

TWO GATES: BAPTISM AND THE HOLY SUPPER

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The book of Revelation describes the Holy City New Jerusalem as having twelve gates. These twelve gates represent all the different true ideas that introduce a person to a genuine life of religion. These true ideas are as countless as the Lord's wisdom is limitless. However, there are just two sacraments in the New Church or two gates that we are called on to make a part of our external and internal lives.

[B]aptism and the holy supper are like two gates to eternal life. By baptism, which is the first gate, every Christian is let into and introduced into what the church teaches from the Word respecting the other life, all of which teaching forms the means whereby a person can be prepared for and led to heaven. The second gate is the holy supper, by which people who allow themselves to be prepared and led by the Lord are admitted into and introduced into heaven. There are no other universal gates. *True Christian Religion* 721

The Lord knows that it is easy for people to be confused about the meaning and value of the sacraments of baptism and the holy supper. This has been true for hundreds of years and probably even more so in an intellectual climate that tends to a strong materialism and can be crudely pragmatic. If we look at these two sacraments, which are called the holiest parts of worship (*True Christian Religion* 667:2), only from the perspective of our five senses, they can seem of questionable value. The Lord refers to this perspective in the opening words of the chapter on baptism in the *True Christian Religion*.

If the spiritual sense of the Lord's Word were not disclosed who could think of the two sacraments, baptism and the holy supper, except in accordance with the natural sense, that is, the sense of the letter? And in that case he would say or murmur to himself, "Is baptism anything but pouring water upon a child's head, and what has that to do with salvation? And is the holy supper anything but eating bread and wine, and does it contribute anything to salvation? Moreover, where is the

holiness in them, except from their having been commanded by the clergy and accepted as holy and Divine?" (*True Christian Religion* 667)

The Lord calls us to think more deeply than this external perspective. He calls us to know and believe that we are not just thinking animals living for a short period of time and then having our lives extinguished forever. He wants us to know and believe that each of us is a spiritual being whose life will go on to eternity. We will all live some day in either heaven or hell. Our time in this world is a period of preparation for the next life. Even now as we live in this world, our motivations and thoughts, our states of mind come into being through an interaction of this world and the next. We could not live without spirits associated with us. This is described in the following passage from the *Arcana Coelestia*:

No one whatever, no matter who, can possibly live, that is, be moved by good to will anything, or be moved by truth to think anything, unless he has in like manner been joined to heaven through the angels residing with him, and to the world of spirits, and even to hell through the spirits residing with him. For everyone during his lifetime is dwelling in some community of spirits or angels, although he is not conscious of doing so. And if he is not joined to heaven or the world of spirits by means of the community in which he lives, he cannot go on living one moment longer. . . The very communities in which and among which people have lived during their lifetime are shown to them once they have entered the next life. When they enter such a community after the life of the body, they enter into the very life that had been theirs while in the body, and from that life they start a new one. And so according to the life they have led in the body they either go down to hell or are raised up to heaven. (*Arcana Coelestia* 687)

The effect of things on us for good or for ill would not take place without spirits being with us. Take, for example, a young woman who sees a young man glance at her. Something in this glance seems warm and loving. It may trigger a hope and thoughts that she may reflect on for hours, days, and weeks. It is not just the glance, but also all the things that the spirits with her

bring to mind and connect to this glance and her states of mind following it. Later that very woman, now a wife, may notice a glance from her husband that is not so loving. The spirits with her take this glance and fill her mind with a sense of hopelessness, inadequacy, frustration and bitterness. But the glances by themselves did not produce these responses. The spiritual communities with her that give meaning to these tiny events stimulate the responses.

The influence of spirits goes on in every part of our mind. We would not be angry or discouraged when things do not go as we might wish them to go. We would not be touched by the innocent presence of a newborn baby. We would not rejoice in the accomplishment of a fellow human being. Thoughts would not come to our minds without this spiritual presence as well. There would be no memory as we know of it. There would be no creativity. So close is the association of our lives with communities in the next life that if that connection stopped for a moment we would collapse like a person who had fainted.

The Lord wants us to know and acknowledge that by spiritual heredity we arrive at adult life unprepared for heaven. He wants us to know that from our own senses we will consistently misperceive what is true, good, important, and truly useful. These misperceptions will bring false ideas to our thoughts on a consistent basis. We will be inclined to make judgments about others that we cannot know with certainty. We will be inclined to make small and temporary things very important and huge and eternal things relatively inconsequential.

The Lord is not angry with us because our minds naturally incline us to false and hurtful things. We cannot do anything else at the beginning of our spiritual life. But the Lord says 'Don't stay there. Don't stay the person you were when you were twenty years old.' He calls us to a conscious effort to change.

To save us from the evil loves and false ideas to which we incline, the Lord has given us His Word as a guide and source of

cleansing. This leads to the first gate of spiritual life. The water of baptism represents the washing away of spiritual impurity and grime that we can bring about in our lives with the Lord's help. We wash spiritually when we consciously turn our mind to what the Lord has taught us and use it as the guide for our priorities, thoughts, and actions. Slowly and gradually the spiritual grime of our heredity can be washed away.

For some of us, our baptism into the New Church took place when we were tiny infants. It was accompanied by our parents making promises to the Lord to bring us up to know and follow the life that leads to heaven. For others here, baptism into the New Church was an adult decision. Some people who come to the New Church as adults have been reluctant to be baptized because they have already been baptized in the church of their parents. They have had a sense that being baptized again seems to be saying the first baptism didn't count. Another way of looking at this issue is to say that their first baptism represented the best truth the person's parents and the church in which he started his life had to give him. In many cases the very foundation that has a person look for better understanding of the Lord and the life of religion comes from important ideas and values that were implanted in childhood and early youth. We do not want to dismiss how the Lord has made use of that early foundation. Instead if someone comes to the New Church as an adult, we would hope that he or she recognizes different ideas or a clarity of ideas that is new—about who the Lord is, how to live the life of religion, what the life after death is like, and why the Lord has given the Word the way He has. Being baptized into the New Church doesn't mean dismissing the baptism of one's earlier life, but rather can be seen as an acknowledgment that now the person wants the truth presented in this Church to guide his or her life.

The bread and wine of the holy supper presents another perspective on the change the Lord wants to bring about in our

lives. Baptism is a washing. It takes something away. The holy supper is eating. It brings something into us that becomes a part of our life. Eating the bread and drinking the wine of the holy supper represents our reception of the Lord's life within our own. Once anyone has eaten and drunk he is not aware of something outside of himself being with him. It becomes part of their energy and part of the cells of their body that allows them to live as themselves. This is how the Lord wants to come to us, not as some alien force, but something we can receive as our own, and acknowledge as coming from the Lord. It represents a profound change that takes place within our lives when the power and influence of the hells is gradually withdrawn from our motivations and thoughts. The holy supper represents the spiritual rebirth or new life that the Lord can bring about within us.

Note that we do not baptize a person into the New Church several times during his life. But we are invited to take the bread and wine of the holy supper potentially hundreds of times throughout life in this world. In reality the spiritual washing represented by baptism and the increasing reception of the Lord's life represented by the holy supper will be going on daily throughout our lives in this world and then on to eternity in the next life.

Some people have found the holy supper somewhat intimidating because they have heard that some people approach it in a worthy state and others approach it unworthily. Since they only have a vague idea of what this refers to and perhaps even a vaguer idea of what would be a worthy state, they tend to avoid the holy supper. In a number of places the Writings of the New Church quote an exhortation from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* that speak of worthiness and unworthiness, but the Writings also refer to this exhortation as including terrifying threats for those who approach unworthily (*True Christian*

Religion 526). The following is part of what the *True Christian Religion* directly states on this subject.

It must not be thought that the Lord shuts heaven against those who approach the holy supper unworthily. He does not do this to any person up to the very end of his life in the world. It is the person who shuts heaven to himself, and he does this by rejecting faith and living a wicked life. Still the person is constantly kept in a state where it is possible for him to repent and be converted. For the Lord is perpetually at hand, urging His acceptance; for He says: I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with me. Revelation. 3:20. (*True Christian Religion 720*)

What does it mean to approach worthily? One simple statement is “The people who worthily approach the holy supper are those who have faith in the Lord and charity towards the neighbor, so those who have been regenerated” (*True Christian Religion 722*). Of course, the Lord doesn’t expect us to be nearly perfect before we take the holy supper. If we have been consciously trying to be led by the Lord and trying to show a wise kindness to the people around us, then we have lived in our lives what the holy supper represents. We have been seeking the Lord’s love and wisdom as guides for our own lives. This is what makes eating the bread and drinking the wine the most holy act of worship.

We know that the miracles of baptism and the holy supper will not take place just because the Lord loves us and is all-powerful. Yes, He is working to accomplish the miracles of regeneration through subtly affecting many millions of things at each moment that have an impact on our lives. But the Lord needs our cooperation. We need to turn to Him in prayer. We need to turn to and guide our lives by the true ideas He has revealed in His Word. We need to acknowledge not just a broad and vague presence of evil within our lives, but specifically recognize and confess to the Lord the evils within ourselves that we have recognized harming us, people around us, and the uses we seek

to serve. We need to seek the Lord's help in keeping these evils and the false ideas that support them from controlling our hearts, minds, and lives. Gradually, as each day goes by, and we do our part to shun evils as a sin against the Lord, He will bring about a change in what we care about, think, and are inclined to say and do. There is great power in the sacraments of baptism and the holy supper to represent the Lord's miracle of change. May we acknowledge this power and seek it in our own lives.

Real Christian Sacraments

But because real Christianity is now for the first time arising, the new church meant by the New Jerusalem in Revelation is now being established by the Lord; in this God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are acknowledged as one, because they are in one person. It has therefore pleased the Lord to reveal the spiritual sense of the Word, so that this church may reap the real benefit of the sacraments of baptism and the holy supper. This comes about when people see with the eyes of their spirit, that is, with the understanding, the holiness hidden within them, and grasp this holiness for themselves by the means which the Lord taught us to use in His Word.

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