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Nellie Thomas

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

Talk given at Nellie Thomas' Funeral
– a doctrinal tribute
Jack, Family and the New Jerusalem Church

Two of the reasons why I accepted the Accrington pastorate were Jack and Nellie Thomas. I found them genuine New-Church people: warm, optimistic, helpful and always happy. (I find all Thomases like this!) I remember the Accrington congregation compiling our supplementary hymn book. It was very

much a project, to which everybody contributed, but it was done in memory of Jack. I'd forgotten that Jack passed away in 1994! Jack and Nellie used to come to my doctrinal classes, so I thought I would write "a doctrinal tribute" to Nellie.

Gathered to our people and our fathers

According to Emanuel Swedenborg, the most Ancient people, who lived before the Flood talked to angels, as did some after the Flood, so they believed in an after-life. This resulted in a belief that is reflected in what the Patriarchs said by using two Biblical expressions: "being gathered to his peoples", such as in the case of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron or "being gathered to his fathers": Joshua, Abram, Jacob and Moses. By this phrase Swedenborg tells us that "the ancients meant that he was in the process of going to his parents, blood relatives, and relatives by marriage in the next life." However the wiser "most ancient people", who were "simultaneously present with angels in heaven", understood that "being gathered to their fathers" referred to those who were like-hearted, but "gathered to his peoples" meant referred to people coming to be amongst those who are like-minded. The Ancient people referred to an initial phase of the after-life or one that can be revisited, whilst the Most Ancient referred to the actual, more usual, reality of eternal life. Swedenborg makes the additional point that when Abraham was buried and wanted to go to his fathers, it could not mean to people in his family tomb, as it was a new burial cave and there was none of his ancestors in it. Only Abraham's wife was in the burial cave.

Every person is unconsciously in a community of spirits who are like-minded or like-hearted in the next life. We are "actually in the spiritual world", and we appear there when in "deep meditation", so our 'deceased' loved ones are watching over us.

Death Bed Visions

Outside of the Writings, Death Bed visions, or the visions of the dying seem to suggest that nobody dies alone and that our relatives and friends come to collect us. As Nellie became more and more conscious of awakening in the World of Spirits, Jack and other relatives and friends will have left their communities in heaven, and be in the World of Spirits, in a replica of Nellie's room. When she was fully awake, they will welcome her to eternal life. Jack and the relatives will have had their worldly memories re-activated and they will have much to talk about it. Nellie will be recognised by her looks by some, and from within by others. All people can be determined by the aura or field or sphere, that exudes from us.

Projected scenes from our memories

I would suggest that Nellie will want some 'alone time' with Jack. Jack will want to show Nellie some things about the spiritual world. Everything about the spiritual world is like our world, but it's more real, because everything can be seen in a clearer light. We can think more quickly, feel more deeply, see and hear more accurately, in fact, telescopically

and microscopically: everything at a distance can immediately become present. For example, they will reminisce about their wedding, and Jack will show Nellie that in the next world, you can project your memories into real, living scenes. They will see their wedding holographically, more than being in a cinema, in greater detail than in a home movie. Their emotions would have been excitement and joy, on the day, but as they re-live and re-experience their wedding, their feelings will be even more intense for each other. (Some people might be thinking: ‘Brian, you’re talking about Life Reviews from Near Death Experiences’! Brian would say, “No!” Swedenborg was over 200 years ahead of Near Death Experiences, and wrote about our Book of Life: our record of everything we’ve said, done, thought and felt, which can be projected from our memories, so that people can reflect on their life and other people can weigh up what type of person we are.) Remember the Scripture: “Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.” (Luke 12:2-3)

“Good people in the next life, though, recall all the states marked by goodness and truth that they had experienced — states of friendship, love for others, and innocence — along with the attendant joys and pleasures, now increased and multiplied beyond measure.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 868:2e [LHC]; cf. *Spiritual Experiences* 3230)

What other memories would Jack and Nellie project, so that they can re-experience their life together after their wedding. David’s birth. Janet’s birth. Alan’s birth. The first time they saw all their 8 grandchildren. Nellie would show Jack cinematically or holographically the first time she saw the great grandchildren! (Jack will then tell Nellie that he has been watching over all of them, and has seen everything!) Christmases, birthdays, anniversaries, family gatherings.

But we not only project our memories, we can actually enter the scene. So, for example, think of the places where Jack and Nellie did their courting. They can create the scene around a lake, or a river, or the Lake District, or whatever, and go walking off hand-in-hand, admiring the scenery and reminiscing.

All this initial acclimatisation to the spiritual world will come to an end, and Nellie will be escorted to, what I call, “The Road of the Risen”.

The Road of the Risen

Swedenborg says that everybody, tens of thousands of people, from our world and other worlds walk on this road to the centre of the spiritual world every day.¹ We will face a choice of paths. There are paths sloping upwards to heaven and down to hell.

All those who have passed away walk along “The Road of the Risen”. Nellie will meet up with thousands of people. She will talk about the three most precious things in her life: Jack, family and her faith. As she shares her love for Jack, it will put some people off and they will disappear from Nellie, and she will disappear from them. But there are more people to talk to about her feelings for her husband, that will resonate with their love for their spouse. These people will be eager to meet up again with their husband or wife. They will carry on walking together. Nellie will talk to some people about her family. The same thing will happen: some people will stay and chat, while others will disappear. The same thing will happen as Nellie shares her New-Church faith, some will stay and listen, and others will vanish. This is the LORD’s clever way of ‘judging us’, or as Swedenborg would say, “we judge ourselves”. It is the separation of the Sheep from the Goats. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Nellie will then be escorted to the place of resurrection, where the LORD and his angels are in greater concentration and intensity. Swedenborg describes the process of resurrection in his books *Spiritual Experiences*, *Secrets of Heaven* and *Heaven and Hell*, (*Spiritual Experiences* 1092-1109 = *Secrets of Heaven* 168–189; 314-319 = *Heaven and Hell* 445-452) The highest, most loving angels are with us as we die, and love us so much they don’t want to leave us. They keep us in our most holy thoughts. If we can’t appreciate the love of the heavenly angels, they are replaced by spiritual angels. They help us move from thinking bound by time and space to thinking that is more eternal and spiritual. They teach us about the after-life and render every possible service to us. These spiritual angels are replaced by good spirits, who do all they can for us. This is a wonderful, comforting teaching that is presented at many New-Church funerals.

Nellie will again meet up again with Jack and anybody she wants to.

Meeting up with anyone

We can speak to relatives, friends, acquaintances after death. But say, for example, that Nellie wants to meet up with a distant cousin or school friend. All she has to do is think of them. She will meet up with people whom she knows, but has never met. These people are members of the heavenly community Nellie was unconsciously in, while in the world.

¹ *Secrets of Heaven* 6699; *True Christianity* 160:2; *Five Memorable Relations* 4; *Secrets of Heaven* 2121; *Apocalypse Explained* 783:6; *Heaven and Hell* 497; *Last Judgment* 51; *Apocalypse Revealed* 621 = *True Christianity* 622

Finding Nellie's community and house

Jack and others will escort Nellie around different communities to find out where Nellie's heart lies, or how she will respond to them. They will visit "different cities, gardens and parks" to find people like Nellie. This travelling is also used to determine our occupation in heaven. The LORD very gently and gradually guides us to our eternal home, using our internal GPS system: our willingness to be led and guided. Miraculously paths and gates become visible, and open for us.

Once Nellie has found her community, she will then have to find her house: the one that has been especially built for her. (*Love in Marriage* 50) People in the after-life "know their homes and houses no matter where they travel." As our reading from John's Gospel, read by Nellie's granddaughter Joanne, says the LORD goes to prepare a place for us. (John 14:2-3)

One fascinating passage in Swedenborg's Writings, says that if people are not alike in their hearts, they will be separated and thrown from the house! Another fascinating passage is where Swedenborg reports that spirits tend to enter their houses through walls rather than use their doors.

There is one passage in Swedenborg's Writings, which suggest that us husbands will live in their wife's community of heaven in her house.

"His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:41 [NIVUK])

Revd Brian Talbot