

THE KINGDOM WITHIN
Charter Day Address, October 20, 2006
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Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

"The kingdom of God is within you." What an incredibly world-altering statement that is! That one simple statement flips the whole idea of religion around. Throughout history people have tried to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Some have tried it on the small-scale, community level. Others have tried to set up countries and whole empires based on their understanding of God's laws in hopes of creating the Kingdom of God here on earth. People have waited, and many are still waiting, for God to come down and establish His eternal Kingdom here on earth once and for all.

But is that really how the Lord said it would happen? Is He going to come down to earth and set up the Kingdom of God Himself? Is His Kingdom even an earthly kingdom at all? The Kingdom of God is not actually something external. We can't just see it someplace out there and go join it. It's not outside of us at all. It's in us.

In many ways the Heavenly Doctrine is an expansion of that key principle. I want to focus this morning on the profound implications that principle has for the whole theory and practice of education here at the Academy of the New Church. Believing that the Kingdom of God is within us gives a new purpose to education. It implies that we need to take education to a whole new level. We need to do more than just teach about our physical

world. We need to do more than teach about morality. We need to do even more than teach the stories and doctrines of our faith. We need to teach to a whole new level of the mind. If the Kingdom of God is within us, then we need to teach people about what's inside them. If the Kingdom is inside us, we need to teach about the nature of spirit and what it means to be spiritual.

This is a totally different goal for education than any other educational system has. The world talks about *academic excellence* and about living a *successful* and *excellent life*. These may indeed be worthy pursuits, and they may have a place here at the Academy, but we need to have them—and more. At its core, the Academy of the New Church is about spiritual education. It's about helping to lay the foundations for a spiritual life. There are other schools that can give you an excellent education for this world. There are other schools that can give you an excellent moral education as well. But what about an excellent spiritual education? Where else can you get an education based on the broadest, deepest, clearest spiritual truths ever given to the human race? Where else can you go to get such a clear picture of our Divinely Human God, the God into whose image and likeness we were created, the God whose image is reflected in all of His creation? Where else can you go to learn about how spirit is present in all things in life and how to bring spirituality into every facet of your life? New Church education is education of the spirit, by the spirit, and for the spirit.

I've used the words "spirit" and "spiritual" a lot now. What is a spirit? Spirits are sometimes portrayed as some kind of airy, floating mists, or as some kind of freaky, magical, ghostlike entities that go "wooooo." We can do better. Some people think of spirits as what we become when we die, and the spiritual realm as the place we go to when we leave this natural world behind. But these are only half-truths. Some of the most striking

and strongest teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine are the ones that elaborate on the fundamental truth that we are spiritual beings right now and that we are part of the spiritual realm right now. The spiritual world is not actually separate from our material world in any way. The spiritual world is present in this world like a hand in a glove. We are all spirits, and heaven is within us right now!

Despite what our senses tell us, we are not just our bodies. We are not merely physical beings. We are spirits, and our physical bodies are really only specialized tools that enable us to experience the physical world. Despite what science may teach, it is not our body that lives and feels and thinks and wills; it is our spirit doing all these through our body. On its own our body is lifeless. It certainly isn't our body that loves and grows wise. It is our spirit. Spirits aren't something strange or inhuman. We are spirits. We are spiritual beings having a natural-world experience.

Our spirit consists of what we love and the thoughts that arise from our loves. Just like our spirit, love can seem like some kind of unreal, abstract, mental thing, or maybe some kind of impulse. But just because love isn't measurable or even perceivable by our physical senses doesn't mean it isn't real. Love is real. We can feel it when it is present, and we feel when it's absent. We feel warm and alive inside when it is present and cold and lifeless when it's gone. We can feel and even see its effects, so we know that it exists. Don't tell parents the love they have for their children isn't real. That love is the most real thing on earth. The precious innocence we feel when holding a newborn child can warm the soul like nothing else. Personally, I've never felt anything more real. In fact, at those moments I'd say everything else seems pretty unreal.

What about you? When do you feel the most alive? Think about it. When was a time you felt really full of life? I'll bet it

was when you were doing something you really loved—hanging out with good friends, playing a sport, "chillin" at the beach, sitting and talking with a close friend about stuff that really matters in your life. What makes you feel alive? Isn't it just doing what you love? The more you love something, the more alive you feel. So love is very real. In fact, the book *Divine Love and Wisdom* (n.1) starts off by saying, "Love is a person's life." Of course!

Love and its partner wisdom aren't abstract. They may not be perceivable by our physical senses, but they can definitely be perceived by our spirit. The Heavenly Doctrine even says Divine Love and Wisdom are real spiritual substance (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 40). They are real things that are received by the faculties of the mind called will and understanding and felt by our spiritual senses. They are every bit as real to our spirit as warmth and light are to our body. Spiritual education means teaching about the spirit. It means teaching about love and wisdom and how they apply to every situation.

The passage we heard from the book of Revelation gives a powerful image of the kingdom that lies within us. The passage I want focus on is the one about the measurement of the city: "And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal" (Revelation 21:16). Now twelve thousand furlongs is equal to fifteen hundred miles or twenty-four hundred kilometers. We may be able to grasp, at least in theory, a city that huge. A city that wide would cover an area stretching from Boston to Miami and extending westward almost as far as to Denver. That's a huge city. But a city fifteen hundred miles high! Fifteen hundred miles is way out into space! We couldn't even breathe in the higher parts of it! Clearly this is no physical city.

The Heavenly Doctrine shows that in describing the features of the heavenly city New Jerusalem, John is actually describing

the nature of our spirit and the Kingdom of God that lies within us (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 907). It is the measure of a man, the measure of an angel (Revelation 21:17). They show that when we apply these three dimensions to our spirit, “length” refers to the intensity of our love, “breadth” means the extent of our knowledge, and “height” relates to the spiritual quality of our commitment to what we know and love.

Let’s look a little deeper at those three dimensions of our spirit and the implications for education. The “breadth” dimension refers to how much ground we cover in terms of the different experiences we have and the knowledge we gain. The greater the variety of things we learn and experience in life, the “broader” our perspective will be. The more knowledge we have about different kinds of things, the more ability we have to extend our influence in those areas. In terms of our spirit, then, we extend as “wide” as our knowledge and experience take us.

The “length” dimension of our spirit is linked to our love and affection for things. Length is a measurement of time as well as space. The more we love something, the longer we stick with it. This is true whether we are referring to a subject we learn about in school, a relationship, a career path, a hobby, or anything. As we move laterally in terms of different experiences, we move forward in those things we enjoy doing the most. The things we have experienced and don’t enjoy, we stop doing. They don’t take up much “space” in our minds because we don’t care about them enough to have them take up a greater amount of time in our lives. But the things we do care about and enjoy take up a greater “space” in our minds because we commit more time to them. As we move forward in time, the things we keep doing over and over again define the “length” of our spirit as they add a second dimension to our experiences, the dimension of intensity of passion for what we know and experience.

The third dimension of our spirit, and the most crucial for New

Church education, is the “height” dimension. The “height” dimension refers to the spiritual quality of our love for something. We use this type of “height” imagery in our ordinary speech when we describe people as “deep” or “shallow” depending on our perception of their level of spirituality. Just as the height dimension is the toughest to picture in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, raising our thoughts and our motives to higher levels is also the hardest dimension to add to our lives. We need to make our life “three dimensional” by including the spiritual realm in it at all times, and we do this by elevating what we know about and care about by means of higher spiritual wisdom and deeper spiritual motives.

While “breadth” and “length” have to do with the *quantity* of our knowledge and our passion, the “height” dimension has to do with the *quality* of our knowledge and our passion. If we don’t raise our thinking and our motives to higher levels, then what we learn from our experiences is only information, and our love for something is merely worldly passion. When we do raise our thinking and our motivations to higher and higher levels, those facts and desires of our earthly life take on a heavenly quality and become the foundations for acting in spiritually loving and wise ways. If we don’t teach to the spirit, we are only giving a two-dimensional education, and a two-dimensional education can only build a flat, two-dimensional kingdom. Without that third dimension the world we build lacks an eternal, spiritual quality. New Church education must teach to all three dimensions. It must be fundamentally about teaching to the spirit.

There is one final misconception about being spiritual that I want to address. The theory is that to be spiritual we must run away from the world and deny all its experiences and pleasures. The Lord created a beautiful world, and He put us in this world to experience the beauty, the wonder, and the joy of His creation. He put us here to learn how to interact with each other and learn

to be useful to each other. We are not meant to shun the world and its pleasures. On the contrary, the more we know of this world and the more we experience it, the wider our potential field for usefulness in this world. The Writings affirm that it is essential for our spiritual development that we live in the world, experience the world, and gain knowledge of the world (see *Heaven and Hell* 528). When we learn about and experience the world in order to be of greater use in this world, worldly knowledge and experience serve as means for becoming wise, for confirming our faith, and for giving us the tools to do more good for the world (see *Heaven and Hell* 356). *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* says: “God is loved by leading a life in accordance with His commandments, and the neighbor is loved by doing services for him. So in order to receive the life of heaven, a person has to live fully in the world, and engage in its services and business dealings” (n. 126).

As we have seen, spirits are not something strange and mysterious. We are spirits, and what is inside us is love and wisdom. When we look to the Lord and strive to have the Lord's principles and purposes be our principles and purposes, we raise our worldly wisdom and love to a new, higher dimension. The spiritual education we strive to give here at the Academy is not some otherworldly spirituality but a "this-worldly" spirituality. Being spiritual requires us to live by spiritual loves and spiritual truths in our everyday lives. As it says in *True Christian Religion* (n. 406): “It is utterly useless for you to know many things if you do not live by what you know. For knowledge has no other purpose than that you may become spiritual through it.”

New Church education is about helping people to be aware of the Lord's Kingdom within them and helping them to actively work to be part of it. If we don't have the Lord's Kingdom within us, then what we do will fade away. But with the Lord's Kingdom actively working within us, the Lord's Kingdom will

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be in all we do. If we continue to look to the Lord as the source of our educational philosophy and practice, and live by the spirit of truth and love He teaches, then the Kingdom will be active within us. If the Kingdom is in here, within us, then wherever we are we take that Kingdom with us. As the Lord said: “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17: 20-21). Amen.

Readings: Luke 17:20-21; Revelation 21:10-17; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 230-233, 236



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