

# A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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## Light of the World

*Have you ever wondered what you are doing here; what the purpose of your life is? Everyone has a purpose and if we are not feeling fulfilled in our lives then we should probably ask our Creator what we should be doing. God knows everything about us down to the least particulars of our lives. He it is that has made us. As the psalmist says, "I will praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Not only has God made us but he has made us in his image and likeness. We are all cells in the body of the "Greatest Man" and we are each of us a tiny replica of our Creator and dependent upon him for our very life. Each of us has a unique purpose - a part to play - within the grand scheme of things, which God has ordained for us. Perhaps your purpose is something you love doing. When you are doing the work that you have a passion for, knowing that you are doing God's will, you will be on the right track.*

*God had a special purpose in mind when he adapted himself to our level of life and manifested as the human being named Jesus Christ. His purpose was to show us the true nature of the God of the universe, to show us how to live and be loving and to show us the way to heaven. In this issue we focus on the Lord as God and the part we can play in becoming the person we were created to be.*



The Lord is the God of heaven and earth and by him all things in the heavens and on the earths were made, are governed by his divine providence and happen according to it.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG



## *Light in our Darkness*

*Brian W. Keith*

Night - a time of quiet when the bustle of the day dies down; a time of weariness when we make ready for a restful sleep; also a time of darkness and cold; our vision is limited and we seek the warmth of fires and homes.

The night time scenes surrounding the birth and early years of the Lord's life depict the shroud that had descended upon the world at that time. Their God, Jehovah, had not been seen nor heard from in hundreds of years. They were lost and rudderless without him. Other than maintaining the ancient rituals, they had little sense of who he was and how they were to live. Hearts were growing colder from the confusion and distortion of everything good.

Then, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory..." The Lord was born with light in the midst of confused and dark states of life. Likewise, when we ourselves see little but gloom and hopelessness, he comes to us. He holds us in his hands, nourishing an inner sense of hope that we might endure and overcome. In the morning we realise he is with us, enabling us to recognise who he is and how we might walk in his ways. This is why the morning with its light and warmth corresponds to the Lord's coming.

The Lord came as the light of the world. This is his glory. Until the Lord took on a physical form as a tender infant, all the earlier concepts of God were vague at best. Dependent upon the finite grasp of the angels, the glory of God had shone dimmer and dimmer into the world, until at last the vision of him was nearly lost. By being born as a human being the Lord acquired a natural degree of life. As he put it on and gradually made it divine, the warmth of his love and the light of his wisdom became immediately present with all.

This is the light of the new day. The Lord's coming heralded for mankind a light shining in the darkness. We can sense this when we reflect upon our feelings on waking - not on those mornings which come after too little sleep, or when we are rudely awakened by alarms and the bustle of hurriedly preparing to rush off to work. But we feel it in the quiet mornings when we awake refreshed and revived; when we listen to

the singing of the birds and know the dazzling sunlight is warming the earth. The light has a special quality then. With clarity we see beauty in even the simplest things around us. And we can sense the closeness of heaven as our spirits are lifted up to the new day.

As the Word made flesh, the Lord can bring us a peacefulness unlike any other. Not a peace like the quiet of evening when we are preparing to rest. Rather it is a peace of contentment and confidence. As the Writings of Swedenborg note, this peace is "the very divine truth in heaven from the Lord which universally affects all who are there and makes heaven to be heaven; for peace has in it confidence in the Lord that he directs all things and provides all things and that he leads to a good end. When a person is in this state, he is in peace, for he then fears nothing, and no worry about things to come disturbs him." The glory of the Lord's Word shines upon us when we have such assurances that he is in charge, carefully guiding every one of our steps.

This is the state of the angels. They fully enjoy the present, sensing all the goodness that the Lord is giving them now. For they trust in him, knowing that he is leading and caring for them no matter what happens. We may taste some of this angelic peace as we awaken in the morning. But we enter into it more and more as we set aside the things of this world: worry about the future, too great a focus on possessions, our selfish drives and desires. To the extent that we can enjoy earthly pleasures without making them all-important; to the extent we can serve others without always thinking about what we will get out of it, so far peace can enter our lives. It is then that we become convinced that the Lord's light is the true light. It is then that we can glimpse the Lord and experience his peace.

The Divine as it is in Itself is far beyond our comprehension. We cannot know God unless we have a picture of him to relate to. So the Lord was born that we might see his nature and have it shed light on our lives, giving us the confidence and trust that he is always with us, always leading us in paths of peace.

## *Editorial*

### **Upon this Rock**

*It is not generally known that there is a real correspondence between the things of our natural world and that of the spiritual world. Everywhere around us we have natural objects which, if we knew their spiritual significance, would be able to remind us of some spiritual reality. We have rocks and streams, birds, animals, trees, flowers, insects and many other things. All of these have spiritual significance which has been revealed to us in the Writings of Swedenborg. His Writings show us how these natural objects symbolise deeper realities. The way that he revealed these things was to interpret them in the stories that make up Genesis and Exodus of the Bible. Much of the remainder of the Bible can be interpreted using what he wrote as the key.*

*When we see a running stream, we may be reminded of God's truth, which quenches our thirst for what is true, washes away what is untrue and gives us a sense of peace. When we see a rock, the same principle may apply. Rocks symbolise spiritual or true ideas laid down in our minds. These are like a foundation upon which we may build an ideal way of life. In the Greek language (the original language of the New Testament) the word for rock is "petros." Jesus said to his disciple, Simon Peter, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Peter the disciple stands for the rock of faith in believing that Jesus was God come on the earth. The Lord wants us all to have this belief.*

*In the story of Jesus walking on the water in a storm, it makes sense that the disciple named Peter was the one to step out of the boat to come to him. We need the kind of faith represented by Peter in order to step outside our comfort zones when God calls us. When we believe that God came upon earth as a divine human being, we have the rock-like faith that is represented by Peter. As long as we can keep our eyes on the Lord, we will not fail, but the moment we start to attempt to do things on our own strength, we will flounder as Peter did. The Lord Jesus Christ is God incarnate and he is the one to whom we should come. He wants us to look to him as our personal God because, to think of him as being just a powerful force is to miss the fact that God is a loving heavenly parent who is taking care of us every moment. God became a human being like us so that he could show us the reality of who he really is. This is the truth upon which he wants to build his global faith community. This faith community is represented by the holy city New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation, coming down from God out of heaven, and it is to be thought of as a promise for the future of peace for the human race.*

*Jenny*



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## *Cheers for Those who Step Out of the Boat*

John Sutton

The boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying "It is a ghost!" and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." So he said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him "O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased (Matthew 14)."

The story of Peter accepting Jesus' invitation to walk on the water in the middle of a storm has become synonymous with those who hold to moral principles even when threatened by loss and danger. Our world would be much poorer without them. Some have become public heroes, like Mahatma Gandhi; Martin Luther King; Aung San Sui Kyi; and Nelson Mandela. Some are local heroes while others remain completely anonymous.

The Gospel stories however do not only illustrate our moral life but also our spiritual life. If we are to become spiritually loving and wise all of us have to "step out of the boat" from time to time. So what does it mean to step out of the boat? The Writings of Swedenborg state that Biblical stories contain a Divinely inspired spiritual sense in which each natural object and event represents a spiritual quality or event. The story of Peter stepping out of the boat in its spiritual sense describes what happens when we face a profound temptation or spiritual upheaval.

Like the storms on Galilee, spiritual storms can arise out of nowhere. At one moment life is

sweet and then suddenly we are immersed in powerful negative thoughts and feelings. The Writings of Swedenborg indicate that these arise from the spheres of lower order spirits with us. This happens because we have no life of our own but receive it from the Lord either through heaven or "hell." The influence of hell is present because by heredity we are born into loves, desires and thoughts which are inspired by the negativity of hell. The Lord does not will this but has to permit these harrowing experiences. It is the only way to change the dominant selfish and worldly loves of our old self to more altruistic ones of a new self. He wants us to be free of the old loves,

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illusions and attitudes and give us new truths and attitudes which lead to lasting happiness.

So the Lord, by permission, allows the influence of hell to excite in us such things as self-righteous anger, greed, sexual lust, self-pity, fears and worries. However His presence with us prevents us being totally possessed by these. We are able to be aware of what is happening within us and have the freedom to make choices.

The disciples represent everything that is good, honest, true and sincere within us which receives its life from the Lord and his angels. (It is interesting that therapists successfully help anorexic and bulimic patients by encouraging them to see their inner negative thoughts and feelings as not being part of themselves. This seems to lend support to the kind of 'modus operandi' which the Writings of Swedenborg teach).

The boat which contained the disciples represents the teachings from God which we have received during our life, as all that is good and true is supported and carried forward by these things.

The terror of a spiritual battle is seen in the

reaction of the disciples to the storm even though some of them were experienced Galilean fishermen. The influence of the hells creates spiritual terror by playing on our fears and worries. It encourages us to focus on a negative attitude so that our thinking becomes distorted, creating irrationalities and mental illusions. Hell's goal is for us to despair of the situation and of ourselves. In such ways our inner world becomes dark and threatening and we are reduced to feeling helpless and hopeless. It feels as though our life is being taken away. At the very darkest time when we are aware of our utter helplessness we become aware of the Lord's presence, just as He appeared to His disciples out of the darkness walking on the water. But like the disciples we do not believe that He is really able to save us despite His teaching that, "All power has been given me in heaven and on earth." When we're in the midst of temptation the power of the Lord's presence seems like a spectre of our imagination.

Peter now takes centre stage. He represents our fledgling faith which the Lord said would become a rock which would be the foundation of His church. But at this time our faith is still being fashioned and strengthened. It is still too self-assured and self-reliant. We are in the dark as to its true nature.

Swedenborg writes about this stage of our spiritual life:

The person who is being regenerated (reborn) is at first of such a nature that he imagines that any good he does comes from himself, and that any truth he utters comes from himself, but the fact of the matter is that all good and all truth come from the Lord. Consequently anyone who imagines that these originate in himself does not as yet have the life that belongs to true faith, though he is able to receive it later on.

Peter's challenge to the Lord to prove that it is indeed He comes from this trust in self and lack of belief in the Lord's omnipotence. Although the Lord knows what is about to happen He also knows that it is necessary for Peter and for our faith to discover that it is based on the illusion that we can save

ourselves. So the invitation to Peter to step out of the boat and walk on the water represents the Lord's invitation to us to put our faith to the test by facing our spiritual battles. Initially we manage it but then the influx from the hells flows into our thoughts and feelings and like the wind which destroyed Peter's confidence, it reveals our lack of trust in the Lord and we start to sink. The Lord in his mercy does not abandon us to our fate however. Seeing the danger He inflows with His love and wisdom and prevents us being overwhelmed. He fulfils his promise from Isaiah 43: *When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you..*

He restores order and calm to our thoughts and feelings. If we really wish to grow spiritually we will have to face spiritual temptations. This can mean facing the same issue several times until those particular attitudes and ideas are given no room space in us. We are like recovering alcoholics who have to step out of the boat everyday by remaining free of alcohol and trusting in God as they know Him. We will be challenged by our spiritual illusions, excuses and addictions.

This story encourages us not to feel overwhelmed by the appearance of spiritual storms but to accept that through them the Lord is inviting us to take the next step in our spiritual growth - a step out of the boat in trusting that He will be there supporting us to the end.





## To My Children

I can allow you freedom, but I cannot be responsible for it.

I can offer you advice, but I cannot decide for you.

I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.

I can advise you about friends, but I cannot choose them for you.

I can tell you about the facts of life, but I cannot build your reputation.

I can tell you about alcohol and drugs, but I cannot say "no" for you.

I can teach you about kindness, but I cannot make you gracious.

I can model values for you, but I cannot make you moral.

I can teach you respect, but I cannot make you honourable.

I can give you love, but I cannot make you beautiful inside.

I can teach you about God's love and care for you, but I cannot make you trust.

I can teach you about living, but I cannot live your life for you.



## *Following the Lord* *An Excerpt from the Writings of Swedenborg*

"Following the Lord," like "going" or "walking" after the Lord, means accepting, obeying, acting, and living *from* the Lord and *with* the Lord. It means this because we cannot follow the Lord from self - only from the Lord.

The Lord attracts us to follow him when we wish to follow in freedom. But he cannot attract us if we do not want to follow him. The Lord works with us in such a way that we can follow the Lord as if it were by ourselves, and in this way the Lord flows into our freedom. He does this so that goodness and truth may be received and planted in us, leading to our reformation and spiritual rebirth.

It must *seem* to us as if we follow the Lord by ourselves - meaning that we believe in the Lord's divine nature and put his commandments into practice by ourselves. Otherwise we would not make the divine a part of ourselves, nor be united with the Lord, and so there would be no reformation or rebirth for us. Everything that we receive in freedom, as if by ourselves, goes into us and becomes as if it were our own - whether it is something we think and say or something we intend and do as if by ourselves.

Yet we ought to believe (as is really, intrinsically true) that we do these things not from ourselves, but from the Lord. This is why I say that we must not act by ourselves, but *as if* by ourselves.

Another reason for this is that we have no awareness of how the Lord acts into our motivation, and the thoughts that come from it, since we know nothing about our union with angels. We surmise that what we intend and think comes from ourselves. Yet everything good flows into us: what we intend and think, and what we do as a result.

Since we know from what the Lord has taught us that everything good comes from God, we should believe that we do not do good from ourselves, even though we do it *as if* from ourselves.  
...

Following the Lord means believing in his divine humanity and doing his commandments, because we can be united with the Lord only when we do this. We are united with the Lord according to our acceptance and affirmation of him both from our hearts and in our lives. . . .

From all this we can see that "following the Lord" means being led by him and not by self. We can be led by the Lord only when we are not led by self. We are led by self when we do not avoid evil things ... It is different when evil things have been moved away, which happens when we avoid them because they are hellish. Then, the Lord comes in with true and good things from heaven, and leads us.

*Apocalypse Explained 864*

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