastic foam on the waves to keep the water calm. But will the fishermen be any happier? Probably not. Happiness does not come from outer circumstances but from within. It depends on spiritual weather conditions, not physical. It comes from a satisfactory handling of our spiritual storms, which originate in a region beyond the reach of technology: the region of feelings and emotions, of good and evil, love and hate, heaven and hell; a region where Jesus alone has absolute authority. And Jesus deliberately hides himself at the bottom of the boat. He does not push himself forward. He waits till we cry, "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?" Man's extremity is God's opportunity. At our invitation, he awakes, rises in full majesty, and calms the storm with a gesture and a word. "Peace! Be still!"

As we make a habit of claiming the Lord's protection and entrusting ourselves to his care, he may go into active partnership with us in the handling of the ship. He will not take over the control; that will be our prerogative. He will see that we remain at the tiller. But he will advise us and tell us what to do; and we shall be wise to follow his advice, as the disciples did against their own judgment when he told them to put down their nets, and they made that amazing catch. So he may say to us, during the storm: "Furl your sails, tack this way, swing her around," or whatever. There will be a beautiful partnership between us and Jesus, and this is life at its very best: we working with him. He will not have to calm the waves. The storms may even become more violent; but we shall be able to handle them better, because He will be very much awake, working with us.

Most of us have not yet reached this stage in our development. We are still, shall I say, in the early days of our discipleship, when we want to do everything unaided. Jesus is our Master, sure! But it has not yet occurred to us that He can help us in any practical way. He is fast asleep, we are carrying Him in *our* boat. He talks well, but He can't really look after Himself; we have to look after Him. Now there is a storm brewing; but see! He is lying there unconscious of the danger. We shall have to try to wake Him up. "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?"

Unfortunately, that is still the attitude of many of us towards Jesus, in the churches, in the economic field, in politics, in our personal lives. It does not occur to us to let Him take over, or even that He *could* take over if we let Him! The storm increases in violence; we are desperately afraid. "What will become of us? What will become of the human race? The whole world is in danger! We shall all be destroyed!" It is, of course, right and appropriate that we should *do our best* to control our situation, as far as we can. God has given us intellectual and physical gifts, which we should use to the utmost of our ability. We should spare no efforts to survive the storm in our own strength and navigate the ship to the desired haven. We must act, Swedenborg says, *as if* everything depended upon ourselves, yet we should be fully aware, all the time, that *in fact* we are utterly dependent on the Divine Providence of our Lord. This realization will remove all fear from our hearts. We should do the best we can, and then say: "Master, I have reached the end of my tether. You take over now!"

What a joy and comfort to know that Jesus is with us in the boat, even though seemingly asleep! - and that He has all power in heaven and on earth! Jesus is in the war areas of the world; He is in the

White House and on the Hill. He will respond to our nation's call, as soon as we seriously make it - even before! "Before they call I will answer," says the Lord through Isaiah, "and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isaiah 65:24) "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." (Psalm 46)

I guess we are all afraid of something, sometimes. What do you fear most? We are not likely to be in danger in a storm at sea; in fact, most physical dangers have been removed from our ordinary daily lives, thanks to science and technology. But as I look around I see that almost everybody has that little devil of fear somewhere in his breast. There is fear of the future - of old age, sickness, want. There is fear of other people, what they might do to us; fear that someone might get ahead of us, or take something that we should have; fear of not being acknowledged or properly appreciated, or given our due. Then there is fear of ourselves, our own weakness and inadequacy; fear that we might not make the grade or measure up to what people expect of us, or what we expect of ourselves. All these fears are instantly put to rest if Jesus is standing in the boat. "Peace! Be still!" he says, and there is an immediate calm.

How about fear of other people and what they can do to you? All this fades into insignificance if Jesus is with you in the boat. Someone gets ahead of you or takes something you think you should have. What does it matter? Suppose you are not properly appreciated - so what? The Lord loves and appreciates you! Luxuriate in His love, and the rest becomes unimportant. That goes also for our fear of *ourselves*. He knows our weaknesses and inadequacies, and He loves us in spite of all. We don't have to "measure up" to anyone. There will always be someone cleverer than we are, or more attractive, or richer, or more successful. But on the other hand there will always be someone less clever, less beautiful, less rich, less successful; and that is perfectly in order. Just be content to be yourself, a child of God.

Our whole value system changes when Jesus is with us. We no longer crave the satisfaction of our worldly itches, but instead seek our joys from the Lord; they are there for the taking. Evil spirits leave us in disgust when they find we are ignoring them. We experience a wonderful feeling of peace. "Perfect love casts out fear." "In quietness and confidence is our strength."

In just such a way can Jesus calm the tempest in each of us. And eventually, as we work alongside him in the boat, we shall reach the final stage. *We shall no longer need the boat!* We shall be able to walk with Jesus on the water! Even though the wind is boisterous, we shall not be afraid, for the Lord will stretch out His hand and hold us. Then at last the waters will be at peace forever, and there will be a calm such as we have never experienced before. We shall be filled with a deep awe, and shall worship Him, saying: "Of a truth thou art... not just the Son of God, but God himself!" God-with-us. The Creator Himself in human form.

17. The Invisible Providence

I suppose it is because of the insecurity of our times, that there has been a fantastic upsurge of interest in horoscopes, fortune telling, tarot cards, dream interpretation - anything that purports to enable us to catch a glimpse into the future. I have no doubt that the future is *there*, somewhere. We are assured that the Lord can see it. He, being outside time, can look into time at any point, past, present or future. He can see at a glance where you will be, and what you will be doing, in twenty years' time, or a thousand years' time. The Lord could easily let us see into the future if He wished. But He knows that if He did so, it would be impossible for us to grow and develop spiritually and become angels.

Just imagine what would happen to this world if everyone could see into the future. The human race would just about grind to a standstill. If you knew exactly what was going to happen to you, and how you would react, during the next twenty-four hours, and the next twenty-four years, all spontaneity would go out of life, and you would just act out the foreseen motions like a robot. You would drift along on the current of predestination, and how boring it would be! Like seeing a movie through the second or third time: it all seems rather pointless, since you know exactly how everything is going to work out.

What would become of our projects if we could see into the future? If Ben Franklin had known the laws of electricity beforehand, where would have been the thrill of his experiments with the kite? If James Watt had been familiar with steam engines, what interest would he have had in the bouncing lid of a boiling tea kettle? Where would be the spirit of adventure as we edged our way into the future, discovering things as we went? Just imagine a Presidential Year, with its campaigning and party Conventions: where would the fun be, if we all knew ahead of time who the next President would be? Not only would the fun go out of life, but, more important, we should lose our free will.

Man's development as a spiritual being derives from his exercise of freedom and rationality. Consider freedom for a moment. Of course we are not free to do just anything we like; but the Lord gives us definite areas of freedom, and our characters develop according to the way we choose to act within those areas. Maybe the Lord could have created us perfect: angels and archangels from the word "go," unable to think a mean or dirty thought, in love toward Him and in charity one with another. Perhaps God did make man like that in the beginning; but He also gave man freedom, and we know what man did with it, and where he has got himself with it at the present day. We are born on a dunghill, and each one of us has to decide for himself what he wants to become, and struggle upward back into the estate for which he was originally created, as a son or daughter of God. It needs to be done with man's willing cooperation, because forced love is no love at all. Man works within the areas of his free will, and the Lord then takes over and completes the job - tightening, loosening, adjusting, pulling down, building up, as required. Why doesn't the Lord let us see Him at work? Because, if we could see what He is doing, we should probably oppose it with all our strength, and hate Him, and turn away from Him. For, believe it or not, most of what the Lord does, simply negates what we have done! He turns our structures upside down, taking the emphasis away from where we have placed it, putting it somewhere else, and generally changing the character of our work till we can hardly recognize it.

We, being materialistically minded, think principally in terms of making a success of our worldly lives, getting our own way in everything, being admired and honoured by our peers, and obtaining financial security for our old age. These are the aims we have in view, toward which we devote most of our time, effort and thought. But the Lord has quite different aims for us. To Him, these things are of secondary importance only. Obviously He wants us to stand on our own feet and develop wills of our own, but only so that we can turn to Him "as of ourselves," and freely renounce the fleeting pleasures of this world in favour of the inexhaustible joys of heaven. It is the heavenly treasure He wants for us, which is infinitely superior to the earthly treasure we seek. So, in many cases, though not all, Providence works in direct opposition to our wishes; therefore we deny Providence, attributing everything to blind chance or bad luck. Better that way, than that we should attack the wisdom and love of God!

Especially does the worldly man deny Providence when he sees the wicked flourish as the green bay tree. "There you are!" he says. "The unscrupulous get on in the world! Look at me. I'm strictly honest in my dealings. I'm a God-fearing man. And see what I get! If there's such a thing as Providence, why

don't I get a bigger slice of the cake?" If such a man realized what was really good for him, he would see that he was far better off through failing in his worldly ambitions than he would be if he got everything he wanted.

People are like plants in a garden. Some flowers, nasturtiums for instance, thrive best in a rocky sterile soil with the minimum of nourishment. Others, such as vegetable marrows, need the richest possible humus. Roses have to be cut back, whereas other blossoms need to be left alone. The gardener knows the individual needs of each species and treats them differently according to their natures. So with us. But we have to be unconscious of what He is doing, or we should accuse Him of injustice and hate Him. There are some people who have a golden touch, who seem to succeed in everything they put their hand to, without even trying. If they enter a sweepstake, they always get a prize. They just sail through life, and we think "How happy they are!" Well, these are the ones who need an easy and pleasant life for their maximum development. There are others who labour from morn till night and seem to achieve nothing. But in their own way they may be progressing spiritually just as fast as the so-called lucky ones. All of us have our lives custom-built for us by the Divine Providence, to give us the maximum opportunity for spiritual growth.

Someone told me the other day that this doctrine of Providence was only a "Rationalization of failure." O.K., perhaps it is, if by failure you mean worldly failure. What it does is to reverse one's values, making very little of worldly success or failure, but a great deal of spiritual growth. There is no harm in seeking high positions for oneself or acquiring wealth. What is evil is the lust of power and dominion, or the lust of possessions. It is against these two hellish motivations - love of self and the world - that Providence is ceaselessly working. So He has to operate in secret, invisibly, because these evil loves are innate in us all.

Swedenborg says that many people who are evil at heart speak favourably of God and Providence when they first enter the other world after death, presumably because they think they will get on better if they do so. But when they find that God and Providence are opposing their evil desires and intentions, they turn against God and blaspheme Him, and finally regard themselves as gods. So on earth men would oppose and blaspheme God if they were aware that He was working against their most cherished aims.

As an illustration of the secret operation of Providence, consider the human body. We are free to control our bodies to a certain degree. We can move our arms and legs, and perform wonders by the control of our hands and fingers. It is up to us what food we eat and what drink we imbibe - we can even become intoxicated if we wish! We can focus our senses; we don't have to take in sense stimuli if we don't want to. ("Two men looked out from prison bars; one saw mud, the other saw stars.") Certain of our emotions are more or less under our control. These powers are necessary in order that our bodies may be a projection of ourselves, able to take us around and do what we want to do. But, owing to the wise provision of the Creator, most of our bodily functions are not under our control. Our digestive systems, our blood and nerve systems, our heart beats, are all unconscious; even our breathing is only partly under our control. If we had the handling of the metabolism of our body, we should doubtless make a complete mess of it! As it is, we strain our bodies to the uttermost, and God has to put us to sleep for seven or eight hours every night, so that He can put things right again.

Even then God cannot always cure us, because our physical bodies come under the laws of nature, which operate strictly according to the principle of cause and effect. This raises another whole aspect of the subject, which must be taken into account when we are considering the doctrine of Providence. All of us are living within the framework of nature, which is predetermined and fixed in its processes and operation. In our illustration of the flowers in the garden, the garden itself functions

according to its own built-in laws, the chemistry of the soil, the effect of sun, rain and air, irrespective of which plants are planted where. Then there are bacteria, molds, funguses, worms, insects of all sorts, contributing to what we call the balance of nature, which man upsets at his peril. It is of Providence that the laws of science (which God created) should operate in a constant manner, even if so-called "natural disasters" sometimes result; otherwise the whole setup would fall to pieces. God does not interfere with His own natural laws. He has ordained them for very good reasons; without them our majestic universe could not function. It is by discovering these laws and working with them, that man can develop a sense of responsibility for himself and his environment. The whole situation would be chaotic if God kept changing or suspending the laws of nature for special cases. This He will not do; but He does provide that each of us can have the maximum opportunity for benefiting spiritually from our contacts with our natural environment, in whatever situation we find ourselves. Evidently, then, the circumstances of our outer lives are not very important, one way or another. The important thing is OUR REACTION TO THEM.

Whether we are rich or poor, lucky or unlucky, healthy or ailing, strong or weak, clever or not so clever, there will be plenty of material available for the building up of an angelic character. And the Lord is with us, close to us, though mercifully out of sight, striving constantly to wean us away from our evils and draw us to Himself. The appearance is that we are doing it on our own, because only what we do in freedom, as of ourselves, can become part of us and have any permanent effect on us. We must act as if everything depended on us. We must take the initiative. We must exercise our best judgment in all things. Only when we ourselves are acting the best we know how, can Providence benefit us to the maximum degree. But: "If we do our best, God does the rest." We can safely leave the outcome to Him.

Man's inability to see the operation of Providence in the present and future was demonstrated to Moses when he wanted God to show him His Glory. God said, "I will put thee in a cleft of the rock as my glory passes by, and I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:22, 23) We can see God's back parts in the past if we want to, and the regenerating man takes delight in seeing evidences of Divine Providence in past events. One can see such evidences even in wars and natural disasters, which can contribute to the spiritual welfare of those who want to be regenerated. Particularly can one see the operation of Providence in one's own past life. But in the present? Hardly at all!

I say "*hardly* at all," because I do believe that, as we progress spiritually, a kind of intuition tells us that God is working with us. Though we cannot see His face, we feel the pressure of His hand upon us. We ask, "Which way, Lord?" and His hand seems to edge us this way or that. Thus, by waiting on the Lord over a considerable period of time, we become so aligned with Providence that we always act in harmony with it. This gives us an enormous increase of power and effectiveness, because it brings us into partnership with the force that created and runs the universe. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." As for the future, cannot we leave it safely to the Lord? It is a kind of insult to Him, at any rate a lack of faith and trust in Him, to be continually worrying about how things are going to turn out. Saul went to the Witch of Endor, and the gloomy forebodings he got from her so unnerved him that he lost the battle and tried to commit suicide. All too often, when people do get what they believe is a glimpse of the future, it is only some evil spirit tempting them to their undoing. Far better not to bother your head with such things! We are living in dangerous times: so what? Do the best you can in the present, and the future will look after itself. Even the time of our death is under control; the Lord knows when it will be, and all provision will be made for it.

The natural man is quite uninterested in seeing evidence of the operation of Providence in the past, but is desperately eager to see it in the future. On the contrary, the spiritual man delights to see Providence in the past, can feel it in the present but does not want to see it; and, as for the future, he prefers to leave that entirely alone, trusting in the goodness and wisdom of God.

So I will end by quoting Swedenborg's *Recipe for Contentment*, which, in a sense, is his rendering of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, especially the part about lack of anxiety for the morrow.

Recipe for Contentment

"Those who trust in Providence, though they have care for the morrow, yet have it not; for they do not think of the morrow with solicitude, still less with anxiety. They are of unruffled mind, whether they have the things they desire, or not; nor do they grieve at loss. If they become rich, they set not their heart on riches; if they are raised to honours, they do not regard themselves as more worthy than others. If they become poor, they are not saddened; if they are lowly in rank, they are not cast down in mind. They know that with those who trust in the Divine, all things follow on to a happy estate in eternity, and that everything that befalls them in time is conducive to that end." (AC 8478:4)

18. Our Daily Manna

"Manna" is a Hebrew word meaning "What is it?" It is a question - a question which was asked implicitly every time this "bread from heaven" was named. "*What is it?*" And, indeed, almost everything to do with this manna was a puzzle and a mystery. It could be baked and boiled; but when the sun shone on it, it melted away. And just consider the point about the quantity gathered every day: no matter how much anyone gathered, or thought he was gathering, it always worked out to be exactly the right amount, neither more nor less. If, however, it was not all eaten that day, and some was left over until the morrow, it bred worms and stank. The meaning of this was clear enough: they were to be content with what the Lord provided for their daily needs, and not be anxious about the future. There would be an exact sufficiency for them all.

Each day is a kind of life in itself. We are born in the morning when we awake from sleep, and we die in the evening when we go to sleep again. We come into this daily life with what we have assimilated from our previous days' lives, and we take with us into the future what we have made of it today. Only today is real, actual, open to us, available, alterable. Today is placed upon the bench for us to work upon. The past exists in our memory, and the future in our imagination; only what we do today can affect our lives. Today is our field of operation; here our freewill can be exercised. Today is the one single point of our lives which is in our own hands and we can do something with it, for good or ill.

When we go to sleep at night, the Lord takes over. He straightens things out, smoothes down some of the sharp corners, suggests answers to problems nagging in our subconscious, and recharges the batteries, as it were, for another day's living. If there were no sequence of day and night, waking and sleeping, we could not endure, let alone progress. Keeping people awake for long periods, with noise and bright lights, is a form of torture too terrible to contemplate. Thank the Lord that, unless prevented by the evil will of man, "The Lord giveth his beloved sleep."

Swedenborg informs us that the angels are directly conscious only of the present. There are no clocks or watches in heaven, because there is only one time - the present. Of course there is sequence, one state giving way to another, one thing happening after another. The angels have memory and imagination, much more keenly than we have. But their memory and imagination only function when

required in connection with the work in hand, to which their whole attention is devoted. That is why they can, and do, live to eternity without getting bored. People think it would be dreadful to live to eternity. They say sixty or seventy years of life in this world is long enough; but they are thinking from *time*. Let them get absorbed in some intense activity that interests them, some hobby maybe, and time will disappear for them, to such a degree that they will have to be fetched to the meal table! That is the kind of interest in the *Now* that angels enjoy to eternity. It *is* eternity for them: a succession of present experiences, each one of which absorbs their whole attention, but is forgotten when they move on to something else. Fortunate are we if we can achieve something of this single-minded absorption in the *NOW*, here on earth! I have often experienced it, and I expect you have too: perhaps while gazing at a beautiful scene in nature, or listening to good music, or being with a loved one. In every religious experience, when worshipping the Lord or praying to Him, we slip out of the fixed dimension of time, into eternity. But also in our daily work, if it is congenial to us. I am sorry for the clock-watcher! His day must drag dreadfully. My advice would be either that he should change his job, or else change himself in relation to his job, so that he can lose himself in it, and not be continually wishing for closing time.

Most of us have toyed with the idea that we should be better off somewhere else: in a different place, even a different country; in a different job; perhaps with a different married partner. There is always the urge to change one's situation. And sometimes, quite obviously, a change of situation is good, even necessary. But don't bank too much on it! Wherever we go, we take ourselves with us, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is we ourselves who are the cause of the trouble. There is something in us that reacts badly and must be humanized and got under control, softened down, sweetened up. And it may be just for this reason that unpleasant situations are allowed to develop around us and within us. They are medicine which our loving Father is administering for our good. We are inclined to laugh when our children struggle against taking medicine. Take it like a man!

When Jesus sent forth his disciples on a missionary journey, he said: "Into whatsoever city ye enter and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you." And, "In the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as are set before you." (Luke 10:7) Would you be prepared to eat anything that was set before you? I have been offered food in foreign countries, the very thought of which has made me want to throw up. Unrecognizable bits of meat, parts of animals which we throw away as offal. Half-bad food covered with flies. I was once offered a cod's eye on a fork! Does our Lord mean we must not be squeamish over our food, but must eat whatever we are given? Or is he speaking of spiritual food, events that crowd in upon us in our daily life, situations in which we find ourselves, some agreeable and attractive, others very disagreeable and unattractive? They have all been given to us for a purpose, and each situation can benefit us if we take it in the right spirit. Accept things as they are, with the responsibilities and duties and obligations they bring with them, pleasant and unpleasant. Use them all for the nourishment of your soul. But don't go out of your way to get involved with concerns which are not your responsibility and which you cannot alter. "Go not from house to house."

Fortunately not all the food offered to us is unpleasant. Much of it is delicious, like "coriander seed, or wafers dipped in honey." The manna was very tasty while they were eating it. They were only in for trouble if they left it over until next morning, when it bred worms and stank. This means, I take it, that we should not carry over into the future the emotions associated with situations that are passed. Often we do this sentimentally, trying to recapture the "good old days" as a form of escapism, to avoid confrontation with the realities of the present. Some mentally sick people live in a fantasy world of the past, and in order to be cured they must be brought back into the reality of the present. The emotions of today must be associated with today's situations, not with romanticized memories of

the past or dreams of the future. The same applies to unpleasant, negative feelings. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," said our Lord. On no account should we carry over feelings of annoyance, anger, resentment or guilt from day to day or from year to year. Events which took place twenty or thirty years ago; mistakes we made, hurts we suffered, should not be allowed to arouse in us a sense of shame, self-criticism, humiliation, indignation and resentment whenever we remember them. These situations are past and done with. Many of the people involved in them are dead anyway. Nothing exists any longer in connection with them except our memories. They are no longer real, only fantasy. Those little bits of manna left over from yesterday are crawling with maggots. The sensible thing to do, if you turn up any such putrefying morsels, is to say, "*What is it?*" and throw them out for the birds!

There is a useful saying in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Before going to sleep at night, think of anything that has happened during the day that has remained unresolved, and settle it in your emotions once and for all, so that it will not bug you anymore. This is not easy. Often it is very difficult to do, if the thing has affected you deeply, even impossible in your own strength. In which case, just hand it over to the Lord in prayer as you drop off to sleep. Think how wonderful He is, and gradually your own tensions will relax, your troubles will shrink into insignificance and fade away. The manna will melt in the sunshine of His glory, and you will be free.

Don't be anxious about the future. There will be food enough for tomorrow, as there was today, neither too little nor too much, just sufficient. Our daily ration will be meted out to us by our loving Father - "angels' food" as manna is sometimes called, food for the nourishment of angels. Eat it up and digest it, and it will carry you right through your wilderness wanderings until you reach the holy land.

19. Reinhold Niebuhr's Prayer

Someone has given me a pen with the familiar little prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr on it in gold letters:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

The more you look at it, the deeper its meaning seems to penetrate. All three of the clauses are so important, one hardly knows where to start in any consideration of them. I think I will begin with the last: "God grant us the wisdom to know what we can (and ought to) change in life (in our own life and in the world around us) and what we cannot change and should not attempt to change." Much unhappiness, frustration, guilt feeling and wasted effort are caused by our trying to change things which we cannot change: which are beyond our competence, which are other people's responsibility not ours. We are called "interfering do-gooders" and are accused of trying to direct the traffic or even "playing God." On the other hand, much unhappiness is caused by needless submission to disorderly conditions which we could improve if we set about it. With courage and persistence, one individual can have a tremendous influence for good in the world. So, if we find anything wrong in our situation, we must consider very carefully whether we should, or should not, attempt to change it; how we could best improve it. To what degree, if at all, is it within our competence to right the wrong? Sometimes we shall decide that to attempt to change it would introduce even greater evils. For example, a doctor has to decide whether cobalt treatment might not have more harmful side-effects than the disease it is supposed to cure; whether the remedy might not prove worse than the disease. In such a case there must be some very careful weighing of pros and cons. Maybe our own wisdom is

inadequate, and so we must pray earnestly to the Lord for guidance, for the "long view." We must decide what is more valuable in His sight and what is less.

As for making changes in oneself, this is very difficult and gets more difficult the older we grow. Probably we cannot change our character much, the peculiar flavour of our personality; but we can change the direction in which we are operating. We can place our gifts at the disposal of the Lord instead of using them only in the service of self, and this will certainly make a big difference to the end-product. And of course we can take account of certain elements in our character which we have found to be annoying to other people, and prune them back or change them altogether, as an expression of our newly-developing love of the neighbour. Our personal freewill operates in a very restricted area; but that area is our growing-edge, it is the vital area of our lives, and we must take immense pains to choose wisely within it.

Now, the next point of importance is: having made up your mind what you should do, you must set about doing it at once, without shilly-shallying. Having set your hand to the plough, you must not look back. Remember Lot's wife! Do not hesitate on the grounds that people will criticize you, or that your security will be endangered, or that you will lose something you value. It is much more harmful to stretch yourself to the point of action and then not to act, than the action itself could possibly be. If repeated too often, such wavering of the will destroys your capacity for action. You become neither hot nor cold, like the members of the church at Laodicea, of whom it is said that the Lord would "spew them out of his mouth." (Revelation 3:16.) And so, says our prayer, "God grant us the courage to change the things we can change," provided our rational mind tells us that change is needed and desirable, and within our competence.

On the other hand, suppose change is impossible? - or suppose we decide that change is not desirable at the present time or in the present context? What must we do then? Why, we must bow to the inevitable, and submit to conditions as they are, with as much grace as possible. "God grant me the serenity to bear the things I must." This is particularly difficult in our Western culture, when all the stress is placed on action and achievement, and where we pride ourselves on being able to manipulate our environment. For an active person to refrain from action, because in some particular situation action seems impossible or undesirable, requires considerable self-restraint. Even to submit to pain without protest, as I have seen cancer victims do, or to be always cheerful when confined to bed or a wheel chair, is extremely difficult; but it is the kind of thing which, if handled well, can bring the greatest rewards of spiritual growth. The same applies to unhappy human relationships which, after careful thought, we have decided to stay with and see through. "Submission" it is called. The pain or evil to which we must submit used to be thought of as "God's will," imposed upon us by our heavenly Father for our good. "It's my cross," people used to say. Well, it may be your cross, but I doubt whether it is "God's will," any more than the crucifixion of Jesus was "God's will." Pain and suffering are from hell, and in themselves are the very opposite of God's will. He only permits suffering if and when He sees that to annul it would cause worse problems, and in the long run worse evils, than to permit it. By way of illustration, a father takes his child to the dentist, not because he wants the child to suffer the dentist's drill or forceps, but because he knows that the alternative would, in the long run, hurt the child much worse.

So, if unavoidable suffering comes our way, the thing to do is to embrace it cheerfully, without anger, fear or resentment; then it will yield you wonderful dividends, whereas otherwise it would do you harm. Suffering does not necessarily benefit you, as some people seem to think. Spiritual growth does not come automatically out of suffering. If we resent it and cry out against it, and shake our fist at God, it will embitter us and do us spiritual harm. Self-pity is one of the most corroding of human

emotions. The hypochondriac who is always telling you of his ill health and what he has to suffer, is reacting to his situation in entirely the wrong way. He is playing into the hands of the evil spirits from hell who want him to do just this, who are whispering into his inner ear: "Why has this trouble come to you? It isn't fair! You of all people don't deserve it! Be sorry for yourself! Tell everybody about it, and get their sympathy!" Self-pity is precisely what the evil spirits want to foster in us; they want us to "curse God and die." But you can defeat them by a complete change of attitude, making your sufferings stepping stones to heaven, instead of a greasy slope down to hell.

To the question: "How can I bear pain?" the answer might well be, "By not minding it so much!" Colonel Lawrence of Arabia used to puzzle his fellow officers in the mess by striking a match and letting it burn right out in his fingers. Others would try to imitate him, but when the flames reached their flesh they would cry out and drop the match-stick. They would ask him, "Where's the trick? How do you do it without hurting yourself?" He would reply, "The trick is, not to mind being hurt!" Don't allow yourself to be too conscious of your troubles. Worse things have happened before, and the world continues to rotate! Learn to relax. Tension is the wild animal's instinctive response to pain or fear; he is poised ready to plunge into the bush. But, if you have nowhere to plunge and cannot avoid what is coming to you, just relax and submit. Absorb the shock of the punches by going along with them, letting them come without resistance, pretending you are a bag of feathers.

Maybe we take ourselves too seriously, whereas a lighter touch would be more in keeping with our religious beliefs. Swedenborg tells us, in fact, that man is nothing but an empty vessel, with the power of choice as to what shall come into him. All our thoughts and desires come, not from ourselves, but from heaven or hell. They can do us good, or they can do us harm. A calm realization of this can neutralize any idea we might have, that we are too important to deserve to suffer, or, on the other hand, that suffering makes us important, that it is something to brag about! Pride is the basis of self-pity. It is pride that prompts us to boast to everyone how sick we are, and how much we are having to suffer. Think less of yourself and your own situation, and your health will immediately begin to improve.

Suppose you must live and work with somebody you don't like. You could leave him, obviously - you are a free agent; but you have decided not to leave him, for other important reasons. Very well; since this is the line you have decided to take, you must stop feeling angry and sorry for yourself on account of what you have to put up with. Stop chewing over in your mind how dreadful he is and telling your friends about it. Evidently you cannot alter this person's character - that is beyond your competence; but you can alter your attitude toward him. Look for some redeeming feature in his make-up, some positive element that you can go along with and enjoy; cling to this, and just close your mind to everything objectionable and painful and displeasing. If this is the bed you have decided to lie on, make yourself as comfortable as you possibly can!

This is the opposite of what we generally mean when we speak of someone "making a martyr of himself." The real saints suffered without seeming to suffer; they went cheerfully to their doom. A Roman Governor in one of the Provinces wrote to the Emperor and asked what he was to do with these Christians who did not seem to mind being tortured and put to death, who sang hymns of praise to their God with their very last breath. These people had conquered death, by following their Master and drawing on His resources of power. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" So we, in our minor way, with probably much less serious problems, can be victors without doing a thing, merely by submitting serenely to those unpleasant things we cannot change, or that we have decided not to attempt to change.

Accept life gladly. Drink the cup to the dregs; accept even the dregs without bitterness. Don't take your own feelings too seriously, they are not all that important. And, whether the sun shines or the storm rages, remember you are in God's keeping. He will protect you from harm, if only you will accept His loving care and submit yourself to Him. "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him. Cease from anger and forsake wrath. For the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." (Psalm 37)

20. Creative Suffering

For over a century now, scientists have been dedicating their labours to the alleviation of suffering, with such success that the average person in a civilized country today can go through life without ever experiencing severe pain. For example, the extraction of teeth used to be a form of torture, but I had a molar drawn a few weeks ago and felt no pain at all. Of course, there are exceptions. Child birth, for instance. And how about cancer, muscular dystrophy, and many other diseases that seem to be worse now than they used to be? Also we must bear in mind that while the medical doctors are working hard to improve the health of mankind, prolong life and relieve pain, another set of scientists are devising fiendish methods of destruction, by which the whole human race could be exterminated in a matter of hours, so that, in fact, life on this planet is more precarious today than it has ever been before.

Anyway, if you extend the meaning of suffering to include mental and spiritual pain, then we are none of us exempt. Suffering is one of the terms of our human condition. Our minds and spirits, as well as our bodies, are vulnerable. We can be hurt by our circumstances. Other people can hurt us, deliberately or accidentally. Our loved ones can hurt us. We can hurt ourselves, and it is surprising how much of our suffering is of our own making. The more sensitive we are, the more vulnerable.

The Lord does not want us to suffer - that's obvious! No loving father enjoys seeing his children in pain. On the other hand, pain can serve a use, insofar as it is a warning sign that something is wrong. I remember hearing a story when I was a child, about a man who was granted a wish, and his wish was that he should never experience pain. Later, he was sitting by an open fire and fell asleep, and a red-hot coal fell on his foot and burnt it away, and of course he never felt a thing. Too bad! Pain sends us to the doctor when something goes wrong; it is a useful indicator. But even when pain does not serve any specific use, it can, if properly handled, deepen our lives and give us opportunities for inward growth which would never come our way if everything was sunny and we never had a trouble in the world.

How true it is that, when everything goes well, we tend to ride lightly on the surface of life, and not put down any roots at all! In fact, we fail to be aware that there *is* a deeper dimension. I remember an incident in a movie where a father is trying to tell his son some serious item of information, but the boy is babbling away about his new girlfriend and the party they are going to; till in the end the father slaps him on the face, simply to get his attention - to get contact with him on a serious level.

It has been pointed out that the Word of God came to us out of the agony of a nation taken into captivity. If all had gone well with the Israelites, would there have been any Isaiah? If Jesus had never been crucified, should we have had the Gospels? Suffering not only brings us inner growth and awareness, but it can stabilize and strengthen character. Compare Peter before and after the traumatic experience of the crucifixion. Before it, he denied his Master three times, saying "I know not the man." Then, when the cock crew, he went out and wept. But only fifty days later, at Pentecost, this same Peter stood boldly before three thousand people, and lifted up his voice and

addressed them... "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:14, 36)

"The Old and New Testaments are the words, stories and prayers of men who suffer. They do not try to hide the fact that they suffer. They find suffering integral to life. They resist it, petition God to remove it, question it, endure it, rebel against it, accept it. Then something happens to them - something as radical as New Birth." (Elizabeth O'Connor, in *Our Many Selves*)

Having experienced suffering, and hated it, they eventually accepted it. That is the point. If you suffer, you must first try to discover what is causing your suffering; and, of course, you are obligated to do all you can to alleviate it. But if you cannot alleviate it, if you cannot ease it or do anything about it, *you must accept it*. Eat it up, digest it, extract the maximum nourishment from it, glorify it. Most of us cannot do this. When we are in pain, whether mental or physical, we bellow and scream. We become bitter, resentful, indignant. It hurts our ego most of all. If the pain comes from a broken relationship, we pour vituperation on the other person; it is all his fault! If we cannot blame an individual, we blame our circumstances, our society, our God.

I think one of the greatest tragedies in life is the loss of a child. The child is sick; the parents fight desperately to save it; they give all they have, but in the end the child dies. They look at the lifeless little corpse, and everything within them rises in agonized protest. "Where is God?" they cry. "There is no God!" I have heard of people who have become atheists because of such a loss. But, if suffering comes to you, and you accept it, live with it, make it your friend, you will find a kind of beauty in it. Superficial worldly ties will be cut, but spiritual realities will open before you in a new way, and the self-styled atheist may very well end up, in spite of himself, with a clearer conviction of the reality of God, than many who say their prayers daily but have never looked down into the depths.

The word "to suffer" used to mean "to bear with something," "to allow it" - as, "to suffer fools gladly," or "suffer little children to come unto me," or "suffer me first to bury my father." It might be a good thing if we could revive something of this older meaning of the word. In our western culture we say, "NO! Get up and fight against it! Resist! Tense your muscles! Grip hold of the arms of the dentist's chair!" But is this the best way? Jesus, I think, would advise otherwise. He would say, "Relax! If anyone wants to smite you, let him! Offer him the other cheek!" Even in childbirth, I am told, it is best to relax, and, when the pangs come, to cooperate with them rather than to grit your teeth and try to resist them. "Cooperation" is the key word. If you want to float on water, don't try to struggle, but cooperate with the water; see that you are in the right position, with your chin up and your face out of the water, then simply relax and float. A spiritually mature friend of ours is a bee keeper, and sometimes when he is mending the supers of his hives he accidentally hits his finger with the hammer. He does not resist the pain, but relaxes and lets it flow, absorbing it into his body; and he says it is amazing how quickly healing takes place. Also, of course, with bee stings.

Absorb the pain. Absorb the suffering and misery of life. Don't be so concerned with your own sensations. Don't resist the hurt, but accept it, whether it is physical or mental. This may take a period of time, varying with the individual and the nature of the suffering. Don't try to hurry it unduly, whether with yourself or others. The would-be comforter at the funeral of a child, goes to the bereft mother and says, "Don't be sad! The baby is in heaven, better off and happier than he would have been here!" The mother groans in her spirit and turns away. She is not ready yet for such advice. We need time to absorb our suffering if it is to benefit us. We must go out into the darkness alone and wrestle all night with the angel before we can get a blessing. The best way to help people when agony strikes is to sit quietly with them, listen to them, love them, help to ease the tensions, and just show that you care.

So far I have been speaking of suffering that comes to us unsought, as part of our human condition. We cannot avoid it, but we can control the way we react to it. And the way we react to it will make all the difference between whether it takes us to hell or heaven; whether we "curse God and die," or "bless God and live."

As we study the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we realize that, humanly speaking, His crucifixion was not inevitable. The gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus could easily have avoided any confrontation with the authorities in the first place, and Pilate would have been only too willing to release Him if He had been a little more accommodating. The early Christian martyrs could have avoided agonizing death, by compromising with the official requirements - throwing a pinch of incense on the flame burning before a statue of the Emperor of Rome. But Jesus had said, "Take up your cross and follow Me." "Submit to crucifixion, if need be, rather than compromise the high ideals of your faith." The conscientious objector who submits to a prison sentence rather than go out and kill his fellow man, is "taking up his cross and following Jesus."

Personally I have never had to suffer for my faith in any spectacular manner. But there is a kind of suffering we must all face, if we want to grow spiritually. It is painful to die unto self and be born again from God. The easy and pleasant way is to continue as we are, living according to the mores of our culture, accepting our society's values, going along with the establishment, applauding when everyone else applauds, and condemning what everyone else condemns; being indignant with everyone outside our group who doesn't think and behave as we in our group

think and behave. It is pleasant and easy to go with the herd, and do everything we are expected to do. On the other hand, if we begin to think for ourselves, and accept different values from those of our herd, we are snarled at, even bitten by our former hunting mates - and that's not nice. But it is what we must face up to, if we are to follow in the footsteps of our crucified Lord.

Evidently, then, pain and suffering will come to us as a result of our efforts to grow spiritually, because we shall have to accept and adopt values which are higher than those of our society, and are therefore unacceptable to our society. We must have the courage of our convictions, and "face the music" - not feeling superior to our society, or condemnatory toward anyone, but just quietly doing what we believe Jesus Christ would have us do, for the eventual building up of His kingdom. As more and more people act in this way, the conscience of society will be stirred, new values will be adopted, and the general level will rise. This is actually happening around us today; it is part of the coming of the New Age.

What if we try to do God's will but fail? The conscientious Christian who strives to live according to his faith but is frustrated by circumstances, suffers even more, perhaps, than the one who achieves his end but is crucified for it.

Frustration can produce real anguish, especially when we are frustrated in doing God's will. The husband or wife who sees so clearly what is best for his or her spouse, and tries so hard to force God's will upon the other party, but cannot do so... this is misery indeed! There may be two possible reasons for this situation. (1) You may be mistaken in thinking that what you want is God's will; it may be only your own will, and it is your failure to get your own way which is so humiliating to your ego. Or (2) God may have a greater tolerance for the other person's free will than you have. Or your timing may be wrong. God may be trying to get the message over to you, that at this particular time you should step to one side and let things be! In this connection I would remind you of our Lord's own words: "Resist not evil," and "Be still and know that I am God."

To stand back and do nothing, is often the hardest and most painful discipline in the world, especially when blows begin to fall on you which might have been avoided. However, what we suffer in this way can be creative in the highest degree. It brings us into oneness with God Himself, who suffers anew at the hands of His children every moment of every day and night. He is still on the cross in this sense, and the nails are being driven through His unresisting hands. Creation itself is like the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12, who is "travailing in birth, pained to be delivered." Suffering is all around us, and so long as it is creative, it is good. Death is all around us, and, so long as it is the doorway to heaven, it is good. Light and shadow are necessary for every perfect picture. There is no picture at all if the canvas is all white or all black; the harmonious contrast of light and shade brings out the beauty.

Night and Day

Winter and Summer

Weeping and Laughter

Sorrow and Joy

Crucifixion and Resurrection

Death and Rebirth

Participate wholeheartedly in the light and the shadow; accept them both, and rest content in both; and your joy will be full, and no man will be able to take it from you.

21. Meditation and Prayer

I have been reading lately about brain waves. Scientists can measure the frequency of the electrical vibrations in our brain by an Electro Encephalograph. When these vibrations get below a certain frequency (say, fifteen per second) you normally drift into a light sleep, full of dreams. At lower frequencies, a deep and dreamless sleep. Lower still, coma, such as is produced by an aesthetic. Some remarkable people, such as Yogis, have trained themselves to remain conscious during these low-frequency brain states. They can induce anaesthesia on themselves, and undergo major surgery, fully conscious but without feeling a thing. Probably you and I cannot do this, but it is fairly easy to retain consciousness when you would normally be in a light sleep and dreaming. You are then outside time and space, no longer bound to your physical body, but in close touch with your subconscious... Emanuel Swedenborg could induce a state of coma on his physical body, and be fully conscious in the Spiritual World, among people who had died as to their physical bodies but who were very much alive in a non-physical environment. In this region of "life after death," love and thought are the basic substance of reality instead of the atoms and molecules of physical matter. There is an appearance of time and space, but this is derived from states of love and thought and their sequence.

I am not suggesting that the ordinary run of people will ever be able to handle these very low-frequency brain waves, but all of us can slow ourselves down to the dream state and still remain conscious. We do it in day-dreaming. Day-dreaming is often mere self-indulgence and can be a waste of time, or worse! However, kept under discipline, the day-dreaming state can be the most creative and productive time of our whole lives. You relax yourself completely, and allow your bodily functions to slow down, including your breathing. Gradually your consciousness slips out of time and space into the inner spiritual dimension. Keep a careful watch over it, and see that it does not slip back again. This is not easy for most of us. It is surprising how few people, in this restless age, ever really sit still!

Here is something for us to work on. Relax all tensions in stomach, throat, eyeballs. Imagine you are sinking into the ground, or floating in a sea of nothingness.

In this state you can be in direct touch with the wonderful computer in your subconscious mind which controls so much of your normal waking life, and you can program it as you wish, clearing it of the undesirable promptings which cause your bad habits and unwholesome tendencies, and implanting suggestions which will bring you health and joy. Also, your brain is operating at its most creative level when you are in this hyper-relaxed state, and will produce solutions to problems which baffled you when you were consciously struggling with them.

More important is the fact that, in this condition of semi-drowsiness, if you send out waves of hatred, resentment, jealousy, revenge, or contempt, they will boomerang back onto yourself, by an immutable law, as Jesus Himself taught when He said: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again." On the other hand, if you send out waves of love, sympathy, healing and peace, these also will boomerang back onto yourself by the same law, and you will have a blessing...

I have still to mention the most important use to which this meditative state can be put: it can help us to draw near to God, and thus greatly enrich our prayer life. Meditation and prayer are not the same thing. People who do not believe in God, or who think they themselves are divine, can meditate but cannot pray. On the other hand, prayer is ineffectual without meditation. God is within us, deep down inside us, the "Ground of our being," as Tillich says. Therefore, we can hardly expect to reach Him in prayer unless we meditate. But for this purpose our meditation must be God-centred. So often it is merely an escape from the hard realities of life. Our minds drift into self-appraisal, self-glorification. We think of our past with nostalgia, especially remembering incidents in which we figured prominently; and look forward to our future, planning this and that, imagining what we shall do and be. God is upstaged, even forgotten. We say we will "confess our sins," but still it is our precious self that we are analysing, our own weaknesses, mistakes, humiliations. We say we will give thanks unto the Lord, but still it is our own happiness and pleasure that we are glorifying, not God's generous love. If our meditation is to help us in our prayer life, it must be focused entirely on God; and, if God is in focus, we ourselves and everything around us will be out of focus and slightly blurred - which is what you have in a good photographic portrait.

Prayer must be concentrated on God. If you were with the President of the United States, or the Queen of England, or some other great and famous personage, you would not waste time babbling away about yourself; you would be thinking about the important person you were with. So it must be if we are meditating in the presence of the Lord. You must lift yourself up into nearness with Him; let Him hold you and support you. Only when you are completely concentrating your attention on Him can you really communicate with Him: and prayer, as Swedenborg defines it, is "talking with God" - communicating with God and receiving enlightenment from Him. Etymologically, "to pray" means to ask for something, as when people used to say "I pray thee, give me this," or, "I pray thee, do this." But it is a mistake to think that prayer is asking God only for material things. God's blessing is what we want, the infilling of our hearts with His love and our minds with His wisdom. We need His guidance for the better living of our lives, and His strength to bear what comes to us. There is no harm in praying for material things, of course; you can ask your heavenly Father for anything that is important to you. But if you meditate deeply in your prayers, your requests will tend to be on that spiritual level, and material things will cease to be important.

Obviously meditation is necessary for intercessory prayer, prayer for other people. You must get through to them first! Go into the silence, and then concentrate your thoughts on someone you love, or for whom you feel compassion. Picture him in your mind's eye, and visualize him looking towards

you and seeing you. Then lay your hands gently on him, holding him. Pray earnestly to the Lord to bless him, to give him the very best that he needs; and the Lord's life will flow through you as a channel to your friend for whom you are praying. And, of course, you will be blessed also in the doing of it...

When I was in South Africa, our little New Church Mission of 5,000 members seemed to be stagnating, neither going backward nor forward. I felt it needed a spiritual shot in the arm. So my wife announced at the next annual Women's League Conference that she was starting a "Prayer Sisterhood." The members should undertake to pray for the Mission every Thursday morning at 6 a.m. Stamped postcards were to be handed out, and those who were prepared to take on this prayer commitment were to put their names on these cards and mail them to Headquarters. After my wife's speech, one of the African ladies came to the front and burst into tears. Asked what was the matter, she said they were tears of joy; this was the first time she had ever heard of a white person who understood about prayer! That was in November, 1960. In January, 1961 an indigenous African Church that I had never heard of before, applied to join our Mission. Others followed, and by the end of 1961 we had a total membership of 30,000 and a new vitality had come into every aspect of our church life. I could tell you much more but this is not the place for it; I mention it now merely to illustrate the point that when a large number of people are praying together for the same objective, no matter how scattered they are geographically, conditions are created in which miracles can happen. Not that we can force the hand of God - obviously! - but we can give Him a greater opportunity to work for His Kingdom in this heavily resistant mass of humanity which we call mankind.

Spiritual power is like atomic energy. It comes from God, and it is always available, but hidden from our everyday consciousness. Use it wisely, with love; do so in the immediate presence of your heavenly Father who is love itself, and your influence for good will be incalculable. And what a joy, this daily period of meditation and communion with God! There is nothing more calming and restorative than prayer.

"It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary rest."

It is like climbing Mt. Sinai, as Moses did to receive from God the Commandments of the Law, and to mediate between God and his fellow human beings. "And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the two tables of testimony in his hand, that the skin of his face shone." And thereafter he became the most practical, efficient and influential servant of God in recorded history, who took an undisciplined horde of ex-slaves and welded them into a nation under God which endured for centuries.

Meditation and prayer are not enervating; they are restorative, invigorating, revitalizing. The three disciples with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration could not stay up there indefinitely; they had to come down into the plain, and bring their newly enlarged spiritual consciousness into their future relations with their fellow men. You cannot truly love God without serving your neighbour, and you cannot truly serve your neighbour without loving God. Prayer and activity, labour and rest. Filling and emptying out. Both are necessary for the satisfactory life. Which do you find most difficult in your present stage of development? In our culture, "doing" is generally found to be easier than "meditating." Concentrate, therefore, on meditation and prayer and you will find yourself

experiencing the joy of heaven, even here in this world of sin. The Lord gives heaven to all who come to Him for it: who ask, seek, knock. Thank you, Lord!

22. Miracles and Magic

There seems to have been a great upsurge of interest recently in the supernatural: ESP, astrology, reincarnation, the psychic, the occult, oriental mysticism. This is probably a reaction against the cold logic of scientific materialism on which our society has been allegedly based since the turn of the century. Many people feel that science has somehow let us down. We were led to believe that science, through its advanced technology, would transform the world into a paradise, bringing "peace on earth, goodwill toward men," without our having to bother about giving "glory to God in the highest." In fact, science apparently ruled God out, and denied the very existence of supernatural or spiritual forces and phenomena, proposing to reduce all human behaviour to mathematical formulae. Well, it has become very obvious to us now that human behaviour is not governed by logic or mathematical principles, nor by sane rational arguments. People act on emotions more than they do on reason. Even wars are won, not by force of sophisticated weaponry (as was expected) but by the power of the human spirit.

As part of the reaction, science itself has begun to extend its frontiers of investigation. Scientists no longer assume that the universe is just a piece of elaborate machinery (as Newton supposed it to be); rather it is a structure manifesting mind, choice. Psychic phenomena are being studied as data. Even the old concepts of space and time have been questioned. Nobody knows for certain any longer whether a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, or whether two plus two really equals four! This lack of confidence in the rationality of the universe has permeated every branch of study. We can no longer assume that African witch-doctors are all humbugs and charlatans, or that Chinese acupuncture is something puerile to be treated as a joke, or that ghosts and hauntings and poltergeists are all figments of an over-excited imagination. Scholars and critics are beginning to look at the miracles recorded in the Bible in a new light. Are they so impossible after all?

We are asking ourselves: What is a miracle? A tape recorder or telephone would have been regarded as miraculous a hundred years ago... We say they are not miraculous because they operate according to scientific laws. But what is a scientific law? In fact, I believe that scientists will be turning more and more to the study of the inner reaches of the human mind, the so-called unconscious...

What, then, is a miracle? I would say that, in a miracle, power flows down from the spiritual world and causes matter to behave temporarily according to spiritual laws instead of the laws of physics. The case of Elisha and the widow's oil would come under the heading of a miracle rather than ESP. The oil went on increasing so long as the woman poured it out into her neighbours' vessels, and only stopped increasing when there were no more vessels to fill. Here the oil was behaving according to the spiritual laws of increase governing love, wisdom and such like commodities, which grow in the degree in which you give them out. The same applied to our Lord's feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Swedenborg would say it operated according to *Correspondence*: physical occurrences *corresponding* to spiritual ones.

Before our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world and glorified His humanity, correspondences from the spiritual world worked much more powerfully than they do today. The Red Sea divided for the Israelites, but drowned the Egyptians. The walls of Jericho fell at the blast of a trumpet. Fire came out of the ark and destroyed the people of Bethshemesh. A heathen altar exploded. Two hairy bears killed the children who mocked Elisha on account of his baldness; these and many other instances were pure correspondences. That kind of miracle does not take place today, because of the change in

the relationship between the physical and the spiritual worlds effected by the Redemption and the taking on by God of a Divine Human nature. In that sense the age of miracles is passed. But it is nevertheless still possible for us to open up a channel, so that increased spiritual force can pour into a situation and produce what we think of today as a miracle; or, if from hell, as magic.

Before I deal further with this, I want to touch on a specific branch of the subject, which is generally called "spiritualism," or, more accurately, "spiritism." By this we mean getting into personal contact with individual spirits on the other side. Techniques for doing this have been known through the ages. In the Old Testament it was called "having a familiar spirit," and was condemned absolutely. Witches who had familiar spirits, or men that were wizards, were to be stoned to death (Exodus 22:18, Leviticus 20:27, etc.). That sounds severe; but at that time hell was so strong that if the Israelites had not taken drastic measures to stamp out other-world communication, the church could never have survived, let alone acted as a means of holding heaven and earth together until the Lord came and "took over."

Swedenborg himself communicated with spirits as a matter of course; but in his case it came unsought. He resisted it for nearly five years until he was convinced beyond doubt that the Lord willed him to have such contacts for a specific purpose, and that the Lord was protecting him. And Swedenborg strongly warns his followers not to seek such other-world interaction, because of the dangers involved. He explains that there are spirits good and bad in close contact with every one of us. We attract or repel them by our own effort of will. If we cherish beautiful thoughts of love and gratitude, then good spirits, and even angels, draw closer. If we harbor evil thoughts of resentments and jealousy, then the good spirits have to withdraw and evil spirits take over, fanning our evils into flame and doing everything possible to ruin us. But good spirits are always there, doing their best to mitigate the influence of hell and win us back to a state of goodness and truth. The whole process owes its effectiveness to the fact that we, and the evil spirits who are with us, are *unaware* of what is taking place. If the evil spirits knew they had power over us, they would destroy us. They do not destroy us only because they think, while they are with us, that they *are us*, and so (apart from trying to make us more like ourselves) they love us as they love themselves! On the other hand, if we on our side deliberately seek contact with spirits, then the evil spirits recognize us as "other than themselves," and see us as fair game for their cunning. They impersonate, with great skill, any individual on the other side with whom we want to get into touch, until we are completely sold on the whole thing. Then gradually, not too obviously, they begin their destructive work. Hence it is that "sorcerers have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

Of course, it is theoretically possible to get through to *good* spirits; and when the Lord opens someone's spiritual eyes, as He did in the case of Swedenborg, and the saints who saw beatific visions, then evil spirits are kept away. But if you deliberately seek interaction with spirits, especially if you do so from mere curiosity, or to prove something you want to prove, then the odds are you will get through to evil spirits and not to good ones. Therefore you are well advised to keep away from séances and from the whole business of spirit communication. Be content with any insight the Lord gives you, but don't try to gate-crash into the other world for your own purposes. Then your guardian angels will have the best possible chance of protecting you and gently guiding you, without interfering with your freedom; and all will go well.

Some people ask about demon possession. I believe the only real demon possession today is what we have been talking about, where people deliberately hand themselves over to evil spirits. Otherwise, what may appear to be demon possession is probably the effect of a damaged brain, which would

come under the general heading of insanity. If a person is insane, his spiritual development is "frozen," as it were. If he goes insane at, say, fifteen years of age, he wakes up in the other world as if he were fifteen, even though in fact he may have lived on in a mentally deranged condition until he was eighty or ninety years of age. In other words, demon possession today does not affect a person spiritually; he is protected from its influence. This is one of the benefits that have come from the Redemption. Jesus Christ fought and conquered the hells, and made it impossible, from then onwards, for evil spirits to "possess" individuals on earth, except with the individual's free consent.

That is all I am going to say now about other-world interaction. Much more interesting to me is the fact that we can be channels of power from the spiritual world - not from any specific individual spirit, but from heaven itself, or, of course, from hell itself. And this is probably the real area of miracles and magic, as operating today. The simplest way to get power from heaven (or rather, from the Lord through heaven) is by *Prayer*. It can operate at any distance.

Miracles can occur *in relationships*. A marriage may be on the rocks; every human thing has been done to save it, but to no avail. Then God is allowed to work on the situation; a miracle occurs, and the couple live happily together ever after. To recapitulate: a miracle is when forces operate from God through heaven, which effect changes in our material lives which could not be produced by any physical force, or even by any psychic power emanating from ourselves. A miracle is an eruption of spirit into matter; and although we can be used as a channel for the flow of spiritual power, the Source must be God, not ourselves. The results need not be dependent on us, and will be unpredictable by us. We cannot command them; we can only invite them and open ourselves to receive them. They are not the result of any effort on our part, but depend upon a Divine intelligence and love, outside and above us. It is God who works miracles, no one else.

Have you had any miracles happen in your life? I am sure you have! If not, you haven't really lived! Expect a miracle, and one will probably occur. God's hand is not so shortened that He cannot redeem. He will touch us and bless us, if we bow expectantly before Him. And blessing is the highest form of miracle.

23. The Cripple at the Pool

Our Lord's question to the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda: "Do you want to be healed?" (John 5:6) must have seemed rather heartless and unfeeling. Fancy asking a cripple whether he wants to be made whole! The poor fellow had been in this condition for thirty-eight years. Most of that time, presumably, he had been lying under the porch, waiting in vain for an opportunity to get down first into the pool after the angel had troubled the water. Time and again, time and again, someone else had got in ahead of him, and come out cured, while he remained there in his old condition. His was a tragic case.

Or was it? I detect a note of challenge, even whimsical humour, in Jesus' question as the man whined out his hard-luck story. "Do you really *want* to be healed?" Just think, he had been sick for thirty-eight years. Longer than our Lord's whole life on earth. This man might have already been lying at the pool for five or six years when the Wise Men came from the east! Could he not have taken his turn in the line-up for healing at some time during all that time, if he had been serious? He said he had no one to help him into the water; but who had been feeding him? Someone must have been bringing him his lunch, and even perhaps carrying him to his accustomed corner each morning and removing him again at night - a regular routine. Why didn't the cripple ask this person to put him in the water at the appropriate time, and thus save all further trouble? No, depend upon it, our friend was a phony, a professional beggar. He had come to terms with his condition. He had settled into a fixed behaviour

pattern, in which his infirmity was an accepted feature. He didn't want the responsibility of an active life, but preferred to lie there all day long, watching other people getting healed by the score, but doing nothing about himself.

And I have a horrible feeling that many of us today are like that man. Physically? Yes, we have probably accepted and come to terms with a low condition of bodily health, which could easily be improved if we took ourselves in hand. But even more important is our corrupt spiritual state. In that area, most of us are cripples: maimed, halt, blind. Maybe we are regular church-goers (the five porches represent the church). For how many years have we been sitting passively in a church pew? Has it cured us of any of our spiritual infirmities? Compare yourself now with what you were, say, ten years ago. Has there been any improvement in the area of inner purity? Is your family life any happier? Are you more gentle and kind? - more willing to stand back and give credit to others? How about touchiness? Self-centred pride? Desire to get your own way, to dominate every situation? Worldliness? Unclean imagination? Quarrelsomeness? Bad temper? Oh, we are too complacent and self-satisfied, content to jog along as we are, confessing that we are "miserable sinners," but doing nothing about it!

At any rate, at least we know that we are sick, and so there is more hope for us than for those who never go to church and who think they have nothing wrong with them. The world today is largely secularized. People live apparently satisfactory lives outside the influence of religion; they feel no need for God, and would not know what you were talking about if you told them they should repent of their sins. They pass back and forth through the market place, with scarcely a glance at the five porches; they feel scornful toward the poor beggars waiting there for the moving of the waters. Yet these worldly wisemen may be desperately in need of healing without realizing it. There are diseases where the patient is starving but feels no hunger; is dangerously in need of sleep but feels no weariness; is astigmatic but believes he alone can see straight; is deaf but indignantly denies it; is lame but thinks he can walk and run; is actually a dead corpse but goes around pretending he is still alive! The world only realizes how sick it is when there is a major war, or a vast business swindle, or a Watergate. Those in the churches do at least acknowledge they are spiritually diseased, they are realists to that extent. They repeat regularly: "There is no health in us." They line up under the porches by the pool, awaiting healing. But, in all too many cases, nothing seems to happen! Would they be any worse off if they followed the secular drift, and spent their Sundays in bed, or cleaning the car, or playing golf? Frankly, the Church doesn't have the healing effect on us that it should do. Is it our fault, or the church's fault, or a bit of both?

Granted that the five porches represent the Church, then the Pool of Bethesda evidently represents the Bible, the Word of God, vibrant with healing power. Many individuals, down through the centuries, have been made, whole by plunging into those living waters. The process was foreshadowed by Naaman dipping seven times in the River Jordan to be cured of leprosy (II Kings 5:14); and is memorialized by the sacrament of Baptism. But, in my own personal experience in counselling, I do not think many people are healed that way today. Reading the Word is of incalculable help to those who are already converted. But it seems to me that the primary basic healing can best be effected, not by reading a Book, but by an encounter with *a Person* - our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is surely the point of His own rebuke to the Jews later that same day: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life (and it is true that they bear witness to me) ; yet you refuse to come to ME that you may have life." (John 5:39, 40) Reading the Scriptures is useless unless it leads us to the Lord.

Jesus, as a Person, is available here and now, with all His healing power. He can cure you without troubling about Scripture readings or the niceties of doctrine, which can come later on. He is standing by you, gazing down with pity, seeing you as you are. He is not deceived by our pretences. Perhaps He is even amused by our frantic efforts to put on a show. He calls our bluff with the simple penetrating question: "Do you want to be healed?" And if He finds that we are able to face up to the reality of the situation, He gives us the equally simple command, "Take up your bed and walk." He does not have to lift us and plunge us into the pool; there is a more direct way. Harken to His voice, and lift yourself up in obedience to His commandments, and go forward, and you will be made whole.

According to the language of symbolism or "correspondence," your bed is your ruling love, where you normally lie. Make a change in your ruling love; elevate it, re-direct it. Start living out the truths you already know (you will find you have plenty to get along with) ; infill them with love to the Lord and the neighbour. Set the machinery in motion to *go forward*, and you will find you can not only walk but run and dance.

Jesus is here. He will cure you today if you really want Him to. He says to you, Arise! Shake off your shackles, for they are of your own welding. Forget the inadequacies and complacency of the past. Elevate your motives, your inner self, to Him; and set forth running to the temple of God. You will be strong and well; and, after that, every day will be the Sabbath.

24. He Needed a Donkey

Aristotle taught that because God is infinite and perfect, He has no need of anything or anyone. Man needs God and strives after union with Him; but, according to Aristotle, God does not need man. He cares nothing for man, whether he sinks or swims. The Hebrew prophets opposed this view. They were not such subtle philosophers as the Greeks, but they knew from personal experience, beyond any doubt, that God was intensely involved in them and their affairs. He was the Good Shepherd who knew His sheep, and followed them in their wanderings with a patience that never failed. He agonized over them when they were disloyal to Him and got themselves into trouble, and rejoiced when they repented and turned back. *God cares*. A realization of this was the outstanding contribution made by the Hebrews to human thought. Only with such a concept of God's nature can we understand Calvary, when He acknowledged man's freedom to oppose and destroy Him; and the Resurrection, when He demonstrated how little His purpose of saving the world could actually be thwarted by man.

"*God is love*" we are told in His own holy Word. We all know something about love, and it has none of the static characteristics which Aristotle attributed to God. Love is outward-looking; it is never self-contained or self-complete. It needs others to whom it can give itself, who will voluntarily receive it. It needs others to cooperate with it in its ceaseless activity. If God is infinite love, He must be infinitely like that. He needs you and me. Aristotle's idea of God, though it sounds intellectually right, is in fact utterly wrong.

God needs me? That is a staggering thought! Almost overwhelming. Does it overwhelm me with pride? No, rather it overwhelms me with humility and a sense of unworthiness and inadequacy. Yet I know that, however humble my contribution, He needs it for filling out His infinite divine purpose. Think of the little Galilean lad in the lakeside crowd, with his bread and fish - his "sandwich lunch," as we might say: the Lord had need of him, and used that lunch packet to feed five thousand men together with their women and children. He needed water from the Samaritan woman at Synchar. He needed the widow's mite. And, in order to ride into Jerusalem on the Sunday before His crucifixion ("Palm Sunday" we call it) He even needed a donkey! "Go into the village over against you," He said to

two of His disciples, "and you will find an ass's colt, whereon yet never man sat; loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? ye shall say, *Because the Lord hath need of him.*" (Luke 19:30, 31)

The Lord's Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey was the very climax of His earthly career as Jesus of Nazareth. He was deliberately staging the literal fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Zechariah: "*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass*" (9:9). He was making a public demonstration that he was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah - "he who should redeem Israel." He was declaring to all who cared to heed Him, that He was the Saviour. Though somewhat cryptic, it was a definite assumption of imperious majesty, and was, in a sense, the peak point of His whole life on earth.

A thousand years previously, another excited crowd had followed a young man riding on a mule in that same valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. Jesus must have passed over the same stones and up the same steep lane to the Golden Gate of the temple. I am speaking of David's royal son, Solomon. "And Zadok the priest took a horn of oil and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save King Solomon. And they piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth shook with the sound of them." (I Kings 1:39, 40). And now, a thousand years later, but in the same place and in the same context, came Jesus riding on a donkey's colt. "A greater than Solomon was here."

And this earth-shaking, epoch-making demonstration of the mercy and glory of God depended for its validity upon a young ass. Could not Jesus have made His tremendous assertion without employing such a creature as that? A donkey! "Nature's walking parody of all four-footed things!" But how excellently that humble creature fulfilled its duty and its destiny! Things might have worked out very differently. An unbroken donkey is usually wild and uncontrollable. I had one given to me in Africa when I was a young man, and, although I could handle a horse tolerably well, this ass kept throwing me until I had to give up, with a broken finger and a dozen black bruises. But nothing like this happened when Jesus rode the "colt whereon yet never man sat." The people put their cloaks on its back for a saddle and set Jesus thereon, and apparently the little beast submitted peaceably, almost as if it appreciated the significance of the scene in which it was figuring so prominently. And the crowds tore down the leafy branches of the trees and strewed them on the path, while others, milling out from the city to meet them, waved palm fronds and cried, "Hosanna! Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

I should like to have been present on that occasion, to add my voice to the general shout of praise and glorification. Yet why need we wish ourselves back in Biblical times? Today Jesus has come again, glorious above all dreams of glory possible in Roman Jerusalem. As the angels declared in the hearing of Emanuel Swedenborg on June 19, 1770: "The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be forever and ever." This was the real thing, of which the Palm Sunday demonstration was but a limited foreshadowing. The New Kingdom, the New Age, is on its way in! And a great number of "asses" like you and me will be needed to carry the King upon our back!

This is God's world, yet the running of it is largely left to us. The Church is God's Church, yet the running of it is largely left to us. We are God's children, and the running of *us* is largely left to us! God, who is almighty and has all power in heaven and in earth, nevertheless withholds his infinite divine power in certain areas, giving us the responsibility of collaborating with Him, so that we may grow up as His children, and there may be a "Father-Child" relationship between Him and us. We must do our part, as of ourselves, yet knowing it is done from Him and for Him and in His strength.

In what areas are we to assume responsibility, and at what point do we hand over to the Master? Somehow we must find the middle way between the position of the practical atheist who takes the whole world upon his shoulders, and the hyper-religious man caricatured by Swedenborg, who stands with arms hanging limp and jaw open, waiting for the Holy Spirit to flow in. To illustrate how I think things should be, take the case of two commercial travellers. One is traveling on his own account, for his own business. He has full responsibility, because if he fails, everything fails. The other is agent for a large and reputable firm. He is personally responsible for the actual selling; but, beyond the duties assigned to him, he has no responsibility; everything is in the safe hands of his Employer. Don't you see what a lightening of the load results from the identification of his interests with those of his Employer? But he must make a total commitment of himself to the Firm, and fulfill his own responsibilities to the utmost of his ability within the limited area in which he has them. The donkey's job, when the Lord had need of him, was just to bear whatever burden was placed upon his back, and pick his way steadily and safely down the steep rocky slope of the Mount of Olives, and up the opposite bank of the Kedron Valley, in through the Golden Gate; nothing less, but nothing more. By doing this well, and leaving everything else to the Master, he was able to participate in the glorious fulfillment of prophecy, and the proclamation of the Messiah.

It is the same with us. The wider issues are not in our hands. They are the concern of the Master, and we can safely leave them to Him. If you find yourself worrying over the future of the world and civilization, or even the church, then you are more foolish than that donkey! How about your own personal future? You must take every reasonable precaution and make every reasonable provision, but beyond that you are not expected to go. People worry, worry as to what might happen in this or that contingency. Can't they trust their Employer to look after these things - especially considering that He happens to be their Father? Stop worrying over anything that is outside your own area of control. Do what you *can* do, to the utmost of your ability. No shoddy work there, no half-measures, no shilly-shallying or compromise, no feeble excuses, no shirking the issue. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do" (no matter how great, no matter how small) "do it with thy might." The Lord is depending on you for just that contribution to His great work of running the universe. He has need of you there. If you evade it... even if it is only giving someone a smile or a kind word, or dropping a resentment or a grudge... if you fail to do what you personally are called upon to do in the scheme of the universe; then, as far as you are concerned, JESUS WILL HAVE TO WALK INTO JERUSALEM. The Messianic prophecy will never be fulfilled, and you will die unredeemed.

25. Treasure Hid in a Field

At a recent retreat, we were able to devote a great deal of time to a study at depth of some of our Lord's parables of the kingdom of heaven. One which struck me rather powerfully was the parable of the treasure hid in a field. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." (Matthew 13:44)

We divided into small groups, to consider the parable. First, the obvious literal meaning of the story. What would the treasure be? Some said, "oil." Some, "gold, or diamonds." One suggested it might have been a robber's hoard: the robber had been caught and executed, and here was his pile of loot, lying perhaps for years, until some lucky fellow happened upon it. The finder is cunning; he does not inform the owner of the field that there is unsuspected wealth lying in his property. He covers it up; doesn't let on about it to a soul. Instead, he buys the field at the lowest possible price (probably telling the owner that it is worthless anyway); then, having obtained title to the land, he pockets the treasure!

Now, our group, particularly one member of it, was quite upset by the story. It was pretty sneaky for that man, having discovered the treasure, to hide it away again and pretend it wasn't there, so as to get the field at a low price! Maybe that is the way people act in business; such underhand methods are accepted as part of worldly prudence. But for Jesus to advocate it, and to say "The kingdom of heaven is like that"... well, it stuck in her throat. "Why did he hide the treasure again?" she kept asking. "Why didn't he open it up, and show it to the original owner of the field, and simply claim a share of it as 'finder's rights'? Wouldn't that have been more honest?" And I couldn't answer her!

But, as we began to consider the inner meaning of the parable, the point seemed to disturb her less and less, till in the end she admitted she had got right over her problem. Because Jesus was not talking in terms of oil, or gold or diamonds, or a robber's hoard. He was speaking of spiritual treasure: heavenly joy; the peace and sweetness of loving relationships with other people; faith and trust in God. We were all created as potential angels, and the wealth of heaven lies deeply buried in some remote region of our heart which we do not normally occupy. One day, when we happen to be going that way (reading some book, perhaps, or meditating deeply on our human destiny) we suddenly sense the presence of those valuable heavenly qualities, lying buried within us. Previously we had been completely unaware of them, but now, owing to our having reached a certain stage in our spiritual development, we sense heaven within us and recognize our potential qualities and the riches God has implanted in us. But wait! We cannot claim possession of that treasure as yet, for this whole area of our mind is alien to us, we have not obtained dominion over it, or made it our own. First of all we must "occupy" this area wherein the treasure lies; we must make it our own by exchange, or spiritual trade.

Please note that nobody else is really involved in this. Jesus said the man sold all he possessed in order to buy the field; but such transactions, on the spiritual plane, do not necessarily concern other people. Spiritual trade consists in exchanging something of inferior quality for something of superior quality. The reformed drunkard has exchanged the questionable pleasures of drunkenness for the true satisfaction of sobriety. Someone else trades his *hurt pride* for the freedom of not taking himself so seriously - he lets his pride go, and in exchange can sleep at nights. In each case of profitable trade, we have relinquished something of the lower self for something of the higher. It is a process which ends in the purchasing of one's soul. "What shall it profit a man," says Jesus, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" We can think of the soul in this sense, as being that part of us in which the treasure is hidden. At first we know little of it; it is somehow alien to us, beyond the bounds of our normal working lives, outside our *ego*. When we first go wandering there, it hardly seems our own!

It all works out somewhat like this. During most of the early years of our lives, we are engaged in developing our ego. This is perfectly in order. The ego is *ourself* - our separate identity, that which distinguishes us from other people and from God. If we didn't have an ego, God couldn't love us. That is why He created our ego. And the ego must be fully grown and mature before our spiritual development can begin. We must first be able to stand on our own feet. This is what we learn to do when we leave our father and mother and strike out on our own. We get a job, we amass possessions; we buy a car and a house, and start a family. Also, we achieve a certain status in the society in which we live; we acquire reputation and honour. People think well of us, they respect us. This is perfectly all right - *up to a point*. In my own life history I worked hard to achieve a certain standing in the ministry. I wanted people to think of me as a good preacher, a good writer, and so on. I was pleased when I got on influential committees, and disappointed when someone else was chosen in front of me. Till all of a sudden it dawned on me that this status, this worldly importance, didn't mean a thing! When I die, an obituary notice will be put in our church periodicals. It will be very

much the same as all the other obituary notices of all the other ministers who have passed on. It will be highly laudatory, as they all are. Then I shall be forgotten, as all the others have been, and a new generation of ministers will serve a new generation of people. I shall be in the spiritual world, where you will be also, and we shall have forgotten all about our little triumphs and achievements, and all that makes us feel important today. In fact, if our worldly achievements and triumphs and our worldly possessions are all we ever had to our name, we should be poor indeed in the future life, having left all these behind! The "rich" in the other world will be those who followed our Lord's admonition: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourself treasure in heaven." When Jesus said to the rich young ruler: "Sell all you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow me," He was thinking of the need of the rich young man to divest himself of the burden of *things*, and of worldly dignity and importance, and perhaps of self-righteousness, which showed itself in his complacent remark: "All these laws have I observed from my youth up." He had great possessions, no doubt; but he does not seem to have walked very often in that area where he was when he spoke to Jesus and asked how he could inherit eternal life. At any rate he does not seem to have noticed the treasure hidden there, or he would most certainly have gone with joy and sold all that he had and bought that field!

I think it is true to say we cannot own that field where the treasure lies hidden, and at the same time a lot of worldly junk. Hence the need for divestment or exchange, which, as we have seen, is spiritual trade. It is all a matter of the order of our priorities, what we value most. However, it is not necessary for us to make a big fuss of stepping down. You don't have to make a public statement: "Look at me, everybody! I am renouncing the world; I am resigning from all my positions of honour." Nothing dramatic is required. What happens is simply that you find yourself thinking: "This worldly honour and status, the high opinion people have of me and that I have of myself, such achievements as I have made... these are meaning less and less to me. All I really want now is a sense of the Lord's presence with me, and a loving relationship with other people."

Suppose you work for some cause, and expect recognition, but somebody else gets the credit that should have come to you. Your first reaction is to feel hurt, and shout out, and draw attention to yourself. But is it worthwhile? Do you need that bit of ego-food at your present stage of development? Surely not! Think: Perhaps that other fellow does need it! Say to yourself: "I'm glad he got the kudos, because it will help build up his confidence and self-esteem, in which he is weak at the moment; I don't really need it and I can afford to let him have it." That is the kind of thing that could be meant by "giving to the poor" - feeding the ego of someone who needs it, who is starving, whereas you are adequately fed.

Ego-food is like any other kind of food; you need the right amount. If you have too little, you wilt away and die; if you have too much, you are sick. Just think for a moment: Do you have enough for your spiritual health? Do you have enough praise and support to satisfy your basic needs - enough success and achievement? If so, why bother to try to get more? More than enough won't make you any happier! You have reached the point when you should begin to relinquish any further desire for worldly applause or power or any other kind of ego-food, and start searching instead for the heavenly manna - food for the potential angel growing within you. For, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" - if he makes an outstanding success of the temporal, but loses the eternal?

Another thing I want to say about the treasure hid in the field: we didn't put it there! It is a free gift to him that owns the field. It is not for sale, we cannot assess its value and purchase it. We can argue about the value of the field and eventually buy the field; but the treasure comes "without money and

without price." This is absolutely basic to all our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," provided you do the necessary preparation. You must "ask, seek, knock," and you must recognize its value when you find it, and you must accept it as a gift. On this point our so-called Protestant Ethic goes badly astray. We are told that we cannot attain to any spiritual grace unless we work hard for it; but that is a contradiction of terms! "Grace" is something good and desirable that comes to us as a free gift from God, without our having to earn it. Here we touch the main difference between the Old Testament and the New, between the LAW and GRACE. Worldly prosperity has to be earned; ego-food has to be earned or it doesn't satisfy us; but the true spiritual treasure is given us by the Lord without any bargaining, as a loving Father gives gifts to his children. Obviously we have got to do our part by accepting and receiving it, and we don't even see it until we are in some sort of harmony with the Giver of all good gifts. We must obtain possession of the field where the treasure is, yes. We must pay the full price for the field, but only for the field. The treasure is not included in the inventory; it is pure grace.

Let us assume, now, that the man or woman of whom we are speaking (maybe you, maybe me) has taken possession of the field. Eureka! The Treasure is ours! We start digging it out and examining it. There is more and more of it. No end to it. But it is not all of equal value; some of it, we feel, might be exchanged for something even better - not, of course, on the worldly plane, but on the spiritual. (There are value-priorities on the spiritual level, just as there are on the material). And so Jesus followed this parable of the Treasure Hid in the Field with another parable, concerning the Pearl of Great Price. This has the same general meaning, but it carries the principle further. First you must sell all worldly possessions in exchange for your soul, and then you must begin to perfect your soul, relinquishing what is of lesser value in exchange for what is of *supreme value* - the Lord Himself. "The Kingdom of heaven," says Jesus, "is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:45, 46) Think about this for a few moments in relation to yourself. At what stage are you in your spiritual Pilgrim's Progress? Have you taken possession of the Field that is your soul? Are you living a heavenly life, according to the Laws of the Kingdom?

Meditate on the treasure the Lord has given to you. Can you name any of the pearls that He has given you specifically? Try to identify five, ten, twenty specific pearls. I think you will discover that the centre and focus of all your inner wealth is the Lord Himself and His great love for you. Have you yet reached the stage when you can gladly relinquish everything for that One Pearl of Great Price?

26. Whose Yardstick?

One of the characteristics of our modern Western culture is its insistence that you have got to succeed, excel, get to the top of the ladder. Almost from the day of a baby's birth he is pushed forward and encouraged to take the next step in his development. And what rejoicing there is, if he can stagger about on his feet at nine months instead of the traditional twelve! At school he has got to make high grades. His parents make financial sacrifices so that he can take private lessons outside the curriculum; and, if this proves too much for him, he is made to feel guilty, and his parents feel guilty. They have failed the goddess of our cult, the goddess whose name is Success.

And in business, of course, it is the same thing. You have got to succeed. If you are of the aggressive type, and enjoy elbowing your way through the crowd to the front, then there are tremendous rewards waiting for you. But, if you can't make it, and fall down, or fall out, then... heaven help you! In a way, it is a reversion to the jungle, "nature red in tooth and claw." How much better, one would think, to live in a tribal society, where individual prowess is not taken account of, but all the members

of the tribe think and live and work together as a team! But it is no use repining, for Individualism is with us to stay. It has produced our affluent society, and has taken men to the moon. But at what a cost, in crime, mental sickness, and sheer alienation!

Is there no way out? Are we caught up in it helplessly, hopelessly? No. There is absolutely no need for us to compete in the rat race, if we have the courage and personal integrity to keep out of it. What are the rewards it offers? What is this "success," which we are supposed to covet so desperately? Well, the winner in the race is placed in a position in which he can boss people around and make them do things his way; and he is enabled to have more gadgets in his house than the people next door. That's about it. But does success make him any happier? In my experience, no. Of course you need to have *enough* of the essentials of life, to enable you to function satisfactorily (and "enough" is defined differently by different people); but once you have enough, by your standards, then further successes will not improve your state of mind. You will discover that happiness depends on other factors, which the world does not take into account; it stems from those areas of the heart and mind which we call "spiritual." Happiness cannot come from the world at all; it comes only from heaven, from God.

Let us, then, stop measuring ourselves by the yardstick of our culture. Let us stop bothering about what the world thinks of us, or expects of us. The rewards it offers are just not worth the taking. Instead, let us live as the Lord wants us to live. Live up to His standards, not the world's. Measure yourself by HIS yardstick, and you will begin to progress in the direction of His joy and peace, and the happiness of heaven. "Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me," says the Lord, "and eat ye that which is good. Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." (Isaiah 55:2, 3)

Someone says: "Yes, we agree with all this theoretically, but we have children and others dependent upon us. We must succeed for their sakes." But won't this only perpetuate the same system with them? Won't it pass on to them the same heritage that has come down to us: a sense of need to succeed? Maybe what we feel obligated to give them is not the best thing for them; maybe we can best serve them by failing!

Someone else says, "Is individualism wrong, then?" No, it isn't wrong in itself. God made you an individual, and so He must approve of individualism. Every single one of the billions of men and women He has created has his or her own particular characteristics and potentialities; there is no mass production. But the values God sets for each individual are based on the needs and potentials of that individual, not on the world's standards of power and wealth. God's interest in us lies in what we ARE, not what we do or achieve or possess. What God wants for us is that we shall always be improving on what we *are*. And, anyone can do that.

Take, for example, someone born with a physical defect, say blind or lame, or mentally retarded. By the world's standards, such a person is ruled right out. He cannot compete, he cannot survive in the concrete jungle. His state is hopeless! But, by the Lord's standards, such a person has just the same opportunities for spiritual growth as anyone else. The prize of happiness and contentment is well within his reach. He is not handicapped at all in the arena where the Lord's game is being played. The Lord's prizes are competitive, yes; but in His game you compete *against yourself*, not against other people; so that, whereas in the world's game only one person can win first prize and all the rest must lose, in the Lord's game it is theoretically possible for everybody to win first prize.

All this is rather precisely laid out in the parable of the talents. Here, three different men were given three different sums of money, "to each according to his several ability." The man with five talents and the one with two talents each doubled what they had been given, and so they each received the same reward. "Well done, good and faithful servants, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make each of you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord!" The servant who had been given only one talent had scarcely sufficient capital to start a business, and this was not expected of him. However, he could have invested the money and received interest; and if he had done that, I am sure he would have been given the same reward as the other two: "Well done, good and faithful servant... !" Instead, however, he made no effort at all, supposing that his case was hopeless; so he ended up in outer darkness, weeping and gnashing his teeth. (Matthew 25:14-30) If we compete against ourselves, doing the best we can in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, then we can gain first prize. The condemnation comes only if we fail to improve on what we are.

Another point: we are already in the arena where the Lord's game is played - the game of Spiritual Growth. Those who measure themselves by the world's yardstick nearly always think they could do better somewhere else, or in some different set of circumstances. "If only I lived in New York, or California, or Hawaii!" "If only my parents had not expected so much of me and pushed me so hard!" Or, "If only my parents had pushed me a bit harder!" "If only I were stronger, more aggressive." "If only I had had a better education." "If only my parents had left me a million!" But, in the Lord's eyes, none of these changes would make the slightest difference. You can *grow spiritually* just as easily where you are now as you could anywhere else, in your present circumstances as well as in any other. Remember, you are not competing against other people, so they cannot have any advantage over you. You are competing only against *yourself*; therefore, any change you make, to be effective, must be made in yourself, in your own values and priorities. You must open yourself to the Lord's inflowing life, bringing the Kingdom into your own heart and life. *You* are the person I am talking about now, not somebody else. Seen in this way, Christianity is the most individualistic religion in the world.

It is also possible to judge or assess a person's *life* either according to the world's standards or according to God's. Consider our Lord's own life as Jesus of Nazareth. According to the world's standards, it was a ghastly failure. I am sure that Judas did not expect Him to go under like that, without doing anything in His own self-defence. Right up to the very last moment, when He hung on the cross and cried out "It is finished," His disciples, and doubtless many others, were waiting for a miracle: for fire to come from heaven to destroy the Romans, for twelve legions of angels to come to His rescue. "Let us see whether Elijah will come and save Him," they said. But no, nothing happened. Jesus proved to be just a poor tortured human being, like any other victim of the cruel execution system of the Romans. A failure! But you see? By God's standards, things were very different indeed! Physical failure was an important element in the spiritual triumph! To have been saved by a miracle, even at the very end, would have vindicated Him before the world, which was exactly what His humiliated disciples wanted, so that they could say, "There you are! We have been proved right!" But that would have been to bow before the goddess Success, and success which springs from apparent failure is most dear to the hearts of her votaries. No, Jesus did not want the world to be able to measure any success at all, only failure... so that the whole success, His mighty triumph, His total victory over the hells, could be measured by God's yardstick only. And, because His success was solely and entirely on the spiritual level, He could establish a spiritual church on earth, which could grow indefinitely; whereas, if He had enjoyed any material success, to that extent the church would have been tied down to the material plane.

So we come again to the point that Christianity was founded on a paradox, and wherever it has been active it has turned the world upside down. "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall surely find it."

27. Changing Altitude

Swedenborg has some very helpful things to say about the levels or altitudes of the human mind. He enumerates six altogether, corresponding to the three heavens and the three hells. While we are on earth our consciousness can switch from one level to another, like going up and down in an elevator from one floor to another in an apartment building; but as we grow older we get more or less settled in one particular level where we feel most at home; this when we die becomes the level of our home to eternity. The point I want to make now is that our impression of the events of everyday life can be very different, and our reaction to them will be different, according to the level or altitude from which we regard them.

This can be illustrated by the enormous difference in the view you get of the world if you are on the ground, in an airplane, or in a space ship. The first time I went up in an airplane was in 1923 when I flew from London to Amsterdam. That was a tremendous experience for an impressionable teenager. For one thing, all the hills and valleys which served as dividing lines or barriers between groups of people were now flattened out, and the broad outlines of the whole country began to appear: cities, towns and villages lying in proper relationship with one another. The channel of sea which separates France from England (or should I say, England from France?) now seemed very narrow indeed - scarcely an interruption. France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, all one! What a difference a higher viewpoint can make! Another thing that tremendously impressed me was to see the clouds from above. Probably you have had this experience and are aware of it as a parable of life. From below they appear to be dark and threatening; but seen from above they shine and glisten, reflecting the glory of God.

If the difference in perspective is so great from an airplane, how about a space ship? I have not yet been up in a space ship; but we have all seen the space view of our earth through the TV camera. The astronauts see it as a little ball floating in a vast area of empty space. Continents and seas are vaguely discernible through the veils of cloud, but all details have disappeared. It is just our little earth; and the astronauts have told us how cosy and inviting it looks from space - their "home planet." That planet belongs to the whole human race, to all of us who are living together on it. Seeing it from this highest of all altitudes, one wonders why we should be hectically manufacturing weapons of destruction and doing all we can, apparently, to make it uninhabitable; why the members of this human family should be killing one another off, taking sides on the question as to whether property should be owned individually or collectively (capitalism versus communism). It would be difficult to explain such strange behaviour to someone from another planet who had only seen our earth from the point of view of outer space.

In the Bible there are many examples of "seeing things from different altitudes"; for example, Moses on the mountain top receiving the ten Commandments from God while Aaron in the valley was organizing the worship of the golden calf; Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree to get a better view of Jesus; and Jesus and the three chosen disciples on the mount of Transfiguration while the rest of the disciples were trying in vain to cope with the lunatic child down in the valley. Remember also the Sermon on the Mount: "Seeing the multitude, Jesus went up into a mountain; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him; and He opened His mouth and taught them."

As I have said, so much depends on the level or altitude from which one is operating. And this certainly applies spiritually. By the ground level I mean the ordinary worldly standpoint: the level of materialism, of secular education, of making and spending money, of gadgetry. This is sometimes called "The American Way of Life," but of course it is found in every country, even in Moscow and Peking! Maybe Americans have worked at it harder and more effectively than any other nation, so that the common man here today can enjoy a higher standard of living than even nobles and royalty could enjoy in past ages. For the first time in history the problem of food production has been solved for everyone. On the material level we are the heroes of a success story.

Unfortunately, however, we do not seem to be much happier as a result of this new prosperity and power. There probably never was a time when there was such tension, insecurity, anxiety and general unrest; so many nervous breakdowns, and even so much fear (though this seems strange in the most powerful nation on earth) ! Our art and music are depressing in the extreme; our theatre is morbid with a strong leaning toward mad-house scenes and sex perversion, and there is a universal feeling of hopelessness, and gloom, leading to so much frustration that our young people are going around smashing everything up, "just for kicks." Loneliness and alienation in overcrowded cities produce alcoholism, drug addiction, smoking, over-eating, over-working, frantically rushing around. The reason for all these troubles is that we have made material prosperity an end in itself, instead of a means to the development of spiritual values. On the natural plane, love of self and love of the world operate, and this is quite all right in the early stages of our development. The child must love himself and must develop a sense of property. This inevitably leads to a certain amount of quarrelling in the nursery, which we can excuse on the grounds of immaturity. The trouble arises when people carry over their loves of self and the world into adult life; then the quarrels of the nursery become lawsuits and family feuds, endless bickering between married partners and between parents and children, and, on the international scale, wars cold and hot.

The whole purpose of life on earth is to learn to switch over from love of self and love of the world, which are natural, to love to the neighbour and love to the Lord, which are spiritual. If we are not achieving this switch-over we are simply wasting our lives. We may be doing fine in other respects, but we are wasting our lives. This gives us a clue to the paradox that people in the more affluent nations, like the U.S.A., Britain and Sweden, are apparently the most prone to a sense of insecurity and fear; it is because their selfhood and love of possessions are given so much opportunity to flourish unchecked. In the poorer regions of the world, people haven't much time to worry about themselves and their own importance; they are too busy trying to get enough to eat. And since they possess so little, and have almost no control over their destinies, they find it comparatively easy to develop a trust in the Lord and his providential care. That is probably why there are so many more suicides, neurotics and scared people among the "have" nations than among the "have-nots," whereas you would naturally expect it to be the other way round. Are the members of the "have" nations then in an impossible position? Of course not! If our characters develop in the way they ought to develop; that is to say, if we grow and mature in the way the Lord intends us to do, then we shall be much better off because of our superior worldly education and our freedom from material want. I believe that material prosperity, freedom from want, high educational qualifications, and plenty of leisure time, will be basic to the way of life characteristic of the New Age.

But we must rise up to a higher level of viewpoint and motivation. We must outgrow the tawdry pleasures of "things," the excitements and stimulations of our old ground-level existence. Forget your own importance, your ego; cease to be anxious about your status, your rights, the image people have of you. Cease to be emotionally involved in your possessions, whether many or few. Once you lose the itch of praise and property you experience a release from all anxiety and fear. You are free of the

nagging ache of shyness, self-consciousness and envy. You are free of the sick hurts of resentment that people "don't appreciate you properly" or pass you by. You are free to do or say what your conscience dictates, regardless of unpopularity.

And if, eventually, you can rise yet higher, to the Lord's own viewpoint, loving Him with heart, soul, mind and strength and seeking His kingdom, then you will achieve such security in Him that nothing the world can do will have any adverse effect upon you, not even torture or death itself. You will take up your cross and follow Him gladly to Calvary Hill - which is to be free indeed. The Lord will surround you with the redemptive power with which He overcame the hells, and you will be safe even from temptation. That is the seventh or Sabbath day of rest. Shall we have to give up our old life and commitments in the world? Not necessarily, though there will undoubtedly be marked changes. Many things which before were important to you and which you sought with all your heart, will henceforth cease to interest you. Other things will now interest you much more than they did, and these will yield you a far deeper and more enduring satisfaction than any of your old concerns could ever have done. Life will continue. Your daily routine will not necessarily change. But you will be changed.

Not only will you have different value judgments in your own life, but you will see things differently in the world around you. From your higher vantage point you will see good where others see nothing but evil; you will have hope where before you had despair. The crime in the streets of our cities, the clash between black and white, the labour unrest and the endless strikes... you begin to see these in their long-range implications, as the birth pangs of the New Age, as the crystallizing out of an entirely new kind of relationship between employer and employee, rich and poor, parents and children, and between the races, between the nations. Barriers are being broken down; mountains and hills are being laid low and valleys are being raised, as I observed in my first view from an airplane; and the most threatening clouds are seen to have a silver lining. The decline in religion is seen as a shifting around in preparation for an entirely new kind of religion, which will be much better than the old. Oh, the airplane view reveals so many unexpected and previously unobserved beauties; good in other people who had previously seemed hopeless; good in situations which had previously seemed wholly bad; hope and joy in place of misery and despair. And if we can but rise to the outer-space view, which takes everything into account: past, present and future, and the needs of all people, preparing them for eternal life... why, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." It has to be, it cannot be otherwise with a God of infinite love, wisdom and power.

I will end with a slightly different version of my analogy of altitudes. Imagine you are someone living in the basement of a house, going in and out by the back door from a slummy alleyway full of garbage and filth and broken bottles. You are eating scrappy meals, because it hardly seems worthwhile making anything better, and life is rather shabby and sordid. Yet upstairs in the same house, on a higher floor, with the entrance in the front, your Father is regularly providing sumptuous banquets. There in His home the furnishing is exquisite, and everything is designed to promote serenity and refreshment of body and soul. You have the key to this upper apartment, and you are always welcome there. Why not go up? Why stay down below, eating husks?

The level of release is within you, the altitude of Christian love and of communion with the Lord. Rise up to this. Deepen down to this. Spread out to this. Life will take on glorious new dimensions. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. And in this kingdom, in a higher ether, you will be secure and at peace.

28. Savouring the Things of God

Jesus turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man." (Matthew 16:23)

The unexpected violence of Jesus' rebuke must have stunned poor Peter, who, after all, had only been trying to shield his beloved Master from danger. A few moments previously, when Peter had declared that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16) he had been highly commended. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," Jesus had said; "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (The word "petros" means a rock.) "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

What had Peter done to deserve this sudden change, from a blessing to a curse? It wasn't what he had *done*, but what he had *said*. In fact, neither the blessing nor the curse belonged to Peter the man, but to the two statements he had made. (1) "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (a statement expressing a belief which, if properly followed through, will admit anyone into the kingdom of heaven). (2) "God forbid that you should go to Jerusalem, at such a time as this, and suffer many things, and be killed. This shall not be!" It was this kindly concern of Peter's, and his appeal to Jesus to steer clear of trouble, that came to Jesus with all the force of a temptation from Satan.

When you make a seemingly innocent remark to a friend, such as, "Don't do that, it might hurt you," and he over-reacts with unexpected violence and show of emotion, you can be pretty sure that an inner battle has been raging in that man's soul over this very thing, and you have unwittingly blundered onto the battlefield. Jesus was human as well as divine, and all his consciousness was on his human side. Do you think he *wanted* to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be put to death in agony? Would *you* have felt happy at such a prospect? Would you have gone through with it, when it could easily have been avoided? And now, in the midst of our Lord's indecision and hesitation and tormenting fear, when he so desperately needed reassurance, he asked himself, "Who am I?" - and he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They answered, "Some say, John the Baptist, some say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets." This doesn't help Jesus much, so he comes nearer home. "Who do *you* say I am?" and Simon Peter declares, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." *That* was what Jesus needed to hear! Blessed be that glorious assurance! Very well, he would go through with the ordeal, which he realized was necessary for the redemption of the human race. So he began to tell his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, and be put to death, and be raised again the third day. *He would see it through!* And it was at just that point that Satan prompted Peter to make his blundering appeal, "Be it far from thee, Lord! God forbid that you should suffer and die in such a dreadful manner!" No wonder Jesus turned and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" He went on to explain that, not only must he himself suffer these things in order to enter into glory, but so must they. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and follow me. For whosoever would save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it."

Turning back now to our Lord's words to Peter: "thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God," the word "offence" means a stumbling-block, something that trips you up and prevents you from progressing. To "savour" means, of course, to enjoy the taste of something. Peter was preferring the things of man to the things of God; or as the R.S.V. has it, he was "not on the side of God, but of men." A struggle is going on all the time in the heart of each one of us, between God and Satan, or, if you prefer it, between heaven and hell. We are in equilibrium between the two tremendous opposing forces, and can choose which side we shall support. The choice often comes to us somewhat in this way: *either* ease and pleasure and security and avoidance of all trouble and risk;

a good time in this world with plenty of fun, all on a downward slope leading to the rubbish heap; *or*, a tough upward climb with much self-denial, facing up to the eventual abandonment of all one's selfish ambitions and the painful whittling away of the ego, until one is nothing in one's own sight - a mere empty vessel to be filled with life from the Lord... and then utter peace and joy in His nearness which is heaven. That is the way our heavenly Father wants us to go; and all the circumstances of our life are carefully planned by Him to encourage and help us to choose wisely and take the path to heaven, without any feeling that we are being pressured or interfered with. All our choices must be made "as of ourselves."

Do you believe that the circumstances in which you find yourself at this moment are the best possible circumstances, taking your present needs into consideration? I am not suggesting that the world is perfect, by any manner of means. Maybe the Lord is deliberately presenting you with a broken situation; but He is also giving you a bag of tools, meaning that you should set about trying to mend the situation. In which case He probably sees that you need at this moment the experience which you will gain from trying to mend that particular situation! Don't blame the Lord that the situation needs mending. He didn't break it! It was produced by the mistakes and weaknesses and evils of men. Grapple with it courageously, in His strength, and it will yield you a blessing.

We are so ready to criticize the Lord for the way He is running the universe. Of course, if I were God, I would make a much better job of it! I would abolish all evil, to begin with: all war, hunger and sickness, all sin and suffering. What if someone wants to sin? Well, I should have to abolish him also! Too bad! This would just leave the *good* people, those who think as I do and want what I want. That is how I should rule the world if I were God. And I can just imagine how glad you are that I am *not* God! The real God has very different ways of working, and different ends in view. He loves *people*, no matter how they act or behave. He will permit evils and irregularities of all sorts if necessary, but He will always twist them around in some way so that good will come out of them. The most important thing, from God's point of view, is that we His children should choose freely to love Him and be united with Him in joy and happiness. So He must preserve our free will at all costs, even when we are misusing it. God demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ that He Himself was prepared to submit to the worst that evil men could do to Him, rather than compromise in the least degree on the absolute demands of *Love*.

"If only things were different!" we moan. "O God, don't let things happen this way! Make them happen in some other way; I'll show you how! It will be much better if things go the way I want them to!" How often have we spoken rashly like this, not openly of course but in our hearts, telling God what *we* want, from *our* point of view, rather than listening to what HE wants, from HIS point of view! Challenging authority is in the air, each man doing what is right in his own eyes. You even hear of university students telling the professors what they are to teach, whereas the obvious thing would be for the students to assume that the professors, with their wider knowledge and experience, would have a better idea of what would be good for the students than the students themselves would have. And, since this world is a school or college, in which we are being prepared for the life of heaven, does not the same thing apply in our relations with God? I think we would all do well to try to develop a greater spirit of acceptance, realizing that the Divine Providence *is operating*, and is overruling everything for our eventual good. Our best line is to go along with Providence, trusting the Lord and following the course which He in His wisdom lays down for us.

I realize that acceptance of one's lot sounds to many people like fatalism, as when the Moslems say, "It is the will of Allah. When accident or sickness strikes, who should interfere? It is the will of Allah!" But this is not what I am saying. Maybe the accident or sickness has been permitted by God. (Of

course God *has* permitted it, or it couldn't have struck!) But it is not God's will that we should leave it at that. It is His will that we should react to circumstances wisely and creatively, doing what we can, within our competence, to improve matters. By doing so, we grow, and that is what God intends for us; whereas, if we were living in a perfect world, without stress or sin or woe, what opportunity would there be for growth?

We have two possible extremes, and must find our way somewhere between the two. One extreme is to play God - to assume responsibility for everything, and, if things are not as we feel they should be, to complain and criticize, or to feel guilty. The other extreme is to leave everything to God, and just sit back and be submissive and make no effort to improve or change anything. Americans have gone to the extreme, so that in speaking to Americans one has to emphasize the need for acceptance and contentment, trust in Providence, relaxing and letting things go their own way. We westerners seem to have a congenital itch, an urge to control and improve things, to make everything bigger and better; convenience and speed, good plumbing, hygiene, the right number of calories in our diet, blood tests, tri-focal glasses, electric tooth-brushes, the lot... and if all this really leads to happiness and contentment, we Americans should be the happiest and most contented people on earth. But we are not! Why? Because happiness is not obtained by gadgets and machines. It cannot be bought with money, or secured by jet fighters and napalm, or threats of nuclear missiles. Happiness doesn't come from this world, let alone from hell on earth. It comes from heaven only, and can be obtained solely by the exercise of loving concern for others and acceptance of the will of God.

So true is this that if a man's conscience is working properly he can know whether a thing is of God or not by his feelings in connection with it. If when you have acted in some way you feel happy, deep down in your heart, then that thing was probably the will of God; but if you feel ashamed and uncomfortable in connection with it, then it was probably not the will of God, but the will of man. Maybe this is the only way by which we *can* know the will of God in any specific sense. If the Lord took us into His confidence and showed us clearly what He had in mind for us, our selfishness would intrude, and, like Peter, we should say, "God forbid!" The old established order of things is crashing around us; the church as we know it is (we are told) "on its way out," and we cry, "God forbid!" Wherever we look, people are crucifying our beloved Master, and we cry, "God forbid!" Great forces are at work which are beyond our comprehension and are certainly beyond our control. We feel that this could not possibly be what God wants for the world, but how do we know? "His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways." All we have to do is to react as well as we can to circumstances as they present themselves to us personally, realizing that however dark the stage, however materialistic the age, however great the devastation around us, the Lord is at the controls. He is handling everything with unerring skill, and we can trust ourselves utterly to Him.

And so I end by saying: *Let God be God*. We cannot possibly tell, with our finite minds, limited as we are by time and space, what our eternal needs are. If we did know what the Lord was planning for us, we should probably resist and reject it, preferring our immediate comfort and pleasure to the long-term advantage. Only the Lord knows what we really need, and He is bringing it forward for us, and it can be ours if we receive it with loving acceptance. But we must abandon all anger and resentment at the way in which life comes to us. Have faith in the Lord, for on this rock of faith He will build His church in us, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

29. God-forsaken

Matthew, the ex-tax-collector, was throwing a party to his former business associates. He was on top of the world! He had made his big decision: he was "leaving all," to follow the Master, Jesus of

Nazareth, the most wonderful man he had ever met. The happy and carefree atmosphere of the feast scandalized the Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist - those long-faced Puritans who thought religion should be a gloomy affair, fasting, and artificially depriving oneself of the joy of living. They made some sarcastic remarks to the disciples, to which Jesus replied, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them; then shall they fast." (Matthew 9:15) In other words, "Don't begrudge my disciples the joy of new beginnings. Their present jollity does not indicate a failure to realize the serious side of life; it is just a natural bubbling-up of joy accompanying a conversion experience, the turning to a higher way." Jesus was with them as the Bridegroom; not yet, perhaps, as *Husband*. This was a betrothal or engagement celebration. Everyone was happy at the prospect of a complete mystical union with their Lord and Master. Later, before the union could be effected, Jesus would be taken away. His disciples would then experience a greater fasting and sorrow than the Pharisees were capable of, going so much deeper because of their present capacity for joy. "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast."

It came true indeed. The Lord *was* taken from them! Our imagination is not capable of conceiving the shock and tragedy of it, as they saw their beloved Master led away in chains... and later, in the distance, outlined against the sky, his broken body hanging on a cross. Yet this shattering of their fondest hopes actually had a healthy effect on them; it was the one thing they needed at that time. Not one of them had really understood our Lord's mission. Even James and John had expected an earthly kingdom in which they were to hold high office. When this fell through, they all ran away. But after the crucifixion and resurrection, and the events following, leading up to the Ascension, and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they at last began to understand. They were transformed! Where they had been weak, now they were strong. Fear was turned to invincible courage. Fasting was finished with forever; their sorrow became a deep-down joy. The Lord was no longer a mere bridegroom; He had become the *Husband* of his Church.

Three stages seem to be indicated. (1) *Conversion*: the Lord present as the bridegroom. Superficial joy as you make your vows. (2) *Temptation*: doubt, sorrow, anguish; the Lord taken away. Many people drop out during this deepening process, but to those who can stay the course comes the final stage; (3) *Regeneration*: real joy, deep down and suffusing the whole being, joy which the world cannot give, but which the world cannot take away; joy from the mystical marriage relationship with the divine Lord, which is heaven.

Think of it, if you like, in terms of the classical philosophical concept of *end, cause, and effect*: the dream or plan, the working at it, and the fulfillment. Take building a house, for example. The architect's blueprint and the finished building are identical, really, except that the first is only in the imagination and intention, whereas the finished building is made of stone, bricks and timber. The "end" must be followed by the "cause" before it can become the "effect." The noise and confusion of the building operations are necessary to bring the dream to life. So with the Christian experience. The original rejoicing (Matthew's feasting) represents the "end in view" - the architect's plan. This has to be followed by a period of extreme temptation, analogous to the turmoil of the building process, before we can actually *become* what, in the days of our dreaming, we had hoped to be. The Bridegroom has to be taken away in order that we may make the necessary adjustments in preparation for the promised union.

The remarkable thing is that Jesus Himself, as to His infirm humanity, underwent just the same process, for He was tempted in all points like as we are. He experienced a sense of alienation from the Divine, a feeling of desertion; and then, when apparently He was utterly unprotected, He was

bombarded by the most excruciating attacks from the combined forces of all the devils in hell. At the apex of this assault, which carried Him up onto the cross, He cried, with infinite pathos, quoting Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (We have the very syllables that fell from His lips, in His native Aramaic Language: "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?") A terrible cry indeed! And a terrible thought, that God could have forsaken him in that hour of his greatest need. Had God really forsaken him? Surely *not!* As a matter of fact, Jesus was on the very point of victory over the hells, the redemption of mankind from the power of evil. His glorification was about to be accomplished, the complete union or merging of the human with the Divine. Jesus and the Father had never been so close together as at that moment. Yet he cried out from the cross: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" Why? Because he had to experience a sense of desertion before the full glorification could be achieved. This feeling that he was being left to his own finite resources was the temptation! If he had felt the overwhelming power of God which was actually flowing within him at that time, there would have been no temptation! He would have suffered no pain; his infirm humanity would not have perished; the Redemption would have been short-circuited, and mankind would have been back where it was. The agony of the crucifixion was real enough, we can be sure of that! He was not play-acting when He made that despairing cry, which has echoed down through the ages: "Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?" Abandoned! Deserted! Cast off! It was his crowning temptation.

I remember when I was a little boy, going with my father to a big London store during the Christmas rush. I turned aside to look at something, and when I looked back, father had disappeared! I rushed hither and thither, pushing my way through the throngs of shoppers; I panicked, I screamed! Then suddenly, there he was! All was well. The agony of desertion is real enough, and if we have never felt it, it is probably because we are too self-sufficient, too complacent. If you have any sensitivity at all, you will recognize what I am referring to. You enter with excited anticipation on some new phase of spiritual development, and then everything seems to slump. The young minister leaves seminary and enters his first pastorate with such wonderful dreams and ideals, but finds himself plunged in dull routine; there is a general lack of response, nobody seems interested in religion, so that soon his own interest lags. He thought the Lord was with him, but now he feels he has been deserted, abandoned, left alone. A young couple believe they are deeply in love; they go through the marriage ceremony, vowing eternal loyalty to each other. They kneel together in the presence of God. Who could doubt that He is with them, as they set off on the road of life together? But soon, all too soon, the honeymoon is over and things begin to go wrong. Oh God, why hast Thou forsaken us?

"God-forsaken" is a kind of slang expression in England; I don't know whether it is in America. People talk about a "God-forsaken old man in a God-forsaken house in a God-forsaken town." The thing about swearing and bad language is that it involves the most terrible concepts, but tosses them about as if they were a kind of joke. *God-forsaken*. No joke that! The suffering of the sensitive Christian, who has tasted the joy of the Lord's presence but now has the Lord taken from him, is a thousand times worse than the rather phony gloom of the long-faced puritan who probably has never been with the Lord at all! Suffering is due to the deprivation of love; the deeper the love, the greater the suffering when things go wrong. That is why Jesus suffered so acutely. "Was there any sorrow like unto his sorrow?" Thousands of poor wretches were crucified, and many have undergone worse physical torments than that, but none suffered as Jesus did. Those who are nearest to God suffer most when He seems to forsake them. It takes some considerable spiritual development and maturity to produce *Despair*, such as we find it in Psalm 22, or in Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord"; or in the Book of Job, or in Jeremiah's Lamentations. It is a very advanced condition. Have you ever attained to it? Perhaps not. It is a thing to work up to. Yet we must not seek it for its own sake. Our plea must be, "Lead us not into temptation." We should cry with the Psalmist:

"Hide not thy face from me; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." (Psalm 27:9) We should just love, and love, and love; the despair will come. And in that hell we shall find a mysterious and secret path to heaven.

It is for the sole purpose of deepening and refining our love of God that temptations are permitted to assault us, even to despair. The Bridegroom is taken away, only so that we may love Him more deeply. The body is removed, so that we can learn not to depend on the body, but to glory in the spiritual presence. The famine is allowed to afflict us, so that we can learn to say, like the prophet Habakkuk: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, nor the vine bear fruit; although the fields cease to yield their harvest, and there is no herd in the stalls: Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17, 18). During temptation, and as a result of it, there can be developing within us a yet deeper love of God: tried, tested and immovable, depending on no rewards. The time will come (perhaps soon, perhaps not until mature old age, perhaps not in this world at all but in the after-life) when we can honestly say, "It is finished." And the next stage? "The Lord has risen: He is glorified! Good Friday has yielded to Easter!" Then we shall be content that the Lord forsook us, because of the joy of His return; and we shall feast with greater appetite and gladness than would have been possible except for that great fast.

There are people, deeply spiritual people, who think that God has deserted His world at the present time; and in many ways it does seem like it. The fashionable word for it is "alienation." The existentialist movement is a product of this sense of alienation. The God-is-Dead movement was a dramatic way of expressing what seemed to many to be God's retreat from mankind, His extreme "disinterestedness" in what happens to His world. Swedenborg announced two hundred years ago that the *Lord had come again*, and a new and purer form of Christianity was being launched. But between God's revelation to us, in the writings of Swedenborg, and the world's full acceptance of His Presence, there must be a period of reconstruction, of doubt or soul-searching, the challenging of old values, and experiment with all sorts of new ones, such as we see going on around us today. Jesus at His Second Coming has been crucified anew, and is now lying in the tomb. But, do not run away! He will rise again, resplendent! He will enter the New Jerusalem, His Bride; and the marriage will be consummated with all the greater joy because of its long postponement.

End, Cause, Effect. Though the "end" seems to be lost sight of and forgotten in the confusion of the building operations, it is there all the time. The blueprint is constantly being referred to by the Divine Architect who is controlling the whole project from behind the scenes. The Lord is never really absent. He is actually nearest when He seems farthest away. So, however bleak and deserted you feel, be sure He is very near you all the time. However hopeless, useless and unproductive we may seem to be, He is with us, implanting those spiritual qualities and graces which will one day blossom and bear fruit. The Lord seems far away during winter, but, with the revolving cycle of the seasons, the sudden outburst of the springtime proves He was there working out of sight through the darkest days. The Lord is never absent! If He were absent for one instant, the whole universe would collapse and perish. Hope and labour on! - and, instead of dining with Him among tax-collectors and sinners and Pharisees, you will be invited to feast at a wedding banquet in the courts of heaven. "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

30. Dead and Alive

"Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." (John 11:25, 26)

How often have we heard those tremendous words read at the funerals of our loved ones! I myself, as a minister, have recited them scores of times, walking with the casket bearers up the aisle of a church, or standing in a funeral parlour. But I have never felt quite right about doing so. Whom am I supposed to be addressing? Are these words meant for the dead body, the corpse? Am I saying to it: "If you believe in Jesus, you will come to life again?" Of course not! That would be ridiculous! We know the corpse has begun to decay already. Am I, then, addressing the spirit or soul of the departed, telling him he will survive death if he believes in Jesus? How could he hear me, let alone believe in Jesus, if he were not surviving anyway?

There has been much confusion of thought on this matter of survival. Many people think that it was our Lord's resurrection from the dead which assured us eternal life. "Because He lives, we shall live also." The implication seems to be that nobody survived death before that first Easter Sunday when Jesus rose from the sepulchre. And, since belief in Jesus is supposed to be a prerequisite of survival, one must suppose that there is no eternal life for Jews, Hindus or Buddhists! I cannot go along with that; it is unthinkable. Swedenborg's basic teaching on the future life is that everyone who has ever lived on earth since the Creation is alive today in the spiritual world. Neither the resurrection of Jesus, nor belief in Him, has had any bearing on this. Man is a spiritual being, and at death he merely puts off his physical body as a snake sloughs its skin, and continues to live in the spiritual body. Death is only a switch of consciousness from one plane to another, after which the physical body is discarded... Even the most hard-boiled atheist, when he dies, "though he were dead, yet shall he live"; and so it has always been.

Evidently Jesus was speaking of another kind of life and death when He said He was the resurrection and the life, and that the man who believed in Jesus would never die. His words did not refer to physical life and death. They apply to us here and now, and are not really appropriate at all at a funeral service. Spiritually speaking, you may be dead already, or you may be alive. And, whether you are dead or alive as to your spirit, will depend very much upon your belief in Jesus Christ, and on His resurrection from the dead.

It certainly worked out like that with the disciples on that first Easter Sunday. Can you realize the amazing change which took place in them as a result of the resurrection? Think of the appalling horror of the crucifixion, and the disciples' guilt and misery when they found it had all taken place with only John out of the whole twelve of them present to witness it, the rest having run away and left their Master to his fate. Judas at least had had the courage to commit suicide. True, Judas had betrayed Jesus, but in a sense so had they all! What was there left to live for, anyway? Though alive as to their bodies, they were inwardly as dead as Judas, every one of them. They felt they would be dead men forever more. Spiritually dead.

But now comes the astonishing change. When Jesus appeared to them in the upper room on Easter Sunday evening, alive and well, more alive than they had ever seen Him before, radiating power, breathing on them with the Holy Spirit... their whole natures were transformed. Whereas before they had been baffled and defeated, now they were victorious. Then they had been weak, now they were strong. Then they had been followers, now they were leaders - of others. Whereas, before, the important thing to them had been, whether *they* would be first in the coming kingdom, now it was the Kingdom itself that mattered. Surely, Jesus was not the only one resurrected that Easter morning! His life poured into all those others who believed in Him, producing a corresponding change in them, so that they were able to go forth in His name, even working miracles as He had done, bringing the whole world to His feet.

How much greater and more spectacular was this change than the mere survival of someone's spirit after the death of the body! I don't see that survival after the death of the body is all that remarkable. Plato pointed out, four hundred years before Jesus was born, that the soul must survive the death of the body, because disease, or accidents, or the assassin's knife, which destroy the physical body, are physical only, and so cannot touch the soul. Therefore the soul, being undamaged, must continue as before. We piously speak of the deceased entering a "higher life," being "nearer to Jesus," and so on. But is that so? Death is only like peeling off the skin of a banana. If the banana is rotten before you skin it, it is rotten afterwards. Even worse, in fact; for the skin did kind of hold it together! The only real difference that physical death makes is to bring out hidden qualities. Whereas in this earthly life our real nature is often hidden under the skin, after death we appear in the other world as we really are. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."

In other words, if a person is spiritually dead before he departs this life, he will be spiritually dead in the life to come, and his state of deadness will go on developing and becoming more noisome in hell. Whereas if he is spiritually alive here and now, he will become even more alive after the removal of his physical body, and increasingly so in heaven to eternity. The death of the body is like taking off one's jacket when one gets home, so that one can feel more free to be oneself. It effects no vital change, only a release. The Lord is Love itself and is continually striving to preserve the good that is in each one of us, in all men. The Good Shepherd is always seeking the lost sheep. Nevertheless, the principle holds - that we shall only enjoy the "abundance of life" that He came to give us, in the measure that we live it here on earth.

In the case of Jesus, the crucifixion stripped off His infirm humanity which He had inherited from His mother Mary, and released His *Divinity*, revealing Him as He really was: God in Human Form. We shall not be like that, since we are only finite. But, if we have regenerated on earth, death will release the angel within us, and we shall arise in resplendent spiritual bodies. We shall not have wings; we shall be human beings, not monster birds or batmen! - but we shall be able to soar without wings, and join others whose characters are like our own, in one of the regions of heaven.

The situation seems to be, then, that we must seek and achieve *Life* here and now. We must be resurrected here and now, rising from the tomb of dead and miserable states here in this earthly life, *before* we leave for the Great Beyond. This present world is the workshop where character is formed. If we don't develop heavenly qualities here and now, we shall not be able to pick them up in the world to come. If a watch won't keep good time when it leaves the factory, it never will.

Very well. How, then, are we to attain this spiritual life? Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The answer seems to be that we must believe in Jesus. But does this answer mean much? I have always believed in Jesus. Haven't you? The U.S.A. is a Christian country, which means that the majority of its inhabitants "believe in Jesus Christ." If you walked down Main Street and asked the first few people you met whether they believed in Jesus Christ, they would probably say yes. Oh yes! The disciples believed in Jesus, right from the beginning of their association with Him; but this did not prevent them from deserting Him when their own lives seemed to be in danger. You can believe intellectually in almost anything: in the North Pole, in George Washington or the Atomic Theory; but how does that help you when you are in real trouble?

There is scarcely a person I know who isn't in trouble of some sort. Life is short-changing them. They do not feel they are getting out of it what other people are, and what they deserve to get out of it. They feel inadequate because they cannot keep up with the pace of modern living. According to the TV, every man should be successful and every woman beautiful. We should own plush cars, have wall-

to-wall carpeting and an electric toothbrush, and we should vacation in the Bahamas. Yet, whatever we own, we seem to be one step behind what other people have. Even our TV is only in black and white, whereas the programs, we are told, are brought to us in living colour! How is it we cannot afford a colour TV like the Jones next door? And what do we hear when we turn it on? All this drug taking. (Fill up my glass, will you dear?) and the kids smoking marijuana. (Pass the cigarettes, will you?) Agitators stirring up trouble; factory workers on strike, and the good-for-nothing poor on welfare; and those disgusting long-haired hippies - should be whipped! Oh yes, and *pollution*, that's the big thing now. With my asthma, I soon won't be able to breathe. Too many automobiles, that's the trouble; I can hardly find a parking place in town in the mornings. The factories belching out smoke - though, of course, we need the products they manufacture. All this building around our house, the district's going downhill. I could put things right, but nobody listens to me. What has Jesus Christ to do with it? Nothing at all!

My dear friend, if that is the kind of way our thinking goes, we are spiritually dead, and our God is dead too. We have nailed Him on the cross. Or we have let others nail Him on the cross, while we settle down in our comfortable arm chair. Sure, we believe in Jesus - He's up there on the cross! We believe in Him intellectually, but our affections are entirely focused on ourselves, and we judge everything by the way in which it affects ourselves. Only when we begin to listen to other people, and try to see things from their angle, and appreciate their needs and enter their agonies, shall we become really alive. And to do this we must be filled with the spirit and life of Jesus Christ. We must allow the treasures of heaven to take precedence for us over the baubles of the world.

Reality lies in God, not in the material world at all; nor can we receive God's living spirit unless we give ourselves out to others. Courage, fortitude, self-sacrifice, love: these are real, and they come to us from God. Who is God? Can we know Him? Not in His infinite Essence, except by analogies and symbols, such as were used in the old religions. But Jesus we can know. He is God in human form, accommodated to our perceptions and experience. We can learn from the example of His life on earth what our life should be. A life of outgoing love. Love even of enemies. Prayer for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, the people who get under your skin. A minimum of possessions. Spiritual poise and lightness of touch. Compassion for the poor and outcasts of society. Humour and joy. With these dynamic qualities, Jesus endured the agony of the cross, forgiving those who were torturing Him. (Forgiving us even!) So He rose triumphant from the tomb, with all power in heaven and on earth. He can give you as much of that power as you need and want, and are able to receive.

Do you believe in Jesus in this sense? Do you believe in Him sufficiently to devote your time, from now onwards, solely to the extension of His Kingdom, in whatever place and circumstance you happen to be? Do you believe in Him the way the disciples believed in Him *after* He had risen from the dead? It is fairly easy to believe in Jesus Christ crucified!; there's a kind of defeat there. But do you believe in Jesus Christ resurrected and glorified? With all power? THAT will transform you! That will bring you to life! Think of Him now, while you are reading this, so that today will be a turning point in your life, a conversion from which you will never turn back. From now on you can press right forward, with victories all the way. This can happen in any framework. You can come to life and begin living victoriously even if you are a cripple in a wheel chair, or penniless in a slum. In the early Christian Church, slaves did. They had "victorious living," by cooperating with the living Lord.

What are the evidences and fruits of victorious living? A serenity and gentleness, a basic stability, and a patience that is in no hurry for results. You are never thrown off balance, but can take things as they come. You can cope with difficulties and deal wisely with problems, because you will have a sound

frame of reference, firm on underlying principles but flexible in their application. You will know what is more important, and what is less; what to press for, and where to yield. You will be broadly optimistic, recognizing God's power and knowing that the future is in His hands. You will be tolerant and liberal, not critical of others, not jealous or resentful, not easily hurt, uncomplaining, not taking yourself too seriously. Beyond everything I would say, you will have a *New Orientation*, no longer hinging around self and your possessions, but focused on the Lord. A *New Self*, resurrected from the old.

May this resurrection take place today. Your family and friends will notice a difference in you, and will wonder at it. They will look into the sepulchre of your old dead self, and an angel will tell them: "So and so is not here, he is risen!" (or, "she is risen!"). And you will be able to say, "I am risen indeed!"

31. The Verdict is in - GUILTY!

Not being either a lawyer or a criminal, I do not know much about guilt from a legal standpoint; but theologically speaking I am rather familiar with it. Like most other people, I have often experienced a sense of guilt; and I am glad of it, because otherwise my case would be hopeless. In a theological sense, guilt can be defined as "a personal consciousness of wrong-doing for which the man himself feels responsible." It is the pain in the heart which comes when we are aware that we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and done those things which we ought not to have done. It is the horrible realization that "I" am responsible for the evil in a certain situation - that I caused it. "Not my brother, not my sister, but me, O Lord!" Not the other fellow, not my enemy, not any scape-goat, but I alone. Without a sense of guilt, we should none of us ever turn from our wickedness and live. Guilt is the emotional driving force associated with a protesting conscience, which can set us on the road to better things. Only sensitive and potentially good people can feel guilt, because only they have an active conscience. Thus a healthy sense of guilt is a sign of grace.

Unfortunately, however, guilt has sometimes gone sick. It has overwhelmed people, it has paralysed them, so that, instead of spurring them on to repentance and reformation, it has floored them. They have rolled about in dust and ashes, beating their breasts and bemoaning that they are sinners. They have even come to take a certain satisfaction in the exercise. It pays off. For one thing, since they are criticizing themselves so severely, they are immune to criticism from other people. Responsibility for making amends is removed; all they have to do is to moan, "I am a miserable sinner; there is nothing sound in me from head to foot; I am beyond hope!" Such people do not want forgiveness and restitution. If assured that God has forgiven them, they say, with some pride, "Ah, but I cannot forgive myself." Well, it is an easy way out, but it is *sick*. The sole purpose and value of guilt is that it leads to reformation. A person who wallows in guilt, and enjoys it for its own sake, is *sick*.

This was the sickness of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, when good-living people beat themselves, often literally, and called themselves muck, filth, ordure. Today we don't do this. In fact, we have gone to the other extreme, and think we are pretty good. The average man in the street, or woman in the pew, apparently has no sense of guilt at all! If you challenge them, and tell them they ought to experience guilt, they become indignant and ask what they have done wrong! I remember a lady, one of my most active church workers, who solemnly assured me that, as far as she was aware, she had never done anything wrong in her life. As for other people, oh yes! Many, many people had harmed or hurt *her*, but she could honestly say she had never intentionally done anything to harm or hurt anyone else! And isn't this attitude of spiritual complacency rather typical of many of us, though we do not admit it quite so frankly as that lady?

However, there is still plenty of guilt around, but on a different level. And since people no longer move in a religious framework but in a psychological framework, I call it "psychological guilt." It is derived, *not* from a sense of breaking God's laws of right and wrong, of alienation from God, but from a failure to live up to the requirements of our secular society: or, if you like, failure to live up to the success-image we have made for ourselves. Maybe we have fallen down in our job, and so feel guilty. We are ashamed because we don't have as good a colour TV as the next man. Or we are too fat, and we meant to diet, but have not kept it up - this makes us feel guilty. Or our children have not turned out as we dreamed they would; they have developed a will of their own, and gone against us, which makes us feel terribly guilty! According to our code, everything should be successful, comfortable and pleasant; if things go wrong, or if we fail in any way, we have sleepless nights, indigestion, stomach ulcers, gallstones - all to no purpose whatsoever.

If only we could realize that the goals we set ourselves are probably unrealistic, and that even if we achieved them they would soon cease to satisfy us; that many of the things we feel responsible for are not really our responsibility at all, and we should keep our fingers out of them (which applies even to our own children when once they are adult). If only we could realize that we are not answerable to the Joneses next door, nor to a society that worships success and achievement, but to *God Alone!*

Not everything that fails or goes wrong is necessarily evil; it may be part of the normal process of growth and development. It is normal, for example, for teen-agers to turn against their parents at a certain stage of their developing self-awareness. The sharp and sometimes bitter hostility between the generations in a household is often necessary to push the youngsters out onto their own two feet (push the baby bird out of the nest, as we say). If this is recognized and accepted by parents and children, much worry and unhappiness can be avoided, and there need be no guilt feelings on either side. Feelings of inadequacy and futility; power struggles between husband and wife; temptations of all kinds; you don't necessarily have to feel guilty about them. It is how you cope with them that makes them good or bad.

If things seem to be going badly, try to see *why* they are that way. Maybe you will find some reason for it which is good. Your aim should not be to have a trouble-free life, nor a temptation-free life, nor even a successful life as this world measures success. Your aim should be to have an ever-improving relationship with the Lord your heavenly Father. True guilt, in contrast to the spurious psychological guilt which we have been considering, has to do with this relationship with God, and with nothing else. It is God-oriented and is an essential part of the process of regeneration.

It works like this. We are all born into hereditary evils of every kind. We start out on the adventure of life facing toward hell. All our innate desires and tendencies have to do with love of self and the world, which are the basic loves of hell. If we continue successfully and pleasantly in that direction, as the world would have us do, we shall end up in hell. Since that is not God's intention for us, the obvious thing to do is to put the brake on our natural, inherited desires, and say "no!" We must repent, be converted, turn around and face heaven instead of hell, transforming our love of self and the world into love to the Lord and the neighbour, the basic loves of heaven. But what driving-force shall we have for doing this if we do not feel personal guilt for our evil condition? Only the sting of guilt can spur us onto the journey of regeneration. You may ask, "How can we feel guilty for our heredity and environment, when we were not responsible for them?" Of course we cannot. But we have free will; and the moment we choose to act freely in accordance with any tendency to evil, that act makes it our own; we become responsible for it, and can feel guilt concerning it. Even if we do not act according to it, but say "yes" to the evil inclination, giving assent to it in our heart, we automatically assume responsibility for it.

A few years ago, partly through the influence of Freud, a "pass the buck" psychology was in vogue. There was no such thing as sin; if you did wrong, it was because of your upbringing. Your parents treated you too harshly, or not harshly enough. Either you came from a broken home, and so did not have a chance; or your home was so good that when you left it you collapsed! Anyway, if your parents were not to blame, it was your school, your companions, your bad health, the weather, anything. Always someone else, something else; never yourself. Fortunately a more healthy and realistic attitude has now been adopted, and blame can be placed where it belongs: in the heart of the man himself - in your heart, in my heart. And with that comes guilt, which disappears only when we have tackled the problem and put things right. If we stifle the guilt feeling, then, of course it achieves nothing, and in the end our conscience which produced it dies, and its body lies festering in our subconscious, producing all kinds of disorders. But if we react wisely to the warning signal of the pain, and set off towards heaven, then conscience revives, and the guilt feeling disappears healthily, having achieved its purpose. Your sorrow is turned to joy.

Later on, the process will be repeated in some other area. Another inherited evil, previously unsuspected, will come to the surface; and, insofar as we give consent to it, this becomes our responsibility, our fault, something for which we are personally to blame. A spasm of guilt will disturb us, prompting us again to confession, repentance and reformation in this new area. And so, gradually, throughout life, area by area will be changed over from alignment with hell to alignment with heaven. "Here a little, there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line."

A point to bear in mind is that on no account should we allow ourselves to continue to feel guilt after the situation which produced the guilt has been put right. A minister in a recent TV broadcast had a small poster which read: "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" Then, under it, in small type, "If you have already repented, disregard this notice." This, of course, was a gag, but it had a real point to it. Once you have repented of some specific sin, and received forgiveness from God, you should put it right out of your life and forget it. Discard it and throw it into the garbage can, and let the garbage collector take it right away. Where he takes it to, I don't know...; I certainly shall not follow him to find out!

As you mature spiritually, the character of your guilt will change. You will become more and more sensitive to the evils still latent within you, and the pain of the guilt will be more intense. But, paradoxically, you will find it becoming easier and easier to bear. You will even learn to welcome and embrace the pain, because you know from experience how amazingly sweet the outcome will be. The pain of the guilt is but a small price to pay for the wonderful drawing near to the Lord which results from the removal of the offending evil.

As you eventually become an angel in heaven, you will cease to be exposed to temptation from hell, and so the ordinary feelings of guilt will cease to afflict you. However, life in heaven is not always on the same level of advancement and happiness. It passes through fluctuations, corresponding to our day and night, springtime and harvest, summer and winter. Otherwise the bliss would pall and grow stale. Every angel periodically experiences an immersion into his own ego. Clouds cover his spiritual sun; he feels alienated and unhappy. When this inner dissatisfaction with his selfhood reaches its painful maximum, he cries out to the Lord and begs to be restored to his former state. The Lord then gently raises him out of his ego and refills him with the Divine Love, Wisdom and Power. The clouds disappear, the Sun shines brightly again; and the angel's joy is all the keener for the sadness of the temporary alienation. These periodic experiences of sadness, which can be called guilt, keep the angel constantly aware of his utter dependence on the Lord, and lead gradually to an abandonment

of the lower self, and complete submission to Him. Guilt renders the ego soft and malleable, so that the Lord can take it in His hands and mould it to His will.

Evidently God Himself likes it best this way. To illustrate what His Fatherly concern for us may be, I will end with a story I heard of a mother who lost her air pilot son during the Battle of Britain in World War II.

The story goes that she was told she could have him back for just five minutes, so that she could re-live with him any five minutes she liked, taken from the whole of his life. Would she like him as he last came home on leave, as captain of his fighter squadron? No, she said. That was fine, but she did not need to repeat it. Would she like him in his last year at school, head boy and games captain? No, not that either. Then she decided upon the five minutes she would most like to share with him again. It was when he was five years old. He had asked if he could cross a busy street alone, to play with a little friend, and his mother had forbidden it. He had shouted "I hate you, I hate you!" and had stamped angrily out of the room, slamming the door. She had gone on quietly with her sewing. After a little while, the door had opened and he had come back. He climbed on her knee, put his arms around her neck, and said, "I'm sorry mummie." And that was the moment, out of his whole life, that she chose to re-live.

Alienation. Guilt. Penitence. Reconciliation. Oneness with God. You can have them today.

32. Looking Down One's Own Throat

Both John the Baptist and Jesus Himself went around preaching "Repentance for the remission of sins." They urged people to repent of their sins, but did not ask first whether they had committed any sins! It was taken for granted. The fact is, of course, that everybody starts out life facing in the wrong direction, driven by the love of self and love of the world. This is part of our inherited humanity. Therefore, unless we go into reverse or turn around (unless we are "converted") we shall all end up in hell. This is a general rule, and I see no reason why you or I or any other particular person should be exempt from it. "Unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." This is difficult for most of us to swallow. The set-up in which we live as respectable middle-class people in a civilized society excludes the more obvious vices. Probably none of us has committed any glaring sins lately. We live good moral lives, helping one another and so on. We feel we are fairly all right, as good as or better than the next man. And so we develop a complacency which verges on self-approval. We are "the righteous who have no need of repentance," to quote an ironical comment of our Lord's. He only came, He said, to call sinners to repentance; the righteous apparently were hopeless! Even God cannot help anyone who thinks he is O.K.

If we come into this category of the self-satisfied righteous, it is about time we had a jolt. What we need is a course of honest self-examination to shake us up! Otherwise, I'm afraid we shall just drift downwards with the current, until it is too late. But if we begin to find out things that are unsatisfactory about ourselves, then we can repent and be forgiven, after which we can make real progress toward heaven.

The purpose of self-examination, then, is to change one's character for the better. Can you change human nature? Of course you can! Just consider how you yourself have changed since childhood. Some things that absorbed your interest then would bore you now, whereas other more adult interests and concerns have taken their place. And you can go on changing till the day of your death. I have seen very dominating and aggressive people mellowing in their old age; which is, for them, an important change for the better. Others, who loved to amass property and judged everything in terms of money, begin to lose their attachment to their possessions, which indicates that their "love

of the world" is lessening. Old prejudices are abandoned; we become more liberal. Oh yes, human nature can change! The point is: do you *want* to change, or be changed? If you don't, nothing can save you. That is why so many people fossilize or go stagnant in their old age. Surely, as Christian people, we want to become angels and live in heaven? But to achieve this, we must be prepared to change our whole personalities; we must "die unto self, and be born again from the Lord." Merely being Christian people and belonging to a church won't save you; you must be re-born! And re-birth presupposes repentance, and repentance presupposes self-examination - knowledge of what we have got to repent of.

But how, you may ask, can we examine ourselves? Isn't it like trying to look down your own throat? Well, for an animal it would be impossible; but one of the main differences between man and beast is that man can detach himself from himself and judge himself objectively. Not easily, however. Swedenborg warns us that self-examination will prove difficult at first. But he gives us encouragement by assuring us that it will grow much easier with practice.

There are two kinds of self-examination; or, rather, two levels on which self-examination can be applied. There is the outer level of *deeds*, and the inner level of *motives*. These correspond roughly to the daily scrutiny of our actions, which must necessarily be somewhat superficial; and the occasional inner probing, which is a major operation and should not normally be undertaken more frequently than, say, once or twice a year. To illustrate what I mean, I will refer to a nephew of mine who works in a plastic factory. His job is to see that the correct standard of production is maintained in the firm's daily output. That is like our regular daily self-examination, done usually in bed before going off to sleep. You review the day, and think: "Oh, I should not have done this, or said that!" or, "I really ought to have done so and so! Lord, I'm sorry. Help me to make a better job of it next time." The other kind of self-examination, the deep-level probing into motives and value judgments and personality quirks, is comparable, in the factory, to the overhaul or replacement of obsolete processes, the introduction of better machinery and systems of production, and so on. You cannot be doing this all the time, or you will never have any production at all; but you should undertake it occasionally, for the sake of long-term improvement.

Self-examination, if it is to be effective, should be detailed and specific. General Confession, what the psychologists call "blanket admission of guilt," gets you nowhere. Martin Luther made a big mistake when he abolished the confession of individual sins. He wrote: "No man can ever know his sins; therefore, they cannot be enumerated; moreover, they are interior and hidden, so that a confession of them would be false, uncertain, maimed or mutilated. But he who confesses himself to be nothing but sin, includes all sins, excludes none, and forgets none." This, surely, is nonsense! In fact, the reverse is the case. He who includes all sins, is conscious of none, and so forgets them all! The practical and realistic thing to do is to take one sin at a time, note the occasions on which we commit it, try to see why we commit it, pray to the Lord for help in avoiding it, and then work hard until the very desire for that sin is no longer in our system. Then start on another specific sin.

In examining oneself, it is useful to have some sort of yardstick, and the most commonly used is the Ten Commandments. But do not limit yourself to the obvious surface meaning of the Commandments. You may not have killed anyone literally, but have you sought to destroy him by contempt? You may not have committed adultery literally, but, as Jesus remarked, to look upon a member of the opposite sex with lust is to commit adultery in one's heart. Deeper still, to profane good with evil is spiritual adultery. You steal from God if you take for yourself the praise and honour due to Him, and so on. But, even if, like the rich young ruler in the gospel story, you have "kept the Commandments from your youth up," the question still has to be faced: "What has been your *motive*

for keeping them?" Has it been because you have really desired to discipline yourself to a heavenly life, or merely because you have wanted to earn a good reputation and be thought well of by your set? Here is where self-examination can be of help.

Ask yourself: "Would I commit these evils if I could do so without being found out? - or if I lived in a society which practiced them and approved of them?" This is vital, because after death all external restraints will be removed; you will be able to do exactly what you like, and will no longer be concerned with what other people think of you. Then, those who refrained from breaking the Ten Commandments merely through fear of loss of reputation, plunge into evil with delight. At last they can do openly what they have always longed to do! But if you train yourself here in this world to refrain from committing evil because evil is hellish and against God's will, then after death you will be free from any desire or prompting toward evil. The main purpose of life here is to develop self-discipline; for self-discipline, after death, is the only discipline to which we shall be subjected.

When we come to examine our motives or motivation ("*why* we are what we are? - what is our ultimate purpose?"), our yardstick should be the Two Great Commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God above all else, and thy neighbour as thyself." The best definition of sin is "anything which prevents us from loving, or having a good relationship with, God or our neighbour." No action can be judged good or evil apart from the effect it has on a relationship. If it helps us to relate better with the Lord, it is good; if not, it is evil. Or, if it helps us to relate better with other people, to think better of them and to desire and seek their welfare, then it is good; if not, it is evil. As we examine ourselves on this level, we shall probably find we are riddled with self-love, concern for our own importance; or with love of the world, desire for possessions, ease and comfort and "security." We shall find we have been continually asking ourselves: "Does this benefit *me*?" "What do *I* get out of it?" - which represents the motivation of hell. And so our main purpose in future will have to be to swing over from love of self to Love to the Lord, and from love of this world to Love to the Neighbour.

Some people find it helpful to write down in a notebook or on a sheet of paper the results of their self-examination. Make a list of your sins or your tendencies to selfish motivation and work out an order in which you think you should try to deal with them. Afterwards you can throw the paper away. Burn it in the fire, if you like; watch your sins go up in smoke! Or keep it for future reference, to see how you are progressing. At one church camp we attended, we were told to write a letter to God; and then on the back of the sheet, we had to write what we thought God's reply would be. We sealed it up in a stamped envelope addressed to ourself, and left it with the secretary of the camp. In six months' time she posted all the letters in the mail, and as I reread my letter, and God's supposed reply, I was reminded very vividly of my feelings in the peak experience of the camp and was able to recapture the determination I had then formed to live my life on a more spiritual level.

In "God's reply" there will undoubtedly be an expression of love and complete forgiveness. If we sincerely confess our sins before Him, and desire to amend our lives, He will forgive us and remove them at once. Jesus Himself showed this in His parable of the Prodigal Son, which makes it abundantly clear that anyone who turns back home from a far country is welcomed by his Father with open arms. Many people, however, although they know they are in a far country and have a vague feeling that they would like to return home, never make the actual effort of leaving their old wretched condition and going to their Father for forgiveness. Guilt feelings that do not lead to repentance and restitution are worse than useless. The maudlin confessions of an alcoholic are all part of the game; he takes a perverse pleasure in castigating himself and is disappointed if you don't listen to him and condemn him. I have known people who have been going to psychiatrists for years, and seem to take pleasure in telling you all that is wrong with their mental outlook, and how they got

that way. Some traumatic experience in their childhood, perhaps: like the old lady who spent her life being waited on in bed, because, when a child, she "saw something nasty in the woodshed!" It is the same with people who tell you all their physical ailments, the surgery they have had, the pills they take, and their indigestion mixture. It would be dreadful for such people if they were cured; they would no longer feel important.

One can imagine the Prodigal Son sitting among his pigs in the far country, a picture of penitent misery, going through his past life in his mind, seeing all the mistakes he has made and the sins he has committed, castigating and condemning himself for them, saying: "It's all my own fault that I got this way. I am a worthless sinner. I deserve everything that has come to me." And if someone were to come along and say, "Why don't you go back home and ask the Old Man's forgiveness?" he would reply, "My father would never forgive me! My sins against him have gone too deep! Leave me alone in my misery! I am unclean from head to foot." That is not how the story goes in the Bible, of course; but it is how it goes with all too many sinners in this world, who take a sort of twisted pride in their evils and guilt, a pride which prevents them from accepting the forgiveness which their heavenly Father is longing to give them, or even from accepting forgiveness from their friends on earth. Such people are mighty good at repentance, but not "for the remission of sins!" Their confession gets them absolutely nowhere; if anything, the weight of it pulls them down into the mire (Bunyon's "Slough of Despond").

What the Lord wants is the lightening of the load that is pressing down on us; He wants us to be released, to soar! Will you allow Him to raise you up? Having discovered a sin of some sort in the murky depths of your heart, repent of it and let the Lord remit it; let Him remove it completely and absolutely, and replace it with something good from Himself. Do not ever hanker after that sin again. Don't even think of it! Don't even stop to bury it! Let the dead bury their dead, while you go and follow the Master. As for your love of self and love of the world, may they be whittled down and deprived of their power. Take up your cross and follow the Master to Calvary Hill and share His crucifixion, so that you may also share His resurrection and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. "For this my son was dead and is alive again; was lost, and is found."

33. Sin, Forgiveness and Salvation

Sin, forgiveness and salvation lie at the very heart of religion: of any religion I would say, although some religions make more of them than others. In the Old Testament we find God as a Law-giver issuing specific commandments which had to be obeyed by man: Ten Commandments in particular, inscribed on slabs of stone to indicate their inviolability. To break the least of these commandments was sin. God was likewise a Judge, condemning and punishing anyone who broke His laws. There are terrible threats of punishment, in Leviticus and elsewhere, upon those who provoked the Lord to wrath. Well, this concept served its turn. It was valuable as an ethical deterrent, well suited to simple and immature people. We use threats with our children: "Mummy will be cross with you if you do that," or "Daddy will spank you when he comes home!" And on extreme occasions, if the child persistently and willfully breaks the rules of the household, daddy does spank him, good and hard! Only as the children grow up do they realize that their parents' anger was only an appearance; that in fact their father did not hate, condemn and try to destroy them when they were naughty, but that he punished them for their own good. King Solomon is quoted as having said: "Spare the rod and spoil the child; he that loveth his son, chasteneth him betimes." And even in the Book of Revelations we get, in the Lord's message to the (immature) church in Laodicea: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent."

Always, you see, there is this legalistic concept, that sin consists of breaking certain laws or commandments. God is angry with us and punishes us, even though it may be for our good. He sends us sickness, poverty, loss. And (at any rate after the captivity in Babylon) there was a long-term threat held over the people: if they did not take heed and repent, if they continued to displease the Almighty God, then He would throw them into hell, where they would suffer the torments of the damned to eternity.

The Book of Revelation crystallizes the legalistic concept by providing the imagery of a Great White Throne where the Divine Judge sits, before whom every soul is taken after death. A list of the accused's deeds, good and evil, is read out by the Recording Angel. If the final balance is on the positive side (more good deeds than bad ones) the soul is acquitted and carried up into bliss; but if the evil deeds outweigh the good, he is pitch-forked down into the everlasting bonfire. (See Michelangelo's picture of the Judgment in the Sistine Chapel in Rome.) The imagination of the Middle Ages was so excited by the prospect of the Judgment after death that people began to punish *themselves*, in the hope of working off some of the balance of sin before dying. And the torture and burning of heretics by the Church under the inquisition was theoretically supposed to be for the same merciful purpose. Better for the poor heretic to suffer burning for a few terrible hours on earth, than in the fires of hell to eternity.

In reaction, another idea was put forward, which was taken up principally by the Protestants after the Reformation. This swung to the opposite extreme. "Did not Jesus die for our sins?" it was asked. "Isn't that the meaning of Calvary?" And a whole new theory was propounded, called "The plan of salvation" which tried to show how God had removed everyone's sins, including yours and mine, and placed the whole load on the back of His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus had borne the punishment upon His own body. So there is no longer any condemnation! Jesus has taken upon Himself the iniquity of us all, provided only that we believe in Him. This is technically known as the Vicarious Atonement, and Salvation by Faith Alone, and is attacked by Swedenborg over and over again in his writings. And, indeed, such a belief is ethically bad as it leads to the idea that it doesn't matter how many sins you commit, they will all be forgiven if you believe that Jesus died for you; you will be "justified," or made just, and admitted to heaven when you die. I read a book only recently which said: "Because of the Crucifixion, God has forgiven all our sins, past, present *and future*." Why bother then?

Of course God has forgiven our sins and always will do to eternity! It is His nature to forgive. But what difference does this make if the sin persists? Moreover, sin is not some kind of morbid growth that can be removed by a surgical operation and grafted onto Jesus. Nor does the question ever arise in God's mind as to whether we should be pardoned or punished for our sins. There is no great White Throne, no Divine Judge weighing the souls of men, no recording angel. The Book of Revelation was never intended to be taken literally like that; it is visionary and allegorical, to be understood only according to the science of symbolism. How, then, are we to think of God? Think of Him, rather, as the Father of the Prodigal Son. In that matchless parable (Luke 15:11-32) Jesus gave us a clear indication of the true nature of sin, repentance, regeneration and salvation. The Father in the parable was not angry with His son; he yearned over him. He did not punish the young man. Nor did he have to "forgive" him, because, as far as we know, he had never condemned him! But how did this help the son while he was away in the far country wasting his substance with riotous living? The forgiveness and mercy and compassion were there *at home*; but the whole nature of the son's sin was that he preferred to be in a far country. Surely in this day of sophisticated psychological analysis we have outgrown the legalistic point of view of sin, as being the breach of some commandment which evokes God's vengeance in the form of punishment?

Sin is subjective, not objective. It lies in the secret chambers of the heart, in the realm of motivation, and it carries its own punishment with it. The only punishment we get is the effect of the sin upon ourselves. Sin can be defined as a deliberate turning away from God. It is the uncontrolled love of self, a blown-up ego. It is hatred and lust and jealousy and resentment fermenting in the heart and ever seeking an opportunity to burst forth into action. That is sin, and whether it is forgiven or not, is neither here nor there. Wicked actions are not sin in themselves, nor is the breaking of a commandment necessarily sin. It depends on why we break it! Sin is the motive which causes sinful actions. You can punish a sinful action in a court of law, and this may have a wholesome effect on society by encouraging people to keep their anti-social urges under control; but this does not really touch the sin itself. It may even increase the pressure of the sin by screwing down the lid. Sin consists in *being*, not *doing*. It lies primarily in a man's attitudes rather than in his actions. Jesus made this clear when He said: "He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her in his heart." The action may, or may not, follow; that is purely incidental from the spiritual point of view.

After the death of the body, hidden things are laid bare. "There is nothing covered" (said Jesus), "that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known. Whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." (Luke 12:2, 3). This means, as I understand it, that the motives behind our sinful actions will be revealed, what we inwardly desired, what we really wanted to do, though perhaps we were unable to do. Our motivation will be revealed for all to see, and we shall no longer care who sees it! On the other hand, we may have done evil things on earth that we didn't really want to do (as, for example, an airman who drops napalm over a village in obedience to military orders, but hates himself for doing it.) This also will be cleared up after death when the motivation is laid bare.

When you have passed over into the spiritual world and remember back to the life you lived on earth, the important thing will be whether you recall your misdeeds with pleasure or regret. If you remember them with remorse and sorrow and wish you had acted otherwise (that is to say, if you have repented of them) then you will obviously not repeat them in the new free atmosphere of the spiritual world. But if you remember them with pleasure and wish only that you had gone a little further, then in the new free atmosphere you will plunge into them openly, without restraint. In the future life, the only restraint is self-restraint. That must be developed on earth, here and now. You cannot acquire it after death, because in the spiritual world you can do everything you want to. That is largely why we have been placed in this physical universe to begin with: to develop self-restraint.

And so begins the Judgment. When I said there was no Great White Throne I did not mean there would be no Judgment. There is a Judgment, but it is self-judgment and is effected unconsciously. The newly-awakened spirit does just what he likes. He expresses his personality completely and openly, as he has formed it by his life on earth. Heaven with all its bliss is freely available, and every effort is made to persuade him to enter heaven and partake of its happiness. The Judgment consists in whether he accepts or rejects the Lord's offer of grace. Unfortunately those who turned their backs on God during life on earth, usually continue to deny Him after death. They have acquired a habit of opposition to God's will, which they cannot now reverse. If a man's whole life on earth has been devoted to self, he is appalled when shown conditions in heaven, where the source of joy is love to the Lord and to the neighbour. Such happiness is utterly incomprehensible to him; the very smell of it fills him with torment, and he turns and runs for his life! What such a man wants, and what he gets, is a kind of liberty hall, where he can give vent to all his hidden evils in the company of others who are likeminded with himself. They fight and quarrel like a lot of dogs, and are jealous and indignant to their hearts' content. That is what we call hell, but the newly arrived "devil" will not think of it as hell,

for he is at home there and it suits him. "Isn't he punished at all?" Certainly he is punished. He is miserable from the very frustrations of his existence, the fact that those around him oppose him and he cannot always get his way and be "top dog." Also, the very boredom of self-love is a terrible punishment which he carries around with him; always the itch and lust are at him from within. Jesus referred to it as the gnawing worm and the fire that is never quenched, and the gnashing of teeth. But the fire comes from the man's own evil passions, and the gnashing of teeth is the ceaseless nagging and arguing to which he is reduced in his relations with his fellows. However, at least he is happier there than he would be anywhere else. Hell is his heaven.

How different is the progress of the man who gladly accepts the invitation to "enter into the joy of his Lord!" He goes to heaven, not as a reward for having lived a good life, but simply because he wants to. The good deeds he performed in the world have had the effect of making him want to go to heaven. The unselfish, outgoing sphere of heaven suits him, he is in harmony with it. This is the kind of life he would have enjoyed on earth, though perhaps he was never able to get it. For all I know, he may have spent his years in jail. He might have been an alcoholic, a drug addict, almost anything. You cannot tell in the natural world what a man's motives are, and we are advised not to try.

Swedenborg was surprised at some of the changes which took place with some of his friends and acquaintances as they "died" and passed over. Famous clergymen, even bishops, were revealed as having been operating from a consuming love of self; many of the upper classes of Sweden were exposed as mean and corrupt. On the other hand, the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, said by historians to have been one of the wickedest women of her time, was found to be among the blest, her sins forgiven, entering into the unselfish life of heaven! Of course, most cases are

not so contrary-wise; people who regularly commit sins on earth are usually sinners at heart and so become sinners in the life to come, whereas most people who are kindly and good on earth, who worship the Lord and love their neighbour as themselves, continue to do so after death. But only the Lord can tell how things will be.

It is hard enough to judge oneself, though you can get a clue as to your future lot by asking yourself: "What would I do if I were completely free to do anything I liked? If I could plan my own environment and circumstances entirely to suit myself, how would I live? How would I like other people to behave toward me, and how would I behave toward them?" Remember, in the other life people have everything they want, provided it can be fitted in with what other people want also.

How about the Ten Commandments, then, and all the other rules and statutes, the breaking of which is traditionally regarded as sin, punishable with hell? I believe they have been given to us by the all-wise Creator as guidelines to a good and productive spiritual life. They reveal to us the unvarying laws of spirit. Break them and you will suffer. You tell your child not to play with the electric toaster while it is operating; he disobeys you, and gets a shock or a burn. You do not have to punish him; his own action punishes him; but your words have helped him to learn that electricity burns. I look upon much of the Bible as being like the handbook or instruction card given by the manufacturers with some new appliance - toaster, TV or whatever, telling you how to get the best out of it, how to avoid smashing it up and smashing yourself up. The many sins we all commit during life, sins of omission and sins of commission, can actually be of benefit to us if we learn from them - just as mistakes made at school in a chemistry lab can be valuable to the student in the learning process. Don't feel guilty over your past sins; learn from them, pay for them, and turn away from them. The Commandments were not given to us to trip us up or condemn us, but to help and benefit us. God is on our side, as every loving Father is on the side of his children. He longs to have us all with Him in heaven. Open yourself to Him. Think of Him often. Get in tune with Him. Develop a heavenly state. of mind, and this will carry you

into the happy, unselfish life of heaven. There will be rejoicing among the angels, and the Lord's intentions on your behalf will be fulfilled. Sin, Forgiveness, Salvation; the sequence will be complete.

34. Danger - Beware of Covetousness

If someone were to accuse you of being of a covetous disposition, you would probably deny it. I know I should! Yet Jesus referred so often to covetousness, envy, jealousy, that we are bound to conclude it was a common failing among the people with whom He came into contact in those days, and presumably with us also. We gather that He regarded it as a cardinal sin which effectively blocks a person's spiritual growth and development. Covetousness is forbidden in the Ten Commandments, as you know, and Swedenborg tells us that Covetousness lies behind and within almost every other evil. We should try very hard, therefore, to see what covetousness is, and whether or not we are actually guilty of it.

Let us examine some of the instances of covetousness referred to in the gospels. First, Luke 12:15, from which my title is taken: "*Beware of Covetousness.*" One of the company said to Jesus, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." (Even in those days, apparently, families quarrelled over wills!) And Jesus replied, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? Take heed of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." There is nothing said here against the just and fair distribution of an inheritance among the heirs. But this man was evidently making too much of it altogether, actually taking it to Jesus for a settlement! The reply is: "Don't take this matter of worldly possessions so seriously! You are letting it eat you up! Surely there are more important things for you to worry about than a mere legacy! Try to see things in their proper perspective!"

Then there is the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20). Here we find a clear case of jealousy. The laborers who began work at sunrise had been quite content with the terms offered: one denarius as wages for a day's work. But when they saw that others who had worked for only one hour as against their twelve were given one denarius, they expected to receive more; and when they did not get it, they were indignant. But the Master rebuked them and said: "Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? What is it to you if someone else gets better terms than you? Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?"

Next comes the incident of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). This has given offence to a great number of people, because indeed it undermines our whole value system. Our culture is "Martha-oriented," and we place our hope of salvation in doing good works. Literally dozens of women have told me during my ministry that they sympathize with Martha, and that Jesus was mistaken in saying what He said. Well, I am not prepared to discuss whether or not Jesus was mistaken. All I can do is to try to put the little incident in its true setting. Martha, you will remember, was "cumbered about much serving," doing her best to make a delicious meal for Jesus as a way of expressing her love for Him. Normally, I suppose, Jesus and His disciples subsisted on a handful of salted olives, some dry bread from a bin, a few dried fish perhaps, and a basket of figs, none of which needed much preparation. Mary, on the other hand, was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening raptly to His wonderful conversation. A delightful scene from every point of view, except for one thing: Martha's jealousy! Martha was jealous of Mary and said to Jesus: "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." And, because of that note of complaint, Jesus took Mary's part and rebuked Martha. If she could not serve Him joyfully, He would rather she did not serve Him at all. Her sour word destroyed all the good she was doing. Now, suppose it had been the other way around, and Mary had complained of Martha? I can well imagine her saying: "Lord, stop

my sister from fussing around like this! I can't concentrate on what you are saying, with her coming and going and moving things around! Is eating so important?" If Mary had spoken like that, I am sure Jesus would have rebuked *her!* "Mary, Mary! You are sitting at my feet, listening to what I have to say concerning the Kingdom. But Martha is expressing her love in a different way. What right have you to say that your way is superior to hers?"

We get the same teaching in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Here the jealousy was on the part of the elder brother, who saw no reason why his Father should roll out the red carpet for the wastrel who had squandered his inheritance with riotous living in a far country. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments; and yet thou never gayest me even a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And wasn't there some justice in his complaint? Surely. But you cannot apply man's principles of justice to God's ways with man. God is not motivated by justice but by love. And of course, the Father loved both his sons equally, as God loves us all. His rebuke of his elder son was due entirely to that one's jealousy towards his younger brother. The elder son was jealous because the prodigal got more than he deserved; and jealousy closes us up, alienates us, separates us from our heavenly Father, makes it impossible for Him to bless us as he is longing to do. It is a cardinal sin, much worse than the sin of wantonness and profligacy of which the younger son was guilty.

There are several other incidents and parables in the gospels teaching the same hard lesson, but I think I have quoted enough to make the point. Maybe I will just mention one more conversation, which Jesus had with Peter and John after the Resurrection. He foretells that Peter will glorify God by suffering some terrible death in his old age (crucifixion upside down, as it turned out). Then Peter, turning about, saw John standing there, and asked Jesus, "What shall this man do?" Jesus replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me" - which is the last thing Jesus said, as recorded in the gospels.

What is that to thee! What does it matter to you if other people prosper or get better treatment than you do, or better than they deserve, or than you think they deserve? Yet how common, almost universal, is this demand for one's rights, this pushing forward of oneself in the name of justice, this elbowing of one's way to the front to get one's share of the good things, and this agonizing cry of dismay if someone else gets favourable treatment! Most of the wars of history, and in our contemporary world, can be traced to jealousy, envy or covetousness, each nation wanting to be one better than the others. The same evil is ruining America at the present time: strikes for better pay, picketing, riots, trouble on the campuses, even doctors and nurses demanding easier conditions of work and bigger remunerations, to say nothing of congressmen and senators, and the President himself having his salary raised! Now let us pause a moment and see what we mean, or we shall be getting jealous of the President, which is the very thing we must beware of doing! If somebody can get his salary increased, good luck to him! It doesn't hurt you or me. And how about better terms for taxi drivers and law students? Fine! Social justice, and improvement of conditions of labour for all. It is an expression of one's love of one's fellow man, to do all in one's power to better the lot of others. And one's own lot too, by any reasonable means. But to make so much of it that one would go to Jesus with one's complaints, and say, "Lord, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me" - as if it were a matter of life and death to get the biggest possible share of the loot... that is ridiculous! It is when one gets emotional about it, and consumed with indignation on one's own behalf, that Jesus replies, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

A lady once told me how she and her sister had been estranged for twenty or thirty years because, when their parents died, the sister had taken a silver tea service which my friend said should have come to her. And then, all those years later, they had met somewhere, and the sister had said: "I am sorry about that silver tea service. It had meant so much to me when mother died, but we have never used it; and now I am wondering why I let it cause this rift between your family and ours. Would you like to have it?" And her sister replied, "I don't think I would have any use for it either. We have been silly, haven't we?" Years of love and companionship sacrificed for a piece of property which nobody needed.

We had a rather similar case in our family, between two sisters-in-law, who lived for three years as near neighbours in a small town in England, back in the forties, but never made any contacts; and years later, after one had been overseas and come back again, they met, and, on talking over the past, discovered that each had thought the other snobbish and "superior," and so, because of stupid feelings of mutual jealousy, they had lost three years of what might have been very happy and fruitful fellowship. Each had thought the other poised and mature in comparison with herself, whereas in fact both had been desperately insecure, timid and afraid; each had been merely "putting on an act" to conceal her own feelings of inadequacy. What a tragic situation!

Most of these troubles arise from the ingrained habit of assessing, valuing, comparing oneself with other people. This is a very dangerous pastime and almost always causes trouble. For suppose you find yourself *inferior* to the other person in some respect? This arouses feelings of envy and puts you in a demeaning position, unworthy of your high estate as a child of God. On the other hand, suppose you find yourself *superior*? That makes you conceited and condescending. The only way to avoid feelings of inferiority or superiority, both of which are damning, is to accept yourself for what you are, with all your limitations and your gifts, and try to improve yourself in your own eyes and in the sight of God, without comparing yourself with other people at all. We used to have a saying when I was young: "comparisons are odious," and how true that is! The critical assessment and evaluation of human qualities and rights, and the making of comparisons between one person and another, this should be avoided at all cost. God has expressly forbidden us to judge others. "Judge not," He says, "that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged"; and insofar as you condemn others, you will be condemned. It is an inexorable law.

Do you want the Lord to assess and evaluate and judge *you*? God forbid! As Hamlet said in Shakespeare's play, "Use every man after his desert, and who should escape whipping?" Fortunately for us, God does not use us after our desert; it does not work out that way. God maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Heaven is free for all who want it; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Therefore, if God loves His children in this way, without discrimination, seeking the welfare of all with equal solicitude, so ought we to love one another, icing in our neighbour's good fortune when he is fortunate and doing all in our power to alleviate his condition if things go wrong. And we should do this, not with the idea of earning a high place in God's favour, which cannot be earned anyway, but from pure outgoing love.

How hard some of us try to be good! We feel we must earn heaven with the sweat of our brow. If we are estranged from God, we think we can win back His favour by working extra hard for Him. But it is not like that at all! Take the illustration of a husband and wife who are estranged, and perhaps have not spoken to each other for days. The wife thinks she will try to win back her husband's love by cooking him a delicious meal; but, if she serves it in a sullen way and sits eating it in silence, he also will be sullen and silent and will scarcely notice what he is eating. Nothing done by either party will have any effect upon the situation, except one thing only: a show of love. Love alone, not strain and

struggle and hard work, restore broken human relationships; and love alone can restore our broken relationships with God. There are only two Great Commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with heart, soul, mind and strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Martha doubtless thought she was "earning" merit in her Master's eyes by slaving in the kitchen, but she was not. The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son claimed a high place in his Father's affections because "These many years have I served thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." To which the Father replied, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." There was no need for him to struggle to get and enjoy it; it was there all the time! So with the parable of the vineyard. Those who had laboured all day, believed they had earned more than those who had worked for only one hour; and by worldly standards they were right. But in spiritual matters, the only law to operate is the law of retaliation. If we love God and the neighbour, we are filled with love, from God and from the neighbour: that is our reward. But if we criticize and condemn others, we are criticized and condemned. It is as simple as that: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again."

I seem to have got a long way from the Danger of Covetousness, but in fact I have not, for we shall be in no danger of covetousness if we can stop applying to spiritual things the competitive attitudes of the capitalist society in which we have been brought up. Competition may pay off in the production of consumer goods, things like automobiles, tooth paste and hair spray. But in the eyes of the Lord there is no competition whatsoever. Each man is given what he needs for his spiritual development, according to his capacities at any particular moment. As he opens himself and expands his capacities, so he receives more; if he closes his capacities, he receives less. So we get the law of spiritual economics enunciated by Jesus Himself, which has been such a stumbling-block because it seems so unjust, unfair: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that he hath" (Matthew 13:12). Jesus called this one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, which could only be understood by those who have ears to hear. May He enlighten our minds so that we can understand and receive it, looking not for justice but for love, pouring out our own love without reservation, neither envying anyone nor coveting anything, but being satisfied with our situation as sons and daughters of God, heirs to His glorious Kingdom.

35. The Sun Standing Still

Reading through the Book of Joshua the other day, I chanced upon the following verses, which set me thinking on a number of different levels. "Then spake Joshua to the Lord, and he said in the sight of all Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of Jasher?" (Joshua 10:12-13).

What are we to make of this? Do you really think it happened literally? You must realize that for the sun to stand still in relation to the earth, the earth would have to stop revolving around its axis. And for the moon to stand still, it would have to cease orbiting around the earth. Astronomically speaking, these processes would have required immense force, and there would have been vast repercussions, affecting and probably destroying everybody then living. One of the lesser effects would have been that the moon would have fallen onto the earth! The Lord is the Great Economist. Would He have upset the sublime order and movement of the heavenly bodies, just to give the Israelites a little longer daylight? Could He not have produced a meteor, or a volcanic eruption, or something like an aurora borealis, to light up the sky if necessary?

The idea that a large meteor, or shower of meteorites, appeared at that time, has been seriously considered by scholars. Professor Velikovsky of Princeton has been studying the records of ancient peoples all over the world: China, Mexico, Peru, Babylon, Egypt, India - and he finds references in all of them to some strange natural phenomena which may have been contemporaneous with Joshua's entry into Palestine. He thinks a huge comet passed close to this earth, and that showers of stones fell from its tail. The Bible informs us, in fact, that more of the enemy were killed by falling stones than by the swords of the Israelites. ("Hailstones" in verse 11 is an interpretation by the translator; the Hebrew just has "stones.")

But need we bother about a literal explanation of the incident? Might it not be a spiritual metaphor? Do we take it literally when we are told, in the opening chapter of Genesis, that light came into existence on the first day of creation, whereas the sun and moon were not created until the fourth day? Or, do we take it literally when Deborah the Prophetess declared in a burst of ecstasy that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera?" In ancient times, people were not so literal-minded as they are today. There is a wealth of symbolism and imagery in ancient literature, which enshrines truth on a very deep level, but has no bearing on what we understand by history or science. Much of this ancient literature was directly inspired by God, as our Bible is. Swedenborg calls it "The Ancient Word," which preceded the Books of Moses. One of the books of the Ancient Word was the Book of Jasher, well known to the Israelites and quoted several times in their scriptures, but lost to us today. Evidently this Book of Jasher contained an inspired poem about the sun and moon standing still, perhaps actually mentioning Gibeon and the Valley of Ajalon; so Joshua, finding himself in that geographical region, and observing the shower of meteorites falling around him, quoted these ancient verses as a prayer to the Lord. And, lest future readers should make the mistake of supposing that the sun and moon actually stood still, the historian added the explanation: "This comes from the Book of Jasher." (See also II Samuel 1: 18).

Was Joshua's prayer not answered, then? Yes, it was definitely answered, but not necessarily on the physical or natural level. It was answered spiritually, which was probably the way he wanted it to be answered. For, if you study the text carefully, you will find he was not addressing the physical sun and moon at all. (Joshua would not have been guilty of such heathen idolatry). He was addressing the Lord Himself. "Then spake Joshua *to the Lord*, saying, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the Valley of Ajalon, until we have avenged ourselves upon our enemies." It was to the Lord that Joshua was praying. His cry was, "O thou Divine Sun and Moon, go not down upon us! Do not hide thy face from us, until the final blow has been struck!" And the historian continues: "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that, before it or after it, that the *Lord* hearkened unto the voice of a man. For the *Lord* fought for Israel." This was no command, then, to the physical sun and moon to stand still. It was a prayer to the Lord as both Sun and Moon; the prayer of a brave soul struggling against the forces of hell; a prayer expressed in the words of an ancient book of inspired heavenly imagery. "Is it not written in the Book of Jasher?"

The Sun standing still in the midst of heaven! Swedenborg makes an interesting point in his book *Heaven and Hell*. "The Sun in heaven," he tells us, "never sets." It is, in fact, the sphere of the Lord Himself, the infinite God, as He first appears in His finite, created universe. It is a dazzling, pulsating aura of tremendous heat and light, radiating into and through the heavens, and reaching ultimately down into the hearts and minds of men and women on earth. The heat of that Sun is the divine *Love*, and its light is the divine *Wisdom* or truth. These together (Love and Wisdom) provide the *Power* which created and energizes and motivates the universe. Swedenborg goes further. He says that whereas the "celestial" angels, who are more in love than in wisdom, see the Lord specifically as a

Sun, like our sun, only much larger and hotter, and redder in colour, the "spiritual" angels, who are more in truth than in love, see Him as a white orb which suggests the likeness of the moon, only a million times brighter than our pale satellite - which is only a reflector of light after all.

Over and over again, in the Bible, the Lord is called a Sun and a Moon: a Sun as to His Divine Love, and a Moon as to His Divine Wisdom. Only when we accept the Lord as our God, does the spiritual Sun and Moon shine upon us. This explains Genesis 1. The light of understanding must come first, in order that the process of regeneration may be got under way; then later, on the fourth "day," we begin to accept the Lord, as represented by the sun and moon, "the two great lights, the greater to rule by day and the lesser by night."

In heaven, the divine Sun never sets. It is always at its meridian. But its position is not static. It appears immediately before the faces of the angels. No matter in what direction an angel turns, the Sun is always directly in front of him. This is because he always has the Lord directly in front of his inward sight; he "looks toward Him" mentally; and, in the spiritual world, the whole outward environment is a projection or objectivation of interior states or relationships. Evil spirits, on the other hand, always have the spiritual Sun behind their backs, no matter which way they turn, since they never look to the Lord for anything. They live in their own shadow.

The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the New Jerusalem, says: "Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light." So it is with the Church when it is functioning properly. Love and wisdom from the Lord shine brightly before the faces of its members. When a Church declines or dies, "the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon becomes as blood" (Revelation 6:12). It is then the "end of the world," as far as that Church is concerned. No matter how vigorously it may be thriving as an organization or club: increasing membership, new carpet in the lounge, a new lamp in the pastor's study, fine choir, fine sermons, etc., etc... nevertheless it is quite dead as a Church, if the divine Sun and Moon are not shining upon the faces of its members.

The story of Joshua is not so much concerned with the growth or death of a Church, as with the temptation combats within a Church, or within a member of the Church. You and I and all of us are living in two worlds simultaneously, and on the inner side are surrounded by spirits, good and evil. The evil spirits are bent on destroying us. Before we can occupy the Promised Land, we must, like Joshua, drive them out, which will probably involve a long and painful campaign. Only when we have "avenged ourselves upon our enemies" can we hope to enjoy heavenly peace and prosperity, with the Lord as our divine King. We are born with hereditary evils in our make-up: innate tendencies to selfishness, greed, jealousy, contempt, irrational fears and impure desires. From all these heathenisms, the evil spirits come forth, like maggots from rotting meat; they swarm into our lower nature, our ego. We do not create them; they come from hell. Nor are we responsible for them, unless we assume responsibility by encouraging them, or compromising with them, or abjectly yielding ourselves up to them. Joshua did not do that! He mobilized his forces in this spiritual warfare, and sent his enemies scattering.

This is no justification for earthly warfare between nations, in which people kill people. War is always wrong. War is hell. Even the wars described in the Bible were evil in themselves, though there was some excuse for them in the setting of their times. If this were merely human history, it would make sordid reading. But it is not mere human history! It is the Word of God. Its subject matter is human regeneration, and the battle-field is our own hearts and minds. Our foes are evil spirits from hell who are trying to enslave and destroy us. We must not yield.

The first thing that happens when evil spirits attack us is that the lights go out. The spiritual Sun and Moon disappear. We are plunged into total darkness. This is unnerving, to say the least! Terror seizes us. We don't know which way to turn, what to do. Resistance seems hopeless. Our imagination gets out of control. Perhaps we think we are in the presence of fascinating and alluring creatures who hold out their arms to us in the darkness, inviting us to unholy pleasures, tempting us to join them in their idolatrous Baal orgies. Or we may picture them as cruel demons - enormous, terrifying, dominating us completely. Everything is exaggerated in the dark. Joshua, too, despaired of achieving anything when once night had fallen. His foes would certainly have ambushed his little band and annihilated them. So he turned his face to the Lord and prayed for LIGHT, light to see things in their proper proportion, as they really were; light to shine through appearances to reality, to expose the false propaganda of the Evil-One, to "call the bluff" of hell.

And warmth, too. The warmth of love from God. The inner acknowledgment that the Lord is the only Source of victory, achievement, peace. Joshua fixed his wavering attention on the Spiritual Sun of divine Love and the spiritual Moon of divine Truth... and they came floating back into his inner vision and remained there, directly before his face, till victory was won. "So the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man," as He always does if we pray to Him, "and the Lord fought for Israel."

Nobody can defeat the evil-one in his own strength, and it is no use our trying to do so. To struggle desperately and say, "I will achieve, I will get rid of this troublesome habit, this haunting fear, this unclean desire!" is bound to end in defeat and disaster, because it is backed by the ego or selfhood, *which is on the enemy side!* If anyone tries to conduct his campaign in that way, the light goes out for him at once; he stumbles in the dark, and inevitably falls. The correct procedure, the only way to success, is to ask the Lord to take over and fight for you, or, rather, to fight through you. You must do the fighting, but in His strength, in His light.

Before closing, I should like to touch on a practical point which people often raise. If the Lord is the Sun or Moon of the spiritual world, a dazzling orb high up in the spiritual firmament, how can we establish any personal relationship with Him? How can we confide in Him and feel Him intimate with us? Hasn't this concept de-personalized Him? Well, of course, God is not really a great shining Orb! He is a divine Person, the only real, self-existing Person. If He were not a Person, He could not exercise Love and Wisdom, which are distinctly "personal" qualities. But He is Infinite, and we are only finite; so, if we try to visualize Him as He really is, we are dazzled. An angel can no more gaze at the Lord up there in the sky, than we can gaze at our sun, without using a piece of smoked glass or black film. If the angel could, as it were, look through a spiritual smoked glass(!), he would undoubtedly see the Lord as a glorious and beautiful *Man*, surrounded by an aura of flaming power.

Here is another point which bears directly on the question. God can, and often does, appear to the angels by *projection*, in a shape suited to their understanding. (An analogy could be made with the projection of a person's face on a TV screen). In ancient times, God appeared to Abraham, Gideon, the Prophets, and many others, by infilling some particular angel with His Spirit, so that the angel spoke and acted as if he were God. Since the Incarnation, God has been able to appear to men in His glorified human body, as Jesus. Swedenborg saw Him in that form on several occasions, as did Paul and many of the saints. Doubtless His appearance is modified according to the recipient: aa African would probably see Him as an African, an Asian as an Asian, and so on. Because God has no fixed "shape," His Humanity can adapt itself to any shape required.

As for the question, "How are we to think of God?" I would say, "Think of Him as the highest, most beautiful and wonderful Person your imagination can conceive of." I personally like to think of Him as He must have appeared to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. "His face did shine

as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." This would correspond to Joshua's Sun and Moon. Or think of Him in His resurrection body, as He ascended up into heaven. Resplendent and glorious, yet available and intimate. Many degrees above our head, yet able to come down into our little life when we want and need Him.

It is so simple to take our problems to the Lord and let Him solve them. We should be doing it all the time; it should be a regular attitude on our part. Every morning we should say: "Lord, stay before my face this day; I want to be warmed by Your love and enlightened by Your wisdom. Nothing else matters." If we can bring ourselves to do this, then we shall be safe against all the wiles of the evil one. We shall walk in the light, and become children of light, and our day will never end. "The light of the moon shall become as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." (Isaiah 30:26).

36. David's Sling-Shot

We all love the story of the young shepherd boy, raw from the fields but with courage in his heart and a prayer on his lips, who brought the monstrous giant of evil crashing to the ground with his little sling-shot.

Before David came into the story, the opposing armies of Israel and Philistia had reached a deadlock. Their fighting strength was approximately equal. Each side had as its leader a man of gigantic stature. Saul is described as being head and shoulders above the average height; Goliath the Philistine general must have been ten feet tall - though this may have included his helmet! The Philistines had the propaganda initiative: for forty days in succession their champion had challenged the Israelites to provide a man to meet him in personal combat, but no one had responded. Saul evidently considered it too great a risk to expose himself in this way, and there was evidently nobody else brawny enough to match the Philistine giant.

That was the situation when David arrived on the scene, bringing food from back home for his three elder brothers who were serving in the ranks. David heard Goliath's challenge (the "propaganda broadcast," as we should say today). He looked questioningly to those standing around, and received the information that if anyone could kill that infernal Philistine, Saul would reward him richly and he could marry the princess. When David's eldest brother saw him taking interest in the situation, he was angry; and I think the ensuing conversation is so typical of what the big brother in any family would say in like circumstances. "Why did you come here? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the haughtiness of your heart. You've come to watch the battle - that's what you've come for!" (The battle? It seems there wasn't much "battle" to watch!)

Eventually, as we know, David himself accepted the challenge to fight Goliath. He explained to Saul that he was not a trained soldier like his brothers, but he had killed a lion and a bear when they had attacked his flock. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the bear," he assured the king, "will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." The Lord? Saul must have felt rather disconcerted at this reference to God. It was true, of course, that his army was supposed to be the army of the Lord; but one was inclined to forget this in the heat of battle. Well, here was a young boy reminding him of their theoretical dependence on God. "Very well," said Saul, "Go, and may the Lord be with you."

Now came the attempt to arm David in the conventional panoply of war. Since he was to fight Goliath, he must be at least as well armed as Goliath was. A helmet of brass, a coat of mail, a great

sword. Goliath had copper leg-shields or greaves, so I am sure David was given these too. Goliath had a spear with an iron point; David must have a similar one. There had to be parity at least.

It reminds me of the desperate race in armaments on the part of the nations of the world. If the U.S.A. has ten thousand nuclear missiles (enough to destroy the whole human race several times over) then Russia must build up her stockpile to equal that number... Then America must get ahead again, and so on. Yet France is actually just as adequately armed as Russia; for, with (say) six nuclear bombs she could wipe out Washington, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago and Los Angeles, which would destroy our nation's economy just as effectively as 10,000 bombs would do. A couple of small old-fashioned uranium bombs dropped from an airplane brought Japan to her knees in the last war; would 10,000 have done it more effectively?

"Ah!" people say, "but ten thousand is a deterrent!" And so we come back to our story. I am sure that if Goliath had had a hundred spears and fifty enormous double-edged swords, David would have been given that number, or twice that number. And Saul, looking approvingly at the piles of steel breast-plates, leg greaves, shields, helmets, spears, swords, clubs, battering rams, and the rest, would have said, "Even if the boy cannot use them all, they will act as a deterrent!"

You can imagine how exasperated David must have been with this idiotic display of logic. He could not possibly meet Goliath on Goliath's own terms. He could not hope to defeat Goliath with Goliath's own type of weaponry. This weighty armour obstructed his movement; these swords and spears were a mere encumbrance. He had a different kind of weapon up his sleeve - a sling. Not an easy thing to handle; it required a steady eye and a balanced and practiced judgment; but it was suited to his style. So he set out, apparently unarmed save for his shepherd's staff, and calmly picked out a few stones from the brook, which he slipped into his sheepskin wallet; then he was ready for the confrontation.

Goliath does not seem to have noticed him at first. When it was pointed out that this was a challenge to mortal combat, he was very angry, and shouted: "Am I a dog, that you come to me with a stick? Let me get hold of you, and I will give your flesh to the vultures and wild beasts!" But David was not at all put out. He answered, "You come to me armed with a sword and a spear and a shield; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. This day will the Lord deliver you into my hand. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and He will give it into our hands." David thereupon slung his stone, which sank deeply into the giant's forehead; the enormous warrior crashed to the ground, and David, drawing Goliath's own sword out of its sheath, hacked off its owner's head. The Philistines broke ranks and fled in alarm, so that the Israelites achieved a resounding victory.

What can we learn from this, to help us in our regenerating lives? One thing we learn is that the terrible and frightening evil forces of this world cannot be met on their own ground with their own clumsy weapons. You cannot put out fire with fire. Force cannot overcome force, neither can hatred conquer hatred, nor insults counteract insults, nor contempt defeat contempt. If evil is equally on both sides, then, in the long view, neither side can win. The armies of Saul and the Philistines stand glaring at each other across the valley, paralysed into a deadlock, with the boastful Philistine giant shouting his challenge morning and evening for forty days, and no one doing anything about it.

"Forty" represents a full period of temptation, and we are reminded that the incident we are considering took place not very far from the spot where Jesus Himself spent forty days in the wilderness, tempted of the devil. (Goliath again? No doubt!) Jesus defended Himself by quoting from

the Word of God. Each quotation was a smooth stone selected from the river of spiritual truth and thrown with the sling of doctrine; it sank deep into the tempter's forehead and floored him.

It is the spirit of God in man that conquers in the long haul. Nothing can check it. The clumsy armour of worldly reasoning and expedience offers no protection against it. It is like a little plant springing up from within, which can split rocks; or, if the rocks are too strong, it finds its way under them, around them, between them, heaving them apart, and reaching the open air at last. Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it becometh a tree, and the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches." We know that very powerful spiritual forces are impinging on the earth at this very time, resulting from a reordering of the spiritual world witnessed by Swedenborg and called by him the "Last Judgment." Strange would it be if there were no upheavals or signs of realignment and change in our human society. The way to deal with them is not to double the size of the police force and throw tear-gas bombs and bring out the guns, nor drop high explosives and napalm on defenceless villages behind the so-called Communist lines; but to spread *Ideas* - ideas of truth and love and forgiveness and human kindness, which will open the way for the Spirit of God to flow in, and the world-wide New Age to dawn.

David with his sling-shot of spiritual truth is still young in our midst: unrecognized, unacknowledged, just somebody's kid brother from back home. But he has the means - the only means - of breaking the deadlock of materialistic thinking, in our society and in our own hearts and minds, and giving victory to the army of the Lord. Eventually, we are assured, he will marry the princess and succeed to the throne. True, there will be a long, unhappy period of rivalry between Saul and David, as Saul grows less and less, and David grows more; but the time will come in each one of us, as we develop our spiritual natures and make our judgments from the spiritual rather than the natural view-point, when David will entirely supplant Saul, and become the prototype of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom shall be forever. Then will all the enemies of our peace be vanquished, and we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

37. Digging Ditches

It seems to me to be fairly obvious that God does not want His children to settle their disputes by killing one another. This, of course, includes war. War of any sort is from hell. To quote Swedenborg: "Wars entail murder, plunder, violence, cruelty, and other terrible evils, which are diametrically opposed to Christian charity." Because of this, I used to get very worried and puzzled as I read about those dreadful wars in the Bible which seem to have been approved by God, and sometimes even enjoined by God. What kind of a loving Father could this be, who encouraged and even commanded His children to hate and kill one another? I realize now, however, that the scriptures are not to be taken literally in this respect, but allegorically. All these old tales have an inner spiritual meaning, by virtue of which they are God's Word. The battles which the Israelites fought against their enemies represent or correspond to conflicts which take place within the mind and heart of every regenerating man: warfare which must be waged against evil spirits from hell who are bent on our spiritual destruction.

By way of illustration and example, consider the strange and memorable military campaign described in II Kings 3. Jehoram King of Israel and Jehoshaphat King of Judah declared war on Moab, because Mesha King of Moab was refusing to pay his annual tribute of sheep: 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with the wool. The country of Moab lies on those blue hills east of the Dead Sea and lower Jordan, which you can see in the distance looking down eastward from the summit of the Mount of Olives. The obvious route for an attacking army would be down the famous road from Jerusalem to

Jericho, across the River Jordan, and up the other side. However, Moab had natural defences along the Jordan valley, with rocky ramparts rising steeply. So, after consultation, the two kings decided to make a detour right round the southern end of the Dead Sea and attack Moab from the rear, from the Eastern Desert. This would mean going through Edom, so first of all they approached the King of Edom. He was friendly, and not only agreed to their passage through his territory but offered to join them with his army. The three kings and their troops, some on foot and some on horseback, made the seven days' journey round through the desert to the eastern side of Moab. One wonders how they expected to survive that terrible region. True, they were now in an excellent position to attack Moab, but before the battle could be joined, men and horses were collapsing in the heat and dying from thirst.

Being now at the end of his human resources, Jehoshaphat decided to lay his case before the Lord. Traveling with the army was the prophet Elisha; the three kings went personally to his tent and asked him to make enquiry of God as to what they should do. Elisha summoned a minstrel to play on the lyre, and as the music began to have its effect, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha and he said: "Thus saith the Lord: Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord: There shall be neither wind nor rain, yet those ditches will be filled with water, that you and your animals may drink. And moreover, the Lord will deliver Moab into your hands." All this came about as he said. The soldiers dug furrows and ditches, which filled with water overnight. As the sun rose over the desert behind the camp, the Moabites saw the red sky reflected in the water and supposed it to be blood. They said excitedly one to another, "Surely the three kings have quarrelled among themselves and are killing each other; see the blood that is being shed! Now come, let us fall upon the spoil." So, without troubling to arm themselves, the Moabites ran into the enemy camp. They got a different reception from what they had expected. The Israelites fell upon them with a great slaughter, so that panic seized them, and they were chased back by the allied armies who killed and destroyed everyone and everything. Thus was avenged the Moabites' refusal to pay the stipulated tribute of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with the wool.

Whether or not such action was morally justified, is not our concern for the moment. What I am interested in is the means the Lord told them to adopt in order to obtain their victory. *They were to dig ditches*. There is nothing unusual about digging in the ground for water. In most areas, the water level or "table" is fairly near the surface, and if you dig a hole below the water level, water will seep into it - which, of course, is the principle of the well. At one place where we lived in England, you had only to dig down a couple of feet and there was water. In dry South Africa, you might have to dig a hundred feet, but you would surely strike water eventually, which is a problem with the deep-level gold mines. In the Arabian Desert behind Moab, you would probably have to go down deeper still. The miracle was that a ditch which could be dug overnight filled up with water in the morning.

We are speaking now about ditches and wells dug in the ground. But there are other kinds of ditches. At school and college, ditches are dug in the mind! Education is not a matter of filling the mind with facts, as one might fill a bucket from a faucet. Rather, it is like digging wells, which fill up with water from within. When the student goes into the examination room, his mind is probably quite empty. The test comes when he begins to read the question paper. Does the water well up from within? Have the ditches been dug deep enough?

In a somewhat different sense, we can dig ditches in the Word of God. Nor do we have to dig down very far; the water table is surprisingly near the surface! Remember the conversation Jesus had with the Woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well outside Sychar. Jesus promised to give her "living water." She replied, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; how do you propose to obtain this

living water?" Jesus replied, "Whosoever drinks of this water that you are speaking about will thirst again; but he who drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst again, for it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13, 14).

The Israelites wanted water to drink. By approaching the Lord through the prophet Elisha, they got it - all they needed, and more than they needed. At the same time, they found it led directly to the total collapse and defeat of their enemies. The process is somewhat complex, but I think you can follow it if you raise your mind a little above the literal level of the story. When the evil spirits see us drawing water from the Bible or Word of God, they mistake the water for blood. "These people are killing themselves," they say; "Let's run in and collect the spoil!" In a sense, we do commit "suicide" when we drink water from God's Word. We die unto our lower selves, the selves in which we were born, and become re-born or "regenerated" from the Lord. We "take up our cross" and follow Jesus to death and resurrection. Jesus "died" as to His lower, finite nature on Calvary hill. As he hung on the cross, many must have thought, "That's the end of Him!" They supposed He was weak and vulnerable, because His blood had been flowing. But His submission to torture and execution was not a sign of weakness but of tremendous strength. If the evil spirits imagined Jesus was at their mercy, they were greatly mistaken. Seeing the bloodshed, they rushed in, like the Moabites, to collect the spoil, but they acted too precipitously. Jesus drove them back into hell, and utterly and permanently defeated them. It was the Redemption of the human race. And so, to a lesser degree, with us. His crimson blood gives us the power to conquer in temptation's strife. We can overcome our lower natures in His strength and enter with Him into glory.

There is an interesting relationship between water and blood, or, to extend it into a triplet, water, wine and blood. All represent the truths of the Sacred Scripture, but at different levels of comprehension.

(1) *Water* - truth seen naturally, in its obvious literal meaning.

(2) *Wine* - the same truth understood spiritually, adapted to the higher faculties of the mind.

(3) *Blood* - truth seen, as it were, with the heart: perceived, appreciated and loved.

Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding party at Cana in Galilee, by changing water into wine. He took the natural teachings of the Hebrew Word and spiritualized them. Then, at the very end of His ministry, His final act before His arrest and execution was to take wine and give it to His disciples, saying, "This is my *blood* of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." He had virtually changed the wine into blood. Blood is the Divine Truth living from Him and conveying His life to as many as receive it. Remember the countless multitudes of the saved, mentioned in chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more... for the Lamb shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Our human blood symbolizes death. It flows out when we die, which was why the Moabites thought the Israelites were killing each other. The Lord's blood, the "blood of the Lamb," symbolizes resurrection and everlasting life. "He that drinketh My blood," said Jesus, "dwelleth in Me and I in him."

Turning back to the story in the Book of Kings, we note that the whole thing was triggered by the rising sun. A new day was dawning, just as in our contemporary world a new Age is dawning. All is being made new - everybody recognizes this. We are blinking our eyes in the light of the sun as it bursts over the horizon in the east. This new light is inexorably revealing hypocrisy, corruption and crime, even in the highest places; it is also bringing out new beauties unsuspected before. Especially

is the Word of God being shown to possess new and amazing depths of meaning. We can see it shining with gold and crimson and all the glorious colours of dawn. Those who are interested in this new understanding of the scriptures will probably be regarded by the secular world as weak, spineless, vulnerable, not quite "all there!" But in fact the Word of God will be your strength, your stay, your refreshment in the desert, your weapon of conquest in temptation.

Study the Bible at as great a depth as you can. Live in harmony with its spiritual teachings. Get soaked in it. Make it your regular drink. Let the minstrels delight you with its music, and the prophets prophesy to you of it and from it. Then the evil hordes, who are bent on withholding from you the innocence which is your due - represented by the 100,000 lambs and the 100,000 rams with the wool. these will be seized with panic and go scattering back to their abode in hell. There will not have to be any actual fighting at all when the crunch comes. No nuclear warheads, or bombs, or napalm or other horrors of weaponry. The gates of hell will not prevail against you. And this wonderful New Christianity, which is just beginning, will bring life-giving truth to the surface, which will cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea, fertilizing and refreshing it. The desert will blossom red as the rose.

38. Resist Not Evil

It is an amazing thing, that Jesus should tell His followers to "*Resist not Evil*" (Matthew 5:39). Aren't we to shun evils as sins against God? Doesn't Swedenborg tell us that the shunning of evils is the heart and core of the Christian religion? Didn't Jesus Himself resist evil when tempted in the wilderness? Wait a minute! Read the context and you will see He was not speaking here of evil suggestions from the devil, which of course must be resisted. He was referring to unpleasant things directed against us by other people. "Whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Resist not evil actions! Do not retaliate, do not attempt to defend yourself. Calmly submit to whatever comes along.

I have heard it said, "Oh, Jesus could not have been speaking literally; we must understand Him spiritually only." And indeed, there is a problem here. Sometimes I believe Jesus *was* only speaking spiritually, as when He said: "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." How can we tell what to take literally and what spiritually? The only guideline I know of is, How did Jesus Himself act? His words cannot be understood apart from His life. He not only spoke the Word of God, but was Himself the Word made flesh. I do not believe that Jesus meant literally that we were to cut off our hand or gouge out our eyeballs or mutilate ourselves physically in any way, because there is no record that His immediate disciples did this, which they would certainly have done if He had meant them to. The same test can be applied to the "signs" which He said would follow those that believe: "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." I take the first two signs spiritually, not literally, because we have no record that Jesus Himself handled snakes or drank poison to demonstrate His immunity. But the third sign, that they should heal with the laying on of hands, I do take literally, because Jesus Himself was apparently doing this, every day of His life.

Now, how about *resisting evil*? Jesus strongly resisted many of the evils of his day. Hypocrisy, for instance. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" In the film version of the Book of Matthew, which uses only the actual words of the Gospel, Jesus comes through as an "angry young man," not at all the meek and unresisting person we usually think of him as. It was his implacable condemnation of the corruptions of the establishment that brought about his downfall, humanly speaking. But, on the other hand, when He Himself was under attack, He uttered not a word!

Arrested and tried for His life, first before the Sanhedrim or Council of Priests and then before Pilate the Roman Procurator, He refused to say anything in His own defence. Misjudged, accused falsely, blamed for what He had never said or done, He uttered not a word, so that Pilate marvelled. He was simply acting in literal conformity with His own teachings, given in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake." Don't resist evil; accept it, let people say what they will. It can't hurt you if your conscience is clear; and if your conscience is *not* clear, then the criticism may help you to get it clear! So, in either case, let it come.

I learnt this in one area in my teens, long before I ever came into the ministry. I had written a very immature article in our church magazine, and someone had scathingly criticized it in the correspondence column in the next issue. I rushed to my own defence with an equally scathing reply, of which I was very proud. My minister, who was a wise man, said, "Why did you write that letter? Don't you know you have cheapened yourself by writing in your own defence?" I said, "Well, the accusations were false; I had to put the record straight." "Why?" he asked. "Well, I couldn't leave people thinking badly of me like that!" "They will think worse of you now," he said. And that, of course, is true, even on the lowest level. When someone is attacked, people sympathize with him and take his side, but if he strikes back, they think: "Oh, he's as bad as the one who attacked him!" But on a deeper level too; we *do* cheapen ourselves if we try to defend ourselves, to justify ourselves, to "put the record straight," as we say. The only time we need to put the record straight is if someone else is involved, and then we must do it for the sake of the other person. But to get indignant on our own account is always harmful, even if it is fully justified. It panders to our pride, our ego; and this does more damage to us, spiritually, than anything the unkind critic could do or say. What if you have been falsely represented? It won't hurt you! There is only one person who can hurt you spiritually: you yourself.

Some people seem to be proud of their hurt feelings. They think it proves they are sensitive, highly strung, of a special and superior nervous quality. Actually, anybody's ego becomes sensitive if it is blown up; but a swollen ego is something to be ashamed of rather than proud of. The fact that you are easily hurt at any particular point is an indication that you are sore or sick at that point. You should examine yourself and try to see why you were hurt, why you reacted in the way you did. Then, instead of striking back, you should set about trying to put things right within yourself. Let the prick burst the inflated ego! It is rather like bursting one of those blown-up air balloons that children have; prick them and they almost disappear! If our pride is burst, we no longer react to what previously caused the hurt feelings, and so we are no longer hurt. We can be slighted, misjudged, ignored, insulted, without taking offence. It all falls off us like water off a duck's back.

Our calm refusal to justify ourself may land us into trouble. In the case of Jesus Christ, it took Him to the cross; and it may lead us in the same direction. But isn't that what Christianity is all about? Jesus said: "Take up your cross and follow me." The cross was the Roman instrument of punishment, but the Romans were not particularly concerned as to whether the victim was or was not guilty of any crime. Jesus, as we know, was completely innocent. And so the cross has come to symbolize: "Deliberate and willing submission to undeserved punishment." Whenever you see a cross you should remember the words of our text: "*Resist not evil.*"

Let's come down now to specifics. Does this mean that, if a mugger attacks you in the street, you should not try to defend yourself? It is not an easy question, and it deserves careful consideration. When the people of Nazareth attacked Jesus and tried to throw him over the cliff, he simply "passed through them and went his way." (Luke 4:30). He was protected by the strength of his personality.

And numerous other cases are on record where people's lives have been saved by the sphere of innocence surrounding them. I read of a girl who was seized by gangsters in New York, and one of them pressed the point of a knife in her side and said he would kill her if she cried out. She was perfectly calm and untroubled, and smiled, and said she was quite prepared to die because Jesus was with her. Soon the men got bored and felt ashamed and let her go. There is a similar story in one of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays, *Pericles Prince of Tyre*. We are each one of us surrounded by a sphere, which attracts or repels the spheres of other people; and if this sphere is heavenly it protects us from harm. Even animals feel our sphere and react to it, which is the basis of the legend of St. Jerome and the lion, and of many incidents in the life of St. Francis of Assisi and other saints who had dangerous animals fawning on them and eating out of their hands.

Even if our characters are not yet sufficiently mature to surround us with a protective sphere, a willingness to submit to evil can be beneficial in the long run. It was the martyrs, who literally took up their crosses and followed Jesus, who eventually won the world for Christianity. Without striking a blow, they defeated the military might of the Roman Empire, the greatest Empire of the ancient world; which was more than the Goths and Visigoths and Vandals and Huns could do with all their violence and cruelty. And, strangely enough, the British Empire, the greatest Empire of modern times, began its collapse in India with the so-called Passive Resistance Movement led by Gandhi, which was so passive that it could hardly be said to "resist" at all! And future historians will probably say that one of the major forces in twentieth century America has been the "Non-Violent Movement for Social Change" inaugurated by the Rev. Martin Luther King.

There is no future for the aggressive, belligerent, violent man or nation. Assyria, the wolf among the nations of antiquity, disappeared from the face of the earth within a few years of the ultimate defeat of its army. Hitler and Mussolini are no more, and their like will probably never arise again. Looking through a fossil bed in South Africa we saw remains of the sabre-tooth tiger, perhaps the most ferocious creature that ever lived. You would have expected that it would have destroyed every other creature and become the sole living occupant of this planet. Side by side with the bones of the sabre-tooth tiger were remains of the harmless bunny-rabbit. Many individual rabbits must have been killed and eaten by the tiger and other predators without offering any resistance; but the curious fact is that the rabbit population has survived and increased, whereas the sabre-tooth tiger is an extinct species. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Perhaps you don't like the idea of being killed and eaten, even with the assurance that the meek will eventually inherit the earth. Perhaps you don't fancy the role of a martyr prepared to submit to an agonizing death rather than compromise with the ways of the world. Perhaps you lack that strong sphere of innocence to protect you when the mugger raises his knife. In which case I would reluctantly agree that, if attacked, you should defend yourself. You should resist evil physically, but only in the same way as you would resist a mad dog. You don't *hate* the dog; it is simply that the situation requires you to try to prevent it from hurting you. So with the mugger. You can punch him in the jaw, or do whatever else suggests itself; but you must avoid hating him or feeling indignant. You must wish him well *as a man*. Maybe it is for his own sake as well as yours that you are resisting him. There was a case in Johannesburg of a girl who was assaulted by a ruffian as she got out of her Volkswagen. Unfortunately for the man, he did not know that she had studied self-defence and was an expert in Judo. As he lurched at her, she calmly threw him over the top of the car and he fell down crash in the roadway. Then she hurried round to pick him up and see that he was all right! - and gave him a coin to get a meal. That was self-defence at its cleanest; it was swift and effective, and there was compassion in it, not hatred. Jesus upset the tables of the money-changers in the temple and

opposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; he hated the evil but loved the people concerned and wished the best for them. We must resist the sin but love the sinner.

Now we come to another aspect of our subject. Should we resist evil which does not affect us personally? The self-centred man, who would go the whole way in his efforts to defend *himself*, says: "No! Don't get involved! Don't stick your neck out! It's nothing to do with you!" And there is a point there. We can go too far in interfering with other people's lives, trying to play God. But when corruptions appear in the State, and the whole integrity of the Administration is undermined by bribery, trickery and perjury, are we, as responsible citizens, to look the other way? Are we to "resist not evil?" I would say that it is the Christian duty of everyone who has any influence in the matter, to use that influence to the utmost to resist corruption and false dealing and illegal manoeuvring, and do all in his power to preserve the integrity and honour of his nation. But still he should do this from the right *motive*: not to gloat over the fall of the Great Ones, as so many of us do, but to seek only the good of one's country, including those who are corrupt. It is basically the same as resisting the mugger; you should do it as an unpleasant duty, without hate or indignation or scorn or contempt. When a Judge condemns a criminal, he does not hate him; he condemns him for the good of society as a whole, including the criminal himself. Always true justice is tempered with mercy. And so with anyone who is "resisting evil" in our national life; there should be no compromise, no white-washing, no respect of persons in the sense of letting the rich and powerful go free where you would penalize the poor and the weak, but one common justice for all. However, while we must resist evil on the external plane, inwardly we should love all men, recognize all men as our brothers, respect the dignity of all men, and, even when we have to strike out, do so with compassion and humanity. We must "overcome evil," not *with* evil, which would put us in the same category as the evil, but "with good."

Lastly, what if you have no influence in the matter, and hardships come upon you which you are totally unable to prevent? The rise in the cost of living. Losing one's job. A car accident, a flood. Well, if you can't avoid it, you must put up with it, with as much grace as possible! Do your best to improve matters, but beyond that you must just "grin and bear it." This is not "compromise with evil," it is *acceptance*. Two people have muscular dystrophy. One whines and complains the whole time and is overcome with self-pity. The other accepts the pain and discomfort. The first looks inward to self and is miserable; the second looks outward to his friends and loved ones and is happy. Which of the two comes off best in the long run? The answer is obvious.

And so we come back to the same thing we always seem to come back to: It is not the *circumstances* of our lives that are important, one way or the other, but our *reaction to those circumstances*. It is in our *reaction* that we show our Ruling Love, whether to the Lord and the neighbour or to self and the world. It is not our circumstances that take us to heaven or hell, but the way we choose, in freedom, to react to them. Someone said: "There is only one prayer: 'Thy Will be done,' taken in the sense of calm and willing submission to whatever Providence has in store for us." Dag Hammarskjold wrote: "For all that has been, Thanks! To all that shall be, Yes!" But the shortest prayer I know, and perhaps the most inclusive, is the single word: *Amen!* "So be it."

39. Forgive Yourself

Sermons are often preached on forgiving other people, people who have trespassed against us, who have hurt our feelings, and so on. But someone said to me the other day: "My problem is not how to forgive other people, it is how to forgive myself!" I said, "Have you done anything particularly bad

that needs forgiveness?" "Oh no, it's not that I have done anything wrong; I just feel that life is too much for me. I'm inadequate; I'm a failure. I guess I've got a guilt complex!"

How to forgive oneself! It sounds crazy, somehow. Psychiatry is probably responsible for popularizing the idea. When I was young, no one would have known what you meant if you had said you couldn't forgive yourself. Yet it is not so new after all. The apostle Paul understood all about it, and describes the psychology of it very well in his letter to the Romans (chapter 7). "What I do," he said, "is not what I want to do, but what I detest. Nothing good lodges in me; for, though the *will to good* is present, the deed is not. The good that I want to do, I do not, and the evil that I do not want to do, that I do. I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul knew that God had forgiven him, but he could not forgive himself.

For convenience, we will refer to the "I" and the "me." The "I" is the higher self, the enlightened understanding, the executive. The "me" is what we actually are: our unregenerate will, our activities in the world, our achievements, the person other people know. The "I" can observe and appraise the "me" and say: "You've made a horrible mess of everything. I cannot forgive you. I don't even like you. What are you going to do about it?" The contribution of modern psychiatry is not to point out that this clash can exist between the I and the me, but to emphasize the danger of it - danger to bodily health, danger to mental health, even to sanity. It leads to the splitting of the mind in two; and the Greek word for a split mind is "schizophrenia," a word which is in common use today.

We *must* somehow come to a satisfactory working arrangement between the I and the me. If you feel disappointed in yourself; if you feel you have failed to achieve what you hoped to achieve; if you have contracted bad habits that you seem unable to control, or a mediocre pattern of life which disgusts you: examine and appraise yourself carefully, and see whether perhaps the expectations you had for yourself were unrealistic. It would be ridiculous, for instance, if you were flagellating yourself and feeling guilty and miserable because you had never succeeded in becoming President of the United States - or First Lady as the case might be (or first Lady President!). Or perhaps you had never succeeded in becoming the head of a multi-million-dollar corporation. Or a golf champion. Or a world-famous pianist (which I had hoped to be when I was a child!). Only one person in a million gets to the top of any of these big high ladders of life; it is not likely that we should be among their number. And those few who do make it, turn out to be no happier than the rest of us. They have their domestic troubles (many of them are divorced), and their stomach ulcers, and their frustrations, and their fears, like the rest of us. They grow old like the rest of us, and when they die they leave all their possessions behind, and are received in the other world with no more honour and dignity than anyone else. Don't bother about the big ladders, then, and don't envy those who have made it in a big way. Choose some little ladder within your competence and climb that, and you will be just as happy at the top of your little ladder as the President is in his position as allegedly the most powerful man in the world.

In moral and spiritual matters, too, be merciful to yourself. To begin with, don't feel guilty for anything over which you have no control. And don't be unrealistic in your demands for self-improvement. Make demands of yourself, certainly. The drifter inevitably ends up in hell. But let them be demands that you can reasonably hope to fulfill. And then *see that you do fulfill them!* The importance of seeing things through cannot be overstressed. We are so made, as human beings, that we need to succeed in what we set ourselves to do. And everybody can be a success in something, even if it is only making a good meal, or being a good friend to someone. Much of the joy of life is

derived from setting ourselves new goals and achieving them. Don't try to do too much all at once. Take one thing at a time. A pianist who wants to learn to play a complex piece of music, can probably sight-read it more or less. He can bumble through it in a slovenly kind of way, messing up runs and slowing down for the difficult chord progressions. He might stumble and fumble through it twenty times that way, making no real improvement. Rather, he should take a few measures at a time, and really work at these until he has mastered them and can play them perfectly without even looking at the score. Then take the next few and master them, and so on, until the whole piece is his. So in life. The man who criticizes himself, saying: "You are a pretty low type; you must pull yourself together all round" - won't make much progress. He will go on blundering and stumbling and failing; he will grow more and more discontented with himself until he is just a mess. But let him take one little fault at a time and master that, and then move on to something else; and his improvement will be rapid and remarkable. Set yourself a strict discipline in some area where you are weak, and *stick to it!* This is the important thing - you must succeed! If you fail, you are worse off than before. One success leads to another, whereas one failure leads to another. And it is the pattern of failure that brings on the feelings of guilt and misery which seem to afflict so many people today in this competitive age and culture.

Another reason why we dislike ourselves, I think, is through boredom with the endless round of trivial thoughts which forever occupy our minds: self-centred thoughts concerned exclusively with the external happenings of our daily life. You can travel the world and see all the sights, and go to parties every night, and still be bored stiff. We talk endlessly about ourselves, and it is dreadful! The cure, of course, lies in entering into other people's interests, learning about their families, seeing things from their point of view. Also, in being less concerned with the external details of life, and more with its deeper issues. Running people down can also be boring, whether we are running down individuals, or whole groups. I always feel uncomfortable when I hear anyone running someone else down, and still more uncomfortable when I find myself doing it! (How I hate myself for that!) I like myself much better when I am praising someone, appreciating people and enjoying them. Appreciation of others is a fine cure for boredom and guilt. If you feel like criticizing someone or running him down; if you think that such and such a person is just dreadful, it might help you quite a lot if you deliberately set about doing that person a kindness, or at least calling him up on the telephone for a friendly chat. This is surely included in what Jesus meant when He said: "Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:44).

So we come to the main point. Insofar as you are aware of being a son or daughter of your heavenly Father, and conscious of your dependence upon Him, you will be happy and at peace with yourself and the world. Paul, after exclaiming what a wretched man he is because of the antagonism between the two parts of his nature, says that insofar as he has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, his lower self drops away. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Romans 8:5,6). To be spiritually minded is not to covet the things of this world, but to value only the qualities of the heavenly life. If you have not succeeded too well in this world, or made a name for yourself or a heap of money, what of it? Nothing to be ashamed of! The important thing is: have you succeeded in developing the qualities of kindness and gentleness and helpfulness and outgoing warmth, qualities which attract other people, so that they enjoy being with you and seek your help in time of trouble? And these inner qualities are gained, not by struggle in your own strength, but by total submission to the Lord, by letting Him take over the ego or "I" and bring the whole of the "me" into alignment and harmony with the Divine "*I Am That I Am.*" The projects we

have to undertake on this deeper level are not so much mastering ourselves as yielding ourselves up to the Lord's control. We get guilt feelings because we have not done this, but instead have been clinging to the idea that we must go our own way and control our own destiny. "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul," says the evil spirit as he plunges into hell. And if he no longer feels guilty about *that*, it is because his capacity for guilt has been deadened, his conscience has been destroyed. If you do feel a sense of guilt on this deeper level, it is a very hopeful sign. It proves that your conscience is still alive! But you must do something about it to keep the conscience alive. You must listen to its voice and obey its dictates, otherwise your conscience will eventually cease to speak to you, and then you will be sunk! And what does your conscience tell you? You yourself are nothing but an empty vessel. Anything you yourself put in that vessel is tainted with the poison of self. All the qualities which you are normally inclined to boast of, are tainted with the poison of self. Empty them all out, throw them away, and let the Lord fill you with His life, His joy, His peace. Then you will become His child indeed, reborn in His image and likeness, a prince or princess of the heavenly kingdom. In that you can glory without shame or guilt!

This is the final answer to those people who ask, "How can we forgive ourselves?" They must take that vessel which is their ego and empty out of it all the dirty, unforgivable, boring little ooings of selfhood, and refill it with the exciting and glorious Life of God! Sounds easy, but of course it is not easy. It takes a long while, a lifetime and more. It must be done like learning to play a piece of music on the piano: here a little, there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line. But, to the extent to which we succeed in this greatest project of all, the load is lifted and we are free.

This is also the answer to those people who say or feel that they cannot forgive their *circumstances*, what life has done to them - the unfairness of their lot; some crippling sickness, perhaps, which they must live with all the time; hard labour, to which they have been condemned for life; domestic unhappiness, from which there seems no way out; poverty... whatever it is that they feel resentful about. Some people, in fact, cannot forgive GOD! But to feel indignant about one's circumstances is to miss the whole purpose of life, which is not just to have a good time and get one's own way in everything. You would not send your child to a school where he could have everything he wanted, every whim satisfied. There is too much "permissiveness" in the world already, and we can see where it has led us. No, our purpose here on earth is to develop an angelic character or nature, and it is toward this that the Lord is leading us all the time. And He can do it just as well under bad conditions as under good. He can do it equally well in the framework of sickness or health, poverty or wealth, worldly failure or success. The Divine Providence must necessarily be working secretly, out of sight, because if we saw it we should oppose it. But it is working, perfectly! It is helping you to transform your heart of stone into a heart of flesh; it is helping you to acquire gentle humility instead of arrogance. Without interfering with your free will, it is wearing away your resistance to the inflow of life from heaven.

Do not be angry about your circumstances, however, bad they may be. Do all you reasonably can to improve them, of course. But, if you cannot improve them, never mind. The spirit is the important thing; and if you can open your spirit to the Lord, He will flow into it with all the deliciousness of the beauty of holiness. The question of forgiveness will never arise again, whether forgiveness of others, or forgiveness of oneself, or forgiveness of God. You will be forever content in the security of His loving embrace.

40. At the Receiving End

We all know very well that it is our bounden duty to love our neighbour as ourselves. This applies also in reverse; our fellow men, if they are Christians, must love us! Do you think they find this easy, or difficult? Don't you think that, in common charity, we should try to help them, to make it somewhat easier for them? Don't you think it is our Christian duty to make ourselves a little more lovable?

Christians in past centuries do not seem to have considered this necessary. There were periods when Christian saints thought it was a sign of holiness to shut themselves away from their fellow men. Hermits would live in solitary confinement in caves in the Egyptian desert. They would deliberately allow themselves to become dirty and unkempt, as a sign of self-denial. Neatness of dress and cleanliness of body were considered worldly and sinful, to be renounced by a holy man. If you told a hermit that he should smarten himself up so that people could love him more easily, he would be astonished beyond comprehension.

However, I am not thinking of clothes and personal hygiene, but of one's character as it shows itself in one's life. What do you look for in a friend, and what personality traits do you find attractive in other people? We should all try to cultivate some of these traits ourselves, so that other people will find us easier to get along with. The TV commercials and glossy magazines do not help at all. They equate beauty with face cream, or, if you are a male, with after-shave lotion. Vivacity, brightness, charm, these are attractive features and can be fun if you are having a good time, but they soon wear thin and are not the kind of qualities I have in mind.

I like a person to be sincere and honest, with a sense of humour, yes, but able to be serious when occasion warrants it. He should be fundamentally optimistic, liberal and broadminded, not easily hurt or resentful of slights. I want him to be easy to relate to, able to talk freely, but also willing to listen. Conversation with him should be like a game of tennis, the ball going back and forth over the net, not like baseball where the fellow with the bat swipes the ball as hard as he can and doesn't expect it to come back ever! Above all, I want my friend to be warm, tender, and readily accessible. Some of this may seem external and superficial, but, in fact, I believe these traits all go deep if you consider them carefully. Anyway, if such qualities as I have mentioned are desirable in a friend, should I not try to develop them in myself, so that other people may enjoy having me as a friend?

How does one set about it? Well, one of the first things we should do is to try to *love ourselves* - in the right way! The wrong kind of self-love is hell, and is condemned by every religion. When I meet an egoist, whose whole world revolves around himself, I think, "This man is so deeply in love with himself that he won't notice whether I love him or not - so why bother?" But there is a good kind of self-love, which we could refer to as self-respect. Jesus evidently had this kind in mind when He told us to love our neighbour as ourself. The two kinds could be illustrated with reference to patriotism. Patriotism of the jingo type is dreadful. "My country, right or wrong." "My country is the only place in the world where you can enjoy freedom of speech; it is the finest, best, greatest, most powerful, etc., etc." Well, this is ridiculous, of course, and our young people are right to turn against such egoistic nonsense. But it is even worse, perhaps, to go to the opposite extreme, as when young Americans declare, "Everything about

America is bad," and tear up the flag, and try to destroy all their country's time-honoured institutions. If other nations are to love America, the Americans must love themselves, love her for the good that is in her, for the potentials of her particular kind of government and culture - potentials not yet fully realized, but one day to be realized. Our love for America should be so great and deep that we can see her realistically. We should be able to recognize her faults as well as her virtues, and still love her.

This is the kind of way we should love ourselves, not egoistically or on account of our achievements, but because of our potentials and the particular qualities the Lord has given to us. We are children of God, made in His image and likeness; that's something, isn't it? God loves us dearly, so should we not be able to love ourselves unselfishly? So many people today seem to be ashamed of themselves, for no particular reason; they think they are failures, they are bored with themselves, they don't even like themselves! They drive themselves to drink or sex, or to endless frivolity, simply because of loneliness and self-boredom. Learn to enjoy yourself more, and then other people will find it easier to enjoy you.

Next I would suggest that you take it as a natural thing that people should love you. Stop all this nonsense about, "Nobody is going to like me! I'm not important, or clever, or well educated, or witty; my face is homely." That kind of attitude will frighten anybody off. Remember you are a *Human Being*, heir to the Kingdom of Heaven! Human beings are marvellous creatures, God's finest handiwork. You may not be an outstanding specimen of the genus *Homo Sapiens*, but you have that rare gift of humanity which God implanted in you, and which can respond to humanity in other people. My wife came home the other day really happy, because in the street she had smiled at an old woman, who had smiled back and said a word of greeting. Human beings are made to respond to one another in love; it is natural. Just let people know you are aware of them and let your love flow to them, and they will naturally love you.

Next I would say, you must develop the faculty of receiving gracefully. Jesus is quoted in the Acts as having said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." But how can anyone perform the blessed act of giving, if there is nobody available who is willing to receive? In our culture, with its tradition of pride, "giving" has become much more popular than "receiving." If someone receives something as a gift, even from a friend, he immediately tries to work out how he can make a comparable return, to even things out. If it is a Christmas present, he thinks, "How much did it cost?" and then tries to buy something, at about the same price to give in return. The reason is, of course, that the person at the receiving end feels inferior to the person at the giving end, and must establish his sense of self-importance by neutralizing the gift. Pride, you see! Yet, why should "receiving" make one feel inferior? And anyway, what harm is there in being inferior? It is no disgrace! I think friends should be able to give and receive without embarrassment, just as members of a family do, and as the early Christians did, holding their goods in common.

What are we to say of the lady who has spent her life doing things for other people, giving herself out and running around helping those who are in need, but who won't allow anyone to move a finger to help *her* when she is in need? "Oh no," she says, "I couldn't dream of allowing people to trouble themselves on my account!" Pride again, and the implication that you cannot expect anyone else to be as generous and unselfish and helpful as she has always been. When I offer to help someone who is obviously in need of help, I would much rather they said, "Thank you! That is very sweet of you! I don't know how I could have managed without you!" and let me do it, instead of, "Oh no, I couldn't dream of troubling you!" thereby brushing me off.

It is not only senior citizens and sick people who must learn how to receive gracefully. We must all learn it. Do not be afraid to open yourself to love from other people! Do not be ashamed to admit you need it. We all need love, desperately; we should not be human if we didn't. Of course, defences are sometimes necessary to protect us from those who would abuse our love, but do not put up defences when there is obviously no danger of abuse. Take them down! Give yourself out to others, and let them give themselves out to you.

Those who find difficulty in accepting from other people, are likely to be unable to accept from God. God loves us all equally, because His love is infinite, and the infinite cannot be divided into parts great and small. He loves the lowest devil equally with the highest angel. The difference lies in their receptivity. The angel receives the Lord's love in full measure with humble joy; that is why he is in heaven. The devil turns his back and blocks the inflow with his own pride, and so is in hell. Here, then, is a tremendous fact: our future lot, whether in heaven or hell, is determined solely by our willingness or unwillingness to receive the Lord's love!

The suggestions I have been making to help you in your relations with other people, apply also on a deeper level to your relations with the Lord. You must make yourself lovable to Him! He loves you anyway, of course; but He cannot make any real contact with you unless you make yourself lovable to Him. To begin with, you must learn to love yourself in the right way, without the slightest taint of self-conceit. He does not want us to throw dust over our heads and grovel. What father wants his children to do that? He wants us to be truly happy, as we human parents want our children to be. Whatever we want for our children in a finite way, He wants for us infinitely. He is not particularly interested in how clever we are, nor how beautiful. He is not much concerned with the niceties of our doctrinal position, nor whether we perform certain rituals in our worship, though these may be of great help to us. What He wants is our human response. He wants us to be good *Receivers*, fully appreciative of His bountiful gifts. "Thank you, dear Lord! Thank you, Father!" - such expressions of sincere gratitude should be continually on our lips; because, if we are truly grateful, we are happy. which is what He wants for us beyond all else. We have nothing to give Him but our love and gratitude, and even these must come from Him in the first place. We are basically mere vessels made to contain His life. If we empty ourselves out of self, it is only so that we can receive more fully from Him, just as we breathe out foul air from our lungs so that we can draw in fresh air from His infinite supply.

"Behold," says Jesus, "I stand at the door and knock." He is outside, knocking at our door. To let Him in we must remove all the obstructions and defences we normally put up to prevent the invasion of our ego. To have Him dwelling within us, we shall obviously have to abandon many of our former pleasures; we shall have to devote more time to Him and the things of His Kingdom. We may have to change the whole pattern of our thinking and living, which would be tough. But who cares, when the Lord's love is offered to us? It will suffuse us, and heal us, and bring us heavenly joy and peace.

Did Jesus really say, as reported, "It is more blessed to give than to receive?" The greater blessing is surely to Receive - from Him. In fact, to receive Him.

41. Am I My Brother's Keeper?

The question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" is asked very early in the story of mankind (Genesis 4:9) but no answer is ever given. Maybe there is no one right answer; it depends on the circumstances of the case, and also on the kind of person who is asking the question.

Roughly speaking, there are two classes of people, the *dominant* and the *recessive*. The dominant man or woman is inclined to say, "Yes, *I am* my brother's keeper." The recessive will say, "No, I am *not* my brother's keeper." Both could be right, and both could be wrong. Many dominant people who have a keen sense of responsibility toward their neighbour become outstanding figures, a source of tremendous strength. Friends and strangers come to them for help. Everybody looks up to them and admires them. On the other hand, dominant people can be a dreadful pest: officious, fussy, bossy, trying to control all the traffic, playing God. The recessive individual who says, "I am *not* my brother's keeper," will be a much easier person to live with; but he will back away from responsibility, avoid

committing himself, being afraid of sticking out his neck. He will be quite useless when trouble strikes, a liability rather than an asset.

A visitor to your home may be of the kind who has to be waited on hand and foot. You think, "Surely he might offer to do something toward the work of the house!" Then there is the dominant type of person who comes forward and says, "Isn't there anything I can do to help?" and soon you find he is running the show! Even worse, he goes around the house putting things right! Just as an example, I knew someone whose garden gate squeaked whenever it was opened or shut. A house guest, wishing to do his good deed for the day, insisted on procuring an oil can and oiling the hinges, so that the gate opened and closed without a sound. But - the owners of the house *liked* the squeak! It gave the lady warning when tradesmen or visitors were coming up the garden path, or when her husband was returning from work; and anyway it gave a characteristic sound which meant home to them. What right had this meddling visitor to change their way of life by oiling their gate? Who made him his brother's keeper? The trouble was, he had acted from his own ego, utterly insensitive to the feelings of his host. He had taken it for granted that what *he* thought was good for them would necessarily be what *they* thought, and it isn't always so.

In many marriages one partner tends to be dominant and the other recessive. Sometimes it is the husband who dominates, sometimes it is the wife; I have known it both ways. We will call the dominant partner A, and the recessive partner B. A feels impelled to be B's keeper. In the early days of the marriage B struggles a bit but eventually gives in and lets A decide everything, arrange everything, and even do everything, until B is a mere nonentity or shadow. If you challenge A, A says she has to take the initiative or nothing would get done at all. If you put this to B, B says it is no use his or her trying to do anything because it is always wrong! What sort of a partnership is that? The only advice one can give in such a case is that each should stand on his own feet and be himself, and let the other be himself, because otherwise how can there possibly be a love relationship between them? The dominant one should respect the right of the other to be recessive, and guard that right for him, never infringing it. Each should allow the other to go at his or her own pace, without needling or pushing or pulling or trying to compete or trying to make the other feel guilty. Remember Lucy in Peanuts. First she accuses Charlie Brown of being wishy-washy; then, remembering her psychology, she says: "Stick up for your right to be wishy-washy, Charlie Brown!"

I used to think that in a marriage the husband should do everything he does as an act of service to his wife, and she should do everything as an act of service to her husband. But I have changed my mind about this, because I have so often seen one partner swallow up the other. The counsel I now give to young couples is that marriage is a team relationship, and each should contribute all he has to the team. They will contribute different things, of course, and they will work at different speeds and in different ways. Neither has any right to interfere with the other or criticize the other's contribution or try to impose on the other. So long as both are contributing to the team in their own way, the marriage is likely to come out all right.

Returning now to the question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" - this was originally asked in the Bible story by Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel. God found Cain walking alone in the open country, and asked, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain answered with a show of innocence, "Why ask me? I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?" It was not a real question but a piece of shameless hypocrisy. Maybe Cain was not his brother's keeper, but that did not excuse him for being his brother's murderer! Yet that is a strong temptation for anyone with a dominant personality. If he cannot keep his brother, he tries to abolish him! I saw it often in Africa. The paternalistic whiteman comes out, full of wonderful plans for the welfare of the "natives," whom he regards as inferior

beings. He tries to introduce all these good reforms which would indeed save hundreds of lives and make the "poor savages" more healthy and better nourished, and raise their standard of living. But, unfortunately, the African does not see it in that way. He fails to recognize the wonderful superiority of the whiteman. He declines to cooperate, he resists the improving innovations, preferring to go in the immemorial ways of his ancestors. In the end the whiteman is so frustrated and angry that he dismisses the African as ungrateful, unappreciative, unhelpable. He murders him in his own mind with bitterness and contempt. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he asks in despair. "No, I am not. He is dead anyway. I've killed him. Let's pack up and go home!"

In contrast to this, the Peace Corps are trained *not* to try to dominate and control other people's lives, but instead to live and work with them, respecting their traditional ways and being sensitive to their feelings, influencing them by loving example rather than by bossy instruction. It is only in partnership that you can help anyone, going along with him so that he will go along with you. God Himself works on this basis. He never forces good on His children. He does not compel anyone to go to heaven. It must be done by first of all getting the person to want to go to heaven. The Lord works with us in partnership, and, if we agree to this procedure, if we accept the "covenant" which God offers us, then He can gradually lift us up. We shall feel we are doing it ourselves; and, before we even begin to realize what is happening, we shall find ourselves angels in heaven!

I think the general answer to the question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" should go something like this. No. No man should be his brother's keeper, in the sense of a keeper at the zoo. You can own and control animals, and you can own and control machines and things. But not human beings. That is the basic evil behind Fascism and Communism, where the State claims the right to control the lives of the people, whereas it should be the other way around. Let us rephrase the question: "Am I *responsible* for my brother?" That sounds better, but still the answer must be "No." I am responsible for myself alone, not for any other adult. Children are a different matter; you have to be responsible for them. And for teenagers in a lessening degree as they grow up. At what point must we take our hands away from under them? - cut the umbilical cord? That is another question! The point I am making now is that the time will come, whether we like it or not, when they will become adults. And every adult is responsible for himself or herself alone. I may be responsible for some element in another man's environment, especially if an act of mine, or thoughtlessness of mine, causes any restriction in his freedom to be himself. There are gross evils in our society which hinder or even prevent the full development of countless people. We could probably contribute towards improving these conditions if we exerted ourselves sufficiently and in the right way. Anything we can do, or could do if we tried, we are 100% responsible for. We are responsible for the way we vote in an election, and to that extent for the kind of government that results from the voting. We are responsible for the way we spend our money or occupy our time. We are responsible for the way we pollute our environment, whether with rubbish or smoke or the over-loud noise of a radio. Even more are we responsible for the spiritual forces which emanate from us, the love and encouragement which can build our neighbour up, or the contempt and scorn that can crush someone down. You are 100% responsible for your *attitude* towards other people and all that follows from it. But you are not responsible in the least degree for the way they choose to run their lives, nor for their attitude towards you, nor for what they do to you.

If this were not so: that is to say, if you could be your brother's keeper, then it would have to be equally true to say that *he* could be *your* keeper! How would you like that? Not too much, I guess! There are some people, no doubt, who would welcome having someone else whom they could blame for their troubles and mistakes. As it is, they blame their heredity, their childhood traumas, their parents and upbringing, their married partners, their children, the government, anything but

themselves. But this is sick. Far healthier to take the blame on one's own shoulders and do something about it. Your brother is not your keeper! Even God is not your keeper! God is your partner, as we have seen, but He leaves it to you how you choose to manage your side of the partnership. God is 100% responsible for His side, and you are 100% responsible for your side...

This suggests what we should be like in our relations with other people. We should make ourselves 100% available to help and heal them. If our neighbour does not wish to receive the help we offer, that is his privilege. We should not hit him over the head if he does not respond as we want him to. Rather, we should patiently continue making ourselves available, in case at any time he does want to relate to us and receive our love and help. What if he hits *us* over the head? Well, that is his responsibility, not ours. Our responsibility lies only in our reaction to what he does, in the attitude we take towards him. It is *that* - our reaction - which will judge us, not anything he does to us. When Shimei cursed David and threw mud and stones at him as he went down to Jericho, it was Shimei who was hurt, not David. David reacted appropriately to it, and actually benefited spiritually, for the Lord repaid him with good on account of his patience and restraint (II Samuel 16:5-14). If you are angry or indignant or resentful on account of any bad thing that anybody does to you, you hurt yourself, not him. It is not our environment or circumstances or anything that anyone else does to us that can help or harm us spiritually, but only our reaction to our environment or circumstances or other people's behaviour. We are responsible for our attitude towards the other person; he is responsible for his attitude towards us. We each judge ourselves by our attitudes, not by anything specific we have done or left undone. When we die and leave this world, it is solely our attitude of heart that takes us to heaven or hell. Someone will object: "How about that well-known saying of John Donne's, *No man is an island?*" Well, as far as our environment is concerned, we are, to a very large extent, responsible for one another. We are traveling through space together in this little space ship called the Earth. Our quarters are getting rather cramped as our numbers increase; there is certainly no room for quarrelling and fighting among ourselves! We have got to work together to see that everybody is comfortable and safe, or we shall all be destroyed. Even on a deeper level, the level of love to the neighbour, we do interact tremendously, and so we should always "do unto others as we would they should do unto us" (the Golden Rule).

However, on the deepest level of all, in our relationship with God, each individual is basically alone. Each man is an island. He cannot escape being so. Each one of us, male and female, must face that final interview with God *alone*. (Yes, my friend, that includes you!) In your confrontation with your Maker, you are alone; and whether His searing love and wisdom envelopes you with joy, or shatters you with agony, that is your affair, and nobody else's.

42. Salt

People sometimes say disparagingly of some small religious sect: "Oh, they think they are the salt of the earth"! - meaning that they are spiritual snobs who imagine they have got a corner in salvation. Yet salt is just about the humblest of all cooking ingredients, and I am wondering whether the disciples took it as much of a compliment when the Master likened them to a pinch of salt! Rather a blow to their pride I would say. The whole point about salt is that, though a certain amount of it is necessary for health and well-being, and even life, yet it must *not* be conspicuous in itself. Think of some dish of meat or soup, or a stew, or scrambled eggs, or a plate of spaghetti. Without that pinch of salt, the meal is "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." Yet you don't have to taste the salt. It is retiring and inconspicuous in itself, but brings out the full flavour of the meat and vegetables. This gives a new slant on what we should be doing as the salt of the earth.

A good Christian doesn't push himself forward. He does not say: "Look at me, everybody, and do as I do - I am holier than you." That would be like drawing attention to the salt, spilling it all over everything. You can have too much of a good thing, even if it is holy. Salt, to do its work properly, must keep in the background. It brings out the best in everything else, but does not want to be caught doing it. A really good man does not seek attention; all he wants is that somebody else should feel good. And if his own contribution to the situation is not noticed, he is perfectly content. You probably know such people. They are not necessarily brilliant, learned or clever, not outstanding in any way. Yet they seem to bring out the best in us. They make us taste good. They are the salt of the earth.

The next thing I want to say about salt is that it is tangy, bracing and astringent, not cloying or debilitating as sweetness tends to be. Sweetness is a very attractive quality, and Jesus might have said to His disciples, "Ye are the sugar of the earth." But in fact He didn't; He said salt. It was characteristic of the Victorian era (at any rate in England) to think of the Christian religion as sweet and sentimental - a velvet cushion to soften for us the shocks and blows of worldly life. One thinks of the syrupy hymns and anthems produced during that period, the pretty-pretty religious pictures of clean little Palestinian children with flowers in their hair. The emphasis was on the first part of our Lord's words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" - overlooking the second part, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." The yoke was a symbol of bondage, slavery. He also said, "Take up your cross and follow me." Be prepared, if necessary, for the gas chamber or the electric chair. Submit to death by torture even. No mention of a velvet cushion! Sweetness there will be in the life of religion (and thank God for that!). But the challenge is that we should be salt, not sugar.

Have you noticed the difference in smell between a fresh-water lake and the salt sea? The lake is enervating, the sea bracing. Often on a lake shore there is a whiff of rotting fish or vegetation; never by the seaside, for a saline solution is a mild disinfectant and preservative. The sea is not sterile - far from it! It is teeming with plankton and fish, and a far greater variety of strange creatures than we have on the land. But there is never any sense of decay. You cannot, of course, drink sea water. If that is the only water available, you will die of thirst. Salt water doesn't quench thirst, it makes you more thirsty than ever. And this brings out another quality of salt: it is thirst-provoking. That is why it helps us digest our food. Religion and church life do not refresh us or satisfy us in themselves. They make us thirsty for something else... for what? For the living water which springs up into everlasting life. This comes direct from the Lord, and from Him alone. "Blessed are they that thirst." Blessed is the man or the church that thirsts. Are you thirsty for the living water? If not, you need some salt!

This reminds me of an incident in the eventful life of Elisha. The Sons of the Prophets, a religious fraternity who were living in a kind of retreat house near Jericho, said to him, "The situation of this city is pleasant, but the water is bad and the ground barren." A stream was there, but it was bitter, and carried death wherever it went. Now, Elisha did a strange thing. He called for a new pot, and put salt in it, and threw it into the stream. You would have thought this would have made it worse, but on the contrary. Bitterness is not the same as salt. Bitterness destroys appetite, salt stimulates it. With salt, the waters were healed, and they have been fresh ever since; the modern tourist can quench his thirst there. The symbolism of this little miracle is clear and interesting. The Sons of the Prophets, who boasted of the splendid situation of their city but admitted that the ground was barren, were just like us Christians with our wonderful teachings and our fine church buildings, if we rest content with our situation but lack the healthy, life-giving thirst for God which salt stimulates in the palate: a thirst which enables us to digest the truths we possess and absorb them into our lives, to transform truth into goodness.

So we see that salt represents, in the abstract, "Truth thirsty for goodness." As Christians, and especially as Swedenborgians, we have plenty of truth, which is pleasant and satisfactory in its own way, but entirely useless unless it leads to an improvement in the quality of our lives. If it does not do this we remain sterile. "Faith alone" has actually been found to carry death with it. Faith inevitably brings a responsibility; we must live according to the truth we know. The professional theologian is at a disadvantage in this respect. He has immense quantities of truth and loves to accumulate it. Perhaps he has written books on it. He is a wholesale dealer in salt. He has warehouses full of salt, and wants to pass it on to other people. But maybe he never takes a lick of it himself. It never occurs to him, perhaps, that he must take the Lord's teachings out of his study into his everyday life. He could live and die in a wilderness of salt.

Remember Lot's wife. Oh yes, she knew all about the wickedness of Sodom. She had special insights which other people lacked, revealed by an angel from heaven. But it didn't seem to occur to her that she herself was involved, that her own life was in danger; that she must get right out of her evil situation, and never look back. She had plenty of salt, but it did not make her hungry for goodness. So she became a dried-up pillar of salt in the desert, a perpetual warning of what happens to those who make the salt of doctrine into a monument, instead of using it as an appetizer.

This leads us to the Lord's parable about salt which has lost its savour. You and I can probably look back to a time when we were really in love with our religion; it meant everything to us. But now, perhaps, the bloom has worn off. Its cutting edge is getting blunt. We are becoming slack and apathetic. This is a dangerous state to be in. With the ordinary worldly pleasure-seeker who has never had any close contacts with religion, salt can be given him to make him thirsty for a better life, which may lead to repentance and reformation. But the religious apostate has been through it all before. He knows the teachings from A to Z. They are "old hat" to him! Such a case is indeed difficult to deal with. As Jesus said: "Salt is good; but if the salt itself has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out on to the dunghill."

This comes as a serious challenge to you, if you have once accepted the responsibility of being the salt of the earth. You must be continually on your guard, lest your savour wear off. You must be careful never to grow careless or apathetic. Remember, on you depends the salting of the world in which you move. It rests with you, as a Christian, to demonstrate in your life how a true son or daughter of God should live. Nobody expects you to be a saint; we are all very ordinary people. But a few ordinary people can make a tremendous difference to their environment, if they live in simplicity and sincerity according to the Christian doctrine. A little leaven can leaven three measures of meal. A small pinch of salt can transform a large saucepan of stew. A few good people can transform a family, a community, a town, a nation - so powerful and far-reaching is the force of example. Your kindness and gentleness, your unselfishness, your intimacy with the Lord, your reverence for holy things, your honesty, integrity and purity, on these may depend the salvation of thousands of people. Not many will be aware of your influence, but it will be there. And some there may be who will say, when at length you leave this earth-life for the Great Beyond: "The world tastes better because he or she has passed this way."

43. Peculiar People

Most of us would not like to be thought of as peculiar people. It seems kind of cranky. For someone to boast that he is peculiar would seem to be the craziest form of egoism. The Israelites of old, however, took it quite naturally when Moses exhorted them: "The Lord hath chosen you to be a peculiar people unto himself" (Deut. 14:2). Again, "The Lord hath declared this day concerning you,

that you are to be his peculiar people, and that you should walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his judgments, and hearken unto his voice" (Deut. 26:17,18). Evidently the word "peculiar" has changed its meaning since the Bible was first translated into English. It simply meant: "of one's own," as one might speak of the properties "peculiar" to oxygen or some other chemical. The peculiar characteristics of a certain person meant the characteristics specifically his own. "God's peculiar people" were those who belonged specifically to God. Paul wrote in this sense to Titus, that Titus as a minister should show himself a pattern of good works, and exhort his flock to shun ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly and righteously in this world, looking to the blessed hope of a life in heaven hereafter, because "the Lord gave Himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a *peculiar people*, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). In Phillips' translation, this reads "Jesus gave himself for us, that he might make for himself *a people of his own*, clean and pure." There are no overtones of crankiness or egoism, therefore, when we claim to be peculiar people. It simply means that we feel we have been set aside for a specific calling: to demonstrate in our own lives a peculiar relationship with God. Others may follow the crowd, or run with the herd; but we as Christians believe that there are many areas in which we should stand aloof from the crowd, or oppose the herd, especially if the herd, like the Gadarean swine, is running down a steep place into the sea!

In the old days, it was fairly obvious who were Christians and who were not, just from the way in which they lived. A rich young ruler, after watching Jesus with His disciples, was so impressed that he came humbly and asked the secret of eternal life. And, despite the apparent failure of the movement with the execution of its Leader, thousands of people soon joined it, finding in its discipline something which made life worth living, even though in many cases their life was cut short by a cruel death at the hands of the secular authorities. Today this zeal for the Lord seems singularly lacking, so that you can hardly tell from a man's life whether he is a Christian or a pagan. Is this perhaps why the churches are losing their influence, especially with the young? The young people today, in this New Age of freedom and anti-hypocrisy, are pragmatic, realistic. They do not take for granted the customs and values of their parents. They ask: "Why should we do this or that? What use does it serve? Why should we believe these dogmas you tell us about? Does it make any real difference whether we go to church or not?"

Well, let us see some of the ways in which a sincere Christian is outstanding, "standing out" from the crowd. Perhaps it shows best when trouble strikes. Everybody at some time or other has troubles to bear. How does he stand up to them? If he is a practicing Christian, with a proper understanding of Providence, he will take trouble in his stride. It will not be any lighter for him than for anyone else, but it will seem to be lighter because he will carry it in a different way, like a man who changes the position of a load so that he can carry it more easily. The Christian will be at ease and content where others are fuming with frustration, because he will understand the educative purpose of the whole of life, including its hardships and difficulties.

We knew of a dear old Christian lady who used to say, when anything harassed or harmed her, "This will do me a world of good!" When eventually her aging body was no longer able to support her spirit, and we heard she had died, I said I was sure she was saying as she slipped away, "This will do me a world of good!"

It was this capacity to bear unavoidable misfortunes with equanimity, even torture and martyrdom, which made the early Christians seem so peculiar to the Romans and explained the immense and rapid increase in their ranks. It was obvious to all that the Christians "had something." Everybody saw they had inner resources, and wanted to know the secret.

Then there was their mutual love. "How these Christians love one another," marvelled the whole pagan world, with scarcely concealed admiration. You see, the Christians believed in a God of love, who required of His worshippers two things only: that they should love Him and love one another. So long as Christians obeyed these primary requisites and loved the Lord and the neighbour, the church flourished. It only began to lose its influence when other loves took the place of those two fundamental loves, and a self-perpetuating establishment with a power structure and all the trappings of worldly dignity and wealth, took the place of the "Koinonia" or shared fellowship of souls committed to one another and to their God. Sensitive Christians today are realizing this, and trying to get back to the spirit of the early church, with small groups of members personally known to one another, worshipping together in their own homes. It is here that one can see the miracle of what love can do.

Love leads to toleration, and toleration leads to a due respect for the other person's personality and point of view, which Christians should always cherish. The opposite of toleration is indignation. Every time anyone is indignant with anyone else, the devil steps in and destroys in a few minutes all the good which you had been building up for weeks! The power which enables us to overcome our indignation and irritation is the same resource of power from which we can draw forgiveness for ourselves in our own weaknesses and sins. For, if we forgive others their trespasses against us, so will our heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses.

You may ask, "Are we to condone and accept evil?" Of course not. We must oppose it in every effective way possible. But being indignant will not help, for indignation springs from contempt and self-righteousness, putting up our own standards, and mentally condemning others for not doing things our way. This is itself a very great wrong, and two wrongs do not make a right. Christians ought to be outstanding in their ability to relate to people and situations, by virtue of the resources of reconciliation available from the Lord working redemptively within them.

What other ways are there in which a Christian can be outstanding in our modern secular society? Principally, I would say, by a lack of anxious thought for the things of this world, and a great deal of thought and concern for the things of the spirit. In the early days of the church, you could tell a religious man by his poverty and a pagan by his wealth. St. Francis of Assisi refused on principle to own anything at all, and the immense force behind that choice of holy poverty exploded like an atom bomb in the sophisticated and over-civilized upper circles of the thirteenth century, and thousands of wealthy young men and women gave away all their worldly goods, taking literally our Lord's statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. We learn from Swedenborg how to take this teaching spiritually, as referring to the wealth or poverty of the human ego. Worldly riches and poverty are not in themselves either good or evil; it is the ruling love that takes a man to heaven or hell. Nevertheless we can demonstrate in our own lives that we do not worship prosperity and success, and that we are quite prepared to go short in our bank account if by doing so we can build up our balance in the kingdom of heaven. For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

The Christian does not have to take himself so seriously as the pagan does. It is the pagan rather than the Christian who is pompous and self-important. I detect a lot of laughter, even banter, in Jesus' relations with his disciples. And, although Swedenborg did not find laughter in the highest Celestial heaven, he found it in the Spiritual heaven, and, of course, in the lower Natural heavens. If only we can grasp the idea that we ourselves are supremely unimportant, not even sufficiently important to be evil! - and that the only important thing in us is the Lord's life which can and should infill us. With such a philosophy we acquire a nature so light and buoyant that nothing can knock us down. We are

entirely free of the itch and burden of self, and able to travel light, even walking safely on the waters while others founder beneath the waves.

I wish most sincerely that you and every one of us could acquire this lightness of touch, free from all selfish ambition, all desire to make a name for ourselves or amass property, or dominate other people; content with our lot, neither complaining nor expressing any sense of frustration or jealousy; feeling neither superior nor inferior, guilty nor innocent, but just joying in the presence of the Lord and our brothers and sisters. This would give us a reserve of power, contentment, stability and inner satisfaction which nothing could take from us. And my dearest wish would be that so many people would walk in these paths, and keep the Lord's statutes and commandments and judgments, and harken to his voice, that this kind of life would no longer seem "peculiar" but would become the normal thing. Meanwhile, let us do all we can personally to make ourselves a "peculiar treasure" to our God; for we have not chosen Him, but He has chosen us, and ordained us, that we should bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain.

44. The Best Left Till Last

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage." We can picture the homely village festivities: the gaudy trinkets and bright clothes; a procession (and perhaps a mock battle); singing and dancing all the afternoon. And finally, the wedding feast. The guests recline on straw cushions at low tables around three sides of a square. In the centre of the middle table sits the bride, decked in her finery, with the groom by her side. Near them is the Master of Ceremonies, the ruler or governor of the feast, perhaps a rich relative from Tiberias or Capernaum: someone accustomed to ceremony and etiquette, with a good taste in wines - a bit of a connoisseur.

And, during the course of the meal, the wine runs out! What an embarrassing situation! There is whispered consultation, hurrying back and forth behind the scenes, coming and going: until at length the servants enter with a number of large stone water pots containing delicious wine, which they pour out all around. The Master of Ceremonies smells its aroma, tastes it, and blinks with astonishment. He leans over towards the bridegroom, and expostulates with him banteringly. "Why hasn't this been served before? Usually at these parties the best wine is drunk at the beginning, and the poorer stuff is held back till the guests are well fuddled. But, bless me! You have kept the good wine until now!"

Little did he realize the cause of the unusual procedure. The bridegroom had indeed given them his best wine at the beginning - the best he had, and all he had. They had drunk it already, there was none left. This was pure spring water, converted into wine by the miraculous power of one of the guests: Jesus, a carpenter from a neighbouring village. He had reversed the order, so that the last was first and the first last. The governor knew nothing of this, but the servants knew, and the man's followers knew, and later everybody knew. It was the opening of our Lord's public ministry.

The comment made by the Master of Ceremonies was probably intended merely as a graceful compliment. But actually, in saying what he did, he laid his finger on the difference between what is *natural* and what is *spiritual*. In the universe of nature, everything does tend to degenerate - the best coming first, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. Our property deteriorates. Our houses, furniture, clothes, automobiles, everything is corrupted by rust and turns to dust. Our bodies are fighting a losing battle against death, and must one day succumb... Also (and this is slightly different) our *interest* in material concerns tends to wither. Pleasure cloy. What thrilled and excited us in our youth now bores us. There is a general running down and exhaustion as we grow older, like

the deterioration of wine at a feast. This dulling of the sensation of pleasure accounts for the almost universal opinion held by people past middle age, that the world is not as good as it used to be. In fact, it is going to the dogs! Oh, for the good old days, when everything was better and more enjoyable than today! How dreadful the young people are now, compared with when we were young. There are no great men any more. Art and music are inferior. There are no good plays or books. Oh, the wine was glorious in those far-off days of our youth; but now it is growing sour, and soon there won't be anything left worth drinking...

"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse." It is cynical, but true. That is how things go. But with the Lord's intervention, it is just the other way about! Everything gets better and better, and the best is left till last.

Swedenborg says, very beautifully: "To grow old in heaven is to grow young." And this happens with our spirits actually while we are still in this world. As the body grows old and senile, the spirit becomes ever fresher and more nimble and supple. Eventually the body is of no more use, and has to be scrapped. But is the man himself extinct? No! The Lord resuscitates him, as he replenished the wine at Cana. The newly-awakened spirit leaps forth, no longer hampered by the burden of clay. He takes up a new and glorious life in one of the mansions of heaven, where he enjoys the springtide of the perfect flower of youth, and so to eternity.

It is the fairy story of the caterpillar and the butterfly. To an observer (say, a greenfly on the leaf) the caterpillar is seen to grow older and feebler, till it builds a tiny silken sepulchre around itself, and dies. And that's the end. But we know, what the greenfly couldn't know, that, with a touch of magic, the caterpillar will rise again as an iridescent butterfly; it will abandon the leaf, and flutter hither and thither at will among the flowers of the garden.

Good men and women feel within themselves this butterfly potentiality, an immortal spirit which will rise again when the body is stricken down. They feel it maturing, out of sight, in preparation for the day of its release into the higher sphere. There are two levels. On the lower, everything gets older and worn out and progressively bad. On the higher, everything gets younger and renewed and progressively good. Our experience, as we progress, is that we slip over from the lower level into the higher.

Take love and marriage. It was at a wedding that the miracle took place, as if the Lord wished to teach this lesson to the bride and groom - and to every bride and groom. Physical love, if there is nothing spiritual within it, soon works itself out, giving way to wranglings and divorce. Spiritual love is on the higher level, and develops in the reverse direction. It starts from nothing, and becomes stronger and sweeter as the years pass, and flows into the physical, ever renewing and refreshing it, so that the best wine is served at the end of the feast.

Robert Browning, who was familiar with Swedenborg's teachings, says in his poem *Rabbi Ben Ezra*: "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was planned." It was a tragedy that his own beautiful marriage lasted for only fifteen years, and he was a widower thereafter for twenty-eight years. But who can doubt that he was "growing old along with Elizabeth Barrett," during that long widowerhood, and that the best came when he was reunited with her in heaven?

All life runs on those two parallel planes. Those who see the world degenerating, are looking out on the lower plane only. Rise onto the higher plane, and you will see evidence that the world is, in fact, getting better and better! The Lord has come again, as the unrecognized Guest at the feast, and is at this very moment turning water into wine. While everybody around us is complaining that there is

nothing more to drink, Jesus Christ is preparing a new and inexhaustible supply of a far better vintage! This miracle is being worked behind the scenes. The great men of the world, the Masters of Ceremonies, the Big Shots - they know nothing about it. But the slaves who draw the water know. *We know!*

So please don't let us have any more moaning about the way the world is going, nor even the way the church is going. Tap the spiritual resources which are even now being provided, and the Best will come at the end.

Now we have a clue as to why the Lord in his providence allows natural degeneration to take place, why worldly pleasures so soon cease to satisfy, why the world begins to lose its attraction for many over fifty! It is to wean us away from our lower contacts, and encourage us to find satisfaction instead in what is spiritual. The gold on the surface is soon exhausted, so we have to dig down to the underground seams, where the reef becomes richer and richer the deeper you penetrate. I think it is under Providence that wives lose their bloom when the first baby comes along, so that their husbands' love must go deeper.

Young folk need not pity us older ones because we no longer feel any desire to dance or play ball games or take interest in pin-up girls. And we need not feel wistful as we look back over outworn states. Faust was a fool to try to recover his youth on the devil's terms. I would rather grow old on the Lord's terms - "grow old along with *Him*." For with Him is an inexhaustible well of eternal youth.

Old pleasures may be ceasing to satisfy you. Life may be losing its interest for you. But, have Jesus for a Guest, and He will make all things new. Better still, have Jesus for a Host! He invites you to feast with Him. Don't decline the invitation, or make excuses. Put on the wedding garment. Repent of your sins, wash yourself clean. Then, as His disciple, you will go in with Him and sup with Him - not at a tawdry village wedding, but at a royal banquet: the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*.

45. On Growing Old

First, a few words about *Time*. Time is one of the most precious commodities in the world. Nobody knows how much of it the good Lord has given him; but we do know it is a finite quantity, so that by this time tomorrow you will have one day less of it; you will be one day nearer to the moment when you will be taken out of time. And no power on earth, not all the scientists and governments working together, can recover one single second of time when it is passed.

According to the manner in which we use our time, we shall be happy or miserable to eternity. You would expect, therefore, that everybody would take the trouble to discover how best to use his limited quantity of time. Experience, however, shows otherwise. We squander it, throw it away, and even pay big money for various devices for destroying it. Or, if we are of the "busy" type and enjoy filling every moment with activity, we often just run round and round in circles. We have so many things to do and are always in such a tearing hurry, that we consume weeks, months, even years of time, without making any progress whatever toward heaven. It does seem that some of us would do well to slow down our feverish activity and allocate more time to the real things of life: to be with our family and friends, to be with our heavenly Father; to think, to dream, to grow. Some of the busiest people I know will probably remain emotionally and spiritually immature to the end of their days. Those who are really grown-up and mature, usually have "all the time in the world."

When we are using up our allocation of time too quickly, God sometimes allows us to fall sick, to remind us of the need to slow down. This is like putting the brake on a car when it is traveling so fast that its occupants cannot see and enjoy the countryside through which they are traveling. And, as we

grow older and our supply of time begins to run short, the Lord allows our arteries to harden, our heart-beats to become more noticeable, our breath to shorten. Our bodies become heavier to move around, we stiffen up with arthritis; our sight and hearing become less keen, our memory begins to fail us. There is nothing abnormal or wrong about this gradual slowing down of our physical activity. It is the mellowing of the fruit in preparation for the moment when it must fall from the tree. Our ties with the world are loosened one by one, so that we can have more opportunity for looking inward, and growing inward, in order to become better prepared for our eventual transfer to the inner plane of being.

I am sorry for people who die suddenly, in the full flush of their worldly cares, say in a car or airplane accident. They are thrown into eternity without warning. Their minds are seething with their business concerns, terribly preoccupied, under the greatest possible strain of *Time*; when suddenly they find themselves in a world where there is no time, just an eternal present. What a shock! The difficulty of readjustment in such cases will be severe. That is not how we are meant to go. Even a few weeks in bed before the transition, will provide a merciful preparation for the unhurriedness of heaven.

There is nothing to be alarmed about in the aging process, nothing to be ashamed of, and I cannot understand why people should ever disguise their age or pretend to be younger than they are. Why attempt to return to states you have outgrown? It would be as if someone at college was ashamed of nearing graduation and tried to be demoted to a lower grade! Strange, isn't it? Even the idea that beauty fades with age is not necessarily true. Walt Whitman, speaking of women, said something like this: "Some are old and some are young; all are beautiful, but the old are more beautiful than the young." One of the most beautiful women I ever met was a wizened old Zulu great-grandmother in whose wrinkled face shone the glory of angelhood.

Grace and beauty stem from the poise of spiritual maturity. There is a lack of self-consciousness about it, as with the innocence of childhood, which is perhaps why Jesus said we must become again like little children if we are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Children are dependent on their mothers, being attached at first by the umbilical cord and then by the apron string. When they are launched on the world in their own strength, their innocence disappears. Then they generally display too much self-consciousness; they want to attract attention, they show off, they put on an act. That's youth! When they marry and sober down, this self-consciousness often still clings to them and becomes a nagging worry. They are concerned all the time with what others are thinking of them, whether they are doing the "right thing," what impression they are making. This is a kind of psychological adolescence which many people remain in all their lives. To become fully adult, you must stand on your own feet, at ease in every situation, afraid of nothing, dependent on nobody except God, answerable to nobody except God. In order to achieve the innocence of maturity, you must establish a new kind of umbilical relationship - with your heavenly Father. This is likened in the Bible to the relationship between the branches and the main stem of the grape vine. "I am the vine," said Jesus, "ye are the branches." To be mature we must draw life from Him; we must abide in Him and He in us.

Spiritual maturity produces a re-orientation of our whole outlook. We no longer feel the itch of worldly ambition. We lose all desire to impress. If our worth is not recognized, what of it? We lose all sense of jealousy and rivalry. If other people get rewards that are rightly due to us, good luck to them! We are no longer touchy or easily hurt, nor do we harbor resentments. We are no longer possessive or inclusive, wanting to grab things for ourselves; we are satisfied with the way things work out. So we lose all undue strains and stresses, and can adapt to situations as they are. We are

not afraid of anything that can happen to us, and develop an absolute trust in the Lord's Providence. That is what I mean by spiritual maturity.

In the Bible, growing old usually has a good connotation, relating to experience and wisdom; but sometimes, as in the Psalms, bodily deterioration is deplored. "The days of our years are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they be eighty years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away. We spend our years as a tale that is told. Therefore (adds the Psalmist), so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Again: "As for man, his days are as grass. As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth; then the wind passeth over it, and it is gone. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, to such as keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them." Here the contrast is made between the physical body which *does* decay and disappear, and the spirit of man which does *not*. And the spirit is the man himself.

Another thing the ageing person must learn to accept, is that the nature of his usefulness will change. In youth, our "use" consists in doing. As middle age approaches, it consists in knowing, understanding, counselling, advising. When we become old, it consists in loving. These three stages (doing, knowing, and loving) are what Swedenborg refers to as natural, spiritual, and celestial. Some old folk seem to resent the fact that they can no longer do all they used to do. They bemoan that they are no longer useful for anything. But this is a fallacy. The truth is merely that the kind of use they can perform has changed. Nobody expects much physical activity, or mental activity, from the "golden ager." If he can still care for himself and play his part in the affairs of life, that's fine! - but it is not necessary. The primary requirement from old age is LOVE. Great-grandmama sits in her rocking chair, beaming around on everybody. No one expects her to jump up and wash the dishes, or vacuum the floor, or fill in the income tax returns. But they all look to her for sympathy, love and compassion. She prays for the family and is a channel from God to them. She provides a celestial sphere in which they can live their lives more effectively. And who can say she is not performing a far greater use than any of them?

Finally, there is one difficult lesson that old folk must learn before they pass over. They must learn to receive as well as give. Old age, like childhood, is dependent on others. How hard it is for someone, who has been giving out all his life, to receive help and support from others in such a way as to give satisfaction to the donor! How humiliating to have to be dressed and cared for! - to have to ask for everything you need! - to be a "burden" on others, even though the others love it that way! This is indeed one of the hardest lessons to master. Yet, unless we learn to receive gracefully, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven, where we shall have to accept from our heavenly Father everything we possess and are. We must sink our foolish pride and learn the humility of submission and dependence.

So at last the end will come. The fruit, being ripe, will fall easily and naturally from the tree, without a maggot in it. What then? What happens to old people in the spiritual world? Why, they grow young again! They enter the springtide of youth and vigour, able to do all the things they dreamed of doing in the earth life, but could not, because of weakness or lack of know-how. They become the personification of all the ideals they ever cherished. In a word, to die from this world is to enter *Real Life*.

When the time comes for you personally to "shuffle off this mortal coil" (as it will surely do, maybe sooner than you expect) I hope you will be able to repeat the words of old Simeon in the temple: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And may the Lord say to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been

faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

"The Lord giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:29-31).

46. The Tree of Life

We are told in the Book of Genesis that "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Man is a vessel made of clay, an earthenware pitcher filled with the pure wine of the life of God. That life takes the shape of the vessel, just as wine in a jar takes the shape of the jar. So, though your life is God's life in you, you are a self-conscious individual with your own distinct personality. You feel that you are separate from God. He is over against you. You can love Him, or hate Him, or even ignore Him. You can think of yourself as God, put yourself in the centre of the universe, and attribute everything to your own great and wonderful ego. We all do this at times.

Not so man, when he was first created in those far-away days in the dawn of the world. He was as innocent as a babe in arms. What do we mean by "innocent?" I mean he had no experience of separateness from God. He was consciously aware of his drawing of life from God and his utter dependence on God, just as a baby is aware of his utter dependence on his mother and is happy in that dependent relationship.

Because of early man's innocence, he lived in Eden, a garden of delight. It was a well-watered garden, producing all he needed for his modest sustenance. And in that garden were trees of many kinds. Literally? Yes, no doubt. And spiritually also. Spiritual trees. What are they? A spiritual tree grows up from the deep sub-soil of our minds, and puts out branches and leaves, and produces fruit. Swedenborg calls it a "perception." It can be a true perception or a false perception. Those early men had a *true* perception that their life was not their own but came to them in constant supply from God. This was the *Tree of Life*. It was in the very centre of their spiritual garden, probably on a little mound or hill, with the other trees sloping away from it in park-like beauty. Man (*Adam* in Hebrew, meaning "mankind") ate continually of the fruit of the Tree of Life, gladly aware all the time that he was nothing, God was all.

The garden contained plenty of other trees: perceptions of all kinds. Our attention is drawn to one in particular, whose fruit was not on any account to be eaten: the TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL. As God said, "in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Why, then, had God planted it there in the first place? Since it was so dangerous and deadly, why didn't God root it out and destroy it? No, that tree had to be there, for it was man's sense of free-will or choice. It was his feeling of selfhood, without which he would not have been a responsible human being. It was his capacity to know both good and evil, to choose between good and evil; to cut himself away from God if he wished to, to taste hell if he wanted to. That capacity had to be preserved, if man was not to be a mere puppet on a string. But woe to that man who preferred the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to the Tree of Life, who preferred to exercise his own freedom rather than depend on God!

Eve, the woman, started the trouble in Genesis 3. She represents the emotional side of "homo"; that is to say, of each one of us. Even we men have this female characteristic, just as women have certain male characteristics, to make us complete people. In the symbolism of the Bible story, it is the emotional side, represented by Eve, which first gets caught up in the glamour of sense experience.

Here is the old serpent of the senses, more subtle than any beast of the field, tempting us to reverse the order of our values, putting lower things above and higher things below. As soon as Eve begins to have dealings with the serpent, the Tree of Life is removed from the central position in the garden, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is put in its place. In actual life it would be a major task to dig up a tree and replace it with another tree, but spiritually this is all too easily done. Eve says to the snake, "Of the tree which is in the midst (middle) of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Yet in the beginning the tree in the middle of the garden had been the Tree of Life, whose fruit they were commanded to eat! She had switched the trees around.

We are continually doing this ourselves. Children do it when they start fighting their mothers and shouting "I, I, I." That is when they begin to lose their innocence. Freedom to choose good or evil has become more central than the consciousness of God as all-in-all. Where has Eve put the Tree of Life? It must still be somewhere in the garden, otherwise she would no longer be alive, but it is now on one side, while the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is given the honoured position on the mound or little hill. And how she longs to eat of its fruit! Of course, if she had not eaten of it, then no harm would have been done. The mood would have passed, the Tree of Life would have been restored to its central position, and all would have been as before. But her senses, represented by the serpent, urged Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, or "appropriate it to herself," as Swedenborg would say, "It won't hurt you," wheedled the serpent; "on the contrary, it will open your eyes, it will give you new and wonderful experiences, it will expand your mind! You will become like a God, knowing evil as well as good." Eventually the emotions (Eve) yielded to the temptation, and she easily persuaded her man to join her in the experiment, to exercise his free-will in tasting good *and evil*. They tried out the new drug together, the hallucinogen. And their eyes were indeed opened, as the serpent had promised them. But what did they see? Beauty and glamour? No. They saw that they were naked and destitute, and for the first time since they were created they felt shame.

Animals do not feel shame. Little children do not feel shame. Shame comes with the loss of innocence. Is shame, then, a bad thing? Not altogether, because at least it indicates that conscience is still alive. There is hope of amendment when there is shame. If acted upon, it can bring us back to a proper relationship with God. But, if shame is not acted upon, or if it only prompts us to make excuses, or to do a "cover-up job," as Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves to hide their nakedness, then the shame itself soon passes, and we become shameless, which is the state of the devils in hell. The devils know they are spiritually naked, but do not care. This extreme state had not yet been reached by Adam and Eve. They were troubled and confused, so God had mercy on them, and covered them more permanently with garments of skins.

Man's first experiment with moral choice was indeed a traumatic experience. He could never be the same again, and his environment had to be adapted to his new condition. It became essential that he should no longer have access to the Tree of Life. Don't you see that if we, in our fallen estate, were consciously aware of our utter dependence on the Lord, it would result in profanation of the direst kind? Normally a consciousness of God's presence protects us from sin; but if, despite of it, we deliberately choose to commit sin, is it not best for us to be unaware of His nearness to us? If the Prodigal Son had known, what indeed must have been the case, that his Father was with him, even in that far country where he was wasting his substance with riotous living - ("If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there!") - would it not have irked and frustrated and angered him beyond bearing? "What! Are you even here, Father, trying to spoil my fun? Can't I get clear of you?" It is the same kind of motivation that has, in recent years, caused many middle and upper class teenagers to leave their comfortable homes and join the hippies: to be free of parental authority, the hateful "Do this! Don't do that!" and discover morality for themselves.

Therefore, in our story of Adam and Eve, it became imperative that the Tree of Life should no longer be available to them. They became unconscious of God's presence, and so lost the delights of innocence. They were driven out of Eden into a far country; and Providence, in the guise of Cherubim with flaming swords, stood guard at the entrance to the garden, to prevent them from approaching the Tree of Life.

There you have the FALL. It is interesting to speculate whether it was inevitable. We do not know for how many thousands of years man had lived happily on earth before he started this mad experiment with evil. Theoretically he might have gone on forever without eating of the forbidden fruit. But in fact, in the course of time, he did eat of it, thus producing hell, and building up all sorts of hereditary evils which have become innate in his descendants. We are fallen creatures. Only briefly in our infancy, before our corrupt selfhood begins to assert itself, do we enjoy a kind of racial memory of those far-off Eden days. Babies, for a few months or a year or so, are completely innocent. But alas, this is only the innocence of ignorance. As soon as they begin to learn things, they feel this urge to experiment, to taste hell as well as heaven, to develop a knowledge of evil as well as good. The Lord has to permit it. If He did not, there would be no "people" at all, only automata or robots.

However, in His loving mercy the Lord provides other ways by which fallen man can, in freedom and according to reason, struggle against the resistance of his corrupt nature. It is true, as the Curse says: "Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to thee; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:18,19). We cannot do anything productive without struggle and pain. The thorns and thistles of our heredity will scratch and tear us as we endeavour to cope with them. Eventually the old selfhood will have to die altogether. But a new selfhood can be built up in its place, which will live forever. This is the process of "regeneration," necessary since the Fall. The whole of the Bible is concerned with it. It is the main concern of our entire life on earth, this dying unto self and being born again from the Lord. If we succeed in it, we go round full circle, and come back to the point from which our race first started. We return to the delights of innocence; but now it is the innocence of wisdom.

Turn to the closing chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, which describe our final goal, the state of life which hopefully we shall attain to at the end, whether in this world or the next. The holy city New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven. It is a beautiful city, and all its measurements are the measurements of an angel. Moreover, God resides in it. Of course, God resides in you, now. But normally, because of the Fall, you are unaware of His presence. Only occasionally do you get a glimpse of His glory in you. You feel a deep stirring, and know He is there. As your regeneration proceeds, these glimpses 'become more frequent, until in the end you become consciously aware that He is taking control of your whole life. You are then in the holy city New Jerusalem. It is not the Garden of Eden. We shall never get back to the unsophisticated life of the cave dweller, no matter how idyllic it may have been. The New Age is almost certain to be civilized. City life is here to stay; we cannot reverse the huge migration to the cities. But there are cities and cities. Some are like hell, some like heaven. The best cities have a great deal of space given over to parks and rivers and trees. The New Jerusalem is described as a garden city. It is Eden in city form!

The Tree of Life? Sure, it is there! Through the golden boulevards of the New Jerusalem flow the waters of the River of Life, clear as crystal. In the middle of the sparkling stream, and on both banks, the Tree of Life is flourishing. It bears twelve manner of fruits, one each month; and its leaves are medicine for the healing of the nations. "There shall be no more curse," we are assured. The ancient Curse of Eden is finally annulled. "The throne of God and the Lamb shall be in the city, and His servants shall serve Him, and shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." "To him

that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the middle of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

The circle is complete. Whereas at the time of the Fall man was driven out of the garden, "lest he should eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life," and cherubim were stationed with flaming swords to prevent him from eating of it; now he is expressly invited - even urged - to come into the garden city and eat his fill of the fruit of this very tree! But what a story of experiment, trial and error, failure and bitterness and frustration and death, must first be told! Now at last his eyes are fully open, and he sees the Lord on the throne of his heart. The Lord is the Sun in the centre of his firmament, the Source of his life. The Lord is his loving heavenly Father. The Prodigal has returned home; the feast is prepared for him. "He was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

No matter how low you may have fallen, you can rise again. The year passes through four seasons: autumn (appropriately called the fall!) followed by winter, followed by spring, followed by summer. We have a dream and see a bright light; then it goes out and we find ourselves in gross darkness. We stumble and fall, and cry: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yes, even Jesus Himself underwent those successive states. The Tree of Life was not always in the middle of His garden. He had His wilderness periods when He felt alienated from the Divine, as well as states of glory when He could say, "I and the Father are one." However bad things may seem with you, do not be discouraged, disappointed or depressed. The wheel will turn and summer will come. Press earnestly forward along the route laid out in His Holy Word, and the day will surely dawn when you will see the golden turrets and domes and leafy tree-tops of the holy city gleaming on the horizon. The threatening Cherubim, originally set to guard the way to the Tree of Life, will have been transformed into beckoning angels; and the royal invitation will resound in your ears:

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."