

An Introductory Talk on The Teachings of Swedenborg

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"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

(Matthew 21:46; Mark 15:34.)

Why did the Lord on the Cross cry out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

One answer given by many at this day is that the Lord was a mere man, like other men, and that He said these words out of despair due to His suffering on the cross. This idea of the Lord denies the truth of the whole of the Sacred Scriptures. It denies the truth of the Lord's Divine birth, and the truth of His resurrection. No merely human man is born as the Lord was born, nor can he say such things of himself as the Lord said of Himself, nor can he rise from the grave with His whole body, as the Lord rose. If we do not believe what the Scriptures say about the Lord, then we do not believe in Him at all. This answer is therefore not acceptable to those who believe in the Lord.

Another answer given by many is that the Lord was the Son of God born from eternity, and that He cried out these words to His Father because of His suffering on the cross. This idea does not answer the question, for why should the Son of God, who is equal in all things to the Father, cry out for help to another, or feel that God had deserted Him? If the Son is equal to the Father, then the Son was omnipotent and omniscient, and did not need the help of another. Therefore this idea of the Lord does not provide an answer to our question.

What answer then can be given? We believe that a clear and understandable answer to this question is provided in the teachings of Swedenborg. The first and essential truth taught in the writings of Swedenborg is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of Heaven and earth. There is no other God, nor any other Divine Person in God. At first glance it may appear that if this idea of the Lord is true, then it is more impossible than ever to answer the question as to why the Lord on the cross cried out "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But with this idea in mind, these words of the Lord can be understood for the first time. Consider carefully the following teachings and you will see.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world by birth from the virgin Mary. He was conceived of God. (Luke 1:35.) Therefore there was in Him the Divine Life. His very soul or essence of life was Divine. From Mary, however, he had a human nature like that of another man. This human nature derived from Mary is called in Swedenborg's writings "the maternal human." From God the Lord had from birth the Divine life or soul; and from Mary the Lord had at His birth a human nature like that of another man.

During His life in the world the Lord changed the human nature He derived from Mary. He made that human nature Divine. This can be seen in general from the fact that the Body with which the Lord rose from the sepulchre is not the same kind of body as that which He had at

birth. At birth the Lord had a material body like that of another man. Now, after His resurrection, the Lord in His glorified Body can be present with all men. This is evident from what the Lord said about His Flesh and His Blood, which we must eat and drink, if we are to have eternal life. (John 6:53, 58.) This does not refer to a material body such as the Lord first had, but to a Divine Body which men receive when their hearts and minds are opened to receive the Lord.

During His life in the world the Lord put off the imperfect body which He received through Mary, and put on a Human nature which in all things was Divine. This is why in the New Testament the Lord did not once acknowledge Mary to be His mother, but called her "woman." This was because she was not the mother of the Divine Human nature which He put on during His life in the world, but only the mother of that merely human nature which He changed and put off.

The Lord purified the human nature which He first received at birth. He prepared it to receive the Divine, and to become one with the Divine life which was in Him from conception. In this way He formed and fashioned in Himself another Human, which was no longer like that of any other man but was Divine. The Lord in the world brought the human and the Divine in Himself together into a oneness which can only be called the DIVINE HUMAN. In Him, God and Man, the Divine and the Human, became indissolubly one.

The process by which the Lord made His Human the Divine Human is called in the New Testament "glorification." The Lord made His Human Divine gradually, step by step, until at His resurrection nothing remained of His first human nature, and all with Him was Divine. It can be seen that the Divine Human was within the Lord even during the time Of His public ministry, from the fact that He showed His Divine Human to three of His disciples at the transfiguration. (Matthew 17:1-8.) At His death on the cross His glorification was completed.

Why did the Lord first take on a human nature like that of another man, and then make His Human Divine?

For this there were two reasons. The first was that in the merely human nature which He first took on from Mary, the Lord could meet and overcome in Himself all the hells. In that human He met and overcame all the disorders of the human mind, all the evils which had come to dominate in men from the beginning. If the Lord had not taken on that maternal human, there could not have been any meeting between Himself and the hells, and He could not have overcome them. The second reason why the Lord took on a human nature like that of another man, and then made the Human Divine, is that in this way all that is Divine could be brought into a Human form in which the human race could understand and love it. Ask yourself, "What can I understand of the Divine except that which I have seen in the Lord Jesus Christ?" Can you really see anything of the Divine except that which you first see in Him? Can you see anything of the Divine which can touch your heart and mind except in the Lord? From this you can see that the Lord has brought the Divine into a Human form in which men can now receive the Divine. This was the reason why the Lord came into the world.

While the Lord was in the world He underwent two distinctly different states of mind, alternately, throughout His life. One state was when He was preparing something of His maternal human for reception and union with the Divine. The other state was when the union of that part of His human with the Divine had been completed. The first state was one of combat and temptation. The second state was one of glorification.

When the Lord was in a state of combat and temptation, purifying His Human and fighting against the hells, His conscious life was within the limitations of that Human in Him which was not yet glorified. In such a state His Love, which was the Love of saving the whole human race, could be brought into doubt and despair. The limitation of His Human nature made this possible. In that state therefore it could appear to Him as if His Divine, with its omnipotence and omniscience, was far from Him. Thus it could appear as if God was absent from Him. This is why the Lord often spoke as if the Father, the Divine Itself, were someone different from Himself.

When the Lord was in a state of glorification, of union of the Human and the Divine, His conscious life was above the limitations of the maternal human. In this state He spoke of the Father and Himself as one. (John 10:30, 14:9, 10.) In this state also He performed His miracles, and in this state He said that all things had been delivered unto Him by the Father. (Matthew 11:27.) And when the Lord's Human had been fully glorified, after His resurrection, the Lord then said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18.)

The Lord on the cross was in the state of temptation and combat. There, when for the last time His conscious life was within the limitations of the maternal human, He was brought to doubt and despair concerning the salvation of the human race. Then indeed the Divine appeared far from Him, and He in His despair cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

After suffering the cross, which was the last of His temptations, the Human of the Lord was altogether Divine. Then He was altogether one with His Father, not only as to His Divine soul, but as to His Human also. The Divine called the Father, and the Divine Human, called the Son, are now one, one in essence and in person.

If one sees that the Lord is our God, if one sees that He made His Divine and His Human one, we can also understand better the nature of the Lord's suffering on the cross. Swedenborg teaches, and shows from the Scriptures, that the Lord had but one Love, one end, one purpose, namely, to make possible the salvation of the human race. This was His Love, which ruled all things of His life. When He suffered, it was as to this Love that He suffered. His suffering was essentially this, that in His human He could be brought into doubt and even to despair as to the salvation of the human race. Nothing less than this could touch His Love. Nothing else was of any essential concern to Him.

When we think of the Lord's suffering on the cross, do we think of it as the suffering of another man? Was He in anxiety about Himself? We could think that this would be the case with an ordinary man. Physical suffering could bring an ordinary man into despair. But if we see that the Lord was not an ordinary man, and keep in mind that the Divine was in Him, then we can see also that His suffering was in relation to His Love. There, on the cross, rejected by mankind, rejected by His Church such as it then was, submitting Himself to indignities which portrayed and represented the repudiation of His Divine by mankind, He was as to His Human brought to the depths of despair as to the salvation of the human race. It was the suffering of His Divine Love for the salvation of mankind. At that moment He could not see how it was possible that men could be brought to the acknowledgment and reception of the Divine life, even as He could show it to them in His Divine Human, This was His grief.

Let this thought awaken us to what our own true relation to the Lord should be. He came into this world, and struggled and suffered to make possible our reception of His Divine Life. He has made it possible for us to see and understand the Divine in Him, and to love it. From His presence with us now in His Divine, Human we can receive the power to turn away from our evils and to receive a new love, a new life, from Him. Do we on our part look to Him? Do we strive to understand His Word? Do we exercise the powers He has given us to repent and receive His life? If we are stirred by the thought of His suffering, let us work and strive to receive what He has given to us.

(The subject of the Glorification of the Human of the Lord is treated in all of Swedenborg's works. We would especially recommend in connection with this subject the reading of the chapter on "The Lord the Redeemer" in The True Christian Religion, and the Arcana Coelestia from chapter twelve onwards.)

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