

Communication

Dear Editor,

I have been interested to read Part One of Alfred Acton's *Paradigms Revisited* in the May 2007 edition of *New Church Life*. The paper is a fascinating study, and I look forward to Part Two.

There was one area of Acton's paper that caused me misgivings. I have for some time shared his view that there is a spectrum of New Church ecclesiology. It seems to me that this spectrum contains similar elements to those which have characterised the traditional Christian Churches. We do indeed appear to have a range reflecting a more Catholic approach to the Church across to what has been seen as the liberal, Protestant end of the spectrum. The last 200 or so years suggest that there are, for example, sections of the New Church which reject women's sense of and call to ministry, where the masculine predominates, and who hold to very definite views about Church government. There are groups who prefer more fluid, flexible, congregational forms, with some crossovers, and internal differences. And so on. Such variety would seem to conform to what the Heavenly Doctrines have to say about the character both of the Church and of the heavens.

What did surprise me, and cause misgivings, in Acton's presentation was the statement in the section *Parallels in the New Church*. He suggests that some people in the General Conference take a "liberal Protestant" view of Emanuel Swedenborg and his Writings, picking and choosing the truths to accept, the Writings containing inspired insights in much the same way as do Shakespeare's writings. Acton says that the Writings are not regarded as Divine revelation by such members of the General Conference.

I guess, on the scale of things, there are people around the world who take these sorts of views. That is inevitable. But Acton's statement nevertheless surprises me, and I wonder what the evidence is for his view. All members of the General Conference subscribe to the Declaration of Faith, which concludes: *I believe in the Word of God or Holy Scriptures and in the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, drawn therefrom and contained in the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.* The vows we are required to make when ordained into the priesthood of the New Church leave no one in any doubt as to the Divine source of the Heavenly Doctrines.

As I say, I was surprised to read Acton's statement. I could have felt offended and insulted, but my feelings are actually sad. Sad that a senior colleague in a sister New Church organisation could make such a judgment without providing any evidence. Scholarly analysis may have its own validity, but one would hope that Divine Revelation leads us to treat relationships with the greatest care and respect. Charity and the capacity to treat others with affection and dignity underpin all our churchmanship. It is this, rather than any precise doctrinal formulation, which will determine the company we keep in the spiritual dimension.

Yours sincerely,

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