

THE THREE GREAT FESTIVALS OF THE CHURCH

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In the New Church the great festivals of the year are CHRISTMAS—EASTER—JUNE NINETEENTH. I think they relate among themselves as promise—fulfillment—explanation. Each brings to remembrance some major event on this earth, and each is a move towards the establishment of a new and eternal kingdom of the Lord in both worlds. The opening of the Word is at the heart of all three. When the Christmas and Easter events happened, together they gave us the New Testament and the First Christian Church, and June Nineteenth gave us the Writings and the New Christian Church.

Easter fulfilled what Christmas promised. For unless the Babe of Bethlehem, growing to manhood, and after completing His three years of public mission on earth, had risen from the tomb in glory and had been seen in glory, then the wondrous birth and the miracles and preachings following could not have been remembered as ending in a victorious triumph. His life's work would have appeared to end in the crucifixion. So it was His resurrection that changed the history of man. He rose as the Immanuel, God-with-us, our God visible and near. These two festivals cannot be comprehended separately. Nor for that matter can the three! For the third festival, celebrating an event in the spiritual world, builds on what happened centuries earlier here on earth, and at the same time explains what then took place and what is now taking place. So there is also a trinal unit. And together the three festivals lift us into an inner vision of a rational faith. Together they show us our Lord and God reaching out to save.

With this in mind we will therefore review the first two festivals as a unit, so that afterwards we may see the third festival in the perspective of the first two. For June Nineteenth

has a mission of its own. It invites our understanding to enter into all things that have happened before, so that by understanding we may find the way to a truly human life, one that leads to the Lord's New Church and to His New Heavenly Kingdom. And it is fitting that we try to deepen our celebration of the third festival in this month of June.

CHRISTMAS (Promise)

In all the festivals we tend to be attracted chiefly to their dramatic aspects. For *Christmas*, these include the scene at the manger with the Babe, Mary and Joseph, the adoration of the shepherds, and (much) later, the arrival of the wise men led by the star, from Jerusalem, "till it came and stood where the young Child was" (Matt. 2:1,9). For *Easter*, they include the cross, Golgotha, the empty tomb, and the resurrection stories. And for *June Nineteenth*, we see the calling together of the twelve who had followed the Lord in the world, and their being sent forth on the following day to preach throughout the spiritual world the Gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns.

These knowledges, learned from childhood and remembered with deep affection, are good and holy memories. Nor could we learn and understand deeper things without them. We should, however, from year to year try to see more of the Lord's wisdom and providence in the things we celebrate; for the more we comprehend the inner causes that made all the above things happen, the more will we exult in the wonders of the festivals and their impact on the spiritual history of the Church.

As for the First Festival, we therefore ask, *Who was the Babe born in Bethlehem?*

In general we know that His soul was Divine and truly was His Father, and that His body was born of a virgin. But what of His *mind*? And we now learn of the Lord's *two heredities*. For brevity we quote the teachings with minimal comments of our own.

The Lord's Two Heredities

1. *From His Divine through heaven.* “Before the coming of the Lord into the world, there was influx of life with men and with spirits from Jehovah, or the Lord, *through the celestial kingdom*, that is, through the angels who were in that kingdom, and hence *they then had the sovereignty*. But when the Lord came into the world, and thereby made the Human in Himself Divine, *He put on just that which was with the angels of the celestial kingdom, thus He put on this sovereignty.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6371. Please note: Emphasis in this passage, as in all subsequent quotations, is added.)

The above teaching is given as the spiritual sense, or inner meaning, of Jacob's words as he blessed his twelve sons, here his son Judah. He said: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh comes” (Gen.49:10). *Judah* is the celestial kingdom, and *Shiloh* the Lord.

But then the teaching goes on to draw the important distinction between the *Human Divine* and the *Divine Human*, and we read: “For previously the Divine transflux through that heaven had been the *Human Divine*; it was also the Divine Man which was presented to view when Jehovah so appeared. But this *Human Divine ceased when the Lord made the very Human in Himself Divine*” (ibid.). And for clarification of this last sentence we read two pages later that “the Lord made the Human in Himself Divine, in order that from the very *Divine Human* of the Lord the Divine truth might proceed, and thus might save man” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6373). Therefore, the “very Human” in Himself was the Lord's *Divine Human*. Finally, for a distinction and definition of the two important terms “Human Divine” and “Divine Human” we go back to *Arcana Coelestia* 2814e, where we read: “We may call the truth with the Lord which could be tempted, and which underwent temptations, *Truth Divine in the Lord's Human Divine*; but the Truth which could not be tempted, or

undergo any temptations because it was glorified, *the Divine Truth in the Lord's Divine Human*" (ibid.).

These statements concerning the Divine heredity through the celestial kingdom will also give us some insight into the related teaching, that "[the Lord] alone was born *a spiritual celestial man* ... [and this so] that He might make His Human Divine, according to order from the lowest degree to the highest, and might thus dispose into order all things in the heavens and in the hells" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4594:2).

Further, these same teachings will lead us to see some of the great secrets enfolded in the angel Gabriel's words of Annunciation: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the SON OF GOD" (Luke 1:35). Are we not here called to ponder the very essence of Christmas? Who was He, the Babe of Bethlehem?

But we must also know of the Lord's other heredity.

2. *From the Jewish race through the mother.* "One may be surprised that it is said there was hereditary evil from the mother with the Lord; but as it is here (Gen 13:7) so manifestly declared, and the internal sense is concerning the Lord, it cannot be doubted that it was so.... But there is a difference between hereditary evil which is derived from the father, and that which is derived from the mother. Hereditary evil from the father is more interior, and remains to eternity, for it can never be eradicated. *The Lord had no such evil, since He was born of Jehovah as His Father, and thus as to internals was Divine, or Jehovah.* But hereditary evil from the mother pertains to the external man: *This was with the Lord.* Thus the Lord was born as another man, *and had infirmities as another man....* The Lord, however, *had no actual evil, or evil that was His own,* as He Himself declares in John: '*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*' (John 8:46)" (*Arcana Coelestia* 1573).

EASTER (Fulfillment)

The three festivals, singly and jointly, like the Sabbath, are to be remembered. They are powerful in our spiritual life. And we needed first to see that Christmas tells us *Who He was who came, and What in the Lord rose to complete union with His infinite Divine, the Father*. And on both of these points the Writings give us detailed answers.

Now, as for Easter, our focus must be on *the Lord's Resurrection Body*. For unless we know that the Lord in rising rejected all things whatever that he had from the mother, we will retain a confused concept of the Lord's Divine Human. We will think that perhaps the Lord added something finite to His Divine. For we read that the Lord "rose again with the whole body, differently from any man" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 221:2).

Yet the idea that there is something finite, thus limited, in the Lord our God is unthinkable. Indeed, the very teaching just quoted is preceded by clarifying words that show how that teaching is to be understood. We read: "The Lord came into the world, and took upon Him a Human, that He might put Himself in power to subjugate the hells and to reduce all things to order both in the heavens and on the earth. This [Divine] Human He superinduced over His former Human [Divine]...*both His Humans being however Divine, and therefore infinitely transcending the finite humans of angels and men. And because He fully glorified the natural Human even to its ultimates, therefore He rose again with the whole body, therein differing from any man*" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 221:2). Thus He rose in a Body that was Divine and infinitely transcended the finite humans of angels and men.

The fundamental teaching, not to be overlooked in contemplating the Lord's Resurrection Body, we find in the explanation of Abraham's calling his son's name Isaac at his circumcision

(Gen. 21:3-4). Three arcana are here drawn forth, one of them (referring to "born unto Abraham") being as follows: "The Lord's Divine Human *was not only conceived, but also born, of Jehovah*, and hence the Lord as to His Divine Human is called *the Son of God and the Only-begotten*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2628). Thus the body in which the Lord appeared to His followers after His resurrection was not born of Mary but of His own Divine. The son of Mary died on the cross; the Son of God rose from the tomb.

This whole secret can also be seen contained in the Lord's words from the cross when He transferred His son-relationship from Himself to His disciple John. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother: 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'" (John 19:25-27).

Moreover, with regard to the body the Lord had from the mother before His death and resurrection, we read that "the Lord, in the sepulcher, and thus by death, rejected all the human from the mother and *dissipated it...* and so He assumed the Human from the Father. Thus the Lord, *thoroughly and clearly glorified, rose with the Human*" (*Athanasian Creed* 162; see also a similar teaching in *Arcana Coelestia* 6873).

We therefore see within the beloved Gospel stories that the Lord throughout His life in the world struggled with a two-fold heredity, that He fought against the one and glorified the other. He was in continuous temptation battles. We say, He fought against the maternal heredity, but this really means He fought against all the hells, because through this heredity these had an entry into Him before He was glorified, and through it they fiercely attacked Him. We see, also, that His Human, in which He rose into union with His infinite Divine, was totally a Divine Human, without a shadow of the maternal human, and was our God visible—truly God-with-us. The Word in the letter also

confirms this. For the Lord Himself never called Mary His “mother,” though others so referred to her (see *Lord* 35:5 et al.). And since His glorification was successive (*Canons. Redemption* vii:6), the Lord addressed Mary as “woman” even early in His ministry: “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come” (*John* 2:3,4; *True Christian Religion* 102; *Lord* 35:4). No, in His resurrection, in His glorified Human, there was not one iota from the mother. And now we turn to June Nineteenth, similarly looking for the essential wonder within the events that we best remember. The Writings will equally lead us here.

JUNE NINETEENTH (Explanation)

June Nineteenth, or New Church Day, is of course unique to the New Church. The rest of the world does not yet know about it. To us, however, it is of equal standing with the other two, but is at the same time the culmination of these. Christmas and Easter both come into their full right because of the Writings, thus because of what we celebrate in June. Now we can see the interior meaning of the Gospel as well as those basic stories themselves. We see all of our three glorious festivals as three Sabbath Days. Remember them, to keep them holy!

And so we now ask: What is the essence of this our third festival? We know that it was on the nineteenth day of June in the year 1770 that the Lord called together His twelve disciples, and that on the following day He sent them out into all quarters of the spiritual world to preach a new triumphant gospel. But why just then? It was because it was then that *The True Christian Religion* was completed!

Let us here recall the familiar charter of this New Church festival: “*After this work was finished*, the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them forth into the whole spiritual world to

preach the Gospel that *the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ever and ever*, according to the prediction of Daniel (vii:13,14), and in the Revelation (xi:15); and also that *They are blessed who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Rev. xix:9). This took place on the nineteenth day of June, in the year 1770. This is meant by these words of the Lord, ‘He shall send His angels...and they shall gather together His elect ... from one end of the heavens to the other’ (Matt 24:31)” (*True Christian Religion* 791).

Here, we note first that this statement, in the original Latin, is set aside on a page of its own and is given a heading of its own: **MEMORANDUM**. “Memorandum” means *worthy of being remembered, or memorable*.

Second, we note that this event in the spiritual world, a world that knows no time, stands alone in the body of the Writings in being given a specific date on earth. The completion of the *True Christian Religion*, thus *the completion of the published works*, did of course take place here on earth, and this on the nineteenth day of June, 1770. But the resulting dramatic event just described was neither seen nor known by the people on earth who lived at that time. It is as though a date is given so that we might have a day for celebration.

But what is the connection between a book being completed and the announcement of the good news that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns? The connection is that He could not reign before this completion, thus not before the whole series of the books that constituted His new Advent had been brought into a summary in “The Universal Theology of the New Church” (the sub-title of *True Christian Religion*). The Lord, even more than any good earthly king, rules only by means of law. But the Word had been perverted in the Church: “They had made the commandment of God of no effect by their tradition” (Matt.15:6). The Lord had no law by which to govern. So the

Church made Him but a “nobleman,” and rejected Him. He was for many centuries in “a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12). But now the time had come for His return. The law had been restored; *The True Christian Religion* had been written. His new reign could be proclaimed. This is what happened on June Nineteenth and the day after, and this is what gives the New Church a crowning festival to celebrate.

We say that giving an earthly date to a spiritual event is unique. Two other events, however, come close, and we can find their general timing, yet neither is given a specific date. The first was the Last Judgment. We learn that this great revolution swept through the world of spirits in the year 1757. It happened a few months after the completion of the *Arcana Coelestia* in 1756. The second was when “the angelic heaven from the east to the west, and from the south to the north, appeared of a deep scarlet color with the most beautiful flowers.” (*Ecclesiastical History* 7) Swedenborg was a witness to this in the company of “the kings of Denmark and others” (ibid.). And what was the occasion? The publication of *A Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church*.

A word must be said of this power-packed, strongly worded little work. It preceded *The True Christian Religion* by about two years, and it may be regarded as a forerunner and herald of that major work. Is it a second John the Baptist? The major work itself can be seen as the crowning work in a series of books that shine with Divine light. The Lord comes in all of them. Nevertheless, through *A Brief Exposition* He calls special attention to the crowning work, and makes us aware that this was the book that proclaimed the reign of the conquering, returning King.

Further, we must note that the little posthumous work, *Ecclesiastical History*, first says that “the books are to be

enumerated which were written, from the beginning to the present day, by the Lord through me,” and then adds: “In the spiritual world there was inscribed on all these books, ‘*The Lord's Advent*’” (*Ecclesiastical History*. 3 & 8). We also quote: “The same I also wrote by command on two copies in Holland” (*ibid.*). And we can add: One of these copies has been found! It is preserved in London, England, in the Library of the British Museum, and is there available for inspection (though not for handling). On the inside of the first cover we find in Swedenborg’s handwriting these words: “*Hic Liber est Adventus Domini, Scriptum ex Mandato*” (“This Book is the Advent of the Lord, Inscribed by Command”). (See an editorial postscript at the end of the little work.)

And now we observe at least two things that the above three events have in common. (1) They all happened in the spiritual world. (2) They are all based on a momentous event in this world, namely, the publication of one or other works of the Writings. The Last Judgment, beginning in 1757, was set in motion by the eight-volume Latin *Arcana Coelestia* finished in 1756; the brilliant display of colors and flowers on the heavenly sky was lit up by publication of the *Brief Exposition*; and finally, the sending forth of the twelve disciples with the everlasting Gospel that **the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns** followed completion of that Magnum Opus, *The True Christian Religion*. I think it is allowable to think of the *Arcana* as the Alpha in the successive production of those Writings, and of *The True Christian Religion* as the Omega. This, however, is not to belittle in the least those works which were written by the same “Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ” and posthumously published by others, but likewise Divinely commissioned. I think of these as “the cup running over.”

All these Writings give cause for humble thanksgiving and joyous celebration. The world, unknowingly, is waiting for

THE THREE GREAT FESTIVALS OF THE CHURCH

them, for on them and on influx from the New Heaven depend the resurrection of the remnant from previous churches and, at the same time, salvation from ignorance, false concepts, and evil destructive ways of living. As we read: “It is clear that unless the Lord [in His First Advent] had come into the world no one could have been saved. It is similar today; and therefore *unless the Lord comes again into the world in the Divine Truth, which is the Word, no one can be saved*” (*True Christian Religion* 3; see also 182 & *Apocalypse Revealed* 9).

One day, we may think, June Nineteenth will be a holiday all over the world. For the New Church *will* be known—perhaps hastened by electronic means now available everywhere, and will be accepted by many. We have the Lord's own assurance in the *Apocalypse Revealed*. It reads: “*It is certain that a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, will exist, because it is foretold in the Apocalypse (chap. xxi, xxii); and it is also certain that the falsities of the former church are first to be removed, because they are treated of in the Apocalypse as far as chapter XX*” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 547:e).

Yes, the Nobleman will return victorious to claim His kingdom. And He will reign for ever and ever, “according to the prediction of Daniel...and in the Revelation.”