



E-Read



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Given For You

Alan Misson writes:

According to Luke's gospel these are words spoken by Jesus as he celebrated the Last Supper in Jerusalem with his 12 disciples. We are perhaps very familiar with them but do we stop and think what they really mean?

We could start by thinking about what the Lord gives! When he said "given for you" it was associated with the breaking and sharing of bread with his followers. This is a very powerful image of the way

his love is shared amongst us, with each one of us taking our own individual portion. The love he shares is universal and unconditional, available to all in every age.

But what we receive depends entirely on our response to that love. And there are two main factors which affect that response. Firstly, each one of us is a unique creation with individual desires, thoughts and abilities. So we use and misuse the Lord's love in our lives in unique ways. Secondly, what we receive depends completely on what we give!

Emanuel Swedenborg makes the following comment in Arcana Caelestia 5828 paragraph 3:

It is a universal law that an inflow adjusts itself to the outflow, and if the outflow is blocked, so is the inflow. Through the internal person there is an inflow of good and truth from the Lord, and through the external there should be an outflow, an outflow into life, that is, in the exercise of charity. As long as that outflow is taking place the inflow from heaven, that is, from the Lord by way of heaven, is continuous.

So putting these two principles together, what we receive from the Lord depends on our individual characteristics and what we give to others. An example can usefully illustrate this spiritual law.

Imagine you are good at listening to other people. If you desire to use this talent to help someone who is lonely or distressed then the Lord's love can flow into that desire and infill your ability to listen with heavenly qualities. And the more you offer a 'listening ear' the greater the love that will flow from the Lord through you in these 'listening' situations.

We are made to be 'channels' through which the Lord's love can flow into the world as we put the love he shares with us into action in our lives. If we are wrapped up in ourselves and unthinking of others needs then our 'channel' will be narrow and constricted and little love will flow through us. But if we are truly open to the needs of others and ready to work for their benefit, not ours, then our 'channel' will be broad and easy flowing and full of love for those around us.

This concept is beautifully captured in the traditional prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, which appears as hymn 271 in our hymn book.

*Make me a channel of your peace:
where there is hatred let me bring your love,
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
And where there's doubt, true faith in you*

*Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope,
where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.*

*Make me a channel of your peace:
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.*

The Lord's love is universal and unconditional and it is "given for you"; what we receive, however, depends completely on how we apply that love in our lives.

Alan Misson

Is Human Life Found Only on Earth?

Stephen Lacy writes:

Is human life found only on earth?

It doesn't sound so weird these days to talk about intelligent life of aliens. Scientists have discovered not just a few but lots of potentially inhabitable planets outside the solar system. So far they have confirmed 5,506 such planets. Given the size of our galaxy, it is estimated there are 11 billion potentially habitable Earth-sized planets in the Milky Way.

UFO sightings and aliens

The mass media has usually ridiculed UFO crackpots for investigating 'little green men'. However, after decades of denial, the United States Department of Defense has now made the astonishing admission that strange aerial and underwater objects have been frequently reported and videoed by pilots and tracked by sensors. Hundreds of declassified reports acquired from the world's intelligence agencies have proved, to those who have taken the trouble to look into this matter, that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, extraterrestrial vehicles really have been visiting our planet.

Swedenborg's communication with the dead

All this should be no surprise to those of us acquainted with the books of 18th-century spiritual philosopher and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. He claimed in his visions he met up with people originating on other planets.

For the last 27 years of his life, he entered altered states of consciousness on a daily basis. Based on his extraordinary experiences, he reported that he was able to converse with the spirits of the dead. In several places in his writings, he mentions that an individual's soul lives on after death. This is that person's spirit, which is his or her real personality. And in the next life it appears in a completely human form in a realm of shared consciousness he called the 'spiritual world'.

He pointed out that this realm of spirit is something those who are sense-orientated cannot easily grasp. Is it not true that people differ in what they perceive? For example, not everybody sees a specific work of art or music as pleasing. Likewise, not everybody clearly sees that there is more to reality than physical existence. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so too don't people vary in their acceptance of a reality of consciousness that continues after bodily death?

The appearance of space

Swedenborg wrote that his spirit contacts included those from other planets. According to his testimony the individuals he met still felt attached to their planet of origin. We wouldn't be surprised, if there were inhabitants of various planets, they might think about things differently. Swedenborg was to discover that people from our own planet, more so than from other planets, tend to use physical and natural ways of talking. He says this is because our inclination towards bodily sense-perception greatly influences how we think about spiritual matters.

Swedenborg maintained that differences in their inner state in the next life set people apart, while likeness draws them together. He mentions the state of feelings and consequent thoughts. As a consequence, the appearance of where one is in the spiritual world represents any dissimilarity or resemblance of disposition.

Astral travel to see aliens?

He had to travel some distance to meet spirits from other planets beyond our solar system. Perhaps this was something akin to the idea of astral travel which is ancient and occurs in multiple cultures on our planet. For he didn't travel physically to encounter them but in the spirit.

I was taken to yet another world in space outside the solar system; this was brought about by changes in my mental state, changes, that is, affecting my spirit. For, ... a spirit is taken from place to place by nothing but changes in his inner state. These changes seem to him exactly like movement from one place to another or travelling. It took around ten hours of continuous changes for me to reach their state of life from my own, so for me to travel there in my spirit. (Worlds in Space 157)

In other words, he had to journey along a path of a changing inner state in himself in order to be on the same wavelength as the spirits he was visiting.

I guess all this would have been like us meeting someone from a radically different culture from ourselves. If they say or do something strange, we might wonder 'What planet are they coming from'. If we want to communicate, it obliges us to try to figure out the framework of assumptions, expectations, and values they have that are foreign to us. Similarly, the trainee counsellor learns to focus on their clients, listen with empathy, and tolerantly set aside his or her values and thus suspend judgment of people seeking help. How else could troubled clients speak freely and stand any chance of being properly understood?

What do aliens look like?

Swedenborg discovered that the spirits from other planets looked similar to the way they were when physically alive.

The very word 'alien' suggests something disturbingly strange. However, he said those he saw did not look hugely different from us.

I saw spirits who looked as they had done when they were living in their world. Their faces were not unlike those of people in our world, except that their eyes were small, and so were their noses. This seemed to me rather ugly, but they said that small eyes and noses are a mark of beauty to them. (Worlds in Space 146)

In any case, he maintained that it's not the shape of our bodies that makes us human, but our capacity for living spiritual lives - sensibly and considerately to others in the image of the divine source of love and wisdom.

Character of aliens

He questioned spirits of very few planets outside our solar system. These acknowledged a one creative divine source of the universe. They also showed a knowledge of divine principles and how to live in accordance with them e.g. in terms of justice and decency. On one planet there was no rule and no control by others. And on another, envy was unknown.

From this account there seems to be no reason to fear our unknown extraterrestrial visitors from outer space.

Submission to e-Read by Stephen Lacy