

New Church Teaching is absolutely clear – there is no oblivion!

*One life continues into the other,
and death is merely a transition.*

Emanuel Swedenborg in Heaven and Hell 493

*Let anyone who wishes to be happy for evermore know
and believe that he is going to be alive after death; let him
think about it and remember it, for it is the truth.*

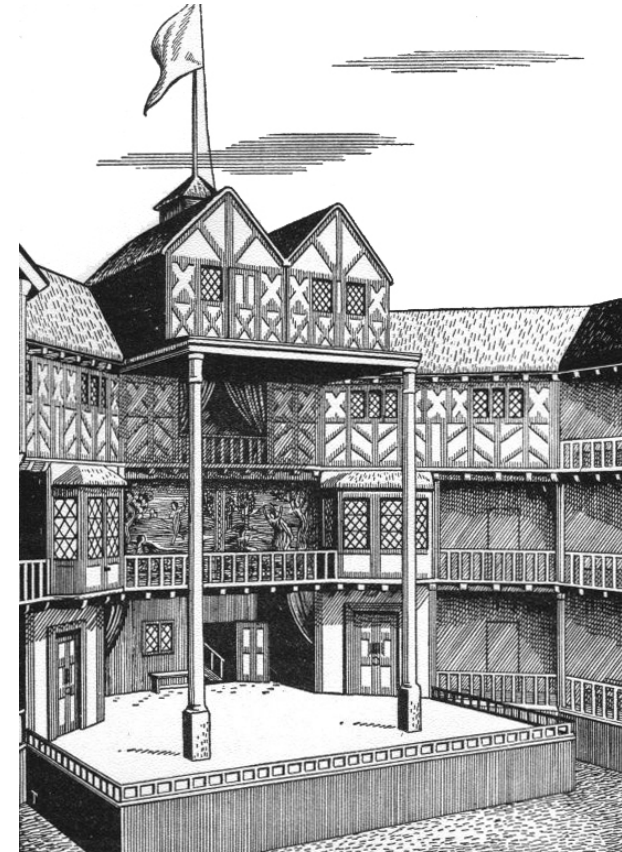
Emanuel Swedenborg in Arcana Coelestia 8939

Whilst we are in this world our inner and outer characters can be different – if we have allowed them to be like that. But when the physical falls away at death our true inner spiritual character emerges transparent for all to see, without any mask or pretence, and we find our spiritual home. Our spiritual character is essentially built around what we love, because what we love is always at the centre of our being and life. And this is true whether our love is focussed more on the needs of others or more on ourselves.

Our spiritual home is truly where the heart is and because we are all unique individuals there is a special place for each of us determined by the content of our character and its love.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” Jesus in John 14:1-3

All the world's a stage



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***All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,***

Shakespeare got it about right when he described us as having many roles in life - from being cared for as an infant right through to the last stage of life when we are often cared for once again. And in between there are the many stages of growth and development as child becomes adult and adult life unfolds. And the parts we play are very diverse. The obedient child leads onto the rebellious teenage years. The excitement and ambition of youth and the opportunities it brings leads on to the possibility of partnerships, families and responsibilities, with all their ups and downs, joys and heartaches. We become child, parent, brother, sister, husband, wife, partner, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandparent. Yes we certainly have many parts to play on the stage of life.

But what of our inner character?

Throughout the ages wise people have realised that we live in two worlds at the same time, a physical outer world and a deeper inner spiritual world. The problem is that we get so absorbed by the opportunities and problems of our outer physical world that we don't spend enough time on the spiritual world within us and sometimes we are barely aware that it exists at all. And yet the real 'us' is the character within – the part of us that is spiritual and created for eternal life. Whereas our outer physical life is just something we put on, like a coat, as we go through the stages of our life in this world.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the visionary Jesuit priest, wrote in the 20th century:

*"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience;
we are spiritual beings having a human experience".*

But the problem we have to face up to is that it is quite possible for us to present one character to those around us whilst our real spiritual character within is quite different. We can appear charming and considerate to people we meet whilst really inside we are deceitful and determined to get our own way by pretending we are something we are not. Jesus commented about this type of hypocrisy when he said:

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's
clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).*

And although it doesn't seem quite as bad we can get things the other way round as well. We may be quiet, thoughtful and caring people deep inside, but feel that sometimes in life we have to put on a face that appears strong, ambitious and self-focussed. And the end result is that we fail to be true to ourselves.

Do we know what our true character really is? Do we let our inner spiritual being shine through on the stage of daily life? Or is the character that other people know just a mask – a life unreal, a scene badly written in which we must play?

Life is not just a dress rehearsal for the real thing – it is the real thing! It is the one opportunity we have to build an inner spiritual character that is focussed more on the needs of others than ourselves - to develop a real humanity involving care, kindness, compassion, mercy, love, wisdom, understanding, tolerance – and much more.

But what about the stage of life when we face the final curtain? Will it be as Shakespeare suggests?

*Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,*