

Communication

Reincarnation

Dear Editor:

I would like to add a passage from the Writings (and also a thought or two) to what the Rev. Dan Goodenough has already so clearly brought forward on the question of Reincarnation.

The passage is from *Heaven and Hell* 256 and reads: “If a spirit were to speak with a man from his own memory, then the man would know no other than that the things which he then thought were his own, when yet they were the spirit’s; it is like the recollection of a thing which yet the man never heard or saw From this, some of the ancients held the opinion that after some thousands of years they should return to their former life and into all its acts; and also that they did return. They concluded this from the fact that there had sometimes occurred to them a recollection as it were of things which they had never seen or heard, and this came to pass because spirits flowed in from their own memory into the ideas of their thought.” This teaching makes clear how the idea of reincarnation arose.

I think, too, that in the final analysis the notion that God will grant however many incarnations will be needed for a person’s final salvation involves a denial of human freedom. For the reasoning implies that in the end, circumstances would prompt or compel him to acknowledge that the only reasonable form of life is the life of charity. Yet “compulsion does not reform, because it inroots nothing, for that which is compulsory is not of man’s will; but that which is free is of his will” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7007:2). And further, “The Lord does not compel a person to receive what flows in from Himself” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6472:2).

And then there are the two special trees in the Garden of Eden.

Both trees had to be there: “the tree of life (Heb. lives), in the midst of the garden” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). The fruit of the tree of knowledge was not to be eaten even though the tree was “pleasant to the sight,” for, said the Lord, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:17) This story of the garden and the two dominant trees in it is the first direct teaching in the Word concerning human freedom. Freedom involves alternatives. If only one way of life is possible, then you automatically and without discernment, judgment, or choice, live that way. You also live without the happiness available to humans alone, thus without the joy of the as-from-self life.

And when can such as-from-self life commence? In general, at birth; but in the spiritual dimension in stages from adolescence to early maturity. You cannot judge intelligently and responsively between alternatives without knowledge and a measure of maturity. But when you do have these things, then you are on your own. There is nothing to wait for. You face a situation, and there is a good way and a bad one to deal with it, or a better and an inferior way. You can act with a concern for the good of the neighbor, including the common good, or with a concern only for self. The second tree is one of knowledge of good and evil, a tree of instruction and warning. The Word is in it.

Your mind is formed by your choices. In the end a ruling love is born within you. That love is your identity, your self. If evil, you can change it by repentance and the power of the Word at any time, but after many confirmatory choices of self-concern, the ruling love loses any interest whatever in changing its “life style.” It will fight “for its life”. And it takes only one lifetime to form and establish one’s ruling love—for good or for evil. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that

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you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days” (Deut. 30:19,20).

P.S. And please, let us not think of evil spirits agonizing, “And this will go on forever...” They have no idea of time, still less of eternity. They live in an ever-recurring Now, and their misery consists only in their being restrained from most of the mischief they would want to inflict on their fellows.

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