

Swedenborgianism's Answer Lady

Candace Frazee is a friend of mine who is tirelessly dedicated to ensuring that the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg remain accessible and understandable to all. As Madam Chair of SILA (Swedenborg Information of Los Angeles), she writes and distributes SILA's newsletter, which I regularly receive. The bulk of each issue of the newsletter is devoted to answering questions about Swedenborg and Swedenborgianism, as for example this very first one from 1992:

Dear Candace,

Who is Swedenborg and why should I read him?

Dear J.A.,

Emanuel Swedenborg was a wealthy scientist who went looking for the human soul in cadavers and ended up finding it in the Word of God. For a rich man he lived modestly, mostly in rooming houses in various countries. He wrote over 50 science books and pamphlets in chemistry, mining, physics, mathematics, mechanics, anatomy, geology, hydraulics, optics, botany, magnetics, mineralogy, astronomy, and acoustics. Swedenborg was an exceptional man of science who drafted many inventions such as the earliest model for an airplane...

Interest in Swedenborg often stops at his scientific knowledge... When he was 56, in 1744, the Lord God came to him and said that He had chosen Swedenborg to explain to people the spiritual sense of biblical scripture. From that day on Swedenborg "talked" with angels and spirits till the day he died in 1772—twenty-eight years later.

Swedenborg asked his employer for early retirement when all this happened. He was offered a promotion instead, but turned it down in order to have time to write his spiritual "findings". He eventually wrote 30 books on Christianity.

Emanuel Swedenborg claimed that the Lord God Jesus Christ told him a "New Church" of Christianity would be formed, but he did not establish one.

Swedenborg gave his books away for free—which he published at his own expense—to the universities and to the clergy of Europe. He was born in Sweden and died in England.

J.A., I think you would benefit by reading Swedenborg's theological books because they answer life's questions. Besides, the things he wrote about will blow you away—there is marriage (with sex) after death, God is love and wisdom, what angels' and devils' homes are like, the Bible is allegorical, the creation story is evolutionary, and we will stay as teenagers for eternity!

He was a remarkable, prolific writer of psychology and religion which will serve as building blocks for future generations. Swedenborg's influence is enormous. The amazing blind, mute, and deaf Helen Keller...was a Swedenborgian and she wrote:

"When Swedenborg's message was revealed to me, it was another precious gift added to life. Heaven, as Swedenborg portrays it, is not a mere collection of radiant ideas, but a practical, livable world. I plunge my hands deep into my large Braille volumes containing Swedenborg's teachings, and withdraw them full of secrets of the spiritual world."

As Swedenborgianism, with all its branches, has never had a huge number of adherents (probably no more than 30-50,000 throughout the world at one time), it's not one of the world's best-known religions, but its theology, as outlined by Swedenborg, is rich and deep and immensely rewarding to explore. His most famous book, *Heaven and Hell* (full title: *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen*) can be read as a work of sustained imagery and poetry—not unlike the Bhagavad Gita—

as can his other works: *Heavenly Secrets*, *Conjugal Love*, and the dozens more he wrote in Latin. All have been laboriously and lovingly translated into several languages by centuries of scholars.

For those who would like to sample this eye-opening interpretation of Christianity/humanity's relationship with God and heaven—in particular the heavenly nature of marriage—Candace has published *There Is an Answer: Living in the Post-Apocalyptic World* (available at her website). It's a friendly, sensible, at times humorous compilation of her newsletters and recounts of her visits to Swedenborgian landmarks, complete with photos, as well as a warm memoir of her life growing up in a Canadian household of Swedenborgians, her early life as a showgirl (catch a glimpse of her the next time the classic "Polynesian town" sketch on *SCTV* comes around), her girlhood as a student in the Swedenborgian enclave of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, and her current life as curator of the delightful Bunny Museum, the Guinness Record-making collection in the home she shares in Pasadena, California with her husband/Swedenborgian soulmate, Steve Lubanski.

To get an idea of how far-reaching Swedenborg's influence has been, click here to glance at the names of just a few hundred of the eminent men and women in history, and in our times, who have either been brought up in the teachings of Swedenborg or found his teachings later in life. (List courtesy of Candace—it's in her book.) Martin Luther King, Jr. is on the list, as is Johnny Appleseed, Robert Frost, Bill Wilson the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Henry James, Sr. and his son William James, Norman Vincent Peale, Walt Whitman, *Believe It Or Not!*'s famed creator, Robert Ripley, Dr. Mehmet Oz of *Oprah* fame...

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