

Editorial

MORE TO THE COMMANDMENTS

In the well-known account in Scripture, the young man asked the Lord what he should do to gain eternal life. When the Lord answered, “Keep the commandments,” he replied that he had done so from youth. And for this the Lord loved him (Mark 10: 21). Still, he was not perfect. There was more to the commandments.

As many members and friends of the church continue a study of the Ten Commandments this fall, it may be useful to direct attention to places of sequential instruction about the commandments to be found in the Heavenly Doctrine. Below are four:

True Christian Religion

The whole of chapter five in *True Christian Religion* is on the Catechism or Decalogue “explained in its external and its internal sense.” Each commandment is treated here as to its natural, spiritual, and celestial senses. The exposition of the natural sense gives not only the strict literal law but broader natural senses as well. For example, we learn that murderous acts can come apart from bodily harm through expressions of enmity, hatred, and revenge. Spiritual murder, a more interior evil, is shown to involve insinuating thoughts that turn people away from God, religion, and Divine worship. The “celestial” degree of murder takes form in hatred of the Lord. In this chapter of *True Christian Religion*, the threefold meaning of each commandment is explained. It is a valuable summary.

Apocalypse Explained

A second general treatment of the commandments similar to what is found in the chapter in *True Christian Religion*, but more

extensive, is in the expositional work *Apocalypse Explained*. Swedenborg added teachings about the commandments at the end of the paragraphs numbered from 948 to 1028. All the commandments are considered. For the convenience of today's readers, these teachings have been collected together and published as extracts in a separate volume. One such book entitled, *Religion and Life*, was published by the Swedenborg Society of London (1961).

Arcana Coelestia

The complete exposition of the commandments as they are recorded in the book of Exodus is to be found in the *Arcana Coelestia* (8859-8912). Here, their meaning is explained in the familiar phrase-by-phrase expositional style of the Arcana. Again, referring for example to the commandment against murder, what we find are "more universal things" than the act of murder, namely, "such things as are of heaven, thus which not only concern the life of the body, but which also concern the life of the soul, or eternal life" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8902: 17).

Doctrine of Life

We find still another treatment in numbers 53-91 of the *Doctrine of Life*. Only the commandments against murder, adultery, theft, and false witness are considered, especially as they relate to the life of charity. Taking again for comparison's sake the example of the fifth commandment, we are told that "in proportion as one shuns murders of every kind as sins, in the same proportion he has love toward the neighbor" (*Doctrine of Life* 67 heading). This section then defines what "murders of every kind" are. Each of these four commandments is similarly explained.

The attention given in the Heavenly Doctrine to explanations of the commandments seems ample proof of their importance in

our pursuit of eternal life. "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19: 16).

Three Things Lacking

It is said that Jesus "loved him." This was because the man said that he had kept those commandments from his youth. But because he lacked three things...the Lord said that he should "sell all that he had," by which is meant that he should remove his heart from riches; that he should "take up the cross," by which is meant that he should fight against concupiscences; and that he should "follow Him," by which is meant that he should acknowledge the Lord to be God. (*Doctrine of Life* 66).

The Effect of Breaking or Keeping One Commandment

...whosoever from purpose or from confirmation acts against one commandment, acts against all the rest, since to act thus from purpose or from confirmation is to deny altogether that it is a sin, and he who denies it to be sin, makes light of acting against all the rest of the commandments....

It is very similar with those who are in good from the Lord. These, if from the will and understanding, or from purpose and confirmation, they abstain from one evil because it is a sin, abstain from all, and still more if they abstain from many; for whenever anyone abstains, from purpose and confirmation, from any evil, because it is a sin, he is kept by the Lord in the purpose of abstaining from the rest....A man comes into this kind of purpose, if he examines himself once or twice a year, and repents of the evil he discovers in himself. (*Brief Exposition* 113)