

PARADIGMS REVISITED

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Part One

“*And behold the glory of Jehovah was seen in the cloud.* That this signifies the presence of the Lord in truth accommodated to the perception, is evident from the signification of ‘the glory of Jehovah,’ as being the presence and the advent of the Lord...and from the signification of ‘the cloud,’ as being the literal sense of the Word...thus truth accommodated to the perception, for the Word in the letter is such truth. ... Truth Divine is not of one degree, but of many. Truth Divine in the first degree, and also in the second, is that which proceeds immediately from the Lord; this is above the angelic understanding. But truth Divine in the third degree is such as is in the inmost or third heaven; this is such that it cannot in the least be apprehended by people on earth. Truth Divine in the fourth degree is such as is in the middle or second heaven; neither is this intelligible to people. But truth Divine in the fifth degree is such as is in the ultimate or first heaven; this can be perceived in some small measure by people provided they are enlightened; but still it is such that a great part of it cannot be expressed by human words; and when it falls into the ideas, it produces the faculty of perceiving and also of believing that the case is so. But truth Divine in the sixth degree is such as is with people, accommodated to their perception; thus it is the sense of the letter of the Word. This sense, or this truth, is represented by the cloud, and the interior truths are represented by the glory in the cloud” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8443).

Paradigms

This article is a sequel to one that I published on paradigms in the *New Philosophy* in 1991 [Vol. XCIV pp. 489-506]. A paradigm is a world view. It is a framework used by people to

understand the data they receive either through their senses or extensions of them, related to a particular field of study. For example, there are scientific paradigms. Think how differently Ptolemy and Copernicus saw the world. One view was geocentric, the other heliocentric. Philosophy has its different paradigms. Kant, for example, wanted to change the whole paradigm that related to understanding philosophy by asserting the reality of “synthetic *a priori* reasoning.”

Thomas S. Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,¹ pointed out that science does not go gradually deeper and deeper within an existing paradigm. Instead as science develops there comes a time when a new paradigm clashes with the currently accepted one. For example, Ptolemy’s paradigm claimed that the universe was geocentric. People looking at the skies from this viewpoint saw things that did not fit the paradigm. These were “anomalies.” To resolve them people turned to “puzzle solving” in an attempt to fit the anomalies into the paradigm. They spent much of their time in this fruitless effort. But they failed since the problem was with the paradigm not the anomaly.

Three Paradigms for Understanding the Authority of the Bible

Certain paradigms have ruled in the Christian church in relation to how people understand what is meant by the “authority” of the Bible. The first was established by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church said it was the “mother” of the Bible. By the year 784, at the second Council of Nicea, it had proclaimed what books properly belonged in the Bible. Other contenders for Biblical status became the Apocrypha.² The church went on to claim that because it was the mother of

¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1962

² Swedenborg says that in Providence all books that had Divine authorship were included, but more than these were accepted into their canon, notably the Epistles See *Arcana Coelestia* 4824, *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 260 and 266

the Bible, it alone could correctly understand the Bible. The Pope speaking *ex cathedra* was infallible. So the Catholic paradigm allows papal interpretation of the Bible to offset what someone might otherwise believe was taught. The letter must be understood according to Catholic doctrine. The Protestant break with the Catholic Church happened when Luther refused to accept the Catholic paradigm. He said that the church could not tell you how to understand the Word. The Bible in its letter is infallible, and you should rely on the letter alone in understanding it. In this paradigm the letter of the Bible is seen as infallible.

Over time, the Bible, which is cast in Ptolemaic scientific paradigms, was deeply challenged by new scientific data. For example, the world is neither flat nor the center of the solar system. There is no firmament or sky dome, etc. More and more of these anomalies kept appearing until finally some Protestants broke with the idea that the Bible is infallible in its letter. Protestants broke in two directions. The first was the fundamentalist view. Fundamentalists asserted that anyone who believed the Bible was not infallible was listening to the devil. All the alleged scientific anomalies, such as creation happening in seven days, were factual. A true believer must accept them although they do challenge one's faith. God put them there to give people a sense of freedom. They could either believe and be saved or disbelieve and go to hell. Christian fundamentalists hold to this paradigm.

Christian liberals on the other hand accept the new scientific data and so have come to the view that the Bible, although inspired, can be wrong. It is at least as inspired as Shakespeare and perhaps more so, but still it is wrong in places. Rational people should pick and choose from that inspired book only the things that really apply to their lives in this world. In effect this view puts human reason above the letter of Scripture.

Parallels in the New Church

In my earlier article I showed that all three of these paradigms are reflected in the history of the New Church. The New Church parallel to the Catholic view is a belief that regenerate people will develop the true doctrine of the church. They will see the truth and, over time, build the doctrine of the church that will increase our understanding of the letter of the New Word, the Writings. This letter is like the letter of past revelation. The letter can be in error, but the internal sense is never wrong. The developing doctrine of the church will show us the truth. The majority of the people with this view are in the Nova Hierosolyma Church, but this view, as well as the other two, exists with people in all organizations of the New Church.

People who are not ready to accept any errors in the Writings hold the fundamentalist parallel in the New Church. This view does not accept alleged “anomalies” in the Writings. Statements such as that the child of a black or Moorish father by a white or European mother is black, and vice versa,³ or that ether exists as one of the three atmospheres in nature,⁴ are true. They are not based on dated scientific paradigms. People with this view prefer to do puzzle solving with these alleged anomalies. The more we look at such statements, the better we will understand them. Basically, this view relies on the general tenet that the letter of the Writings is infallible. The strongest proponents of this view are in the General Church. They understand the infallibility of the Writings in the fundamentalist sense of that term.

The liberal Protestant view is paralleled in the New Church by those who believe that Swedenborg was inspired to make a commentary on the Bible but that his “writings” are not Divine revelation. They contain inspired insights, but so do the writings of Shakespeare. We must pick and choose as rational people the

³ See *Divine Providence* 277

⁴ See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 176 et al

truths we wish to accept. We need not ascribe authority to the works of Swedenborg. This view was brought into sharp contrast with that of the fundamentalists in 1905, 1906, and 1907 during the Krampf Will case. In this case there was a rejection on the part of the liberal wing of the New Church of the teachings of the latter part of *Conjugal Love*. People with this view are found primarily in the General Convention and, to a lesser degree, in the General Conference.

So far I have briefly summarized what I said in my first article on this subject. That article ended with a fourth paradigm, my own.

A Fourth Paradigm and Five Assumptions

I turn now to that fourth paradigm. My first assumption in this paradigm is the same as that on which the General Church was founded: “The Writings are the Word of God and have Divine authorship.” This statement has been and is the slogan of the General Church. I doubt if anyone in the General Church would dispute this assumption.

They might debate what the phrases “the Word of God” or “Divine authority” mean, but I think they all would agree that the Writings of Swedenborg should be seen as a part of the Word, a Divine Revelation, a New Word for the New Church that is the basis for a new religion.⁵

A Second Assumption

My second assumption is that because the Writings are in writing, they have a “letter,” but I believe a letter as different from the letter of the New Testament as the letter of the New Testament is from the letter of the Old Testament. In fact, I believe the letter of the New Testament is more like the letter of the Writings than it is like the letter of the Old Testament. The New Testament gives the generals of doctrine which are further

⁵ See *Heaven and Hell* 1, *True Christian Religion* 786 et al.

described by the particulars of doctrine given in the Writings. The Writings are not a new covenant (testament), but an expansion of the covenant based on the two great commandments.

There are very real differences in each form of Revelation which I will discuss later; nevertheless all three Revelations have historicals, propheticals and doctrinals, albeit in different proportions. There are many historicals in the Writings. I would say perhaps as much as a quarter of the Writings are bits of history although we would never know them without revelation. For example: what happened to Luther after death; the details of the Last Judgment; the existence of Preadamites, the Most Ancient and Ancient Churches, and so forth. There are also some propheticals in the Writings such as what angels say about the growth of the New Church.⁶ Of course, in the Writings doctrinals predominate in comparison to other forms of revelation. To me, the term “Word” means Divine Revelation, the Lord speaking to people through a human medium, be it Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, or Swedenborg. Although in very different forms, all three Revelations present the Lord to people. They give people the freedom to love Him or reject Him. From being invisible, jealous, and angry in the Old Testament, He becomes more and more visible, merciful, and loving in the New Testament and the Writings.

A Third Assumption

A third assumption I make is that the letter of the Writings reveals both the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments *and* adds new doctrines⁷ which clarify and give particulars of the doctrine of genuine truth. The doctrine of genuine truth and the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments make one when seen in the light of their internal senses.⁸ But the internal sense

⁶ See *Last Judgment* 74

⁷ See *Doctrine of the Lord* 65

⁸ See *Arcana Coelestia* 9030, 90966, *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 262, *White Horse* 11 et al.

of the Old and New Testaments is only opened by the doctrine of genuine truth, enlightenment, and a right comparison of passages.⁹ A right comparison of passages is also necessary to see the doctrine of genuine truth in the Writings.¹⁰

A Fourth Assumption

A fourth assumption is that all three forms of Revelation have a “spiritual” sense. Notice I put the term “spiritual” in quotation marks. I do this because the term "spiritual" has more than one meaning. Here I mean the sense that angels understand when reading the Word. What angels understand is what is “spiritual.” This meaning of the term "spiritual" is not what is meant by the term “internal sense.” I am making a distinction here between the definitions of “internal sense” and “spiritual sense.” The “internal sense” is a description in natural language that covers, or includes, or shows, the “spiritual sense” to people on earth. Without the internal sense we would not see the Lord in fullness. But we can also see the Lord in fullness in the doctrine of genuine truth that makes one with the internal sense. For us here on earth, both the internal sense and the doctrine of genuine truth are in written form. There is a sense above what is expressed in human words that I am calling the “spiritual sense.” To see this sense a person must see truth on its fifth degree (as described in the introductory quotation) by enlightenment entered into through prayer and study which promotes a state apart from one’s evils, a state, though perhaps fleeting, that we call a regenerate state. Such enlightenment comes through a right comparison of passages whether in the Testaments, as Swedenborg illustrates abundantly, or in the Writings themselves. To see the “spiritual” sense of the Writings a person must make a right comparison of passages instead of trying to

⁹ See *Arcana Coelestia* 10324, *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 257

¹⁰ See my article “The Exposition of the Writings,” *New Church Life*, 1972,320ff

unfold the representatives and significatives used in the Testaments.¹¹

In the past, our church has been troubled by not defining terms. We have discussed the terms “spiritual sense” or “internal sense” in relation to the Writings. Many people have not distinguished between these terms, treating them as though they had the same meaning. If this were so why would the *Arcana Coelestia* repeatedly refer to both terms together?¹² I think the more carefully we define these terms, the better off we will be in understanding the distinction between these two senses. Notice also that the doctrine of genuine truth makes one with the internal sense. They both have a “spiritual sense,” that is, the sense angels see within the internal sense and the doctrine of genuine truth. In terms of my introductory quotation, this sense sets forth truth on a plane above the letter: level five instead of level six.

A Fifth Assumption

My fifth assumption is based on the fact that all three forms of revelation are finite. For the Lord to achieve His purpose in creating us, He must be able to be present with us. He is present with us in His Word, which is where He speaks to us. But all finite things by definition are limited. They are limited by time and space. For this reason revelation necessarily has finite limits. My opening quotation shows how truth has descended into finite form. It exists on six levels, the sixth being adapted to people on earth. Fortunately, all deeper levels are present in the Word. People who are enlightened can glimpse the fifth level. But the Word in all its forms here on earth has the finite limits of time and space. The Lord approaches us objectively in His Word. We

¹¹ The “internal” sense of the Old Testament is opened by applying the doctrine of representatives and significatives to its letter. In the New Testament there are no representatives of the Lord but people represent spiritual things such as Peter representing Faith and the disciples representing the Lord’s church.

¹² Again and again, we see the phrase “the internal or spiritual sense” See *Arcana Coelestia* 3229e, *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 258 et al.

receive it via our senses. Because time and space limit all forms of Revelation, it follows that this level of Revelation contains “fallacies.” Fallacies are things based on sense data. They are often called “fallacies of the senses.” Although they are not actually true, we live with their appearance.¹³ For example: the sun does not actually rise and set, but we usually get up in the morning after the sun rises and go to bed after it sets. We live with the fallacy, but we know better. There really is a sun, but our senses tell us about it in a misleading way. A deeper fallacy that the Writings describe is the appearance that life is a property of the physical body. Most of us, when we prick our finger with a pin, might say, “Ouch.” Our reaction proves that we are alive. But the reality is that life is not a property of the physical body. Our as-of-self tells us the fallacy is true, and we necessarily live with that fallacy. The reality is that we are living not because of the physical body but because it is receiving love or life from the Lord. When the physical body dies, we continue to live.¹⁴

Everything that appears in “natural light” is a fallacy and is subject to misinterpretation. In the *Invitation to the New Church* Swedenborg makes a distinction between natural and spiritual light. He states that prior to his entrance into the spiritual world, all spirits seen by people on earth were seen in natural light, but he was permitted to see spirits in spiritual light, a thing which he notes “surpasses all miracles.”¹⁵ The distinction is obviously important. What seeing in natural light seems to mean is seeing things as though they were on our earth, in the light of our natural sun, that is, in terms of time and space. Angels appeared to Abraham as though they were here on earth. He even gave them what appeared to be natural food.¹⁶ The Lord after His resurrection appeared to His disciples as though He was still on

¹³ See appendix (at end of Part Three)

¹⁴ See *Arcana Coelestia* 5084:6 et al.

¹⁵ *Invitation to the New Church* 52

¹⁶ See Gen. 18

earth.¹⁷ In both cases the people here on earth actually saw either the angels or the Lord with their spiritual eyes opened.¹⁸ Both these visions were couched in “natural light.” Swedenborg, on the other hand, saw the things of heaven in spiritual light. He saw angels as angels see angels, not on the backdrop of this natural world. Natural light produces fallacies of the senses. Angels and the Lord appeared to be here on earth, but they were not actually here. On the other hand, although things seen in the other world appear according to our alphabet of time and space, they are in fact real appearances, not fallacies of the senses.¹⁹

Fallacies and Falsities

Fallacies are not truths, but they may illustrate spiritual truths. Nevertheless, because we live in this world we cannot escape living with fallacies. However, if we confuse a fallacy with a spiritual reality, *we turn the fallacy into a falsity*. If we believe life is a property of our body, we turn the appearance, the fallacy, into a falsity. Fallacies become falsities when they are taken for realities.

The doctrine of genuine truth and the internal sense do not have fallacies. Nevertheless they are “expressed in human words.” Referring back to my opening quotation, they are a part of the “sixth degree of truth Divine” (expressed in human words) but, although they have finite limits, they are devoid of time and space references. It is this deeper set of meanings in level six that opens to people some sense of level five. For example, when in the New Church we say “God is one,” we are not thinking about the number one. Rather we are thinking of oneness. We do not believe one God plus one God makes two Gods. This latter kind of thinking is contained in the Ten Commandments which were accommodated to the people who first received them. The Lord

¹⁷ See Luke 24:36-48

¹⁸ See *Heaven and Hell* 762 et al

¹⁹ See *Arcana Coelestia* 3485

said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before my face.” That statement describes what is called monolatry or the worship of one god among the many that exist. Hebrew people were not yet ready to discard the idea of many gods. On the other hand, the monotheism of Isaiah and the Jewish faith of today accepts belief in the one only god. The idea of oneness in the two cases is very different. In the first case “one” is a concept in natural light, limited to time and space, while in the second case the idea of “one” is beyond time and space. If we accept the “one” in the first case, which is a fallacy of the senses, we turn the idea that “God is one” into a falsity. There are not many gods.²⁰ Christianity has in effect made this same mistake by asserting that there are three different persons of God. In this view the idea of a person is limited to time and space. “One God” transcends a time-space idea of the number one. This distinction is critical. Some people make this error when they think of God as a male Jew. They limit God to time and space. To limit God in this way is to turn a fallacy into a falsity.

In the New Church we worship the Lord in His Divine Human. He is the Lord God Jesus Christ. But for us the Lord rose with His whole body. In the process He left the world of time and space, rising first into the discrete level of the spiritual world and then rising still another discrete level into the infinite from whence He descended at the incarnation. But people on earth need a time-space vision of the Lord. They need to see Him in the form He chose to put on at the incarnation, the man Jesus who lived in the Holy Land. The man Jesus Christ became the Divine Human in fullness at His resurrection. Today, in His New Word, we are privileged to see His Divine nature which transcends time and space. In discussing the first commandment the *True Christian Religion* states: “The spiritual sense of this commandment is, that no other God than the Lord Jesus Christ

²⁰ The internal sense of this commandment is given in *Arcana Coelestia* 8867 and *True Christian Religion* 291-296

is to be worshiped, because He is Jehovah, who came into the world and wrought redemption without which neither any man nor any angel could have been saved.” The celestial sense adds that “Jehovah the Lord is infinite, illimitable, and eternal; that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; that He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, who was, is, and is to be; that He is love itself and wisdom itself, or good itself, and truth itself, consequently life itself; and thus the one only Being from whom all things are.”²¹

Conclusion to Part One

My fourth paradigm accepts these five assumptions. It recognizes that all forms of revelation on all degrees of truth Divine have finite limits which make it possible for angels and people here to see the Lord. The finite limits on the sixth degree are in human language that has accommodations of truth transcending time and space and also fallacies of time and space. It asks us not to confuse fallacies with accommodations of truth. Still, if we accept a fallacy as a reality, it becomes a falsity.

In Part Two I am going to discuss some of the following six categories of finite limits on the sixth degree of truth which have both accommodations and fallacies. These categories exist in all forms of revelation. There may be more, but these are the ones I see now. Here is the list:

1. The mechanics in giving Revelation (pen, paper, and printing).
2. The language of Revelation (Hebrew, Greek and Latin).
3. The mind of the Revelator (Concepts that can be understood by the author).
4. The culture of the day in which Revelation was given which defines the meaning of ideas at the time.
5. The finite limits of angels' knowledge.
6. The changed nature of the Lord in each form of Revelation. (The distinction between the terms "Divine" and "the Infinite").

[To be continued]

²¹ *True Christian Religion* 294, 295