

The Organization of Heaven and How it Relates to This World

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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“...When [Jesus] was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” ~ Luke 17:20-21

A world of insight is summarized in this one short verse of the Gospels. And yet, for all that it reveals, much remains hidden. Who knows how the human mind really works or what causes human consciousness to occur? Yes, of course, a great deal is known about the brain and how it functions, but consciousness? Not so much – least of all apart from the physical components of the brain. So when people have considered the life after death, apart from some special personal experiences generally they have been inclined to a lot of fantasy and speculation. Until now.

But what we have now is a comprehensive, systematic, rational revelation of this world of the human spirit – in this life and the life after death. It is, in fact, the most comprehensive and detailed explanation of this world in the history of human thought.

It begins with the idea – the fundamental principle – that all of life is from God, that God is infinitely, perfectly Human, and that the essential qualities of this Humanity are Divine love and wisdom. Of course we can’t see or touch this infinite Humanity, since what has no limitations has no physical shape. Rather it is pervasive and its qualities can only be perceived to the extent that they are received in finite forms – like the human body. Still, once they *are* seen in that way they can be recalled and considered, and understood as forces functioning within – but not dependent on – that body. So now, when we think of God we think of Him in the form He adopted for His work in the natural world, the form of the Man, Jesus Christ.

Of course, prior to this people still had seen Him as a Man, but they never saw Him directly, only indirectly in the person of some angel or other representative who was able to embody and so communicate His love and wisdom – to a certain degree. Now we can see it in fullness, and how it affects everything!

For example, just as the human form – the form of love and wisdom – may be clothed in a single human body, so it may be clothed in a body of people, what we sometimes call a corporate body, or a body politic. Such is the whole kingdom of heaven: it is organized in the human form – *not the human shape, but the human form* – such that various people with varying interests and skills make up the various functioning parts like the heart, the lungs, the kidneys, liver, skin, eyes, ears, hands and feet, and so on. Paul wrote about this in general terms in his first letter to the Corinthians (ch. 12), and Swedenborg has now expanded on it from his personal experience interacting with people in the spiritual world. Those who function as the eyes of this body love to see and understand the truth; those who function as the ears love to obey; those who function as the kidneys love to analyze things and separate the good from the bad. People who constitute the ligaments or skin like to pull and hold things together, and also provide special sensitivity and protection for this corporate body. The parallel with a fully functioning individual human body is perfect, in fact, every element of one corresponds exactly to the other.

So there are some communities of people – we call them societies – in the spiritual world that are relatively internal and others that are relatively external. There are some that are devoted to communication throughout the body, and others that are entirely focused on one highly specialized, localized use. There are, in short, brains, nerves, blood vessels and bones, various glands, and all sorts of “little” things like fingers, toes, cartilage and so on. There is a place, a purpose and a use exactly suited to every person God creates – because He creates every one *with that particular place or use in mind*. The thing is, they are not normally visible as parts of one giant physical body (HH #62), but they are arranged in a *spiritual form* that provides for the same sort of integrated, interrelated action. Paul called this “the body of Christ;” we call it “the Grand Man,” meaning, as it’s put in another translation, “the Universal Human” form.

So here’s where it gets really interesting. We read in the book, *Heaven and Hell*, that there are TWO kingdoms in the heavens (not to mention two opposing kingdoms in hell), and THREE *degrees* of each kingdom. The two kingdoms typically are called “celestial” and “spiritual,” but the three degrees are also called “celestial” and “spiritual” with the addition of the “natural” degree. Adding to the challenge, our most recent translation from the original Latin refers to what is celestial as “heavenly,” thus distinguishing what is “heavenly” from what is “spiritual.” How can we understand all this, and how is this system manifested in the human form?

Well, keeping what is essentially *human* in mind we know that our two primary faculties are those of will and understanding – what psychologists refer to as the “affective” and the “cognitive” domains. Some even boil this down to people who are essentially “right brained” or “heart” people as distinct from “left brained” or “head” people, maybe even “artsy” or “creative” as differentiated from “cerebral” or “intellectual” types. And while all these terms are of course oversimplified, each does in some ways reflect the basic distinction between what is of the will or emotion vs. what is of the understanding or reason. We just need to be careful to observe the fact that both faculties occur in every person, not to mention every corporate body, and that one is not more important than the other even though one, namely the will, is, in fact, more interior than the other, that is, the understanding.

Turning, then, to the “celestial” kingdom, we’re taught that this is the realm of all our loves, affections and emotions. It can therefore be compared to the heart and all its associated arteries and veins. Indeed the cardio-vascular system corresponds exactly to the celestial kingdom: it affects every part of the body from head to toe, but it is a distinct system, separate from but integrated with the respiratory system, which corresponds to the spiritual kingdom.

The celestial kingdom can also be compared to the cerebellum and its autonomic nervous system which, while extending throughout the body, essentially functions apart from our conscious thought. This system in the physical body controls things like our heart beat and digestion. And yes, we can increase our heartbeat and interfere with our digestion, but these are consequences of certain behaviors, like exercise or specific eating habits; we can’t change our heart rate by just “thinking” about it. In the same way we can’t just decide we’re going to have a new or different love flowing into us; we have to DO the things that invite that change.

People in the celestial kingdom have the same intellectual faculties as the rest of us but they are primarily motivated by their loves and affections, often acting rather spontaneously and decisively without a lot of careful analysis. In heaven they love the Lord more than anything and so are closer to Him than the rest of us, and less inclined to *reason* about what they should or shouldn’t

do. In hell they love *themselves* more than anything, and don't much care to elevate their thoughts above that. Once in hell, they have no interest in being educated or "talked out of" their selfishness, which is why they can never hope to be raised up into heaven.

The "spiritual" kingdom, on the other hand, is the whole realm of conscious thought and determination. We call it "spiritual" because the word, spirit, refers to breath or wind, and in the body relates to the function of the lungs, which includes our ability to speak, and *express* our thoughts. Compared to the cerebellum and the autonomic nervous system, this is the kingdom of the cerebrum and can also be compared to the central nervous system through which we consciously direct all our daily activities. Again, its reach is throughout the body, but whereas the celestial kingdom is the home of the will, the spiritual kingdom is the home of the intellect – a distinct and separate system operating in perfect co-operation with the celestial. The relationship between the two is like a marriage, and symbolically in Scripture it is often called a marriage, the two "partners" being unique and distinct but working together as one when they love each other.

People in the spiritual kingdom love to think and reason about things, and they are generally very cautious until they *understand* a situation. Without the influence of the celestial they might never do *anything*, but they also *inform* the celestial and keep it grounded – which is why it is so important for each of the two types to respect the other and cooperate.

Now then, within each of the two kingdoms of heaven, or rather within both of them together, we also have three degrees, from the highest to the lowest, or inmost to outmost, and these also have their opposites in hell. In this case the *highest* degree is also called celestial because the greatest blessings in life have to do with love, but spiritual people can also have a very high degree of love, it's just that it tends to be a love of understanding, and so perhaps not as intense and single-minded as of those in the celestial *kingdom*, but still delightfully heavenly.

The *lowest* level of both kingdoms is called the natural level because this is where all our thoughts and emotions take effect in what we do, whether it is in the physical world or the world of our relationships with others. The people in the natural heaven are the DO-ERS, but again they come from both kingdoms: it is where we are when we just want to get something done – either from love or from understanding. And you know, some people are more inclined this way than others, so they are most at home when they are busy on the natural level. They are, perhaps, the arms and legs of the human form, the hands and feet. And so in providence there is a place just for them in heaven.

Finally, the *middle* degree in both kingdoms is also called spiritual because our intellectual life is really midway between our loves and our actions. It is where we think not only about what we want to do but how we should do it. And again, you know, there are people who love thinking and planning more than anything, and much more than doing. They are the students, the philosophers, the organizers, the managers, the efficiency experts of the world, and so, again, there is a special place for them in heaven.

But what about co-operation between the levels? Is it like the co-operation, or marriage, between the two kingdoms? Well, no, not exactly. People may of course consult with each other between the levels, just as factory workers may consult with draftsmen and architects, who in turn consult with the owners of the business, but in broad terms they stay within their areas of expertise and – more importantly – their levels of comfort. The owners inspire and motivate, the

techies and managers figure things out, and the workers build the product. Most of the workers wouldn't have a clue about how to run the business, and would find it extremely stressful to try, and most of the owners would find it just as stressful – or at least tedious – to be on the shop floor day after day, even if they did know how to do the work. Still, each level of the business depends on the others and they inspire and motivate each other even when they don't communicate directly with each other every day.

Much, much more could be said about all of this, and if anyone's interested there are two groups in the church right now reading and discussing all about it. For now, though, the critical thing is to see why it matters, and why we should care to know about this or any other aspect of the life after death.

One answer is much the same as we would give for our preparations to visit another country. It is of course wise, if not critical, to know what to expect and what will be expected of US when we get there. Climate, customs, currency, accommodations, language concerns, all these have their exact counterparts in spiritual life. We certainly don't want to go somewhere – least of all for all eternity – where we will feel uncomfortable or out of place. So either we must prepare for the place we hope to go, or we must understand what will be necessary to get along if we go unprepared.

There are aspects of our character and disposition that we will probably never be able to change, and that's good because we are, as noted, all created for the specific uses in the Grand Man that will be most rewarding and fulfilling for us. But in this life we can learn and discover more and more about where it is that we do truly feel the most comfortable, and what sorts of things make us feel the most fulfilled. In this way we can get some real sense of where we are headed in the next life, and then learn more and more about how we fit in with others who are either like us or perhaps very different from us.

Of course, given a basically celestial, spiritual or natural disposition, there are still many things that we can change. For example we may be most comfortable in a sphere of love rather than thought, but it might be love for the Lord or love of self; it might be love for the neighbor or love of controlling the neighbor. We may be most comfortable in the realm of thought and reasoning, but that could be based on truths or falsities. And if we're most comfortable in the sphere of action – getting things done – that, too, could be useful or destructive action. So if we examine ourselves and find something frightening or discouraging in us, as in the case of some really selfish attitudes, we can take initiatives to correct our trajectory, switching, as it were, from a hellish to a heavenly paradigm still within the kingdom or degree of life where we feel most at home.

Finally, learning about all this can really help us “get” where we belong. If you're of a spiritual or natural disposition, don't compare yourself unfavorably to celestial people; you wouldn't want to be like them, anyway. And if you're a celestial type don't be envious of the thinkers or the doers; you would find their world tedious at best. Rather, be your best you; give what only you can give, and watch how you and others thrive when you are in your groove.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 10:1-8
Children's talk on unique uses for every person
Genesis 49:1-27 (cf. *Deut.* 33:6-25) & *Arcana Caelestia* #3624-3626