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ANGELS ARE COLOURFUL PEOPLE

by Candace Frazee

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Dear Candace,

I was inquiring if some information regarding angels could be sent to me. I'd appreciate it.

L. S.

Framingham, Massachusetts

Dear L. S.,

The concept of angels starts in childhood. We are told:

"You're being an angel today."

"You're a cute little angel."

"Be an angel."

Most people have a basic concept of what an angel does, but few have the understanding of who an angel is.

Through our teen years, we think we know what an angel does, cause most of the time people imply the devil is in us. As we grow up, the concept of angels brings recognition of death. Literature tells us angels with wings are going to greet us at our deathbed and carry us to heaven.

In the 18th century, Emanuel Swedenborg wrote about angels he said he saw in vision. What he said regarding angels changed the contemporary concept of angels 180°. So much so, that his take on angels changed the thinking of the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, August Strindberg, and William Blake, to name a few.

Swedenborg wrote that everything in the Old Testament and the New Testament was true—not necessarily understood at first.

For example, it says in the Word of the Lord that, *"In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage."* For centuries, religious leaders have claimed that this means that no one is married in heaven.

What Swedenborg was shown in his visions was that when people died, they entered into the world of spirits, got back with their deceased partner (or waited for their deceased partner), THEN entered heaven together. And that's because when you marry on earth it's supposed to be for ETERNITY! And

if it's a good marriage, it will be.

If it's not, you go your separate ways, find your true partner, get married, and THEN enter heaven. Everyone in heaven Swedenborg witnessed, IS married. The contract of marriage happens on earth (or outside heaven) and then the married state of the couple exists forever. (Ah, true love!)

Swedenborg said that an angel is a person in heaven. Not a separate creation of beings, but people that had lived on earth. He explains further that when people die their spirit lives on. When they first arrive in the next life, they are called spirits. Overtime they get acclimated to the next existence, educated, and oriented as a student, so to speak, and then either graduate to become an angel or fail and become a devil.

Swedenborg gives such a refreshing approach on the subject of angels. Heaven is not a reward and hell is not a punishment. They are states of mind. We CAN get there. We won't be living in heaven amongst the angels, we will become an angel ourselves and live with the angels. Or vice versa, it's your choice.

Dear Candace,

I'm curious about something. My curiosity is really not, but I want your answer to this question. I want you to tell me why is it that any reference to an angel is of a Caucasian ethnicity? I mean angels can't be limited to a racial aspect. The only reason I ask this is that I'm looking for some diversity in the pictures that I see of angels. Plus most pictures and statues of such are of a European origin. This is not an attack on you.

W. A.

Farmington, Missouri

Dear W. A.,

Egyptians drew the soul as either a bird with a human head or as a shadow. The Romans drew the human

soul as a small female with butterfly-like wings. Later in time the Romans and the Greeks drew the human soul simply as a butterfly!

In medieval Christian art, the human soul is depicted as a small baby floating away from its adult deceased body. The Renaissance period showed little youths leaving dead bodies behind on earth.

Accompanying the human souls were angels drawn with bird-like wings. These wings were representative that the angel was made of spiritual substance and could move quickly about to and fro, such as our thoughts do.

In the 18th century tombstone art changed. Many depicted human souls rising into heaven as adult bodies. These were directly influenced by Swedenborg's teachings about people as spirits entering into the next life. The English sculptor, John Flaxman was famous for his Swedenborgian monuments in graveyards. His style was copied by other English and Italian tomb makers.

But, by the end of the 19th century tombstone artwork pretty much disappeared because belief in the human soul living after death was doubted.

The depiction of angels has not waned. Their whiteness symbolizes an angel is pure and of a spiritual nature. (Also, they were drawn from live white models.)

In the decades approaching the millennium interest in angels has emerged again. Since the near-death studies have demonstrated that human beings live after death as human beings and Swedenborg's descriptions that angels are people that have died, some angels have been drawn without wings. And drawn as every race on earth, with or without wings.

I certainly have not covered all cultures. An art historian would help you there. To answer your question simply, angels have appeared as Caucasian because the wealthy, dominating powers were white. Swedenborg saw not only white angels, but angels of every colour on earth, in heaven.