

New Church LIFE

A monthly magazine devoted to the teachings
revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg

In this issue:

The Parable of the Leaven: A Sermon About Change
By Jeremy F. Simons

Why Young People Leave the Church
By Tom Fiedler

Not “Three Aspects” of God
By Daniel W. Goodenough

What? The Christian Church Has Ended?
By Kenneth J. Alden

Church News: South Africa, Great Britain

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Notes on This Issue

Our sermon this month was delivered recently at the Cathedral by the Pastor of Bryn Athyn Society, the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons. It considers the complex nature of change, and the factors involved with change. Do we receive the fullness of the Lord's presence? This depends on our willingness to change for the better.

We are pleased to receive an article by Tom Fiedler, concerning the different approaches to life by people born in different eras. Is our New Church message heard by all generations the same way? Do we need to change the way we express it? There is a worthwhile answer.

Rev. Dan Goodenough has written a clear and concise way of looking at the Trinity, and how we should beware of some analogies. We may in fact label ourselves wrongly.

Is the Christian Church really 'dead'? Rev. Kenneth Alden considers this question, in view of all the activities of the Christian churches in one 5th of the world population. How should we regard this teaching? The eternal dimension gives a longer view.

You may recognize a few faces in Church News, garnered from websites. Of enduring quality and life, are New Church Assemblies, and Summer Schools and camps. Pictures tell the story of fifty years of such activities!

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN: A SERMON ABOUT CHANGE
BY REV. JEREMY F. SIMONS

“Again He said, ‘To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’” (Luke 13:21)

The parable of the leaven describes the kingdom of heaven by comparing it to the way that yeast makes bread rise, turning dough into something that can be baked into bread. The parable often makes little sense to people when they first hear it. How can the kingdom of heaven be like yeast? However, when you see what it is getting at, you may see that it is a parable about a changing world and about how the Lord acts on it. He is the one who changes the world, both the world as a whole and your personal world, and the process can be compared to the making of bread.

The whole point of religion is to change people’s hearts. One of its most joyful aspects is the assurance that people’s hearts can change, and that the Lord is guiding the world to become a better place. The result, we are told, will be bread and not something inedible.

It is reasonable to have concerns about the world’s future. There may be a coming recession; you may be worried about the results of the upcoming elections, about the effects of global warming, the shrinking of the earth’s resources, terrorism, possible global war, or any number of things. It is easy to be pessimistic about humanity’s inhumanity to man, our relentless materialism and immorality, the apparent decline of religion in the West, and forces that threaten marriage and the family in our culture.

The teachings of the New Church, however, assure you that whatever hardships may lie ahead, the long-term future of the

human race is almost certain to be a happy one. According to the Heavenly Doctrine, we are entering a new spiritual era; it has already begun. Moreover, this era will be better than all previous ones. This is what is called the New Church, which is the New Jerusalem, and you are invited to be a part of it. People's hearts will change. The negative trends and the proliferation of harmful and mistaken ideas are like the leaven that is mixed into the bread-dough. They force a process of change and transformation, and the end result will be better than what we started with.

Our topic this morning is the way that change happens. In any culture, and in any community, styles change, trends come and go, and things that are seen as interesting and valuable one year will be ignored and forgotten about the next. The changes can seem random. They are not always positive, and they often seem unrelated to anything spiritual or important. But according to the teachings of the New Church, all the movements of culture are interconnected in fascinating ways, and they all ultimately relate to the Lord's purposes as He guides the human race towards heaven. The changes are not random. They spring from constant universal laws as they interact with human free choice. Our topic this morning focuses on four ways that the Lord works to bring about the process that our text compares to the making of bread.

Our reading from *True Christian Religion* made the observation that "although the secrets revealed by the Lord at the present time surpass in excellence and importance all spiritual knowledge made public up to now, they are regarded on earth as of no value" (*True Christian Religion* 848). When the angels wondered how long this would be true, they were told, "Until time and times and half a time," a phrase from Daniel and Revelation which means "until the end of this age and the beginning of the next" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 562). In the next era, this information will be highly valued. Therefore the

question is, what governs public opinion, and how does the Lord guide it? Here are four influences of which the Writings speak: The first is described by the Lord's words in our reading from John: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10). The Lord makes information available, and people are then free to follow or not as they choose. A second is that you are influenced by what the Writings call "universal atmospheres" from the Lord, which invisibly affect all created things (*Conjugal Love* 386). A third is that although you seem to yourself to think and feel autonomously, the truth is that you are enormously influenced by others (*Divine Providence* 308). Although people do change individually, they are always doing it within their own context, and these patterns change slowly. The fourth is that since these three influences are seldom in perfect agreement with each other, the differences need to be resolved, and the process of doing this can be compared to what happens when yeast is mixed with the dough in the making of bread (*Divine Providence* 25).

The interaction of these and other influences is one way of describing the Divine providence. The Lord guides the human race while leaving all free to think and do as they wish. Because of this guidance, public opinion changes, and one day the "secrets revealed by the Lord at the present time" will no longer be "regarded on earth as of no value."

The first principle here is that "My sheep hear My voice." The Lord has revealed the truth. Information of all kinds is available throughout the world, and it is increasing continually. People choose to learn, accept, believe, and practice whatever they wish. It just so happens that the Bible is by far the best-selling book of all time. An estimated six-billion copies have been printed (Wikipedia.com). Worldwide it is not only far and away the cumulative leader, it has also been the best-selling book every year since printing was invented—and even before then

(Christianpost.com July 4, 2007). This has happened partly because of organizations dedicated to the cause of distributing Bibles. However, they could never have been successful if people did not respond. For some reason, world opinion has cooperated in making this happen. Is it just chance, or has the Lord caused public opinion worldwide to move in this direction?

There is a remarkable self-reinforcing aspect to the process of being the sheep who hear the Lord's voice. We are told, "there is in faith, or in truths, an imperceptible blessing insinuated by the Lord, relating to eternal blessedness, which is preferred to evil delights" (*Spiritual Experiences*, minor 4611). This means that once that voice is heard and believed, it begins to change the one hearing it.

One effect that the Lord's words have on you is related to the second way that He works to change your heart. You are influenced by what the Writings call "universal atmospheres" from the Lord, which invisibly affect all created things. We read, "Everything that flows out from an object, surrounds it and envelops it, is called an atmosphere. As, for example, the atmosphere of light and heat from the sun around it; the atmosphere of life from a person around him; the atmosphere of aroma from a shrub around it; the atmosphere of attraction from a magnet around it; and so on. [2] But the universal atmospheres which we are discussing here are from the Lord around Him; and they emanate from the sun of the spiritual world, at whose center He is...The realization of His purposes by means of these atmospheres is Divine providence" (*Conjugal Love* 386).

That is, you are affected by the Lord's presence, by the atmospheres that surround Him, and the effect of this influence is so powerful that it is said that this is what the Divine providence is. "The realization of His purposes by means of these atmospheres is Divine providence." This is the origin of the universal impulses in all living things to survive, reproduce,

provide for the survival of their offspring, and similar things. On the natural level, these impulses are what move all of nature. On the spiritual level, these atmospheres are received by people to the extent that they turn to the Lord, hear His voice in the truths that are taught in the Word, and obey them. The way that people respond to these atmospheres on both the natural and spiritual levels produces the changes that we observe as trends, styles, cultural views of good and bad behavior and correct and incorrect ideas. These things are always changing, and the impetus for the changes is related to how people respond to these universal atmospheres.

A third factor here in the way that the Lord works to change your heart is that you are not as independent of others as it seems. “Almost everyone believes that we think and intend autonomously and therefore talk and act autonomously. Can we on our own believe anything else when the appearance is so convincing? Yet this is impossible. (The truth is that) the source of our thinking is not in ourselves but in others, whose source is again not in themselves” (*Divine Providence* 308).

The “others” who influence your thoughts and feelings are the people that you associate with and also your spiritual associates, the good and evil spirits who are with you interiorly. What this means is that ideas, points of view, and values tend to be shared by members of a group, making it hard for conflicting ways of seeing things to be taken seriously. Styles, manners, and concepts of right and wrong tend to be held in common within a culture because of this sharing of thoughts and feelings. Yet every individual is actually free to think whatever they like, and everyone’s exact thoughts and feelings are unique to them. The effect, nevertheless, is that it is hard to change individuals without changing the whole culture. Things that catch on quickly do so because they are in harmony with the way that people already think. Real change happens slowly. The importance of

your spiritual associations is underlined by the statement in the *Apocalypse Explained* that “the New Church on earth grows according to its increase in the world of spirits, for spirits from that world are with men” (*Apocalypse Explained* 732.3).

Three factors, then, affecting changes in humanity’s spiritual character are the revelation of new truth, the effects of the Lord’s presence, and the way that people are connected together, in both this world and the next, as to their thoughts and feelings. A fourth factor is the leaven of our text. The forces that act on what people think and feel do not necessarily agree with each other. Disagreements within a group produce processes that can be compared with what happens when leaven is put into flour. We read, “There are evils together with falsities which, when introduced into societies, act like ferments put into meal and juice of the grape. By means of these, discordant things are separated and concordant things are united, and purity and clearness are the result. They are what are meant by these words of the Lord: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal’” (*Divine Providence* 25).

The process of resolving the issues of life is compared to the fermentation process that takes place when yeast is put into flour to make bread. A similar process takes place in the making of wine. The meaning here is that even though the issues and conflicts in a person’s life are caused by false and evil things, the effect can be a very good one. They force people to repeatedly consider and struggle with their beliefs and priorities. The kingdom of heaven is formed in the person in that struggle. People individually, and societies in general, successively reject what is false and evil as they see it more and more clearly. And in the process they are purified—being made into good bread, or clear wine. Contrary ideas cause you to think and consider what the truth really is. This is the value of controversy and disagreement.

The point is that society changes and individuals change. The

changes are not random, but are governed by factors and guided by the Lord. He is able to do this in a way that moves humanity in a good direction and also leaves us in freedom.

It will not always be true that “the secrets revealed by the Lord at the present time... (will be) regarded on earth as of no value.” Swedenborg writes, concerning the sales of the *Heavenly Doctrine*, “I received letters [informing me] that not more than four copies had been sold in two months, and this was made known to the angels. They wondered indeed, but said that it should be left to the Providence of the Lord, which was such as to compel no one, though it might be done. But that it was not fitting that [any others] should read [my work] first but those who were in faith; and that this might be known from [what happened at] the coming of the Lord into the world, who was able to compel men to receive His words and Himself, but [yet] compelled no one. Still there were found those who would receive, those who were in faith, to whom also the apostles were sent” (*Spiritual Experiences* 4422).

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27).
Amen

Lessons: Luke 13:20-21, John 10:14-16, 27-28, *Spiritual Experiences* 5222, *True Christian Religion* 848



The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons was inaugurated into the priesthood in 1982 and ordained into the second or Pastoral degree in 1983. He first served as Assistant to the Pastor in Kempton Society, Pa., then as its Pastor in 1983 taking on also the role of Principal to the school there. In 1993 Jeremy accepted a call to be Assistant Pastor to the Immanuel Church, in Glenview, Ill., and the Principal of its Church School. Jeremy accepted the call in 1996 to be the Assistant Pastor to the Bryn Athyn Society, and in 2004 he became its Pastor. Jeremy lives with his wife Allyn (Edmonds) in Bryn Athyn.

“Rejoice!”

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THE KEMPTON PROJECT WEBSITE

<http://www.kemptonproject.org/>

Do you wish to look up any scripture passage, and then click on what the Writings say on that verse? Try it out.

Just click on the webpage given above, and follow the directions. You can insert any chapter and verse of the Word of Sacred Scripture, the books which contain a spiritual sense, and then locate this meaning revealed in the Writings. There is more to explore. Rev. Andy Heilman and Mr. Roy Odhner developed or are running this program.

WHY YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH.

BY TOM FIEDLER

Some New Church parents of adult children wonder why their children have either left the New Church or are no longer influenced by Swedenborg and the New Revelation. It is heartbreaking to conclude that those who have left did so from a conscious free will rejection of this present Dispensation.

The New Church parent is not alone. New Church people often presume that the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant parent is losing her children to the current cultural pantheism because her church teaches false doctrine. Is it not time to put aside this presumption and examine other evidence? Just why are young adults (including New Church youth) abandoning the faith of their parents?

We need to recognize that there are (and always will be) spiritual forces that seek to eradicate truths of faith and affection for them (remains) that parents consciously strive to instill in their offspring. These spiritual forces will attack us directly as individuals, but they will attack us through natural persons and worldly organizations in our nation and community.

Faith in God and eternal life must never be mixed with science, or Science must never be mixed with politics, or Economics must never be mixed with anthropology; and the big one, Theology must never influence government. Of course that allows the Humanist to be the watchdog over everyone who does not share Humanist metaphysics. By default then, the Humanist hopes the rest of us won't notice that Humanism itself shifts from compartment to compartment whenever convenient for

manipulating the rest of us. And most of us don't!

The Boomer generation was the last generation to be raised in a predominantly Judeo-Christian culture, but with a heavy emphasis on 'self-esteem' lacking in the depression generation. Generation X has been raised in a culture of Humanistic skepticism (AKA post-modernism) while generation Y¹ has been raised in a culture of pantheistic socialism (political correctness). Each paradigm has adopted new definitions and altered basic assumptions.

For example, the depression generation and baby boomers shared a didactic absolute epistemology. Those are three fancy words for a discoverable reality one can see and understand through reason and meticulous observation (AKA rationalism and modernism). Hence the hard sciences were popular viz. physics, mathematics and the various forms of mechanical engineering. Those generations were encouraged to pursue knowledge individually, critically and competitively, regardless of what the experts and authorities promote. This way of thinking is portrayed by its critics to be "bigoted" and "exclusive".

Generation X and Y were educated in a dialectic relative epistemology. In other words, reality is merely whatever collective humanity (through consensus) perceive it to be at any given time. Hence the arts and humanities, political science and psychology are popular subjects. For X and Y generations reality is evolving according to thesis—antithesis and synthesis (dialectic process). Their education has conditioned them to follow the published and acclaimed intellectual lead and seek consensus. This is labeled by its critics as "group think" and by its adherents as "transformational thinking".

¹Generation X, those born from 1965 to 1982; Generation Y those born from 1980 to 1995.

Of course these cultures blur in and out of each other. Fortunately, the internet and communication with third world aspirants has broadened the paradigms of each generation. But in the New Church our failure to see the conflicting foundations of the way each generation thinks (specifically the logic employed to process information) will result in frustrated communication. And none of us will be able to ‘get it’, let alone pass our values on to our children.

The solution is to define our terms and follow the money. We can no longer assume terms such as ‘liberal’, ‘freedom’, ‘religious’, ‘progressive’, ‘tolerant’, ‘democracy’ and ‘fundamental’ mean the same to each generation. We can no longer assume that our children and their children speak the same language even though we use identical words and phrases.

Following the money should be broadened to discover our individual motivation. The times call for rigorous honesty, transparency and courage. We can no longer assume that one generation accepts the same basic “obvious” facts about God, reality, the purpose of life and the value of one's family as the previous one did. Everything we wish to bequeath to following generations must be redefined in such a way as to avoid self-serving storge² agendas and un-confessed phobias. It isn't going to be easy, but I bet it will be enlightening.

²Storge , from the Greek *σῶϊνᾱς*, Wikipedia, family love, Conjugal Love 176, Heaven & Hell 277

NOT THREE ASPECTS OF GOD

BY DANIEL W . GOODENOUGH

Who is our God? How should we think of God? We know the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not three persons, because God is one person. In the New Church He is often called Divine Human. However, if not three persons, then how do we explain what Father, Son and Holy Spirit really mean? How many of us have simply said—they are three aspects of God?

There is a real trinity or three-ness in God, and it is the same three-ness all human beings have: soul, body, and active influence (See *True Christian Religion* 165-169 for a good summary). The core of any person is the soul—our spirit and mind, how we really feel, care and love deep inside ourselves; and also what we truly think inside, in our own freedom and rationality. Our soul is our primary or ruling love—what we love above all else.

Our soul is the real human being. Nevertheless, our souls would be helpless unless they had bodies to express and show what our soul is, and to act on our wishes. Our bodies live from our soul. It is through our bodies that we do things and contact other people's souls. It is through our bodies that we can see each other. That is why angels have spiritual bodies, to express their souls. A soul never exists by itself, but always has a body, to show itself and carry out its wishes.

Finally, to be human we must be able to have outside influence, to go beyond ourselves, through doing and saying things that actually affect others. A soul and body that could never reach out and touch other people would mean a totally

isolated life. To be human, life must mean we can have effects on other people, through our actions and sayings, our looks, our mood, the spiritual aura flowing from our loves. We influence others because our minds and hearts go out through our bodily actions and are felt—for good or for bad—by others. Though people sometimes abuse this ability, its purpose is that we may love each other, and be actively loved by others.

The Lord God is Human—it is in His image that He made us human. His soul is Jehovah—infinite love and wisdom that created the universe and preserves it. That is our “Father,” but that alone is invisible—“Someone” we cannot know. The Lord God’s body is Jesus Christ—the human form that Jehovah God took on by being born of a virgin. During life on earth, He made His body Divine, or “glorified” it: He made Himself the Divine love in human form. It is in Jesus Christ that we can see God. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14.6) Jesus Christ is the body and face of God.

In addition, the Holy Spirit is His Divinely active influence. He touches all human beings and reaches out to uplift us towards Himself, by flowing into us with love and light—good feelings and ideas we can grasp and use. The Lord’s Holy Spirit or activity is also called His proceeding, His operation, and His Divine providence. All these mean the inflowing activity of our Creator God, acting through His body Jesus Christ.

This is the New Church trinity. The Writings do not say Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “three aspects” of God, and we really should not say that either. Although “three aspects” may seem an easy way to avoid the mistake of three Divine persons, in fact it is not true. It also lines up the New Church with the ancient heresy of “modalism”—that “Father, Son, Holy Spirit” are just

three different modes or ways that God appears. This is an old idea in Christianity, but false, and it moves God away from our sight and makes him a kind of chameleon who changes how He looks. Since an aspect is an appearance or a way of looking at something, modalism can also mean the trinity is not something that is inherent in God, but a matter of how we look at Him—that is, the trinity or three-ness is not anything actually in God, but in how we see Him.

The New Church is sometimes called modalist (wrongly!), and we open ourselves to this when we say Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “three aspects” of God. Sometimes we are called modalist because they do not know what else to do with our denial of three distinct persons while we affirm Jesus’ full Divinity. Historically, only the modalists did that. Often Christians say, “three aspects” of God too, not realizing what it means.

It is important that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are much more than three of God’s aspects, appearances or names. They are the three essentials of one Divine Human Being—soul, body, and activity/influence. No one—not even God—can be human without all three of these. Talking about the New Church trinity is a great opportunity to show how the New Church idea of God and His incarnation is new, yet Biblical, is simple, and makes sense.

“Father, all things of mine are yours, and all of yours are mine.” What does this mean, if not that the Father's Divine belongs to the Son's Human, and the Son's Human to the Father's Divine? Consequently in Christ God is man and man is God, and thus they make one as soul and body make one....It is plain from this that the Father's Divine is the Son's soul, and the Son's Human is the Father's body. (*True Christian Religion* 122:4,5)

WHAT? THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH HAS ENDED?

BY REV. KENNETH J. ALDEN

Our title captures one of those enduring questions that confronts every generation that embraces the New Church and accepts the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as a revelation of Heavenly Doctrine from the Lord. Intellectually we can recognize that the Lord foretold the end of the Christian Church, notably in Matthew 24, Luke 17, and Revelation 15-21. But what often challenges us is the fact that there are so many active Christian congregations around us, doing good work and spreading the Gospel around the world. It hardly seems credible that such a church may be called “ended.” Does it imply that all these people are without a living religion—that they have no truth to guide their lives? After all, most of us know many practicing Christians whom we respect and love for their belief in the Lord and their life according to His commandments. How does this experience fit with the teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine?

Our experience confirms the teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine in two ways. First, there is the negative possibility that some of the goodness we see is tainted by hypocrisy. With his spiritual eyes opened by the Lord, Swedenborg witnessed many cases of people who had seemed on earth to be the best of Christians but who were exposed after death as being interiorly self-serving and worldly. From this perspective, there is not necessarily any contradiction between the teaching that the Christian Church has ended and our experience of active churches doing laudable things. Further, the Heavenly Doctrine says of the post-Christian Church era: “As to the external appearance divided churches will exist as heretofore, their

doctrines will be taught as heretofore; and the same religions as now will exist among the Gentiles” (*Last Judgement* 73).

Although the Lord foretold such spiritual darkness at the end of the church that the spiritual “sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light” (Matthew 24:29), His purpose in His Second Coming was to give new light for a New Church. With a new revelation from the Lord, the truth shines again in that Word and is received among a new people, along with a remnant of people from the former church. So, when the New Testament was added to it, the Old Testament Word took on a new meaning and shed new light. Now the Old and New Testament take on a new meaning and shed new light when the Heavenly Doctrine opens them up to be understood spiritually. With the establishment of a New Church, new light goes out, not just to the members of that church, but to the universal church throughout the world. All who worship one God and keep the Ten Commandments constitute one church which, in the eyes of the Lord, is as one person. The church which has and rightly understands the Word is like the heart and lungs supplying life to the whole body. Whereas the Jewish Church once filled that role, it was later transferred to Christians. Now it has been transferred to the New Church which is a kind of center from which spiritual light is available to Christians, Jews, and all other people and faiths.

When we find people who genuinely believe in one God and live by the truth they know, it confirms what the Heavenly Doctrine says—light is going out through the spiritual world and reviving the church (See *Conjugal Love* 532; cf. *True Christian Religion* 182:2). In fact, the Heavenly Doctrine compares the succession of churches on earth to the stages of a person growing to maturity, and on into wisdom (See *Apocalypse Explained* 641:4). We could say that the universal church has a “change of heart” and a new way of thinking as it moves from

infancy to childhood, then to adolescence and adulthood, and now into the age of wisdom. The previous states have all ended and a new center of interest and thought has taken their place, and yet the valuable things from childhood or adolescence are still there, but receiving their light and life from the new center.

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that all people who acknowledge one God and keep His commandments can be saved (See *Divine Providence* 253). It also teaches, “No one can hereafter come into heaven unless he be in the doctrine of the New Church as to faith and life” (*Canons* 47:7; cf. *Brief Exposition* 92; *True Christian Religion* 758). Can we not conclude that all who are heaven-bound are moving toward being in the doctrine of the New Church in faith and life? On earth people receive as much of that light and life through the New Church in the spiritual world as their religion can support. Is this not what it means, that the Christian Church has been ended and a New Church has been established by the Lord, that there is a new center where the Word is rightly understood and from which the light of the Word shines anew?



“Father, all things of mine are yours, and all of yours are mine.” What does this mean, if not that the Father's Divine belongs to the Son's Human, and the Son's Human to the Father's Divine? Consequently in Christ God is man and man is God, and thus they make one as soul and body make one....It is plain from this that the Father's Divine is the Son's soul, and the Son's Human is the Father's body. (*True Christian Religion* 122:4,5)

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from the General Church Office of Education

2008-2009

The Office of Education offers a special program to help meet the spiritual needs of your pre-school age children. Starting in September and going through June, each month your family will receive a package of “treasures” based on a story from the Word, following spiritual concepts for three different age categories—
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If you have any questions,
please contact Janet Lockard at 267-502-4951
or janet.lockard@newchurch.org

Editorials

MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM

Incontrovertible is the sheer fact of two genders. There is however a fair amount of confusion nowadays over the genders. We witness traditional societies round the world with a largely subservient status for women, with male domination in some form or other, while other cultures have exalted and secure status for women. There is today also the ‘transgender’ phenomenon, with gender confusion and even alteration. We also face the agenda of ‘gay’ proponents and practitioners, who wish to accept alternate life-styles. Meanwhile, Christian mores and religion accept the one man to one-woman monogamy as the only ideal. Their voices are often muted. The New Church from the source of Heavenly Doctrine has always belonged in this latter camp. That is why “Male and Female Created He Them” are taken at face value. Monogamous marriage is “from creation.” In addition, the spiritual sense shows how the understanding and will may unite a couple interiorly and forever (*Arcana Coelestia* 54, *Conjugal Love* 156:2, *Last Judgment* 20).

Why is there so much confusion? It is because the spiritual levels of the human mind are not disposed in the same manner in male and female. These levels are spiritual, and therefore hard to detect or confess as relevant. The Writings reveal these distinctions, and from them “sides” have been taken on gender issues even in the New Church.

The levels or degrees of creation are essential and must not be ignored or treated as a mere exercise. The Writings warn that unless we keep these discrete degrees inserted throughout creation, “enormously false conclusions will arise” which some will then swear are “right and true” (cf. *Divine Love* and *Wisdom* 187). We have better get it right, then, because otherwise we will not see any distinctions between the two genders either.

Declaring male and female to be the “same” in every regard would be such an “enormously false conclusion.” No, there are indeed distinctions, but they have to be revealed for us to know about them. The physical distinctions stem from the spiritual ones.

The key to understanding discrete distinctions is that conjunctions take place between two levels of unequal height! The “truth of a higher degree” is always conjoined with the “good of a lower degree” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3952). That means the conjunction between one man and one woman involves two levels, which stand in inverse relationship to each other in the two genders. Well, the sequence begins in the Lord Himself: The “Divine marriage itself within the Lord is not a marriage between the Divine good and the Divine truth present in His Divine Human but between the Good of the Divine Human and the Divine itself.” This is explained: “The Good of the Lord's Divine Human is that which in the Word is called ‘the Son of God’ and the Divine itself that which is called ‘the Father’” (*ibid.*).

From the Lord, creation then produces a similar “chain” of higher joined to lower: “from eternity, the Lord who is Jehovah produced from Himself the sun of the spiritual world,” which is the first of creation, and from that, “created the universe, and all things in it” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 290, 152, *Canons* 7). As the creation process flowed outwards from the Creator, from the spiritual sun as the beginning of finition, God's substance or essence, which is Love (*True Christian Religion* 33) was the starting-point for all finite things in the created universe (*True Christian Religion* 29). Being so proximate in the process, the highest two levels were too active for even angelic reception. They are therefore like “belts, made radiant by a fiery source, which surround the Sun,” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7270:2) which is the Lord. This is the nature of the consecutive degrees of order

down to the heaven nearest to the Lord, buy a “continuous chain linked to the First Being” down to the “lowest degrees present with humans, [who are in] the last and lowest...natural order” (ibid.). As these degrees are discrete, i.e. non-continuous, they become relatively “unresponsive and frigid, general and obscure” (ibid.). All the way down the chain, truth of a higher degree is conjoined to the good of the next lower level. Divine Truth (Wisdom) is conjoined with the celestial good (*Arcana Coelestia* 3952). This marriage produces celestial truth, conjoined with spiritual good; its truth is conjoined with natural good. Natural truth is conjoined with rational good; its truth is joined to sensuous good. Sensuous truth is joined to corporeal good (although these degrees are quasi discrete). Seed is conjoined to soil. Soil is termed “female” in the Writings, and all “seeds” are masculine (*True Christian Religion* 585). That does not ignore stamen and pistils, which Swedenborg observed in his scientific works, but returns to the ancient model of the earth as mother, and all seed as male. This model for a truth of a higher degree joined with the good of a lower degree follows the “chain” of creation right into the male and female.

We get the idea. These degrees are present in both male and female. God created humans into two genders: “Male and Female Created He Them.” They are like the soil itself on earth, where all influx terminates (*Arcana Coelestia* 7270). The higher “truth” is conjoined with a lower “good” just as a seed is implanted into soil.

When we talk of degrees, we usually think of consecutive tiers as in a cake, or floors in a building. However, there is also a concentric way of looking at this. What is highest in consecutive order becomes the center in simultaneous order. It is like an extended telescope, which is then pushed together: the highest eyepiece then becomes the “center” of the collapsed cylinders. Seen from above, you see something like a dartboard, with a

bull's-eye, an inner ring, an outer ring, etc.

The Writings talk of male and female distinctions that way: not above or below, but two concentric circles. Nevertheless, they are the same as high and low. Therefore, the gender distinction: In the male, the deepest i.e. highest or inmost level of the soul is love, and its covering or veiling is truth. Conversely, the highest or inmost level of the soul of the female is truth, having in it a strong urge to be joined to a male source, and this truth is covered or veiled with love. The woman's truth is accepted "as is" and proceeds in terms of affection.

Since a male's inmost is good, which proceeds in terms of truth, this is called "the truth of good" or the "truth from good." "The truth of good or truth from good is masculine" (*Conjugal Love* 88). It is the same as "love and its clothing wisdom, or, love veiled over with wisdom" (*Conjugal Love* 32). We can picture love as colored "red" and wisdom as colored "blue." The male in that case is a red circle with a blue edge. The female is the converse: "the good of truth or good from that truth" (*Conjugal Love* 88) or "wisdom and its clothing the love stemming from it" (*Conjugal Love* 32). Her picture is thus a "blue" circle and a "red" edge! As said before, the two genders are converse of each other as to the discrete levels of their soul! From this, distinctions come all physical differences. Here we find a new reason for saying "Vive la Différence"!

There are no proofs of this, but plenty of illustrations. Everyone knows what attraction to the "feminine" involves. Males are attracted by the face, body, clothing, make-up, behavior, manners of women. Women look deeper to find men attractive, but among the more outward characteristics of "male"— are the bearded chin, the deeper voice, a more visible musculature. The Writings mention these differences between the genders (*Conjugal Love* 218) and "jobs" according to gender (*Conjugal Love* 90). However, we should admit right

here and now that a totally unforeseen factor, only hinted at during the Age of Reason when the Writings were published, was universal education and suffrage. Beginning with the works of Rousseau, contemporary to Swedenborg, Education was revolutionized, and today both genders receive equal educational opportunities and increasingly equal jobs as well. Everyone today knows that ‘coeds’ just as often as not outperform males in practically every scholastic subject! There are no differences, many say. Only in most sports are there still a gender distinction, i.e. males and females do not compete together or against each other. All of this has erased or at least put into question many of the social distinctions observed in the Writings. However, we should beware of erasing the inward distinctions of degrees of creation along with them.

Still active, for example, will always be the physically based attraction between the genders, namely “beauty, manners, and similarity of conditions” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4145). However, these do not account for the vast depth of love and “falling in love” which must be moved by far deeper forces, namely those of the soul stemming from creation itself. Such depth of love for the opposite sex is illustrated in the Writings by those who duel to the death for the love of a woman (*Conjugal Love* 333). One recent movie put it: “Is she worth dying for?”

The inverse relationship of the degrees of the soul is the secret powerhouse for the level of attraction between males and females. This level of friendship is totally blunted and parodied between friends of the same gender. Same gender friendships are not internal unions, but are like the sparring of athletes (*Conjugal Love* 55:6). Because of the inverse discrete levels of the soul, the male soul is “male” and all through his body and the soul of the female is “female” and all through her body, and they can never be changed into each other (*Conjugal Love* 32, 33, 46)! The love worth dying for, the deepest attraction, doctrinally

stated, therefore exists between “the male wisdom from the love of growing wise, and the [female] love of wisdom from that wisdom,” or between “truth from good (masculine), and the good of truth from that truth (feminine)” (*Conjugal Love* 89). This can exist only between two of the opposite sex.

There are many “keys” to keep such a conjugal or marriage union alive and looking to eternity. We only mention one: the woman or wife is able to draw man’s love of his own intelligence to her own heart, and love his intelligence for him! She does this in ways not even she knows (*Conjugal Love* 193), and not without some silence about the man’s deeper inclinations (*Conjugal Love* 167:2).

Can we see some of the distinction of gender in ourselves? Can we reflect that whatever is of “love” then comes out in a conscious response from the “other” end of equation: if you are male, your love only works by means of truth, and at least at times views truth abstractly from your driving love? If you are female, your truth is the starting point, a “fact” to go by, but it only manifests itself together with your personal affection or involvement. There can hardly be a “litmus” test for such interior distinctions, since the outcome is affection together truth in either case. Both men and women appear the same in their productivity. That is why the inner mental workings of the two genders have to be revealed.

Finally, we come to the conjunction between the male and the female. Because there is One only God of all creation (by however many Names He is known!) and because the entire Church both in heaven and indeed on all planets in the universe, appear as One Church before His eyes, to reflect One God and One church, heterosexual monogamy is the only legitimate conjunction from creation (*Conjugal Love* 70). The two genders were made so complimentary that only a denial of the history of the human race could construe any other than a heterosexual

union. Besides, the “end of creation is an angelic heaven from the human race,” which is why the highest level of human delight is attached to the act of procreation (cf. *Conjugal Love* 68, 143, 390, *Heaven and Hell* 402), thereby guaranteeing the continuation of the human race. The source of the delight is from the conjugal or marriage sphere, which extends from the Lord as Source throughout His entire creation, “in an instant” (*Conjugal Love* 92, 222, 389). The “conjugal-instantly” leaves the mere “speed-of-light” for dead! So holy is the monogamous act of procreation that the organs themselves are deemed holy, and should not be abused away from procreation; and all manner of alternatives are deemed as “foul” and “profane”, “prohibited degrees,” listed in the literal text of Leviticus 18 (*Arcana Coelestia* 6348, *Apocalypse Revealed* 784, 799, *Conjugal Love* 519). In that chapter, all sexual disorders are listed by verse: adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality. Rape is mentioned elsewhere, and sexual abuse or harassment is condemned as the intention behind these acts, via the 9th and 10th commandments against all coveting of evils. Such “foul” liaisons, which “profane marriage,” are prohibited degrees of sex. When the Old Testament text already proscribes anything that clearly, all the Writings need do is to add the Divine imprimatur to it.

The spiritual relationship between the husband and wife being on two levels, the reproductive organs also switch to the opposite of its gender. I.e. the woman’s womb refers to truth, or a rational reception of doctrine of the church (switching from woman’s usual representation of good). The male now represents love from which truth comes as seed (switching from the male’s usual representation of truth). Both male and female in the act of procreating, thus move to their interior nature (male love veiled by truth, female truth veiled by love). This is illustrated by the Lord and the Church represented by a

Bridegroom and Bride. As a couple approach the Lord, the Bridegroom represents the Lord, and the Bride the Church. But after they are married and have taken their vows, the Lord alone is the Bridegroom, and the Man and his Bride, i.e. husband and wife together, form the Church or Bride (*Conjugal Love* 125). The representation changes when the interior marriage takes place, effecting a reversal in roles between going up the aisle and going down it! This doctrine has been the source of the occasional New Church custom of the Bride and Groom exchanging places on the Chancel after they are declared “husband and wife.”

It is for the same reason that physical conjunction is prohibited during the betrothal state or anytime prior to the wedding. Remember that Mary was in danger of being stoned to death for being with child before she and Joseph had contact. Most world cultures hold the pre-marital state equally sacred and protected, an ideal in which the New Church joins forces together with a rational view as to ‘why.’ Namely, “It is apparent that a love for the opposite sex is not the origin of truly conjugal love, but that it is its first stage, being first in time, but not in end” (*Conjugal Love* 98). People who fall in love want to have sex before marriage, and perhaps the explanation above is not enough. The Lord forgives the “sins of youth” and everyone can always recover to an orderly path. However, the law is to harness the sexual desire by the Betrothal union, which is of “souls” before that of the body. The “end” of marriage is first; but the “first” manifestation of marriage is the physical attraction, tempting couples to yield. Nevertheless, marriage love does not grow from that attraction! A stronger marriage does not result from premarital unions. That is why the holy state of betrothal protects the couple by turning to the spiritual side of the marriage, letting doctrine sustain their souls as they seek a closer union. The ideal “time” for the wedding is then just right, whenever its condition is fulfilled.

“Male and female created He them” signals an order to creation. The miracle that the same Lord and God created two genders, lies in the degrees in the chain of creation running through both, but offset by one step. If you think of a staircase, good is a platform, and truth is the riser. The male begins with a platform and goes down the next riser; and female starts with a riser and comes down to a platform. The higher truth is always joined to a lower good, all the way down. Although the male and the female stand on the same ground, spiritually, couples access each other, higher to higher, lower-to-lower, higher to lower. All these relationships are described in the work *Conjugal Love*. These movements are only perceived as lateral movements, which can become a source of “colds” and some argument in marriage. However, knowing these doctrines allows both singles and couples to be aware of degrees of height in the human soul: the masculine need to see a point most high and lofty, and the feminine need to fly even higher with her affection for that same point. The truth both see is from the Lord, and joins them forever.

BE PERFECT

The Lord said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Since creation is finite, it cannot be perfect. Only the infinite Lord God is perfect. Why then does the Lord command us to “be perfect”? It is because it has a spiritual meaning. Literally, it is impossible, but the spiritual meaning is quite possible: “They are ‘perfect’ when the Lord is in them” (*Doctrine of Life* 84). Simple, we are perfect, when the Lord can be in us.

Even though we are still finite and imperfect, the Lord can be in us when we turn to Him, or when we have overcome evils on our own, and thanked the Lord for the victory. The good that we then do has the Lord in it, because genuine good does not seek any reward or praise. We do it unselfconsciously, in charity. We are “perfect,” but only because we then lose the power of reflecting on the good that we do. The more regenerated a person

is, even if it is only a momentary state of regeneration, the more he loses his power of reflection. Those who are being regenerated are not “capable of reflecting on the state of their regeneration” (*Arcana Coelestia* 933), thus on his or her own state of perfection.

However, this is the very condition when the Lord is present. We do not notice Him either, since doing good is unselfconscious.

Perfection is thus a spiritual state or quality of being, which comes at some moments in life. We may recognize that it has happened to us at some time, but we do not know exactly when! We just are grateful that good came out of our efforts.

Perfection also increases another way: with the sheer number of those involved: “Each heavenly society becomes more perfect as “new angel guests enter” (*Heaven and Hell* 71, *Last Judgment* 12). “Every perfection in heaven increases with the increase of number” (*Heaven and Hell* 418, *Arcana Coelestia* 3629).

So two modes of “perfection” may be ours, even though we remain finite humans: first, by states of regeneration so that the Lord can be present in our unselfconscious good; and secondly by many joining together to do good. Then you are “perfect.” The beauty of this is that we become perfect, to eternity.

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Thanks very much for the article, “When Prayers Go Unanswered” in the May New Church Life. Thanks, too, to the author, E. Kent Rogers.

This article is very inspiring and practical. And with all my being, I hope I shall apply to my life the beautiful and inspiring truths of this article.

As the author says, “In the final count, the only thing that matters is loving the people God brings into our lives.” (p. 198).

The ending is truly memorable. “We are just lucky to be given the chance to try to love. And that is the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. It is His chariot.”

Bill Hall

Queensland, Australia

Church News



Assembly in South Africa.

The Assembly took place near the gorgeous Drakensberg Mountains in Kwazulu Natal from 18-20 April, 2008. The theme was "Hamba Nenknosi" which means "Walking with the Lord." Bishop Peter Buss gave the keynote address. About 100 people attended from all over South Africa, and the mood was one of shared hope and community. After the great success of this one, we are hoping to have them more frequently in the future.



After our Sunday worship service with Holy Supper.



Great Britain Young People Gatherings.

There have always been camps, hikes or Summer Schools for the young or "young at heart" in Great Britain. In the top picture you will find many pillars of London or Colchester societies, or the Open Road as it was called, meaning all the rest, many now in the spiritual world. Included is a youthful face of Rev. Fred Elphick. The two other photos show New Church young people in high spirits from more recent venues. Who among the readers recall attending a Summer School in England? Or perhaps sending their teens to them? The British Academy Summer School (BASS) is now closing in on its 50th consecutive year! There are probably third generation attendees by this time, since the first one was held in

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