

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

How often have people asked this question? Another version of it is, “Why am I here?” If something is going wrong, it is “Why me?” All these questions imply a teleological existence: there is a purpose to being, but I don’t know exactly what it is.

Another version is “Where did I come from?” Origin means purpose, since there has to be a reason. In the New Church, there are answers to all these questions, and so there is little point in asking anymore. We know that “the end of creation is a heaven from the human race.” “Heaven consists solely of those who have been born [as people] ... and as heaven consists of no others it follows that the end of creation is a heaven from the human race” (*Divine Providence* 323). So the answer to all such questions as “Why am I here” in each case is “in order that you may become an angel.” All the trials and tribulations that make us question our own purpose, end up in the same bin: an afterlife, where all human beings either enter heaven as angels, or what we know as hell, namely their own version of paragons of self-hood. However, because the term “angel” is already taken, the only one left for such is “devil,” or if they insist, “Satan.” In either case, the purpose remains eternal life. Wherever a newly awakened or resuscitated person is heading, the first question on their minds is, “Am I still dead?” “When] awakening [from death] happens...at first the angels are checking to see whether [the] thoughts of those dying individuals...are about eternal life” (*Heaven and Hell* 449). Many then “thank God” that their life is eternal, and “that death has not wiped them out” (*Five Memorabilia* 7).

The end of creation, that is the purpose behind God creating the universe, is a “heaven” from the human race, not a hell. Hell came from human free choice, from refusing the option of heaven. That does not remove heaven as the primary purpose of creation, however, but this does bring up the next answer to “Why are we here?” It has to do with freedom: “Spiritual

freedom is from the love of eternal life ... Everyone may come into this freedom provided he is willing to think that there is an eternal life” (*Divine Providence* 73). Part of the “parcel” of a heaven from the human race, is spiritual freedom of choice, i.e. free choice in spiritual things. Another answer to the “Why” question, therefore, is that we are to exercise spiritual choice. Make a selection! Pick a life. This problem often face young people looking to their future: What job shall I seek? In addition, isn’t it interesting that the option is “which job” not “whether to work or not.” The entire planet is set up for working. Look at the economies of all nations: they depend on either products or services. People grow potatoes or make furniture etc., or they offer their own services in some manner. A job is part of existence. Although we may dream of an idyllic vacation with nothing to do, it would stop being idyllic if for some reason we were laid off our jobs! ‘No job’ equals ‘no income’ for almost everyone. Even those who hate their job, realize they need it. The love of performing uses goes deeper than just having job-security. No one can live usefully without education or training for a job, unless there is inherited income of some kind. Even people well enough off from an inheritance find they have to occupy themselves somehow. The idea of perpetual idleness soon palls.

Consequently, the eternal “rest from their labors” and “the works which follow after” (*Revelation* 14:13) promised in the after-life, actually do not mean rest from work at all. The cartoonist view of “heavenly peace” as being eternal idleness dies hard, since everyone here on earth regards a vacation as a “bit of heaven.” Those who think heaven consists in idleness while “being served by others” can have a try at it, until they realize it would be eternal dreariness (*Arcana Coelestia* 454, cf. *Conjugal Love* #6—16). “Eternal rest” on the contrary means “dispelling idleness” thereby causing men instead to feel alive (*Conjugal Love* 207, *True Christian Religion* 694); while “resting from labor and their works following” actually means rest from temptations, i.e. no longer being anguished by doubts of any kind, nor tormented by faults or worries. THAT is the rest

meant. The “works following after them” means coming into spiritual life, into their own good intentions that were their “soul and life” while at work even on earth, all of which remain in heaven forever (*Apocalypse Revealed* 640, 641, *Apocalypse Explained* 896). The outcome upon entering heaven is thus working at a daily use, but with joy and anticipation, with the same ‘soul and life’ you gave on earth to a ‘job well done,’ but now with accomplishment at the end of every heavenly day. Thus “...everyone, no matter who, must in the next life perform a use; for the sole purpose for which a person is born is that he may perform a use to the community he is in” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1103.2). This passage embraces both worlds, the one into which he is born, and the one to which he comes “in the next life.” “Angelic life consists in performing the good works of charity, which are uses, and the angels find all their happiness in use, from use, and in accordance with use” (*Heaven and Hell* 403).

Every angelic use then descends as inspiration to all who perform similar uses on earth. Angels “direct the deeds of man by removing as far as possible his evil intentions...and dwell with man in his affections” (*Heaven and Hell* 391). The two worlds thus depend on each other, and “make one... and one cannot be taken away from the other” (*Last Judgment* 9). That is how closely our human world depends on the input from angels, while their eternal uses rest on the output from earth. “On the heaven of angels depends the heaven of angelic spirits, on this the world of spirits, and on this again the human race” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2026). “An influx coming through angels adjusts itself to the person's affections, which they guide gently, turning those affections towards what is good without breaking them. The actual influx of them is silent, barely perceptible, for it is an influx into the person's interiors, always operating through his freedom” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6205). Do we sense that our freedom at our jobs depends on angels?

We are to do our work “sincerely and well” in every “office and station” which we do by avoiding the evils of graft and corruption, which tempt workers depending on their occupations (*Heavenly Doctrine* 128). It fits right in with the sheer fact of life

that we have to be educated and grow up just to qualify for a job. This is the heritage of the fall of humankind. Before Noah's flood, children went out and discovered the details of their home instruction on their own, details that "nowadays men must learn before knowing about them" (*Arcana Coelestia* 895)!

Therefore, another answer to "What is the meaning of life?" is being useful. "Evidently, the universe was created by God to give existence to uses; and for this reason the universe may be called a theater of uses. And as man is the chief end of creation, it follows that each and all things....belonging to order were brought together and concentrated in him, to the end that through him God might accomplish primary uses" (*True Christian Religion* 67).

We are *foci* for primary uses, performed by God. Thus the more practical answer to "why am I here?" is to be useful to society, find a job, help society function, be of service to others. Anyone who has had a stranger asking you for directions knows how eager you are to be of service, by getting him to his destination! Or, vice versa. That is the love of being useful. Orderly useful work has the same kind of latent urge, seen in the accomplishment. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses; all angels perform "practical labors and active services" (*Heaven and Hell* 535). This goes deeper than just helping others: we are born not just in order to exist, but also to "help others." "Man was not born for his own sake, but for the sake of others; that is, so that he should not live for himself alone, but for others. Otherwise no society could hold together, nor could there be any good in it" (*True Christian Religion* 406).

Such an innate urge to work of course beautifully matches a world in which everyone has to work! One wonders, "How did that come about!" We remember those family picnics and games and long afternoons. Could not life be just a picnic? Well, the Most Ancient Church tried it, and it worked until the invention of human evil. From then on, "in toil you shall eat... all the days of your life ...in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Genesis 3:17,19). All of this means the misery that comes from evil spirits in your life, and "relapsing into the external man

where he was before regeneration” (*Arcana Coelestia* 270, 275). Working for a living was “invented” at the expense of being lumbered in external life with a dead proprium, which harbors all our hate and resentment and snarls at every obstacle. Therefore, we now need to be born with an inkling of what the purpose of life portends: “No one knows what a person's life is unless he knows that it is love. Without knowing this, one may believe that ... life is simply sensing and acting, another that it is thinking, when in fact ... inmost thought, which is a perception of ends or purposes, is actually the first effect of life... and sensation and action its second effect” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 2). Our inmost thought right after birth—our “first thought” upon entering this world—has to do with “ends and purposes”! We face up to the “Why I am here” question but now as the reason for our existence. This happens before “sensing and acting.” Perhaps we know now why the angels concentrate on a dead people’s thoughts about “eternal life” when they usher them in as newcomers after death (*Heaven and Hell* 449). That inmost thought of “purpose” homes in on an occupation as a purpose of life, taking you all the way into the next world.

Work is one answer to the question, why am I here? A close “second”, indeed the “first” thought of many people, is marriage. Perhaps 99% of the entire human race has institutions of heterosexual marriage, with cultural support and expectation of a family coming from such unions. How many novels and movies have not centered on some drama of giving birth and furthering the causes begun by ancestors, etc. The family unit of father, mother and their own children is what started clans, tribes and finally nations. Always, family has included the extended love of the neighbor, embracing orphans and foster-children, the spiritual version of “family” known to the wisdom of the ancients (*Arcana Coelestia* 1224, 1264). For family members mean real, celestial and spiritual, things in heaven, with all the names for family relations and relatives ultimately referring the Lord Himself (*Arcana Coelestia* 1876, 1888, 4442). That is why “family” often incorporates others beyond the core unit. To this day nations have attributes based on commonalities from

marriages within given cultural confines. Parades such as at the Olympics demonstrate the wholesomeness of the family of humankind.

The purpose of marriage therefore goes hand in hand with the “end of creation for the sake of a heaven of angels from the human race.” Again, “The purpose of the actual creation of the universe was none other than the formation of a heaven of angels from human beings; one where all who believe in God might live in everlasting blessedness” (*True Christian Religion* 773). That is why another answer to the question of why am I here, is “find a wife” “find a husband.” No other purpose has such a depth of motivation! The “conjugal sphere” permeates the universe “from angels to worms” (*Conjugal Love* 92). That certainly catches us humans in between, doesn’t it? “In spring time, the only pretty ring time” as said good ol’ Shakespeare.

Arguments for celibacy stand no chance: “The reasons why the married state is preferable are: the married state exists from creation, its source is the marriage of good and truth, it corresponds to the Lord’s marriage with the church, the church and conjugal love are constant companions. [Thus] its purpose is higher than that of all else in creation, since it is the propagation in due order of the human race, and also of the heaven of angels, since this comes from the human race. A further consideration is that marriage is a person’s fulfillment, since it makes a person fully a person, as will be proved in the next chapter. All these reasons are lacking in the case of celibacy” (*Conjugal Love* 156). Case closed.

Of course many are single but not from choice. “It is different if unmarried people have longed to get married, and even more so if they have kept seeking to get married without success. If such people are spiritual, blessed marriages are found for them, but not until they reach heaven” (*Conjugal Love* 54). With every individual on earth, there can be conjugal love, since this goes together with regeneration and with the states of the church (*Conjugal Love* 339, *True Christian Religion* 847, *Conjugal Love* 130). However, in an unmarried person, conjugal or marriage love is more in potential than actual, since it depends

on an actual partner for the subtle spiritual elements of the conjugal (cf. *Conjugal Love* 199). That is why marriage is a “higher purpose than all other purposes of creation” (*Conjugal Love* 143), being the purpose of “reproduction, propagation and procreation” which are clearly “continuations of creation” (*Conjugal Love* 183:5). Because marriage, in which there is conjugal love, is the “ultimate aim of creation, it follows that every ... bliss, pleasure, charm and gratification that the Lord the Creator could ever confer on a person are concentrated on this love” (*Conjugal Love* 68:2).

If sometimes your question is “why me?” the answer is “Divine Permission.” Spiritual freedom, as we saw, is part of eternal life, and we at times question our own role in the fabric of current events. When we feel victimized, the Lord is only “letting” bad things happen to you, not as if He “wills them” but as though He cannot prevent all of them, because our salvation hangs in the balance (*Divine Providence* 16). Perhaps all you need is to be jogged back to a spiritual viewpoint (*Arcana Coelestia* 762). We just have to regroup and try to remain “unruffled in spirit” as we take care of the mess we face (*Arcana Coelestia* 8478:4). The comforting answer to “why me?” then goes back to that first thought of “purpose of life” right after birth, which we now have to reaffirm. Regardless of how bad things appear to be, we should have trust in the Lord’s providence (*ibid.*). The Lord is not only in general charge of our spiritual life, but specifically details you to be “in this or that place in heaven” (*Divine Providence* 67). That is “why you.” A new choice lies before you.

We see how important it is to support society by entering into its functions, or else “it could not work.” Families are integral to a healthy society, and we cite countless family reunions as evidence for that. Consequently, the question “why am I here?” has plenty of claimants. Many readers no doubt recollect particulars of their own occupations and families. There is satisfaction in knowing one has entered into the world, as intended. The purpose of life is being fulfilled. There is hope for the future, when one’s “works do follow after” into the next life.

Our satisfaction of the soul will continue in a heavenly use. It is not surprising then that everyone is in fact regenerated and saved “according to their occupation” (*True Christian Religion* 580). A doctor has different temptations to face than say an engineer. And so on. The main “charity” that everyone performs, is not giving to the poor, etc., important though that is, but one’s occupation! That is where genuine charity is exercised. The faith strengthened in Sabbath worship is exercised as charity Monday to Friday. “Worship is one thing, regeneration another” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10206), although “worship itself” carries over into “performing useful services, and dealing honestly with human beings” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7038). That is why when “uses rule, the Lord rules” (*Heaven and Hell* 564), for the Lord is in all the good that is done. In that good lies all purpose.

I heard many newcomers from the world complain that they had not known that *their life’s fate [or destiny. Ed.] would accord with the affections of their love*, saying that in the world they had not thought about those affections, still less about the delights of those affections, because they had loved whatever they fond delightful...[T]hey had simply believed that *everyone’s fate* would accord with the intelligence of their thoughts, especially the piety of their thoughts...expressive of their faith.

But they received the reply that *they could have known if they had wished* that evil of life is repugnant to heaven and displeasing to God, but gratifying to hell and pleasing to the ‘devil.’ *Divine Providence* 305 emphasis added.