

**BOUND ON EARTH, BOUND IN HEAVEN:
REFLECTIONS ON KATRINA AND HOW THE LORD
IS IN THE WORLD.**

BY DON BRANDIS

Matthew 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them and departed....13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? 14 So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. 15 He said to them, But who do you say that I am? 16 Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Arcana Coelestia 9410:2 Those who are restricted to the outward sense of the Word, separated from the inward, thus those who are separated from the true teachings of the Church, convince themselves that such power was given to Peter by the Lord, and also to the rest of the Lord's disciples....Those therefore who know the outward sense of the Word and at the same time its inward sense understand that these things spoken by the Lord had regard to faith and the truths of faith, which are received from the Lord. Such faith received from the Lord possesses that power, thus the Lord Himself, and not at all any

mere human being.

We live in a time dominated by natural thinking, by a determinedly secular view of all things. When times are hard, when hurricanes displace millions and destroy cities, when the AIDS pandemic kills millions around the world, when a revised world economy benefits some at the expense of others (as all economies do), when bitterly contested elections resolve nothing, when the conflicts that are inevitable arise in any human relationship obscure its benefits, natural thinking has neither spiritual nor moral resources. Even people of faith in such times wonder where God is, what He is doing.

There is bad news in our world every day even though the news from the Word, although not always easy and sometimes very uncomfortable, is always good. It is often easier to believe that the Lord has all power in heaven than it is that He has all power in our world, even though the Word assures us unambiguously that He has all power everywhere and always. Faith affirms this, and yet all too often we wonder and do not believe. Where is the Lord when terrible things happen, or even when smaller cruel and unnecessary things happen? Why do these bother us, when we know we have faith? Why are we so often unsuccessful in reaching the minds and hearts of others who have no faith with what gives us spiritual comfort when they are suffering? Why are there times when our own faith does not comfort us, when we suffer and find our faith unequal to it?

The *Writings* contain the needed answers to these questions. Although we have heard them many times before, part of the reason we are here is to work through these reasons, and so we need to hear them many more times. In the alternation of weekday and Sabbath, of doubt and faith, of natural thinking and spiritual thinking, we do our small but essential part in our regeneration and that of others around us. What is power in our world? Natural thinking sees only the exteriors of people and

things, and thus for natural thinking, power consists in one thing forcing itself on another. Hurricanes blow down trees and houses, push water overland, flood cities and highways. Nations make war on each other, viruses spread from one human or animal host to another, the managers of corporations decide to close plants in one country and move them to another. We know how to look for the effects of these external events in individual lives.

The *Writings* tell us the natural world is the world of effects, the spiritual world that of causes, and the celestial or inmost that of ends or intentions. The current suffering of New Orleans' poorest citizens results from thousands and thousands of human choices, some by them and some by others. The dikes that kept the waters out had not been constructed and maintained properly, the disaster planning had not dealt at all with how to get the citizens who did not own cars out of the city. Much of the National Guard was in Iraq, FEMA had been marginalized due to other demands on federal funds. Further, the causes of poverty in the region as across the nation are complex and deep-rooted and have been largely ignored. The matter has not been important enough to us to deal with effectively.

Well, the failures that resulted in so much suffering after Katrina can in no way be blamed on God. He neither caused them nor failed to prevent them. The suffering and injustice are not evidence of Divine impotence. So to think would be to think externally about God. Even though we must use some natural concepts in conjunction with spiritual ones if we are to think faithfully about God, natural concepts by themselves are inadequate to understand the Divine. See *True Christian Religion* 339—"The reason why we must believe, that is, have faith in God the Savior Jesus Christ is that it is faith in a visible God, in whom there is an invisible God; and faith in a visible God, who is human and at the same time God, enters into a

person. For faith is in its essence spiritual, but in its form natural. With a person therefore faith becomes spiritual-natural, for everything spiritual must be accepted in the natural, in order to be of any value to a person.”

We see from this how the Lord acts mainly from within us, and only secondarily from outside us, from our experience. We need to learn to recognize exteriors from interiors, to see the natural in terms of the spiritual and not the reverse. The *Writings* tell us, for example, that if educated people who are usually oriented to such merely natural thinking, were told of deeper senses in the literal Word, “he will be taken aback at first, then dismiss the idea as nonsense, and finally ridicule it” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9407:4).

To demand the reverse, i.e. that the spiritual conform to the natural, is what the *Writings* call negative doubt, and it will always fail to bring us into the light of heaven—unless by its failures we try something else (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2094, 2832, 2588). So let us try something else. How is Jesus Christ—the Divine Human, the risen Lord—Lord of our world? His disciple Peter found out how. Let us watch him do so. Chapter 16 of Matthew’s gospel is about our need for signs from heaven, about our need to experience the Divine at work among us. A group of Pharisees and Sadducees came to Him and asked for a sign from heaven, and he rebuked them, saying the only sign they would receive is the sign of Jonah.

What is the sign of Jonah? There are at least three meanings of the sign of Jonah. The first is the correspondence of Jonah’s three days in the belly of a whale to the Lord’s resurrection after being dead for three days. In this context the Lord means that the Jews will get the same sign everyone else gets, namely the glorification of the risen Christ as the Divine Human. It is the Divine Human who makes faith possible for each of us and for all of us. We can have faith that He is Lord of heaven and of our

world because the Lord has come and subdued the hells, reordered the heavens and given us the Gospel and the *Writings*. The tasks of faith are the same whether people are in the Universal Church or outside it. We all are called by the Lord to shun evils as sins, to do the good we see to do as charity toward everyone else, and to worship the Lord we see. The Lord gives everyone a glimpse of things in the light of heaven now and then, and we need to notice when it happens, learn from the Word what our spiritual insights mean, and to reform our lives by them.

The second meaning of the sign of Jonah comes from the story of Jonah's reluctant ministry to the people of Nineveh. You remember the story of the evil gentile city of Nineveh, and that the Lord called Jonah to go to it and tell them He would destroy them unless they turned from their wickedness. Jonah did not want to help the gentiles in Nineveh. Here he represented faith without charity. This kind of faith runs away from the Lord, but this does not work, and he ended up on a ship at sea in a great storm the Lord sent against him. Jonah eventually told the sailors to throw him overboard, and they did so, and the storm stopped. Jonah did not drown; he was promptly swallowed by a whale, where as we said earlier he remained three days. He prayed to the Lord to save him again, and the Lord had the whale vomit him out onto dry land. The Lord now had Jonah's attention, and Jonah went to Nineveh and preached repentance to them for three days, i.e. long enough to get *their* attention. He told them that in forty days the Lord would destroy them if they did not repent, meaning that in the fullness of time the inevitable consequence of unrepentant wickedness is a hellish life, a permanently miserable spiritual state reflected in a miserable natural state. This is in truth the certain result of living wickedly and resisting the Lord's salvation in a world where all power comes from the Lord, and is the spiritual truth that is the second

meaning of the sign of Jonah.

The people of Nineveh heeded Jonah's sign and repented, turning from their wickedness. By "wickedness" here we may understand the primary social sins denounced in the Decalogue: murder, false witness, adultery and theft. Having renounced these and begged the Lord's forgiveness, they did not settle into a permanent hellish spiritual state. They were lifted into the light of heaven, and had the good lives of people who are being regenerated. Such lives are not always pleasant, but they lead to heavenly life in some form in this life and in the next.

What about the third meaning of the sign of Jonah? For this we look to our text from Matthew 16. Jesus has rebuked the Pharisees who asked him for a sign from heaven before they would listen to him in the Biblical sense, with a spiritual hearing that leads to obedience. Jesus then asks his disciple Peter, who has been with him now for some time and seen Him in action, heard Him speak to many people, witnessed the healings and the conversions and the repentances. "Who do you say I am?" He asks. "You are the Christ, the son of the living God," replies Peter. The Lord answers, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-19).

The inner sense of this text is unusually rich in meaning. The Lord calls this disciple by different names in different circumstances. "Peter" means "rock" and commonly represents spiritual truth, and in Peter's case usually means truth of faith; truth known, acknowledged and believed. After Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the living God, Jesus calls him blessed, and also 'Simon son of Jonah'. 'Simon' has similar

correspondences to ‘Simeon’, the second son of Jacob and Leah, which at the most general level means truth from good, and then more specifically obedience, faith of charity and affection for truth (Genesis 29:33, *Arcana Coelestia* 3867-3872). “Jonah” means “dove” in Hebrew, and represents the good of charity. “Simon son of Jonah means hearing and obeying spiritual truth from good” or “faith from charity” (*Apocalypse Explained* 443:4-5).

Faith of charity or faith from charity is real faith, bound to or conjoined with real charity. It is good and truth conjoined, which is the intention and the product of regeneration. People in this state are blessed, are conjoined in community to the Universal Church and also to a particular church and so to a community in heaven. They are so bound in heaven as well as on earth. The meaning of the third sign of Jonah is that of the Beatitudes. The second and third meanings of ‘the sign of Jonah’ taken together are this: on the one hand, if you persist in wickedness and refuse the salvation the Lord offers, you will have a certain sort of life forever, and if you accept the Lord’s salvation and shun wickedness you will have a very different sort of life. This is true because the Lord has all power in this world and in the spiritual world. Real faith—i.e. faith conjoined with charity—is from the Lord and contains the keys to the kingdom of heaven. “Keys” represent power. The Lord gives people the power to save themselves or to condemn themselves. The Lord does not give us Divine power but only human power. The small but vital power to choose the left hand or the right for ourselves but not for others is essential to the Lord’s power on earth and in heaven and in the hells.

This is also the reason there are positive and negative correspondences of every spiritual representation. The Lord’s power on earth does not compel anyone. When He says to Peter that He has given him the keys to the kingdom, He means that

anyone who has faith from charity, who has good and truth conjoined by regeneration, can see when he or she is in a Sabbath state that all events in our world that involve humans require of them spiritual choices, and that their spiritual state is a result of those choices. Regardless of how clearly or unclearly we see them, these choices determine what we are. “They are judged according to the actions done in their life and according to their thoughts and ends in view” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2335). What matters most is not whether a person in New Orleans got out before the hurricane or not, but how they reacted to the events of their experience, and especially to the other people in those experiences. Our spiritual lives have much less to do with what others have done to us than with what we have or have not done to them and for them. Material states are not reliable indicators of spiritual states, even though the former are results of the latter,—unless they are seen in the light of heaven. We are not in the world alone, and the states of others are just as important to us spiritually as our own is. Even when the just suffer materially and the wicked prosper, the just are better off.

Suppose that a twenty-first century Jonah went to New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina struck and spoke plainly and openly about what was to come and why. There were such voices, but they were ignored. But suppose they had been heard in the Biblical sense? Advisors and the public officials of the states involved could have been called together and worked out both a plan for the coming hurricane and also for a more lasting and faithful public response to the needs of the poor, the blind, the elderly, the sick, the prisoners, the lame (*Matthew* 25:35-40, *Arcana Coelestia* 4956-4958, 5063-5067, 6004). Then when “the rains came down, and the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against the house, it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock” (*Matthew* 7:25).