

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**Science and Correspondences: food for thought**

Dear Editor,

We've come a long way since the 18th century! When the Lord opened Swedenborg's spiritual sight, little progress had been made in science. It seems the flowering of science (and music also – that's for another time) was awaiting the Last judgment and the Lord's second coming.

When I first started as a scientist what seems like centuries ago, I often used to wonder how differently Swedenborg might have addressed correspondences if he had known what we do today about the natural world around us. In his time, no-one knew anything about bacteria, viruses, that there was life in the depths of the sea, let alone that organisms could survive in any conditions in or on this earth, no matter how extreme. They didn't even know what those conditions might be. For example, think about the heat vents in the ocean where life survives intense heat and noxious fumes (with the help of specialized bacteria); these vents were not found until just a few years ago.

When I first studied bacteria, it occurred to me that not all disease-causing bacteria were bad all the time. In many areas in the human body, many different types of bacteria co-exist quite happily without causing any disease. In fact, we need those bacteria to help us digest our food, clean up our skin, or just keep things in working order. The problem in these areas seems to occur whenever conditions change, either with the bacteria or the host (the person) so that one bacterial type takes over. Then infection can occur, and the person becomes sick. My idea is that bacteria could represent the affections associated with the loves of self and the world. The bacteria that always cause disease no matter what could represent the more heinous evils; the others that are sometimes bad could represent loves that are not inherently evil: they just become so when they predominate over the loves of the Lord and the neighbor. When the order is inverted (the host's immune system is compromised, or a barrier to infection is

removed/conscience is squashed or the Lord is forgotten) those bacteria/loves can attack and cause natural/spiritual disease.

Having watched the BBC/Discovery Channel's "Blue Planet," I became fascinated by the team's journey to the depths of the ocean, a place no-one had ever been before. To do it, they required a special submersible that would not implode when exposed to the intense pressures at those depths: 400x the pressure at the surface.

When they descended, they discovered not only were these areas not barren deserts, but they saw creatures they had never seen before. Normally these creatures lived in complete blackness, except for the fluorescence/lights generated by the predators which attracted their prey (from bacteria living in these creatures incidentally). When the lights of the submersible shone on them, it was a fascinating yet hideous sight. Many of these "fish" had huge sharp teeth; in some the teeth were so huge that they could not close their mouths.

However, in other areas, the creatures found resembled decorative plants; some were deep sea versions of corals that lived without light. They were much less hideous than the predatory fish, in fact they seemed more beautiful, but they were still carnivorous.

The extreme depths with fish with huge teeth made me think of the hells of the Nephilim. The people going to these ocean depths required extra protection, just as Swedenborg did before he could be exposed to the spirits in those hells. The light in the depths of the ocean were as illusory as the fake lights in hell, and there was intense pressure in the ocean, just as I imagine there would be for us in the Nephilim hells, which is why the Lord prevents them from affecting any of us here.

Maybe the corals and other vegetation existing without sunlight could be likened to lesser hells, maybe representing the hells in the love of falsity: the beauty is still illusory, but it does not seem as fierce and so without beauty as the carnivorous fish?

I'd appreciate other scientists' ideas of how learning more about the natural world has helped them realize the amount we must still have to learn about the spiritual one!

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