

# What is the Nature of Good Government?

*from*  
**Heaven and Hell**

*by* **EMANUEL SWEDENBORG**



## *A Unique Vision of the Afterlife*

The following pages contain a brief taste of heaven based on the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), a Swedish scientist and mystic. They are taken from his best-known work, *Heaven and Hell*, originally written and published in 1758 in Latin as *De Coelo et Ejus Mirabilibus, et de Inferno, ex Auditis et Visis* (Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell, Drawn from Things Heard and Seen).

*Heaven and Hell* is a detailed description of the afterlife based on Swedenborg's personal experiences. The work includes discussions of what happens to us after we die, what it's like to live in heaven (or in hell), and the nature of God and angels. Now celebrating its 250th anniversary, *Heaven and Hell* has been in print continuously since its first publication, and it has been translated into twenty-three languages.

This translation was produced by George F. Dole for the New Century Edition of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg, published by the Swedenborg Foundation. The full translation includes an introduction by noted scholar Bernhard Lang, extensive notes on the text, and other helpful references. This deluxe edition is available in hardcover and full-sized paperback; there is also a smaller portable edition without the introduction and endnotes. •

# Forms of Government in Heaven

SINCE HEAVEN IS DIFFERENTIATED INTO communities, and the larger communities consist of some hundreds of thousands of angels, and since all the people in a given community are involved in similar good but not in similar wisdom, it follows of necessity that there are forms of government. Good order needs to be kept, and all matters of good order seen to.

The actual forms of government in heaven vary, though. There is one kind in the communities that constitute the Lord's heavenly kingdom and another in the communities that constitute the Lord's spiritual kingdom. They even vary depending on the particular function of each community. However, in the heavens there is no government except the government of mutual love, and the government of mutual love is heavenly government.

The form of government in the Lord's heavenly kingdom is called justice, since all the people there are intent on the good the Lord's love does in and through us, and anything that results from this good is called just. This government belongs to the Lord alone. He leads them and teaches them in matters of life. The truths that we associate with judgment are engraved on

their hearts. Everyone knows them, grasps them, and sees them. So matters of judgment never come into dispute for them, only matters of justice that are matters of life. The less wise ask the wiser ones about them, and they in turn ask the Lord and bring back the responses. Their heaven—their deepest delight—is to live justly from the Lord.

Government in the Lord's spiritual kingdom is called judgment, since they are intent on that spiritual good that is the good of thoughtfulness toward their neighbor, and this good is in essence true. What is true is a matter of judgment, and what is good is a matter of justice.

These angels too are led by the Lord, but indirectly; so they have officials, fewer or more depending on the needs of the community they live in. They also have laws that they observe in their life together. The officials manage everything according to the laws; they understand them because they are wise, and in matters of doubt they are enlightened by the Lord.

Since government on the basis of what is good (the kind in the Lord's heavenly kingdom) is called justice, and government on the basis of what is true (the kind in the Lord's spiritual kingdom) is called judgment, in the Word it says "justice and judgment" when it is talking about heaven and the church; "justice" meaning heavenly good, and "judgment" spiritual good—which latter good, as explained

above, is in essence true. The following examples may serve:

There will be no end to peace on the throne of David and on his kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it in judgment and justice from now on and even to eternity. (Isaiah 9:7)

"David" here means the Lord, and his kingdom means his heaven, as we can see from the next passage:

I will raise up for David a just shoot and he will reign as king and act discerningly and make judgment and justice on earth. (Jeremiah 23:5)

Let Jehovah be extolled because he lives on high and fills Zion with judgment and justice. (Isaiah 33:5)

Zion too means heaven and the church.

I, Jehovah, am he who makes judgment and justice on earth, because in them I take pleasure. (Jeremiah 9:24)133

I will betroth you to myself for eternity, and I will betroth you to myself in justice and judgment. (Hosea 2:19)

Jehovah, in the heavens your justice is like the mountains of God, and your judgment like the great deep. (Psalms 36:5–6)

They ask me for judgments of justice, they long for the approach of God. (Isaiah 58:2)

And elsewhere.

In the Lord's spiritual kingdom there are various forms of government, not the same in one community as in another but varying depending on the functions the communities fulfill. Their functions parallel those of the human [body], to which they correspond; and the variety of these is well known. The heart has one function, the lungs another, the liver another, the pancreas and spleen others, and so also for each sensory organ. Just as we have these various services going on in our bodies, so services are carried on in the universal human that is heaven, since it is its communities that correspond to them. (The reader may see in [another chapter of this book], that everything in heaven corresponds to something in us.)

Still, all the forms of government share a central focus on the public good as their end, and within that good, the good of each individual. This is because everyone in all heaven is under the guidance of the Lord, who loves everyone and who from his divine love arranges things so that it is the common good from which individuals receive what is good for them. Each individual receives benefit in proportion to his or her love of the whole, for to the extent that they love the whole they love all the individuals. Since this love is the Lord's they are proportionally loved by the Lord and are benefited.

We may conclude from this what the officials are like—namely, that they are the people who more than others enjoy

love and wisdom and who therefore, out of that love, wish well to everyone and out of that wisdom know how to make sure it happens. People like this do not control and command but minister and serve, for doing good for others out of a love for what is good is serving, and making sure that it happens is ministering. They do not make themselves more important than other people but less so, for they put the welfare of the community and of their neighbor first and their own later. What is first is more important, and what is later is less.

They do have respect and renown, though. They live in the center of their communities, loftier than others, and in splendid mansions as well; and they accept this renown and respect. However, they do so not on their own account but for the sake of obedience. They all know that this respect and this renown are gifts from the Lord, so that they may be obeyed.

This is the meaning of the Lord's words to the disciples:

Whoever among you wants to be great needs to minister to you; and whoever among you wants to be first needs to serve you; just as the Human-born One did not come to be ministered to, but to minister. (Matthew 20:27–28 [26–28])

Let the greatest among you be as the least, and the one who is your guide be as one who ministers. (Luke 22:26)

A similar form of government, on the smallest scale, is found in each household. There is a master and there are servants; and the master loves the servants and the servants love their master, so out of this love they serve each other. The master teaches how to live and says what needs to be done and the servants obey and fulfill their functions. Being useful is the essential delight of life for everyone. We can see from this that the Lord's kingdom is an organized structure of functions.

There are forms of government in the hells as well; for unless there were, they would not be kept in restraint. However, the forms of government there are exact opposites of those in the heavens because they all derive from selfishness. All people there want to control others and to be preminent. They hate the people who do not agree with them, and use vicious means to get even with them because this is what selfishness is like. So for them it is the more vicious ones who hold office, and who are obeyed out of fear. •

Taken from *Heaven and Hell*  
paragraphs 213–220

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG (1688–1772) WAS born Emanuel Swedberg or Svedberg in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 29, 1688 (Julian calendar). He was the third of the nine children of Jesper Swedberg (1653–1735) and Sara Behm (1666–1696). At the age of eight he lost his mother. After the death of his only older brother ten days later, he became the oldest living son. In 1697 his father married Sara Bergia (1666–1720), who developed great affection for Emanuel and left him a significant inheritance. His father, a Lutheran clergyman, later became a celebrated and controversial bishop, whose diocese included the Swedish churches in Pennsylvania and in London, England.

After studying at the University of Uppsala (1699–1709), Emanuel journeyed to England, Holland, France, and Germany (1710–1715) to study and work with leading scientists in western Europe. Upon his return he apprenticed as an engineer under the brilliant Swedish inventor Christopher Polhem (1661–1751). He gained favor with Sweden's King Charles XII (1682–1718), who gave him a salaried position as an overseer of Sweden's mining industry (1716–1747). Although he was engaged, he never married.

After the death of Charles XII, Emanuel was ennobled by Queen Ulrika Eleonora (1688–1741), and his last name was changed to Swedenborg (or Svedenborg). This change in status gave him a seat in the Swedish House of Nobles, where

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

he remained an active participant in the Swedish government throughout his life.

A member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, he devoted himself to scientific studies and philosophical reflections that culminated in a number of publications, most notably a comprehensive three-volume work on mineralogy (1734) that brought him recognition across Europe as a scientist and philosopher. After 1734 he redirected his research and publishing to a study of anatomy in search of the interface between the soul and body, making several significant discoveries in physiology.

From 1743 to 1745 he entered a transitional phase that resulted in a shift of his main focus from science and philosophy to theology. Throughout the rest of his life he maintained that this shift was brought about by Jesus Christ, who appeared to him, called him to a new mission, and opened his perception to a permanent dual consciousness of this life and the life after death.

He devoted the last decades of his life to studying Scripture and publishing eighteen theological titles that draw on the Bible, reasoning, and his own spiritual experiences. These works present a Christian theology with unique perspectives on the nature of God, the spiritual world, the Bible, the human mind, and the path to salvation.

Swedenborg died in London on March 29, 1772, at the age of eighty-four. •