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Netflix Film: Things Heard and Seen by Revd Brian Talbot

PREMIERED ON NETFLIX ON THURSDAY 29TH APRIL

In February 2021 I reviewed Elizabeth Brundage's 2006 book *All Things Shall Cease to Appear*, which mentions Swedenborg 25 times. I told you that the film would come out in May and sure enough it is available to Netflix subscribers. In the UK it was film 10 in Netflix' top 10, when I watched it, but number 2 in Netflix' Australian chart, when my older brother watched it!

At the start of the film is the following quotation: "This I am able to declare: that those things which are in heaven are more real than those which are in the world." (Swedenborg) It comes from *Spiritual Experiences* 5685.

There are two ghosts in the film as opposed to one in the book. The new ghost is a Swedenborgian lady who was married to a Calvinist minister. In the film Catherine, George Clare's wife, finds a family Bible of the Schmit family and next to the wife's name is



written the word “Damned”. Her husband didn’t approve of her Swedenborgianism. (It is not explained whether she was a convert from Calvinism.) The Swedenborgian wife died mysteriously in their house. The implication is that her husband murdered her. This is not in the book. I find this fact a bit of a stretch of the imagination, that a

Calvinist could marry a Swedenborgian, unless they are deeply and madly in love with each other. Theologically Swedenborgians and Calvinists can be poles apart. Calvinists believe that some people were created to go to hell, while we believe that all people were created to go to heaven. Calvinists believe we are sinners and all our good deeds are selfish, whereas we believe that we choose to become sinners and are capable of performing God-inspired good works. Swedenborg argued that angels felt uncomfortable and felt limited to work with Swedenborg, when spouses were of different faiths. (*Conjugal Love* 242; *Documents concerning Emanuel Swedenborg* 2:547) In *Secrets of Heaven* 8998:1 he wrote: “Therefore also in heaven marriages on earth between people of different religions are thought to be detestable, and especially those between members of the Church and people outside the Church.” I like to think that the wife converted to Swedenborgianism, because she found a version of Christianity that was more fulfilling than Calvinism.

“I was once wandering through the streets of a large city to look for somewhere to live, and I went into a house, where there lived a couple who were of different religions. Then, though I knew nothing of this, angels spoke to me and said, 'We cannot stay with you in that house, because the couple there are not in agreement on religion.' They could tell this from the lack of inward unity between their souls. “ (CL 242e [Chadwick]; cf. HH 378) Shearsmith’s maid, who became his second wife, said “that before he [Swedenborg] came to their house [the first time,] he was offered another lodging in the neighbourhood, but he told the mistress there was no harmony in the house; which she acknowledged, and recommended him to Mr. Shearsmith's.” (*Documents concerning Emanuel Swedenborg* 2:547)

Catherine reached for *Heaven and the World of Spirits and Hell*, the edition with the George Innes painting of The Valley of the Shadow of Death, which portrays a soul transitioning into the afterlife. Unfortunately there is a bit of license taken here, as Swedenborg’s book has the title *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen*. Catherine quotes from *Heaven and Hell*, but I think it is actually from *True Christianity*: “All of us on earth are associated in spirit with those in the spiritual world

who are like ourselves; we are in a sense united to them.” (TCR 14:4 [Rose]) Still a great quotation though!

There are far more supernatural happenings than in the book, such as dreams or lightbulbs exploding, or unplugged radios working, or the bolts of bathroom doors locking themselves, especially when the ghosts are chastising George Clare or protecting Catherine, his wife. Another instance is the showing of a slide of George Innes’ painting “The Valley of the Shadow of Death” repeatedly in front of his art class. In fact the whole carousel of slides had only this slide in it. A worry I have is that the ambiguous term ‘spirits’ can be interpreted as referring to ghosts, and not deceased loved ones in the afterlife. Swedenborg says very little about ghosts. He uses a ghost as a simile of people, who are blinded by their own selfishness, (e.g. AC 2385:2; cf. AC 4416) or as a belief some people have of a deceased person as an ethereal shape. (e.g. AC 443; 4527:2; AE 575:5; 988:3; 5M6) Swedenborg has very little, if anything, to say about the ghosts, spectres and phantoms, that are behind hauntings or are involved in poltergeist activities.

George Clare’s boss Floyd DeBeers is an avid Swedenborgian who arranges séances, and Catherine holds one in their house. The candles go out, a table cloth goes flying across the room and they hear voices. There are no coincidences according to Swedenborg, says DeBeers. DeBeers, the Swedenborgian, reassures Catherine that the ghost is there for her, but they assume that it is the Swedenborgian wife.

So, as films go, it was interesting and well acted. I definitely was excited with all the mentions of Swedenborg, but viewers might be left with the impression that we Swedenborgians hold séances. In the history of the New Church in the United Kingdom, we have had a very small minority of church people involved in séances, but most of us avoid them due to concerns of danger and dubiousness. Sadly two Swedenborgians lose their lives in the film. Still, worth a watch.

Temptations

by David Friend

Temptation might be compared with listening to a non-verbal conversation within one’s mind - the bad men and women from the hells in conflict with their opposite numbers from the heavens. We are faced with recognising the arguments which face us all the time, and making up our minds what to do about the questions which we are being faced with.

Perhaps an easy way to think of the processes we go through in temptation is by consideration of the activities and words of young children at play. Johnny has found a toy bus and is contentedly pushing it around the floor when Charlie comes along and

wants to play with the bus as well. Johnny is not happy with the interference, and tells Charlie, "You can't have it'." Crying - and maybe tantrums - ensue. Charlie's view is that he wants the bus and he creates a fuss in order to get it. Johnny, on the other hand, thinks, "Well, I found the bus - why should I give it to Charlie?"

I wonder how many parents have had to deal with that sort of situation - probably the majority. One parent or the other has to arbitrate. Perhaps this problem has not arisen before, and so both Johnny and Charlie have to learn the need to compromise - and also to understand the need to consider the other one's point of view.

Two separate elements regarding temptation are here illustrated. They are understanding and opportunity. In order for a temptation to be real, the tempted individual has to understand the rights and wrongs of the situation. What should be done and what should not be done. Opportunity also plays its part. Natural opportunities present themselves readily at all times when decisions have to be made. However, opportunities can also be generated. The chance to create an opportunity provides a temptation in its own right. Life gets complicated from an early age doesn't it?

In real life mother makes a suggestion to Charlie to offer an alternative toy to Johnny in order to calm the situation. This, however, can result in another temptation for Johnny. Should he relinquish the bus and take up with the new toy, or should he act the hard man and refuse to part with his toy? And so another opportunity arises for mother to teach a lesson. Johnny must learn to consider other people's wishes rather than being selfish. Maybe he can find another toy for Charlie so that he can retain the bus.

This case illustrates, in a very crude way, the internal conflicts which we all face in life. Thank goodness we don't have to break everything down into all its elements each time we have to make a decision - we'd never get anywhere. However, there is little doubt that the pros and cons of real life present us with inner conversations for consideration many times a day. We have all grown up to do most things according to a pattern we have learnt earlier. Were it not so, we'd never make any progress in life. It is only when we are presented with a situation which either has no precedent for us or has been the subject of a decision which we are now not happy with, that we can really consider the matter again. The choices we make in this sort of situation set a pattern for future choices - every time we take the easy - and usually selfish - way out, we become more likely to do so again when the temptation recurs, and vice versa. Those non-verbal voices mentioned at the beginning of this note will talk to us - and we have to consider the matter all over again. That's progress. That's how we learn to do the right things.