

New Church LIFE

A monthly magazine devoted to the teachings
revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg

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A Sermon by Fred Elphick

Paradigms Revisited by Alfred Acton II
An Analysis of the Letter of the Word

Responding to the Word by Grant Odhner
Part Two: Gaining Spiritual Meaning from the Word

Not Bearing False Witness
An Essay on the Commandment by Stephen Smith

May 2007

New Church Life

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO THE TEACHINGS
REVEALED THROUGH EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

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Notes on This Issue

The Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton considers how our view of revelation is organized by the paradigms we accept. In this first part of his study, Bishop Acton reviews three paradigms used in the church for interpreting the Writings and introduces a fourth.

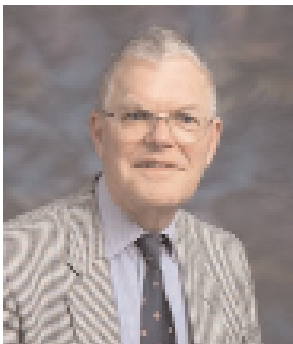
In the second part of his study, the Rev. Grant Odhner introduces several principles from the Writings for finding spiritual meaning and sense in the Word. He also examines how these teachings apply to the Writings themselves.

We welcome the thoughtful essay on the eighth commandment by Dr. Stephen Smith of Riegelsville, Pennsylvania.

The Rev. Erik Sandström, Sr. adds a key passage in his communication on reincarnation, plus other reflections.

Mr. Ron Schnarr, currently enrolled in his second year in the Academy Theological School, has written a heart-felt appeal about the work of the church in Ghana where he has twice visited.

Beginning on the next page, the Rev. Fred Elphick's sermon weaves together the principles of the Lord's second coming with the ideals of conjugal love that have been made possible through His coming.



The Rev. Fred Elphick has served as pastor of the Michael Church in London, England since the summer of 1984 (nearly 23 years). He also serves as visiting pastor to the Surrey Circle, England, and the Hague Circle in the Netherlands. During his years in England, Mr. Elphick has organized many British Assemblies, British Academy Summer Schools, and Family Study weekends. Fred and his wife Jane (Gill) live in the manse in Beckenham, near London..

THE LORD'S COMING IN CONJUGIAL LOVE

BY THE REV. FRED ELPHICK

We sometimes forget that the dramatic and mysterious visions of John in the Book of Revelation were not dreams. He was actually seeing things in the other world, and almost the whole book describes what he saw. And what he saw symbolized the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

Think of the drama of the Lord coming with clouds, the warning messages to the seven churches, the four beasts, the Book sealed with seven seals and the opening of them, the great plagues that follow, the angel with the key of the bottomless pit, the woman clothed with the sun, and the great red dragon ready to devour her child. Later, John witnesses the opening of the book of life, and finally a new heaven and a new earth, with the heavenly Jerusalem, the river of the water of life, and the tree of life with its twelve fruits. And then, speaking of the Lord, the telling phrase: "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:4).

All twenty-two chapters of Revelation lead to this idea of a loving and approachable God who is visible to the eyes of our mind. And it is no accident that His relationship with those who freely choose to respond to His infinite love is compared to a loving marriage. The Lord is the Bridegroom, and the church—made up of people the world over who, in their own way, return His love—is the bride.

This relationship between the Lord and those He creates is perfected to eternity. It is the source of all true happiness and fulfillment. And this mutual love—between the Lord and those who truly worship Him—is reflected in the love between a husband and his wife who, having lived in the world, shunned evil and made the choice for good, have eventually become angels in heaven.

It also applies to people who may not have been married in this world or who married the wrong person. If they have at least taken the first steps on the path to heaven—if there has been the beginning of a “wedding” within them—then they will certainly find their true love after death. That is the Lord’s promise. The two go together—a marriage of true principle and the love that gives it vitality. That’s why we have bread *and* wine when we celebrate the Holy Supper.

This responsive love for the Lord, embodied as a bride, is said to come down out of heaven: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). We think of a bride as one about to be married or having just been married. There is the idea of a new state.

But John, his spiritual eyes opened, also saw this love for the Lord as a holy city—a place to live. Here’s the connection:

Jerusalem had been a center for worship since ancient times. No doubt even the tableland on which the city was built—one of the highest points in Palestine—had been a place of worship since before recorded history. But more than that, a beautiful city—with its centers of government and learning, with its avenues of communication and peaceful gardens—also represents the inner beauty and order of what the Lord teaches through His Word. Such wonderfully structured teachings—like a garden city—are designed to be a spiritual haven in which His people can dwell in peace.

And so John saw a “New” Jerusalem—a new vision of what loving the Lord means—as it comes down into the minds and hearts of receptive people in the world. And the effects of it are described in the verses that follow: There will be no more tears, no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying—no more pain. For the Lord will make all things new (Rev. 21: 4-5).

Later, almost the same image is repeated. A mighty angel comes to John and says: “Come, I will show you the bride, the

Lamb's wife" (ibid. 9).

Now, through John's eyes, we see the bride as the Lamb's wife, the Lamb symbolizing the Lord as the Source of the wise innocence of the highest angels. Their heaven is indeed built on the great and high mountain of love to the Lord: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God..." (ibid. 10).

This celestial heaven, as it is called, is where angel couples have lived together in the most wonderful conjugal unions—in some cases for thousands of years. It is their sphere that affects all people on earth who are stirred to seek a happy marriage that looks to the Lord for its inspiration.

We read earlier that the states of mind produced by conjugal love are innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, and a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good. (*Conjugal Love* 180)

Here also, there is a descent—from innocence, or simply willingness to be led by the Lord, down to action—"to do the other every good."

And so the Writings say that the reason for listing them in this way is that innocence and peace have to do with the highest part of the mind (ibid.). This gives rise to a feeling of tranquility as the couple turn to each other, stirred by inmost friendship. There is complete trust in their heart, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good.

Too idealistic? Not really. It's something to work for.

Marriage is sometimes made to look insignificant by people with other priorities. "Who wants to be permanently bound to another person?" they say. But this misses one of the essential characteristics of a happy marriage—a total commitment to one's partner, in which both look to the Lord. It is based on a love of truth—but the kind of guiding truth that leads to good and useful action—the wisdom that will increasingly become

part of their life together.

So when John saw the vision of the New Church “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” he was also seeing an embodiment of the affection of that truth in people’s minds, beautifully clothed with teaching from the Word and prepared for the Lord’s coming.

We can see then, that a true marriage stands on the foundation of true principles that the Lord has revealed to us in the Writings. That’s one reason these principles are called the Heavenly Doctrine—revealed “out of heaven” (See *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 7e).

Clearly though, marriages go through many intermediate stages. And so, as the partners gradually progress in their spiritual life, their marriage too, in a sense, awaits the coming of the Lord in fullness.

In the same way, although we celebrate the second coming of the Lord as He is newly revealed in the Writings—and the beginning of the New Church in people’s hearts and minds—we also think of His coming as a *future* thing. For the Lord first prepares us –wraps us about, so to speak—with the stunning new concepts that are woven into the Writings. He presents us with wonderful ideals of marriage and family life, thrilling new visions of how people live in heaven and how all this can begin here and now in our everyday life. And then, little by little, He leads us to be receptive to His second advent in our actual life.

This is why, in the last chapter in the Book of Revelation, we have those familiar words, used in our reading earlier: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come,” speaking of the second coming of the Lord. The Writings explain that “the Spirit” in the highest sense is the Lord Himself – the Bridegroom. It is also His Spirit that breathes life into the new heaven (made up initially of angelic spirits)—and that “the bride” stands for all people who are in the truths of faith and long for His coming (*Apocalypse Revealed* 955, *Apocalypse Explained* 1189). Thus the Spirit and

the bride are two corresponding levels of response to the Lord's coming—in heaven and on earth.

And so we are all called to celebrate *life* and new beginnings—to gain a new and joyful vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the special love in marriage that flows from Him. For the Lord says:

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:16-17) *Amen.*

Lessons: Isaiah 52:1, 7-9; Revelation 21: 1-12, 22: 16-17;
Arcana Coelestia 4145: 2, 3 parts:

One who is being regenerated is perfected by degrees

Take...as an example conjugal love: the good which precedes and initiates is beauty, or agreement of manners, or an outward adaptation of the one to the other, or equality of condition, or a desired condition. These goods are the first mediate goods of conjugal love. Afterwards comes conjunction of minds, wherein the one wills as the other, and perceives delight in doing that which pleases the other. This is the second state; and then the former things, though still present, are no longer regarded. Finally there follows a union in respect to celestial good and spiritual truth, in that the one believes as the other, and the one is affected by the same good as the other. When this state comes, both are together in the heavenly marriage, which is that of good and truth, and thus are in conjugal love—for conjugal love is nothing else—and the Lord then flows into the affections of both as into one affection. This is the good that flows in directly; but the former goods, which flowed in indirectly, served as means of introduction to this.

PARADIGMS REVISITED

BY THE RT. REV. ALFRED ACTON II

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

“THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOR”

BY STEPHEN H. SMITH, M.D.

The spirit of the commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” in the natural sense plainly means that we are not to lie or to deceive in order to conceal our transgressions, to gain what is not rightfully ours, or to willfully harm others out of malice. While this would appear to be a relatively simple and straightforward matter, rather “black and white,” the nature of truth (absolute and relative) is worth at least some reflection for everyone. For philosophers, it is a worthy, lifelong career.

To be able to tell the truth as completely as possible, to be as honest as humanly possible, perhaps ought to be a universal goal, for the pursuit and transmission of truth is more than an academic inquiry. It should to be a lifelong endeavor for each of us.

One of the defining moments of my formal education was in senior math (Algebra II) with Mr. Kenneth Rose. The matter under discussion was the difference between “accuracy” and “precision.” It was a lightning bolt; from that moment forward the world was divided between that which could be pierced with “bulls-eye” accuracy and that which had of necessity to be placed on the continuum of precision; the absolute and the relative.

Thinking in this way can become a habit. Rather than being a collector of butterflies or books or even words, one can become the author of an immense catalog of concepts divided between those that can only be approximated and those that can be fixed with certainty. Over time this catalog will become well thumbed, oft revised, and may cause no little loss of sleep.

An unfortunate complication may arise: “confirmed belief.” I thought this was entirely the province of others, misguided souls who believed in the redistribution of wealth or homeopathy, or

the vicarious atonement, until, one day I looked at a map and saw that my residence in upper Bucks County was directly north of Quakertown, not east as I has always assumed.

I could not believe it. I would not believe it. I still cannot believe it!

In fact, as irrational as it may sound, I despise the compass on the mirror of my car for refuting what I so strongly feel in my heart to be the case. Now, after years of dealing with this geographic dementia, I have acceded to a pitiful compromise (imprecise but at least more comfortable); I live *northeast* of Quakertown (not true!). I am making progress; my self-diagnosis has been changed to cartographic delusion.

Try explaining the fallacy of the vicarious atonement to a lifelong “born again” evangelical Christian. It is like trying to use a compass at the magnetic North Pole. The truth, simply and plainly stated, seems unable to penetrate the armor of confirmed belief. (But on the other hand, I will not lie and say that I am open to discarding the New Church views of salvation either; confirmed belief? Yes, it would appear so!)

Toward the end of his life, Benjamin Franklin made a remarkable confession. He said that in his old age he just wasn’t quite so sure of things anymore. I wince at the things I did with such self-assurance as an intern and resident: pulling the plug on life-support systems of persons in a vegetative state; making absolute judgments of a life and death nature on patients whose state could only be regarded with some precision but never with accuracy. Most decisions in medicine are in the realm of precision rather than accuracy; although our instruments are quite precise, our diagnoses are not always accurate.

Experience also teaches that there is frequently a cost/benefit ratio to increasing the precision of any endeavor, even answering a simple question. Sometimes the simple response, “OK,” may not only be good enough, it may be the wisest investment under

certain circumstances. Do you want your surgeon to be a perfectionist? The simple answer is “yes and no.” How am I doing with my regeneration? Truthfully? Apparently, and mercifully, one cannot know this with anything but the crudest precision.

Do we always speak the absolute truth with bull’s eye accuracy? Is our wording both precise and accurate? Or are our utterances only relatively true and therefore only somewhat precise? Will a simple “yes” or “no” be sufficient? The approach to accuracy or even a high degree of precision in our ideas and consequent statements sometimes requires courage, prayer, practice, and self-examination. We should strive to make our statements as precise as possible (carefully choosing our words) and as accurate as we can (accurately representing reality). This is part of the Refiner’s fire. This is a process by which we gradually come to understand what the Lord intended when He gave us the timeless commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

[Dr. Stephen Smith is an orthopedic surgeon in the Quakertown, Pennsylvania area. A graduate of the Academy of the New Church Boys School ('64), he enrolled in the Bryn Athyn College Lifelong Learning Program* during the Winter Term 2006-2007. This is a portion of a longer paper that Dr. Smith wrote for Religion 172: "Perspectives on the Decalogue"—the academic version of *Rise Above It*.

**The Bryn Athyn College Lifelong Learning Program includes e-learning, distance learning, correspondence courses, and lecture series. Participants may enroll on a part-time basis for full credit or as auditors. For more information contact:*

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RESPONDING TO THE LORD’S WORD
Approaching written revelation to be led to the Lord

BY THE REV. GRANT ODHNER

Part Two: Gaining Spiritual Meaning From the Word

Let us recap a few ideas from the first part of this paper. The purpose of the Word is to establish a relationship of mutual love (conjunction) between the Lord and human beings. Written revelation serves to initiate and foster such states of love. More wonderfully, when that love is present on our part, the written Word becomes an actual means of conjunction! We also presented the view that the Word for the New Church consists of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Writings. And we suggested that the principles which the Writings give us that bear on the nature of written revelation and our approach to it apply to the new revelation as well.

We will now take a look, specifically, at the principles taught in the Writings about how to approach the Word for spiritual meaning or sense. In doing this we will see how these teachings apply to the Writings themselves and at the same time what the Writings’ special function is. (The main principles are given bold headings.)

The Writings characterize the Lord’s essence as love and wisdom—inseparably married. These are His spirit, the essential Word, and are within our written book, making it what it is. These two things *together* are the “spiritual sense” (properly the spiritual and celestial senses) that we seek when we go to its natural pages. But how do we find the Lord’s spirit, His love and wisdom, in what, “on the surface,” seems to be a jumble of assorted and loosely-related documents and ideas?

The first step is to approach *the Lord* there

The Lord is the Word, for the Word treats of Him alone....

Therefore those who do not immediately approach the Lord cannot see any truth from the Word. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 958)

Man cannot discover a single Divine Truth, except he approach the Lord immediately. (*Invitation to the New Church* 22)

Approach the Lord and you will be enlightened. For He is the Word, that is to say, the very Divine truth in it. (*True Christian Religion* 634e)

The effect of approaching *the Lord* in the Word is that He gives us light to understand it: “Approach the Lord and you will be enlightened” (ibid).

Approach with holy regard

I don’t know of a passage that directly makes regarding-the-Word-as-holy a condition for enlightenment, but I have been increasingly impressed with how often reading it in this spirit is linked with deriving “life” from the Word and being conjoined with heaven and the Lord.¹

It is a wonderful thing that where the Word is read with reverence (*sancte*) and the Lord is worshipped from the Word the Lord is present together with heaven. (*Divine Providence* 256:2; cf. 260:3)

The Word gives life to those who devoutly (*sancte*) read it. (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 19)

Approach affirmatively

Implicit in our approach to the Word must be holding an affirmative conviction that the Word is from the Lord, that He

¹ *Arcana Coelestia* 4027.2, 6789.2-3, 3735.2; *de Verbo* 2, 6, 8.2, 11; *Sacred Scripture* 19; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 280; *Divine Providence* 256.2 (260.3); *Apocalypse Revealed* 200, 245; Lett. 8.

speaks to us there, that it is the source of truth.² Without this how could we find its light?

Approach from the Lord and not from self

We can get light from the Word's truths (which are "the Lord's with us"³) only in the measure that we are approaching it from affections that are "the Lord's with us." Good affections are given to every human being. From them we have the capacity to consider what the Word says, to see and understand its truth, and to be affected by it, at least temporarily. The Writings call these gifts "remnant" states.⁴ They are not our affections but the Lord's affections with us.⁵

From these affections we can be affected by the Word merely intellectually, and "now and then." But the real light comes only in the measure that we are applying its truth to our lives. Hence the next few headings.

Be in the effort to love truths and practice them

Enlightenment is from the Lord alone, and exists with those who love truths because they are truths and make them of use for life. With others there is no enlightenment in the Word. (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 57; see entire section; another good reference: *Arcana Coelestia* 9382)

Be in the effort to shun evils as sins against the Lord

Every person who possesses a spiritual affection for truth, that is, who loves real truth because it is true, is enlightened by the Lord when he reads the Word. ... The person who receives enlightenment is one who refrains from evils

² *Arcana Coelestia* 2568, 2588, 128, 6479

³ *Apocalypse Revealed* 200, 222.3

⁴ cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 530.2, 560, 977.2, 1707.3, 5894, 10110.2, 4

⁵ "remnants" are the Lord's alone with us: *Arcana Coelestia* 8, 575f, 1050, 1906.3.

because they are sins and are against the Lord and opposed to His Divine laws. In such a one and in no other the spiritual mind opens, and in the measure that it opens, in the same measure the light of heaven enters (all enlightenment in the Word being from the light of heaven). (*de Verbo* 12)

Summary so far

All the points about our approach to the Word mentioned so far are true of our approach to the Writings. If we want to see the Writings in genuine light we must be approaching them as the Lord's books (as holy) and be seeking Him there. And we must be in the effort to apply their truth to life.

Because the next clear teaching has been the focus of much debate and difference of view, I will spend more time on it.

We are to approach the Lord and find enlightenment and doctrine *in the Word's literal meaning*

The Doctrine of the Church must be taken from the sense of the Letter of the Word, and be confirmed by it. ...the Word in the sense of the Letter is in its fulness, its sanctity and its power; and since the Lord is the Word, for He is the All of the Word, it follows that the Lord is eminently present in that sense, teaching and enlightening man from it. (Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 50)⁶

In Part One of this paper we suggested that while the Writings say that they themselves are doctrine drawn from the letter of the Word (meaning the Old and New Testaments), their practice is to lead us from the doctrine of heaven. There is no real contradiction here. The angels themselves are said to be instructed from the Word in ultimates, yet the appearance with them is that they are instructed from their own heavenly Word,

⁶ *Sacred Scripture* 50-61, 44.3, 48e, 97.3; *Arcana Coelestia* 9905.4, 9824.5, 10548.2-3; *de Verbo* 20

and they take their doctrine from that. Hence the Writings proclaim to us the doctrine of heaven, and they speak of doctrine from both senses.⁷

A number of ideas are embodied in the principle that we must go to the letter of the Word for doctrine. Some are broader and some more specific.

1. The Lord wants people to go *to the body of truth that He has revealed on earth*. It is the source and foundation of the church on earth and of heaven.

Was Swedenborg speaking of the Old and New Testaments when he wrote that we are to go to the sense of the letter for doctrine and light? I believe so. Does this principle extend to the Writings? It must, because they are now part of the revelation that's been given for "the doctrine of life and faith for the New Church" (*Apocalypse Explained* 670:4). The church must go to the Writings to open the Old and New Testaments, to open their meaning. So if the church does not include the Writings in the body of natural truth given to the church on earth, it will not be led by the Lord.

2. The Word, including the Writings, *provides an ultimate foundation for truth in the human mind* in this world and to eternity.

A study of the teachings on "ultimates" as a necessary foundation for heaven shows that this term can be applied not only to the Word in its letter, but to the human race on earth in general, to the natural plane in general, to natural thought, to natural knowledge and delight, to the natural memory, to the

⁷ *Arcana Coelestia* 9375; *Apocalypse Explained* 587

corporeal-sensual level of the mind, to our actions and speech, to the material substances of creation.⁸ In fact, unless we are clear that all of these things are necessary for making the foundation, we are not getting the proper picture. The “bottom line” is actually natural “matter.” All things terminate in that. But this cannot be a foundation for heaven unless it enters the senses of a human being’s mind, and becomes a vehicle for presenting the Word there. Continuing this line of thought, we can see that to make the full connection the foundation must include natural (and its highest level, rational) thought and affection, thus *understanding and life in harmony with it*.

Implication: Broadly speaking, the Writings are part of the “ultimate” foundation for the Word in heaven. In speaking of the importance of the Word as the foundation of heaven’s wisdom, *Spiritual Experiences*, nos. 5607-5617, mentions many of the above facets of “ultimates.” In this context Swedenborg states: “...when [angels are turned] to those things which are in my thought from the heavenly doctrine, then they are in greater clearness than in any other case” (n. 5610). The foundation is complete when a person is in natural thought from the Heavenly Doctrine in connection with the Old and New Testaments.⁹

3. The Lord does want us *to bring the rational truth revealed in the Writings into relationship with the Old and New Testaments*, to see it reflected there both directly and in corresponding forms. In this way His truth is most fully expressed, is most affecting, and most powerful.

Our thought from revelation becomes a complete foundation when it is from all three revelations. But the Old and New

⁸ A few general references: *Heaven and Hell* 304.2; *Last Judgment* 9; *Apocalypse Explained* 726.5-10

⁹ Compare the teaching that conjunction with heaven through the Word is brought about especially when a person is able to think from something of the internal sense: *Arcana Coelestia* 4027.2, 8972.2; *Heaven and Hell* 310

Testaments form a *distinctly more ultimate* part of this foundation by virtue of the natural and sensual appearances in which they were (largely) written. They employ terms which directly bring into the mind the most ultimate objects in creation: water, stones, leaves, garments, roads, etc. These objects of our outer senses are the building-blocks of our physical and mental lives.¹⁰ As such they are the base, containant, and support for all higher mental operations and realities.

Our need for finding fullness of expression in sensory forms remains with us to eternity. Sensory images and actions—the sight of a sunrise, the smell of a loved one, a kiss or touch of the hand—are capable of encompassing and expressing more interconnecting feelings and insights than can ever be expressed in rational language. For this reason angels must still have bodies and an outer world, to every appearance like ours, and their speech and mental life (especially their understanding of the Word) are expressed by continual “representatives.”¹¹

4. In terms of human development, *we must have a foundation in the Old and New Testaments in order to be led into the rational truths of the Writings*

It is virtually impossible to enter into the ideas of the Writings without first entering into those of the Old and New Testaments (or—in the case of those not educated in the Christian Word—into ideas equally sensory and natural). Little children receive and respond to nothing else! Thus all the love and wisdom that we ever acquire *begin from* and *return to* that apparent source and rest there—consciously while we live in this world, and

¹⁰ *Arcana Coelestia* 3309-3310, 10252.2-3, 1486, 6077; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 71.

¹¹ On the importance of representative sensory imagery to angelic life: *Arcana Coelestia* 3342, 2249.1-3, 1876.1-2, 3376, 7153; *de Verbo* 14.4; *Heaven and Hell* 270.5

unconsciously after death. Our very identities are formed and fixed in ultimates by mediate influx entering through our senses!¹²

The Function of the Writings in relation to Old Testament and New Testament

As we have noted before, the Writings distinguish the kind of explanations that they give of the spiritual sense (which they call a “natural sense from the spiritual”) from the “Word in the letter,” which they identify with the Old and New Testaments. In this connection they say:

The angel (in Revelation 17.9) did not explain the vision (to John) in the natural sense from the spiritual, because his explanation constitutes the Word in the letter; and the Word in the letter must be natural, in every particular of which the spiritual sense must be stored up; otherwise the Word would not serve the heavens as a basis; nor would it serve the church as the means for its conjunction with heaven. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1061)

The Writings *by themselves* cannot serve the function of providing an ultimate base, containant, and support for the spiritual meaning of the Word. They are written largely in rational language.¹³ This rational language is still completely natural. It is based on sensory ideas, like all natural language.¹⁴ And this rational language, and our thinking from it, is a discrete

¹² *Divine Wisdom* 8; *Divine Providence* 220; *Arcana Coelestia* 8701, 7056.3; *Divine Providence* 28, 44; *Married Love* 122

¹³ cp. *True Christian Religion* 25.1; *Married Love* 42.2; *Apocalypse Revealed* 544, 148, 936; *de Verbo* 3.4; *Sacred Scripture* 4; *Apocalypse Explained* 1065.3.

¹⁴ The words of language are from ultimates (*Divine Wisdom* 8.5). Our natural thought (based on natural words) consists of “material ideas,” which correspond to “immaterial ideas.” We enter these latter consciously only after death. See *Arcana Coelestia* 10551.2, 5, 10604.2-5, 7089.2. All of our ideas even to the deepest arcana of faith are founded on and attended with sensory ones, though we are not aware of this being the case (*Arcana Coelestia* 3309-3310, 10252.2-3, 1486, 6077; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 71).

degree below spiritual thought, in which the Word's spiritual meaning itself is fully grasped. Therefore the letter of the Writings clearly *corresponds* to its spiritual counterpart. Nevertheless, it is plain to see that the Writings' general character is markedly different from the previous revelations, and serves a different function. All their ideas find a more ultimate seating and their proper context in the New Testament ideas and images, as these in turn find their ultimate seating and proper context in the Old Testament.

In revealing the doctrine of genuine truth, a knowledge of correspondences, and other supporting truths, the Writings help us to enter into the Word's spiritual meaning in a natural way, in our natural thought and affection.¹⁵ They speak in clear, direct terms of the Lord, His essential nature, His purpose, and our response to Him. They unveil the appearances of the letter of the Old and New Testaments. They speak in rational terms to the mature mind. And the rational is that part of the natural mind which receives the spiritual most nearly (*Apocalypse Revealed* 911e, 936) so that "the spiritual self and the rational self are almost the same" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3264.2).

For every person by truths scientifically and naturally understood acquires for himself a rational into which the spiritual can flow and operate. For through the rational which belongs to his understanding a person receives the light of heaven, which is spiritual light, and through the rational enlightened by the spiritual he surveys cognitions and knowledges, selecting from them such as are in accord with the genuine truths and goods of heaven and the church, which are spiritual, and rejecting those that are not. Thus it is that the person lays the foundation of the church in

¹⁵ The Writings are clear that while we live in the world our conscious thinking remains in natural light: *Arcana Coelestia* 10551.2, 5; *Heaven and Hell* 356.2; *Apocalypse Explained* 625.4-5; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 238, 252, 257; et al.

himself. (*Apocalypse Explained* 654:16)

This passage notes later that rational things “enter into ultimates and are in them,” just as spiritual and celestial things do (*Apocalypse Explained* 654:19). “Interior truths” collected from the Word by people of the church who have enlightenment—which would answer to the interior truths revealed in the Writings—are also said to “close in the ultimate truths of the external sensuous, and are all together there. . . . All interior truths are together in the truths of the sense of the letter of the Word, for these truths... are the ultimate ones” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10028:2).

Yet the Writings are not strictly spiritual and celestial; they are intermediate. That is how they serve as a bridge:

The spiritual sense of the Word has been disclosed by the Lord through me.... This surpasses all the revelations that have hitherto been made since the creation of the world. *Through this revelation a communication has been opened between men and the angels of heaven, and the conjunction of the two worlds has been effected*; because when man is in the natural sense the angels are in the spiritual sense. (*Invitation to the New Church* 44, emphasis added)

Note that the effect of this revelation is that the “angels” are in the spiritual sense, not “man.” People in this world are in a natural sense from the spiritual and are thinking naturally in correspondence with the angels.

To interpret the spiritual sense from truths of doctrine, opens heaven, because that is the sense in which the angels are; and so man by means of it thinks together with angels, and thus conjoins them to himself in his intellectual mind.... (*de Verbo*:7:7)

In our communication and conjunction with heaven by means

of the Word, the Writings function both as a literal sense and the spiritual sense. Without the *natural letter* of the Writings—with all of the new vocabulary and concepts they make possible—we could not think about the spiritual sense in relation to the Old and New Testaments and thus could not think with the angels and be linked with heaven.

Another summary

We return now to our list of principles regarding how we are to approach the Word to find connection with the Lord and heaven. We have mentioned the following:

- The first thing is *to approach the Lord* there
- Approach *with holy regard*
- Approach *affirmatively*
- Approach *from the Lord* and not from self
- Be in the effort to *love truths and practice them*
- Be in the effort to *shun evils as sins against the Lord*
- We are to approach the Lord and find enlightenment and doctrine *in the Word's literal meaning*

In our concluding part in this series we will mention three more principles for approaching the Word for spiritual meaning.

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Editorial

SPRING

Nature is a parable of human life. Think of the parable of springtime.

What do we love about the spring? It means the end of winter. New warmth comes from the sun. Life stirs in nature. Trees, shrubs, and flowers bud and blossom. We see a soft beauty in the various shades of emerging foliage. The atmosphere is moist and full of the promise of new life. Surely, there is something special about spring for each one of us.

Here is the parable: Springtime in nature is a season brought about by the temperate balancing of the sun's elements of heat and light. When there is a balance of love with our wisdom in life, it will result in a new fruitfulness, a human springtime.

It is always springtime in the heavens because the angels constantly receive the love and wisdom of the Lord in equal measure, particularly as angelic couples. The Lord constantly desires to provide this state of spring. Therefore, He appears constantly in heaven's sun at a middle altitude.

The most exciting states of our life are initiated by a marriage of our loves with wisdom, a marriage of our ideas with purpose. When we have a plan and the means to carry it out, we sense a delight that is exhibited in the blossoming of trees and flowers. On a deeper level, our life becomes fruitful through the process of regeneration. The blossoming of all things in spring and the gradual development of the blossoms even to the fruit, from the first warm month to the last, represent the progress of human regeneration. Springtime heralds and portrays the promise of our new spiritual life.

The most delightful flowering of potential human uses is in that marriage love between a man and a woman which we call love truly conjugal. This is one of the reasons there is a delight

in springtime on earth—it is a parable of a beautiful marriage relationship as well as a parable of our individual regeneration.

Spring also represents heavenly peace. "Peace in heaven is like spring on earth," we read (*Arcana Coelestia* 5662). Surely, as we bask in the warm atmosphere of earth in the springtime and contemplate the Lord's creative forces at work, we can be led to feel a sense of peace. Winter's hardships have ended; the spring brings new promise. It is a time of hope and beauty.

In our life of regeneration, we pass through the winter of temptation, coming at last to a spring state—a state of true peace: not an idle peace or inactivity. Nature bears testimony that spring is a busy time. Peace is not a state of nothing happening. Peace comes to us in that rare happy state when we know what is right and love to do it. We are busy and content in heavenly uses.

Spring is a favorite time because it carries hidden forces into the world from the Lord. The Lord's love, a love that looks to human salvation, peace, and conjugal contentment, is active in creating human delights. It also clothes these delights in nature's springtime mantle.

"For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations" (Isa. 61:11)

Peace

Peace may be likened to morning or dawn in spring time, when, the night being passed, with the rising of the sun all things of the earth begin to live anew, the fragrance of growing vegetation is spread abroad with the dew that descends from heaven, and the mild vernal temperature gives fertility to the ground and imparts pleasure to the minds of men, and this because morning or dawn in the time of spring corresponds to the state of peace of angels in heaven. (*Heaven and Hell* 289)

Communication

Reincarnation

Dear Editor:

I would like to add a passage from the Writings (and also a thought or two) to what the Rev. Dan Goodenough has already so clearly brought forward on the question of Reincarnation.

The passage is from *Heaven and Hell* 256 and reads: “If a spirit were to speak with a man from his own memory, then the man would know no other than that the things which he then thought were his own, when yet they were the spirit’s; it is like the recollection of a thing which yet the man never heard or saw From this, some of the ancients held the opinion that after some thousands of years they should return to their former life and into all its acts; and also that they did return. They concluded this from the fact that there had sometimes occurred to them a recollection as it were of things which they had never seen or heard, and this came to pass because spirits flowed in from their own memory into the ideas of their thought.” This teaching makes clear how the idea of reincarnation arose.

I think, too, that in the final analysis the notion that God will grant however many incarnations will be needed for a person’s final salvation involves a denial of human freedom. For the reasoning implies that in the end, circumstances would prompt or compel him to acknowledge that the only reasonable form of life is the life of charity. Yet “compulsion does not reform, because it inroots nothing, for that which is compulsory is not of man’s will; but that which is free is of his will” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7007:2). And further, “The Lord does not compel a person to receive what flows in from Himself” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6472:2).

And then there are the two special trees in the Garden of Eden.

Both trees had to be there: “the tree of life (Heb. lives), in the midst of the garden” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). The fruit of the tree of knowledge was not to be eaten even though the tree was “pleasant to the sight,” for, said the Lord, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:17) This story of the garden and the two dominant trees in it is the first direct teaching in the Word concerning human freedom. Freedom involves alternatives. If only one way of life is possible, then you automatically and without discernment, judgment, or choice, live that way. You also live without the happiness available to humans alone, thus without the joy of the as-from-self life.

And when can such as-from-self life commence? In general, at birth; but in the spiritual dimension in stages from adolescence to early maturity. You cannot judge intelligently and responsively between alternatives without knowledge and a measure of maturity. But when you do have these things, then you are on your own. There is nothing to wait for. You face a situation, and there is a good way and a bad one to deal with it, or a better and an inferior way. You can act with a concern for the good of the neighbor, including the common good, or with a concern only for self. The second tree is one of knowledge of good and evil, a tree of instruction and warning. The Word is in it.

Your mind is formed by your choices. In the end a ruling love is born within you. That love is your identity, your self. If evil, you can change it by repentance and the power of the Word at any time, but after many confirmatory choices of self-concern, the ruling love loses any interest whatever in changing its “life style.” It will fight “for its life”. And it takes only one lifetime to form and establish one’s ruling love—for good or for evil. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that

NEW CHURCH LIFE, May 2007

you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days” (Deut. 30:19,20).

P.S. And please, let us not think of evil spirits agonizing, “And this will go on forever...” They have no idea of time, still less of eternity. They live in an ever-recurring Now, and their misery consists only in their being restrained from most of the mischief they would want to inflict on their fellows.

Erik Sandström, Sr.
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

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The Lord is My Shepherd in May 2007
Signs in Heaven in June 2007

Church News

UNDERNEATH THE MANGO TREE Thoughts About the New Church in Ghana

BY RON SCHNARR

Today, I had the privilege of celebrating New Year's Day at the Asakraka New Church in Ghana. What a way to start the year! Today, under the shade of a mango tree, we had a celebration for the unveiling of a billboard advertising the New Church. As the blue tarp fell to the ground, there before my eyes stood a New Church billboard, an awesome sight to behold. There was a picture of the Lord on it with the words, "The One and Only God of the Universe"; a bold statement to say the least.

Like those who have gone before us, we are spreading the news of the Lord's second coming. Whether we're like Johnny Appleseed preaching "News fresh from Heaven," or like James Glen whose first advertisement read, "For The Sentimentalists: A Discourse on the extraordinary science of Celestial and Terrestrial Connections and Correspondences..." the Lord will give us the words that need to be said. The Church is beginning to take root here in Ghana as it has in America, and today's unveiling was a huge symbol of its coming. Before we even finished the celebration, a truck full of Ghanaians pulled over just to read the sign.

People in Ghana are hungry and thirsty for spiritual nourishment. They are excited about the Church and have faith that the Lord is establishing it among them. The first time I went to Ghana, I had my doubts about whether the people were interested in my Church. Sometimes, I wondered whether they were so warm and welcoming because they knew my Church would bring money with it. But this time I really saw the truth. These people love the Church from the bottom of their hearts.

They love to know that there are other people in the world who are wise and useful in a life according to the Heavenly Doctrine. First and foremost, they really care about the Church, and secondly, they are desperate for natural means. They need things like books of the Writings, pens and paper, computers, and access to medicine, all things we take entirely for granted in the United States.

Today, I saw a little piece of the Church's history in Africa. The Lord is approaching quickly and I feel blessed to have watched a portion of the Church's foundation being laid. For me, the most powerful part of the celebration was not the unveiling itself, but listening to the students of the Asakraka New Church School recite all twenty-three doctrines of the *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*. It was an amazing experience, and I had to hold back tears. It wasn't that I thought the children really understood what they were saying, but within that innocent recital I saw the first seeds of what would later grow into a full New Church education. Those who, until a few years ago, may have been destined to a life without a knowledge of the Lord's oneness or what it really means to be a Christian, are now going to grow up in the light of the Heavenly Doctrine. Not only will these doctrines serve them spiritually, but in the course of time these doctrines may help to bring new life to a continent in distress.

The doctrines of the New Church are for everyone, and their effect reaches far beyond the bounds of the Church organization itself. I believe the doctrines have permeated and structured modern culture as we know it. From the founding fathers of the United States to Abraham Lincoln, from the early abolitionists to Helen Keller, many of the great thinkers of our nation have been influenced by Swedenborg. Though it may only be apparent to New Church people, the ideas of the Heavenly Doctrine have provided some of the founding principles which make the

United States as successful as it has become. The ideals of freedom, rationality, and usefulness are the basis for almost every historical document on which this country was founded. The Heavenly Doctrines have brought us a new way of life, full of light and prosperity. In view of this, think of the blessings that will accompany the growth of the Church in Africa. By motivating people to lives of useful service in the Lord, corrupt governments will fall. Moral lifestyles free from disease will become the norm. And doctors, farmers, and scientists will be inspired with passion and new ideas that will help take Africa into a new age.

Picture a New Church university in Ghana where thousands of students come to learn the truths of the New Church. There, ministers and teachers would be trained and sent all over the continent bearing a message fresh from heaven. This vision is not too far from reality and is already in its beginning stages. In the five years since my last visit to Ghana when I helped set the ground level cement to the Asakraka New Church School, a school with over two hundred students and fifteen teachers has already blossomed. Next to this building, a Junior High School has been started where students are being taught lessons in a partially-constructed building. Even before the building is finished it is full of students ready and willing to be taught. Think of what could happen if we helped lay the foundation for a New Church university.

Many children have come up to me just to tell me how much they love the Church and its teachings. These same children have since written me many times asking for books, pens, and computers. It can be tiresome to think of sending over even a portion of what I am asked for, but as I sit in my large house with my fancy computer, I sometimes forget what I am not seeing. What I don't see is the 10x10 foot hut this child lives in surrounded by open sewage and garbage heaped up around the

house. I don't see his sick brother or sister who doesn't have enough money for proper treatment, and I don't see the excited eyes of a boy who hopes to get an education so that he can get a good job and make a little extra money to support his family. Seeing it in person has helped me to understand the real importance of supporting the Church there.

Picture a world where the riches of a man's wallet match the riches of his heart. What a better place this world would be. We can make that world if we are willing to do what it takes. Africa is so rich at heart. In the book *The Last Judgment* Swedenborg says this about the Africans: "Africans are more receptive of the Heavenly Doctrine than any others on this earth" (*Last Judgment* (posthumous) 117).

Someday, this place will be a thriving kingdom, and in many ways it already is. Right now, unfortunately, New Church people are living in third world conditions and something must be done. Are we willing to take a look at a situation that might be painful to see?

While it has not been easy, our Church has never been one to look away from hard situations. New Church people have always been involved in important causes from religious freedom to the abolition of slavery. We have rarely been in the public eye because we know that the Lord's work must be done with humility, but we have always been behind the scenes making things happen. So let's start the process of getting these people the natural means and spiritual knowledge they are asking for. The Lord is bringing the New Church to Africa, and we can either stand by and watch or we can be the hands that help lay its foundation.



**NEW PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY
THE REV. ERIC H. CARSWELL**

I am delighted to announce that following my nomination, the Board of Trustees of the Academy of the New Church has unanimously elected the Rev. Eric H. Carswell as the new President of the Academy. He will begin to serve on July 1st of this year.

This nomination followed careful counsel received from a Board/Corporation/Faculty committee that I had appointed for this purpose. The committee was enthusiastic and unanimous in supporting the nomination, as are the Heads of Schools.

The Rev. Eric Carswell is currently Dean of the Academy Theological School and has served in key leadership positions in the Church over the past ten years. He also has a long and impressive history of work in New Church education at all levels—elementary, secondary, Bryn Athyn College, and the Theological School.

This election of a new President will also allow the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith to return to his full-time duties as Assistant Bishop. The Academy is most grateful for Bishop Keith's wise and sensitive leadership as Interim President during this challenging transition period.

The Rt. Rev. Thomas L. Kline
Chancellor of the Academy



The Rev. Eric H. Carswell

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

I am pleased to nominate Wayne Parker as the new Director of Development for the General Church and Academy, pending ratification by the respective Boards in their May meetings.

The search process included strong candidates from within and outside of the Church. The search committee and I feel strongly that Wayne is the right candidate for the job.

Wayne retired as Vice President of Planning and Development with the Davey Tree Company in 2003 after 27 years with the firm. He and his wife, Vina, began living a dream retirement in the Canadian wilderness near Algonquin Park, but felt a strong calling to come back and serve the Church and Academy.

Wayne was chair of the Contributions Committee on the General Church Board, was a leader in fund-raising for the North Ohio Circle, and secured major gifts for a land conservancy in Ohio. He is chair of the Human Resources Committee for the Academy Board, from which he will be resigning to take this new position. Wayne also has been active with the Forward Sons in Toronto.

We are thrilled to begin this new chapter in Development. We wish once again to acknowledge the fabulous leadership Bruce Henderson has given to Development over the past eight years—serving as both Director of Development and Communications for the past six years. He will continue as Director of Communications for the Church and Academy, working closely with Development and Marketing.

Rt. Rev. Thomas L. Kline
Executive Bishop/Chancellor

YOUNG ADULT CONNECTION NEW COORDINATOR

The General Church is pleased to announce the hiring of Rachel Deckert as the new Coordinator of the Young Adult Connection.

Rachel will be an active team member of General Church Outreach, serving from Boulder, Colorado. Her main duties will include the organization and running of Young Adult Retreats, building supportive relationships with New Church young adults, and working to integrate them into General Church life.

As a member of the General Church Outreach team, Rachel will also assist in the uses that relate to welcoming and integrating newcomers into the life of the church.

Rachel has been working for the Young Adult Connection since 2003 and we are enthusiastic about her continuing to work in this new capacity from Colorado. The official contact information for the Young Adult Connection has changed to:

Young Adult Connection
Attn: Rachel Deckert, Coordinator
P.O. Box 4156
Boulder, CO 80306
phone: 303.952.0287 email: youngadults@newchurch.org
<http://www.newchurchyoungadults.org/>

The Rev. David Lindrooth
Director, General Church Outreach

Springtime and New Beginnings

A sampling of recordings from the Archives.

“And God said, let the earth cause tender plants to spring up, seed-bearing plants, fruit trees bearing fruit, each according to its kind, in which is its seed, upon the earth; and it was so.” Genesis 1:11

Worship Services: Sermons

The New Covenant - Rev. Grant Schnarr, #107619

Begin a New Life - Rev. Mark Pendleton, #107052

Plant a Heavenly Garden- Rev. Kenneth Alden, #106884

Spring - Rev. Kurt Ho. Asplundh, #101756

New Beginnings - Rev. Donald Rose, #105534

Good “Fruits” From Evil “Dung” - Rev. Grant Odhner, #100103

The Interior Beauty of a Flower - Rev. Andrew Heilman, #105146

New Beginnings - Rev. Harold Cranch , #103592

May Flowers - Rev. Reuben Bell, #103883

The Unfruitful Fig Tree - Rev. Christopher Smith, #101297

Be Fruitful and Multiply - Rev. Brian Keith, #102246

By Their Fruits You Will Know Them - Rev. Frank Rose, #106265

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