

THE HUMAN FACE

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Lesson 3

A Special Lesson on the "Incredible"

In the last lesson we noted a statement about how much could be expressed by the human face. And the statement ended with the following sentence:

This may perhaps seem incredible, but yet it is true (*Arcana Coelestia* 607).

Earlier, the same passage suggests that this is "perhaps difficult to believe." Let's think a little about the "incredible" things in the Writings. Most of the things that we learn from the Writings are very easy to believe. In fact, the main thing about them is that they make so much sense. Take, for example, a teaching about the face. Imagine for a moment that you had never heard or thought of the following teaching in your life. (And, just possibly, you have not.)

The teaching is that someone who has an ugly face in this world just might have a really beautiful face in the other world. According to *Conjugal Love* 330, this is not uncommon.

Does it seem reasonable to you? Does it make sense to you? It probably does, because your own experience has told you that beauty is only skin deep, and the same applies to ugliness. Someone you come to think of as a beautiful person just might not be attractive to look at in this life. But it certainly makes sense that such a person would look different in a world where things are clearly seen to be as they really are.

The appeal of the Writings is that they make sense. One aspect of this is that they take parts of the Bible that might seem strange, but then show that inwardly they make a lot of sense.

But there are things in the Writings that are absolutely incredible. And you find that in various branches of science there are things that are "incredible." You look up at the stars, and they seem pretty far away. But you learn a little about the real distances involved, and some things become incredible. A star which you see clearly may be many light years away. As you try to get into your head the concept of the distance of a light year, the subject is amazing and in its way "incredible."

You study the human body and come upon astonishing things --the wonderful workings of the human ear, the nervous system. It is an incredible mechanism. You study animal behavior, or the workings of a beehive or an ant nest. It is incredible. The Writings talk about animal instincts and say, "This knowledge in some animals is such that man cannot but be amazed by it." The study of matter itself is not a study of the obvious and commonplace. The forces of matter and its composition are quite incredible.

Sometimes when we say “incredible” we mean “amazing” or “wonderful.” Some things you study are surprising and exciting. Sometimes when the Writings tell us something, they first say “and this is wonderful” -- as if saying to us, “Get ready for something that is really going to astonish you.”

The universe in which we live is full of amazing (incredible) things. You take even something commonplace and ordinary and look at it carefully, and you might be amazed. Look at it through a microscope if you want to see amazing things.

This brings us to a favorite passage in the Writings. It is near the beginning of the book *Divine Providence*. It is a passage that says to you, “You will see wonderful things.” Here is what it says:

Select any particular object and examine it with some wisdom. Take a tree, or its seed, its fruit, its flower, or its leaf, gather up the wisdom that is in you, examine the object with a good microscope, and you will see wonderful things; while the interiors that you do not see are still more wonderful. Observe the order in its development, how the tree grows from seed even to new seed, and consider whether there is not at every successive step a continual endeavor to propagate itself further; for the final thing to which it aims is seed, in which its reproductive power exists anew. And if you are willing to think spiritually, which you can do if you wish, will you not now see wisdom here? Moreover, if you are willing to go far enough in spiritual thought, will you not see also that this power is not from the seed, nor from the sun of the world, which is pure fire, but is in the seed from God the Creator, whose wisdom is infinite (*Divine Providence* 3).

A little later the same number says, “You will be astonished at it all.”

Examine any other object on the earth, as a silkworm, a bee, or any other little creature; look at it first naturally, afterwards rationally, and at length spiritually, and if you are able to think deeply, you will be astonished at it all; and if you will let wisdom speak within you, you will say in amazement, ‘Who can fail to see the Divine in these things? All things are of the Divine wisdom.’ Still more will you wonder if you examine into the uses of all created things, how in their order they follow on even to man, and from man to the Creator from whom they are.

Now, if there are “wonders” in the natural world, what about wonders in the other world? Do you know the full title of the book *Heaven and Hell*? It is about heaven “*and its wonders.*”

As already mentioned, the Writings sometimes use the phrase, “and what is wonderful...” This is often the case when some wonder of heaven is being described from what Swedenborg has “heard and seen.”

Let’s take the example of meeting someone you have never seen before and having the feeling that you have known them for a long, long time.

When someone goes to heaven and comes where he or she really belongs, there is a meeting of people who have the same loves:

... and what is wonderful, when he meets them, and sees them, it is as if he had known them from infancy (*Divine Providence* 338).

When it is time to go to one's eternal home, one finds the way as surely as a bird finds its way in its migrations, "and, what is wonderful, everyone knows the way" (*Divine Providence* 319). When a spirit comes into a place, he knows where he belongs. "And what is wonderful, everyone when he enters a room knows his own place" (*Divine Providence* 338).

That remarkable experience of feeling that one knows someone is described in *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*. Swedenborg describes the experience even when people have never met before, and he describes what he personally experienced when he saw some people.

All who are in like good, even though they have never seen one another before, recognize one another just as men in the world do their kinsmen, relatives and friends. This is because in the other life there are none but spiritual kinships, relationships and friendships, thus such as are of love and faith. It has been granted me to see this sometimes, when I have been in the spirit, thus withdrawn from the body and so in the company of angels. Then some of these I saw seemed as though known to me from childhood, but others as if not known at all. Those whom I seemed to have known from childhood were such as were in a state similar to that of my spirit, but those who seemed unknown were in a dissimilar state (*Heaven and Hell* 46).