

New Church LIFE

A monthly magazine devoted to the teachings
revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg

In this issue:

For the Former Things have Passed Away
A Sermon by Rev. Göran Appelgren

The New Church
By Rev. David Roth

How We Look to Angels
By Rev. Donald L. Rose

Heaven or Hell? It's Our Choice
By Chandra Hall

June 2009

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Notes on This Issue

Our sermon this month details one text associated with the New Church, in celebration of June 19th and the Second Advent. Rev. Appelgren points out the contrasts of light and darkness in many of the verses dealing with the New Jerusalem. How do we let in the light, and avoid the darkness?

A short comparison of all the Churches, by Rev. David Roth, singles out the New Church from the historic background. There is one thing we can do to promote it.

Rev. Donald L. Rose has appeared in *New Church Life* so often, let's face it, he owns it! Here is a sermon reprinted as an article, asking us to think of how angels might look at us: imagine a mirror which showed us our 'states'. In heaven angels look the way they love. How do we improve our 'looks'?

The students at our excellent Bryn Athyn College, with half a dozen ministers teaching religion courses there, receive a greater concentration of religious instruction than anywhere in the world. Here is a student study by Chandra Hall, asking how do we know if we are "in heaven" or "in the other place"?

In *Hope*, Wystan Simons asks poignant questions on how any Society makes progress. Many of our readers in around the world will sympathize. We all need Wystan's HOPE to do this more and more. Previously printed in the *ECHO*, slightly altered here.

FOR THE FORMER THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY

BY REV. GÖRAN APPELGREN

“And there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Light and darkness are very present in our lives and in our thinking. If we have to choose one over the other it would be light. But to be honest there are times when we would rather be surrounded by darkness. Then no one would see the bad stuff we’ve got into.

The New Church, the heavenly bride, the New Jerusalem is what we will put our light on today. See there how often we use the metaphor of light. And the heavenly bride is so strongly connected with the idea of light. And light is connected with the Word, in particular with the Sacred Scripture.

In the first verses of John’s Gospel God is equated with the Word, and with a slight change of words we have:

“In [it] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4, 5). Another way to translate would be say: “Darkness did not overcome it”, the meaning being that the light was more powerful than darkness. The application of this is that where the Word is, there we have light and also life. And darkness is gone, not gone far away but just gone.

Celebrating the New Church is celebrating the Word and the light in and from the Word. In a way we could say that it is the Word that we celebrate. We celebrate that the Word once again shines on us: “In [it] was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

When we read the Book of Revelation, especially the last

two or three chapters, we notice that there is much talk about light and life, but also, indirectly, about darkness and death. Darkness and death lurk in the background, obviously as something that has gone by and has been defeated. Still it is there, present and noticeable.

If any of you have been out on the roads and been close to being struck by a reckless driver, then you know what it means to leave behind something that could have led to your physical death. The incident has passed you by but is still present in your mind, reminding you of the horror of death. Just the same way, in the Book of Revelation the darkness is gone, not gone far away but just gone. That is why when we hear the most encouraging and uplifting words about the New Jerusalem, we also hear about darkness somewhere in the background: “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, adulterers, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:6-8).

Again, when John is told about this wonderful city by an angel, we are indirectly reminded of the gruesome things that had happened up to this point: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife’” (Revelation 21:9).

So, when the text deals with the most sublime we are given images of the dark things that lurk in the background. Is it meant to keep us on our toes? Not to feel too comfortable on the personal level? Regeneration is impossible without being attacked by the dark forces, impossible without examining ourselves and to reject our evils as sins against God.

Reflecting on these images of the beauty of the Holy city and the dark background you may get the impression that when

the light is at its peak, the background is at its darkest. When our Lord Jesus Christ in His First Coming defeated death by His own power and established His Divine presence on earth, then darkness fell on the earth at midday: “Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (Mark 15:33). The “sixth hour” was the way they counted the hours up to midday. It was dark from noon to three.

Read chapter 11 in Revelation and the explanation in the *Apocalypse Revealed* 499-514, and you will see a similar pattern at the Lord’s Second Coming. The two witnesses, the olive trees and the lamp stands, were killed by those who hated the light and felt their positions threatened. But they could not be killed, just as the Lord Himself in His Divine Human could not be killed. Not even the dragon in chapter 12 could kill the woman arrayed with the sun and about to give birth to a child, just as the pagan world could not stop the Gospel from being preached and spread around the world after the Lord’s First Coming.

That dark background has to do with evil forces that look for ways of extinguishing the light. But they cannot, ever, even if they seem to succeed for a short while, that is from midday on Good Friday to the morning of Easter day, or for three and a half days in Revelation (Revelation 11:11). But what is three days in comparison with eternity! That is the good news about the New Church that we celebrate on New Church day. “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”(John 1:5).

All these things talk about the Word, its light, or about light in and through the Word. In the Word there is light and life. The evil forces strive to extinguish the light and destroy life. Those forces are death and are called “death” in the Word. As embodied forces we call them evil spirits, satans and devils. For e.g. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does

not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19-20).

In Revelation chapter 20 they are called “the dead, small and great”. They are the ones that had destroyed the Word and thus taken it away from honest people, and now they stood in front of the throne, in front of the Lord who had Himself defeated death: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God...And the dead were judged according to their works” (Revelation 20:11-12).

This is a stark picture of the fact that evil has no power! Darkness can create confusion for a while, but in the end it is always light that wins. It is all about the Word, the Word of God, in a way about God Himself, God who is the Word.

The Word had been destroyed. The use and interpretation of the Word had degenerated to such a degree that it could not function any more the way it was meant to help people gain spiritual guidance and directions for how to reach heaven. Those who are called “death”, the dragon and Babylon, had deceived people in the Christian world and made the Word almost completely inaccessible. But light always wins. The Word shines again. That we celebrate: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them...and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

Darkness lurks in the background, but the Divine always wins. That is the hope for every person and for mankind as a

whole. “And there shall be no more death...for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).

And this is all about the Word. The Word gives light and life. New Church day is about this. The Lord’s Second Coming is about this. It is the Word that gives us light and life. “In [It] was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

If we see this in a slightly different way, John is saying that the Word shines. Therefore it is not surprising that the New Jerusalem is described by words having to do with light and luster. The holy city New Jerusalem had “the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11).

The city is built with stones that radiate by themselves in beautiful colors. A grey little stone can also be pretty, but a precious stone is simply much more beautiful. It radiates with a light that seems to come from within the stone itself.

That is what the Word is like in Itself. The Word, the Sacred Scripture, that “death” had destroyed and made dark, is in Itself something incredibly beautiful that radiates by itself. The Lord is the Word, and the Word is the Lord. That is why the Word shines from within. There is a source of life inside the precious stone, “like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11).

That source of light is the Lord Himself. “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). That is the same light as the light Moses and the 70 elders saw up on the mountain in a vision just after the 10 commandments had been delivered: “And they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (Exodus 24:10).

Moses who was the one who had received the Word of God was allowed to see and understand that the whole heaven is contained within the Word. The whole of heaven is present in the Word. And all of the Lord is present in the Word, in its literal sense and nowhere else (cf. *Sacred Scripture* 53, 69).

That is why the Word shines in and through the letter. In the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Sacred Scripture Swedenborg bore witness to this: “It has been granted me to know from much experience that man has communication with heaven by means of the Word. When I was reading through the Word from the first chapter of Isaiah to the last of Malachi, and the Psalms of David, it was granted me to perceive clearly that every verse communicated with some society in heaven, and that in this way the entire Word communicated with the whole of heaven” (*Sacred Scripture* 113).

That is how it is, but the association with heaven and the reception of the light in heaven, in the Word, does not come automatically like when you turn on a switch when you enter the room. The Lord leaves people in spiritual freedom: “Man’s spirit or mind is in full liberty to think, will, believe and love” (*Divine Providence* 129:1). Therefore there has to be a strong wish with man to discover the light and to be touched by heaven.

Death by contrast is darkness, and death does not want us to see the light switch, actually does not want us to know that there is a light that could be switched on. “Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19-20). Those who hate the light do not want others to find it either. Those powers are still at work in the background, much weaker but still there. But we know that there are thousands, yes, millions of people who want to find the light. We celebrate that this is now possible.

“I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:6-7). “He who overcomes” is a person who from goodness of heart searches for the light. For such a person the Word shines from within. It even shines the way it shines in heaven. Heaven comes close to that person. That is why the Lord can say: “And I will

be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

Dark forces destroyed the understanding of the Word and made it difficult for people to see the light within it. That is why the Lord has come again to take away the darkness, the veil. The Word can shine again. We celebrate that.

When a person with the help of the *Heavenly Doctrine* reads the Word with a new understanding, then the precious stones of the walls and foundations of the New Jerusalem shine brightly. A door is opened within that person. That person then stands in the same light as the light the angels are in: “The angels...derive all their wisdom from the Word, for the light in which they are varies with their understanding of the Word, light with them being Divine Wisdom, which is the light of heaven” (*Sacred Scripture* 73).

That is where we, human beings, are going. That is where the Lord wants us to go, because where there is light there we also find life. “In [it] was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). The Word is meant to be understood, to be read and to be used. There is a mighty power within the Word that no evil force can bend.

Death stood in shame and judgment in front of the throne because it had rejected the Lord and the Word (cf. Revelation 20:11). The Lord has all power in heaven and on the earth (cf. Matthew 28:18). That power acts through and by means of the Word (cf. *Sacred Scripture* 49, 50). We might understand some of what that power is when we read about one of Swedenborg’s experiences in heaven: “In the sacred repository, where the copy of the Word is kept, the light is flaming and bright, surpassing every degree of light in heaven outside. The cause is the same as that stated above, that the Lord is in the Word” (*Sacred Scripture* 73).

Imagine that we could see that light with our physical eyes, when we look at our own copy of the Word! But now that light, the interiors of the Word, is protected. It shines although we

cannot see it. But now we at least know it shines. And sometimes we can have the experience when we read the Word with delight and in prayer to the Lord to enlighten us.

The foundations and walls of the city New Jerusalem signify the Word in its ultimate sense (cf. *Sacred Scripture* 36). They are made of different precious stones and shine from within. That light has come to us as explanations of Divine truths

Swedenborg himself also testifies that the Sacred Scripture was the entrance to the revelation he received from the Lord to give to us, so that we can better understand the Word. He has walked into the light which it is meant that mankind will enter into and get access to: “From the first day of that call I have not received anything whatever pertaining to the doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I have read the Word” (*True Christian Religion* 779; cf. *Divine Providence* 135).

To find the light switch is to understand that there is in the Word a tremendous power to change our lives, to regenerate us and make us angels. The *Heavenly Doctrine* makes it possible to find the light switch and to turn it on and to understand: “Within the Word which is in the world lies all angelic wisdom, and this is ineffable, for the Word is its containant. After death a man who is being made an angel by the Lord by means of the Word comes into that wisdom” (*Sacred Scripture* 75).

Dark forces had destroyed the understanding of the Word. The crucifixion of the Lord is a symbolic picture of destroying the understanding of the Word. The Lord is the Word. The Lord was crucified. The Word was destroyed. The Lord is risen from the dead and is present in His Divine Human. The Word is risen, resurrected and shines from within like the precious stones in the walls of the New Jerusalem. There are different stones just like people are different and think in different ways. The Word gives enlightenment to each one according to the need. The important thing is that the Word does shine again.

We celebrate that the Lord has defeated “the dead, small and great,” and given us back the Word. “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

There is darkness in the background. The dragon and Babylon are still at work, both in the world and in a representative sense within each one of us, but light and life has come back to us: “In [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:4,5).

The Lord has given us back the Word that shines. “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). *Amen*

Lessons: Revelation 20:11-15, 21:1-11; *Sacred Scripture 73, 75, True Christian Religion 779.*

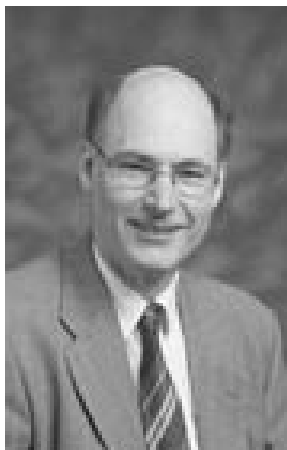
Sacred Scripture 73. The angels themselves confess that they derive all their wisdom from the Word, for the light in which they are varies with their understanding of the Word, light with them being Divine Wisdom, which is the light of heaven. In the sacred repository, where the copy of the Word is kept, the light is flaming and bright, surpassing every degree of light in heaven outside. The cause is the same as that stated above, that the Lord is in the Word.

Sacred Scripture 75. From this we may conclude what wisdom lies concealed in the Word which is in the world; for within it lies all angelic wisdom, and this is ineffable, for the Word is its containant. Into this wisdom after death the man comes whom the Lord makes an angel through the Word.

True Christian Religion 779. VIII. THIS SECOND COMING OF THE LORD IS EFFECTED BY MEANS OF A

MAN TO WHOM THE LORD HAS MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN PERSON, AND WHOM HE HAS FILLED WITH HIS SPIRIT, THAT HE MAY TEACH THE DOCTRINES OF THE NEW CHURCH FROM THE LORD BY MEANS OF THE WORD.

Since the Lord cannot manifest Himself in Person, as shown just above, and nevertheless has foretold that He was to come and establish a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who is able not only to receive these doctrines in his understanding but also to publish them by the press. That the Lord manifested Himself before me, His servant, and sent me to this office, that He afterward opened the eyes of my spirit and thus introduced me into the spiritual world and granted me to see the heavens and the hells, and to talk with angels and spirits, and this now continuously for several years, I affirm in truth; as also that from the first day of that call I have not received anything whatever pertaining to the doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I have read the Word.



The Rev. Göran R. Appelgren was inaugurated into the priesthood in 1992, and ordained as Pastor in 1994. He began by serving as the Resident Minister for the Surrey Circle in southern England, from there also visiting Copenhagen. From 1994 he has been the Pastor of the Stockholm Society, Sweden, adding in 2006 the role of Regional Pastor for Europe, Georgia and the Ukraine. Göran knows Russian and so is helpful in the new developments there. Göran lives with his wife Josephine (Turner) and family in Stockholm, Sweden.

THE NEW CHURCH

BY REV. DAVID ROTH

What role does the New Church play in the world's religions? What is the significance of the New Church? I think understanding these questions is the first thing that will help make sense of the teachings of the New Church. Understanding the context of the giving of these teachings to the human race gives clarity to them.

Here is how I understand things. First of all, the Church on earth is the place where the Lord connects with the human race collectively—He also connects with each person individually. It is in the Word, sometimes called the Bible, that the Lord tells the story of the history of the Church on earth. Life on this planet and human freedom as a whole depends on this connection with the Lord called “the Church”. Throughout the history of the human race on this planet there have been five Churches that have played the primary role of maintaining this connection. The Church that maintains this connection is strong or weak depending on how well its members know the Lord, read and understand correctly His Word, and live by the principles of the Church as revealed by the Lord. There are of course many varied religions throughout the world. They are all part of the body that is the Church, but the specific connection or link depends on the specific Church set up by the Lord to maintain this connection. As I said above, there have been five of these specific Churches throughout the history of the human race—each one of them different in nature.

The story of the first Church is told metaphorically in first few chapters of the book of Genesis. The creation story and the set up of the Garden of Eden tells of the beginning of this Church and its pristine nature. This Church had a perception which enabled them to see in everything of nature truths about God and

spiritual things—this is called the science of correspondences. In the course of time this Church fell. Its fall is first described in metaphors in the story of the eating fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, and its end is pictured in the flood story. This Church was called the Most Ancient Church. The story of the second Church called the Ancient Church is described, again in metaphors, by the story of Noah and his family. This pictures the beginning of this Church. Its end or fall is pictured in the story of the tower of Babel. This Church had knowledge of the science of correspondences that the Most Ancient Church had but it wasn't something they perceived, it was something they had to learn and that they wrote down and taught one another. These teachings comprise what is called the Ancient Word. Some of these stories are referred to in the Old Testament; for example the Book of Jasher is mentioned in Joshua 10:12, 13. For the most part this book, however, is lost.

The story of the third Church, called the Hebrew or Israelitish Church, is told in the Old Testament beginning with the call of Abram (later to be called Abraham) in Genesis 11 and carries on throughout the rest of the Old Testament, ending with the displacement of the Hebrew people and the Babylonian captivity. This Church was a representative of a Church. What this means is that all of the external rituals and laws such as sacrifices, incense offerings, circumcision, cleanings, etc. picture symbolically what a spiritual person does in obedience and love to the Lord. For example, to offer burnt incense pictures prayer to God. The people of this Church didn't know about the internal meaning in what they did. They only did it in obedience to their God. So it was an external Church without the corresponding internal life. It was able to play the part of the specific Church of the Lord by representation.

The story of the fourth Church, called the Christian Church, is told in New Testament. The story is told in the Gospels and the

fall of this Church is described, again symbolically, in the first 20 chapters of the book of Revelation. This Church was able to guide people into a visible picture of a Human God—the Lord Jesus Christ. It also abolished all of the external rituals of the law (not the Ten Commandments) and restored lost teachings of love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. The stories left in the New Testament still were written symbolically or, as Jesus said, in parables.

In time this Church fell because people destroyed the truths about the Lord and about charity and faith. So the Lord had to raise up a new Church. The story of the fifth Church, called The New Church (for lack of an official name at this point—some call it the Church of the New Jerusalem, or New Christian Church) is told mainly in the last two chapters of Revelation. The qualities of the Church are described in imagery or correspondence in the details of the Holy City New Jerusalem. The truths given in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church as revealed by means of Emanuel Swedenborg, explain all this imagery and internal meaning, as well as the Oneness of God, and the unity of charity and faith in life. Just as the Hebrew or Jewish Church was left with a set of books to follow which we now call the Old Testament, so was the Christian Church left with a set of books we now call the New Testament, and now has the New Church been left with a set of books called the Heavenly Doctrines or Writings for the New Church.

So pick up one of the books that the Lord has given and dive into an amazing world of understanding, hope, and love.

HOW WE LOOK TO ANGELS

BY REV. DONALD L. ROSE

In the book of Revelation it is written, “Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). In a red-letter Bible this verse stands out because it is the only one in the chapter that is in red.

In our lesson we read the words, “Do not provoke him” (Exodus 23:20). This is said about the angel sent before the Children of Israel. They guarded their behavior because of the presence of an angel, and they knew that if they obeyed, the angel would keep them and bring them safely to their destination. The angel, then, knew the way in which they walked, and in some manner saw them.

There is a teaching in *Heaven and Hell* about how we look to angels. It is number 131. It says that when we are in good we are regarded by angels as beautiful, and when evil we appear ugly. The chapter is the chapter on light in heaven. We are told that when that light shines on you, you appear as you really are.

Do you know what you look like? You may have a mirror in the bathroom and one in the hall and one in the living room. We are accustomed to seeing our face in a mirror. But do we feel we know what we look like? We might look with real curiosity at a photograph in which we appear. It is sometimes surprising to see a film or a videotape in which we participate. “Do I look like that?” We might ask someone else to tell us. “Do I move and act like that?”

It is particularly interesting to see something we are familiar with from an entirely different angle. If there is an aerial photograph of our neighborhood, we might search in it for our house or office, and perhaps look with fascination at the route

we regularly walk. That reference to the path we walk is of interest, because when we are viewed in the light of heaven, it is as if we are taking certain paths or ways (see *Heaven and Hell* 534). Sometimes, although we are not moving physically, we walk in the valley of the shadow, and sometimes although there may be confusion and turmoil around us, we walk beside the still waters.

Take some familiar thing and look at it through a microscope. It is surprising. The Writings invite us to look at an object such as a leaf or a flower or a bee and to examine it with some wisdom. Look at it first naturally, afterwards rationally, and at length spiritually. Use a microscope and you will see “wonderful things, while the interiors that you do not see are still more wonderful” (*Divine Providence* 3).

There is a statement in the *Arcana Coelestia* which reads as follows: “If a person should see the quality of a single thing as it appears before the angels, he would be amazed, and would confess that he would never have believed it, and that in comparison he had known scarcely anything” (# 4930). The passage says that the quality contains many, many things “which cannot be seen in the light of the world, but only in the light of heaven, thus before angels.” Look at the world or contemplate the universe and everything in it. What is it? Is it not a theater representing the Lord’s kingdom? (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3000, 3483)

But the Writings emphasize something else much more than material objects. They emphasize the mental world of affections and ideas. We think the affections we experience and the ideas in our minds are simple. But they are wonderfully complex. Once in the spiritual world some doubted the wonders within a single idea, and the idea was then opened up for them so far that they seemed to see “a universe leading to the Lord” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4946).

Each idea an individual has is in a way a picture of that individual. We read, “The quality of a spirit can be known in the other life from one single idea of his thought. Indeed angels have from the Lord the power of knowing at once when they but look upon anyone, what his character is ... It is therefore evident that every single idea and every single affection of a person ... is an image of him and a likeness of him” (*Arcana Coelestia* 803).

What a different feeling we get about our own thoughts and about reading the Word when we have some awareness of how wondrous are the contents of our minds. We are told that angels are in particular delight when children read the Word. Indeed the Word, not on a book shelf but in a human mind, is a resting place for angelic wisdom.

In the sight of the angels, how are we dressed? If someone is going to look at us, we want to be becomingly dressed, and when our minds are engaged with truths from the Word we are so dressed. This brings us to the verse in Revelation 16. It is said that someone is blessed who is awake and keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame. Who sees his shame? It is the angels. We will mention this verse again. Let it be noted that the garments mean truths, and that to live without truths is to walk naked. As it is said in *Apocalypse Revealed*: “A person may indeed live like a Christian without truths, but this before men, but not before angels” (#706).

Is there such a thing as a beautiful deed? Yes, there is, and the real beauty is in the intention and love behind the deed. There is a saying in the Doctrine of Charity that everything a person does is an image of that person. “Before the angels he himself appears in his image ... which I have seen a thousand times” (*Charity* 6).

As we make our choices from day to day, how much difference it can make to realize how unpleasant in the sight of heaven are some of the things in which we might be inclined to

indulge. What a difference when we realize how beautiful to behold is life in which we do not harm others but wish them well.

Paint a picture, if you can, of some of the feelings that can motivate us, such as revenge or pride. What do they look like?

Listen to this from the *Arcana Coelestia*: “In order to obtain a clear idea of the nature of the life of the love of self and of the world (or what is the same, of a life of pride, avarice, envy, hatred, revenge, un-mercifulness, adultery), let any person of talent make for himself an impersonation of it ...and he will then see, in proportion to the energy of his description or picture, how horrible these evils are, and that they are devilish forms, in which there is nothing human. Forms such as these all those become after death who perceive the delight of their life in such evils....On the other hand, let the same person delineate for himself an impersonation of love and charity, or let him express it before his eyes under some form, and then in proportion to his power of description or portrayal he will see that the form is angelic, full of bliss and beauty, and pervaded within with what is heavenly and Divine” (#2363).

People who make it part of their lives to shun evils as sins against God “appear in heaven before the angels as beautiful human beings, and partners and companions of the angels” (*Divine Providence* 121).

The angels see things so differently. They see in the clearest light. Take all the doubts that can trouble you. Take all the arguments against the beautiful truth about the Lord’s loving Providence. Write a whole book about them and put that book in the hand of any angel, “...and I know,” says the seer, “that the angel will write underneath these few words, They are all appearances and fallacies” (*Divine Providence* 213). Our lesson this morning from the Sermon on the Mount was about worries. What shall we eat or what shall we drink? We do find ourselves

sometimes filled with worries, and perhaps we feel that we could fill a book with them. But if an angel looked upon that book, would he not see that those worries are based on the appearances of self-life and the fallacies that cloud our trust in the Lord's Providence?

Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments. The Writings seem to say that this is a wake-up call to people who are associated with the New Church. "Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Here is what the Writings say on this:

"These things are said for those who will be of the Lord's New Church, that they may learn truths and remain in them, for without truths their connate evils, which are infernal loves, cannot be removed. A man may indeed live like a Christian without truths, but this only before people, not before angels" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 706).

Do you know something about the New Church? Then this is a message to you. Learn truths. Remain in them. Yes, remain in them. Do not lose those beautiful garments. What a shame that would be. Stay awake. Think of things the way they really are. Think of your life in this world and in the world to come as it really is. You can call this a warning, but remember that it is a happy warning. Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments.

The case is the same at this day, for it has now pleased the Lord to reveal various arcana of heaven - especially the internal or spiritual sense of the Word - which have been till now entirely unknown, and He has also taught the genuine truths of doctrine. This revelation is meant by the "Coming of the Lord" in Matthew (xxiv. 3, 30, 37) *Apocalypse Explained* 641[3]

HEAVEN OR HELL? IT'S OUR CHOICE

BY CHANDRA HALL¹

Since hellfire means all the craving to do evil that flows from love for oneself, that same fire also means the kind of torment that occurs in the hells. This is because the impulses that arise from that love are urges to wound people who do not offer respect and deference and reverence. To the extent that rage takes charge, and the hatred and vengefulness that come from rage, people are driven to attack others viciously. When this impulse is inherent in everyone in a community where there are no external restraints, no fears of the law or of loss of reputation or position or profit of life, everyone attacks everyone else out of sheer malice. The strong conquer and subject the rest to their tyranny to the point that they are of equal intensity. This is because sadism is inherent in hostility, envy, hatred, and vengefulness, which as already noted are the evils of a love of cruelty (*Heaven and Hell* 573).

It is fascinating to me that, whether on earth or in the afterlife, each of us constantly chooses whether we want to be in heaven or hell. When we act with malicious intent or let our negative emotions completely consume us, we are reveling in that feeling of “hell.” Although doing so undoubtedly brings us misfortune and misery in the long run, there is without a doubt a certain sinful “pleasure” in acting devilish. If there were not, people would not act that way. The truth is, whenever we are being selfish and mean, or expressing our anger in a destructive way, we are doing so to satisfy a need.

This need is briefly and superficially satisfied, but then it inevitably rises again. When we act only in a state of negative “reaction” to the things around us, or only in a way that will serve ourselves, there is no permanent state of peace, happiness,

¹ Assignment for Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman's College course, Religion 102

and contentment. Although we may be able to get a “fix” by giving in to evil temptation, it is only a fix, and eventually we become addicted to the negative. In this way, we have essentially dragged ourselves into hell.

When I think of the fact that doing or saying evil things can sometimes be satisfying, I think of when I get into an argument with my parents. It is often said that “we always hurt the ones we love.” This is because we feel so comfortable with them. These are the times when we feel like we can let our guard down and be the “worst version” of ourselves; we feel safe doing this because we know deep down that these people will not stop loving us.

It is in this comfortable state that it is easy to get irked by the people we know and who know us so well. When my parents “push my buttons,” so to speak, my first instinct is to snap back at them in a disrespectful manner. When I do this, I am initially satisfied, and if they yell back at me, there is all the more of a devilish “rush” to continue the fight and take out all of my negative feelings on them. I know that we will inevitably apologize to each other, and that I will feel bad later for being mean, but it is still tempting to let the instincts of evil take over and not think about the repercussions of what I say.

When I reflect on experiences like this, I can fully understand the teaching that we go to either heaven or hell because we choose to; we think we will be the happiest in whichever one we choose. Throughout our lives, just as we choose whom we wish to associate with, we also choose what negative feelings we wish to enjoy. The extent to which we enjoy these “evil delights” (*Heaven and Hell* 570) plays a big part in determining whether we end up in heaven or hell.

I remember watching an old episode of *The Twilight Zone* with my dad once. It was about a man who lived a life in pursuit of material pleasures. He was extremely selfish and did not care

whether he committed petty crimes or hurt others in order to get what he wanted: fancy possessions, lots of money, and beautiful women. Eventually, his questionable behavior caught up with him, and the police came after him for his illegal activities. While trying to escape, he fell off the side of a mountain and died.

But that is not the end of the story. As the episode continues, we see him for a while in what looks like heaven for him. It's a place filled with unlimited laziness, prostitution, con games, and other material indulgences. At first he is thrilled and considers himself lucky to have gotten into "heaven." He is surrounded by people like himself, who are only out for themselves. Everything is shallow and full of glitz, but has no substance. After a while of indulging his senses completely—like he never fully could on earth—he realizes that he is not happy. Even though he is getting everything he ever wanted, he feels empty and deeply unsatisfied. Eventually he is so frustrated with the life of "heaven" that we hear him shout, "Get me out of here! Take me to the *other* place!"

It is at this point that the inevitable twist of the episode is revealed. A deep, disembodied voice says: "*This is the other place!*"

In *Heaven and Hell* we learn that heaven and hell are internal states that we freely choose, depending on what we really love. Even though this man shouts, "Get me out of here," it is quite clear that he would be far less happy in "the other place." People who are deeply selfish and consumed with material pleasures may long for a "better place," and they could go there too, if this were truly their heart's desire. But we know, full well, how often we tend to say, "I'm tired of being mean and selfish," only to revert to our mean and selfish feelings at the next opportunity. This is the only thing that makes hell "permanent" for us.

In conclusion, the lesson of “going to” or experiencing heaven and hell is a very important one. It reminds us to think more deeply about our behavior, about what we value, about what truly will make us happy. I try to remember this when I am tempted to act with disrespect just because it will be briefly pleasurable. If the man from the *Twilight Zone* episode considered what would really satisfy him, he might not have devoted his whole life to seeking out the superficial, shallow pleasures of the senses. But, in the end, the decision would be his alone. It is the same for us. We only get what we give ourselves in this world.

We read in *Heaven and Hell*: “The Lord grants this freedom to every individual, and it is never taken away. By virtue of its source it in fact belongs to the Lord and not to us because it comes from the Lord; yet still it is given us along with our life as though it were ours” (#597). This illustrates the essential point of our freedom: we are able to choose our own heaven or our own hell because the Lord knows that heavenly love cannot be forced. We reap what we sow, whether it be heavenly or hellish. When we wake up and realize that we truly do want the goodness of heaven, and that the pleasures of hell are all just an illusion, we have made, by our own volition and in our own sweet freedom, the ultimate choice.

To receive the life of heaven a man must needs live in the world and engage in the duties and employments there, and by means of a moral and civil life receive the spiritual life. In no other way can the spiritual life be formed with man, or his spirit prepared for heaven.

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Editorials

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THE NEW CHURCH?

The Lord continually invites every person to come to Him, for He says “He who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6.35, 37) “Jesus stood and cried, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” (John 7.37) The meaning is: “Who does not know that the *invitation or call is universal*, and also the grace of reception? Man obtains life by going to the Lord because the Lord is Life itself” (*True Christian Religion* 358 added emphasis).

All people are invited to the New Church. The reason all are invited, is because “the Word is revealed interiorly...as to the spiritual sense, before the Church has been fully devastated, because then the New Church will be established into which *those who are of the former church are invited*” (*Apocalypse Explained* 948.2 added emphasis). The interior revelation lifts up the meaning beyond human prejudices, beyond the apparent contradictions of the literal text.

All are invited to the New Church. One of the first followers of the Writings, Count von Höpken, one of Sweden’s Prime Ministers, stated his conviction that “no religion could be better than the one developed by Swedenborg from the Sacred Scriptures” (Tafel ii p. 416 Doc. 252). This follows from the Lord’s invitation, as now issuing from the pages of the *Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem*. For in these Writings, “the Word has been opened interiorly at this day, and still more interior Divine truths have been revealed there from for the use of the New Church, that will be called the New Jerusalem” (*Apocalypse Explained* 948:2.)

The New Jerusalem has twelve gates, three each facing

east, north, south and west. These gates “signify all knowledge of truth and good through which man is introduced into the Church....The wall in which are the gates means the Word” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 899).

Who will come? All those “who are in the love or in the affection of good more or less, ...or in wisdom or the affection of truth, more or less” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 901). The Lord gives all people their ability to love and understand Him, some more, some less. But regardless of how much it is seen, the truth remains the same, and becomes a “pearl of great price.” From seeing the truth, people love the Lord *from* the Lord’s gift so to love Him! So also He gives them their ability to understand Him: “Those who are in the good of love, the Lord gives the faculty of understanding and knowing the quality of the Lord’s New Church as to doctrine and its introductory truths” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 904).

What introductory truths? Such truths are countless, any point of interest which starts with a simple statement which introduces to a deeper view of it. “God is Love and Wisdom” is one such truth. “The Word of Scripture has an internal meaning, as a soul contained in the body” is another. “Eternal life begins with anyone’s birth, and continues forever after death” is another. You can think up several more, and put them your own way. All such truths stem from the Lord. Such truths are *genuine* when there is innocence attached to them, i.e. when the person who believes in a truth, loves it to be so, and thus can by its very means be led more closely to the Lord. And the greatest of all truths is: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

However, no one can come close to the Lord if he suddenly turns and strikes his neighbor! The saying goes, “You cannot love God and hate your neighbor!” People end up hating each other because they have different opinions! *Opinions* can

become *absolute truth* in one's own eyes, and neighbors end up arguing and fighting over view-points. Wars begin over no less. But if there is charity present, *opinions* are not *absolute truths*, but the reverse: *truths* are treated as *opinions*, various outlooks or view-points, because there is *innocence* present. This was the situation in the Ancient church right after the flood: "they recognized as members of the church all those whose lives showed the good of charity and called them brothers, however much otherwise they differed in truths, what are to-day called matters of faith. One taught another about truths, and this was one of their charitable deeds. Also they did not take it amiss, if one failed to accept another's point of view, knowing that each person accepts truth only to the extent that he is in a state of good" (*Heavenly Doctrine* 9).

"One taught another truths, knowing that each person accepts truth only to the extent that he is in good." It is worth pondering on this statement. Everyone can become a "source" of instruction, as long as you only count the truth you state as points of view! You may know that it is truth itself. Still, others may accept it differently. It is put this way in *Divine Providence*: "A truth from whatever mouth it may be spoken, enters into another's hearing and is received by the mind according to the state and quality of the mind" (#14).

Each person's degree of goodness determines the amount of truth they can accept. Less goodness accepts less depth of truth. And so there are twelve gates into the New Jerusalem to mean "*all*" knowledge of truth and good which introduce. *Opinions*, points of view, then become the means to lead to the Lord. But they do not lead to the Lord if the *neighbor's opinions* are not tolerated also. So the second great truth: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All who qualify enter through the wide open pearly gates of the New Jerusalem.

But once they have entered, their innocence turns all to look

to the same source, the Writings. For all who enter do accept the Divine authority of the Writings. They are the Word of Heavenly Doctrine, the same Word angels have in heaven, but not in angelic language which is ineffable to us, but rationally stated to our understanding upon the earth. The ideas of angels, “full of secrets” on all doctrinal topics, “could nevertheless still be described in words of natural language, even to rational comprehension. I was also told that there are not any Divine mysteries that cannot be perceived and expressed naturally also, even though more generally and less perfectly” (*De Verbo* 3:4). Only the sound of angelic and human languages differs, not the contents (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 8862, *True Christian Religion* 280). The Writings are in fact meant by the Holy City: “John was carried away into the third heaven, and his sight there opened, before whom was made manifest the Lord’s New Church as to doctrine in the form of a city” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 896, cf. 194, *Apocalypse Explained* 223, 880). The Writings, the Word of Heavenly Doctrine which constitutes the Second Coming, are thus the mutually accepted focal point for all who enter the New Church on earth, from any “point of view” or point of the compass, which innocence allows.

NO INTERCESSION BY PRAYER

This topic can also be stated as a truth replacing the falsity of previous churches, whereby the New Church is established. It is false to think that prayer can have any power of intercession for ourselves, as if the Lord will remove our temptations, or act upon the mere utterance of a prayer. Let us begin with the whole passage, and then comment afterwards.

Arcana Coelestia 8179 “‘Why do you cry to Me?’ means that there is no need of intercession. This is clear from the

meaning of 'crying to Jehovah' as interceding, that is, pleading for them to be delivered from temptation, and therefore the question 'Why do you cry to Me?' means, Why do you intercede when there is no need of intercession? And as there is no need of it the words 'Speak to the children of Israel, and let them travel on' immediately follow, meaning that the people will be given help, but that temptation will still go on until their preparation has been accomplished.

[2] With regard to there being no need of intercession, the situation is that when people are in the throes of temptation they usually stay their hands and resort solely to prayers, which they then pour forth feverishly, unaware that such prayers achieve nothing, but that they should battle against the falsities and evils which the hells introduce. The truths of faith are the means for fighting that battle, and they are of help because they strengthen the forms of good and the truths opposed to falsities and evils. In the conflicts brought by temptations furthermore a person should fight as if he did so in his own strength, yet he should acknowledge and believe that he does so in the Lord's strength...If a person does not fight as if in his own strength he does not make his own the goodness and truth which flow in from the Lord by way of heaven. But when a person does fight as if in his own strength and yet believes that he does so in the Lord's, he does make those things his own. This gives him a new proprium or selfhood, called a heavenly proprium, which is a new will.

[3] Moreover people in the throes of temptation who take no action other than to send up prayers do not realize that if their temptation were terminated before running its full course their preparation for heaven would not be accomplished, and so they could not be saved. For this reason also little heed is paid to the prayers of those in the throes of temptation; for the Lord desires the end in view, which is the person's salvation. The Lord knows that end, but the person does not, and the Lord does not do what

prayers ask for if that is contrary to the end, which is salvation. The truth of this also becomes more firmly established with the person who conquers in temptations; but one who does not conquer entertains doubts about God's help and power because he is not heard. Then sometimes, because he stays his hands, he gives in to a degree.

From all of this one may see how to understand the explanation that there is no need of intercession, namely that one should not rely on prayer. For in prayer, when inspired by God, there is always the thought and belief that the Lord alone knows whether what is sought would be beneficial or not. Therefore the one who prays leaves the Lord to decide whether to listen to what he asks for, then accordingly pleads that the Lord's will may be done, not his own, in keeping with the Lord's words uttered in Gethsemane during His severest temptation, Matt. 26:39, 42, 44" (End of quotation).

Now for some comments: clear it is that the kind of prayer which should *not* be exercised is the one which substitutes for action. However, a prayer for strength from the Lord to overcome in the temptations, or asking for the Lord's help in our own temptations, is *not* meant here. Obviously we can pray for that. However, then we must move on to actually overcoming the evil in *life*. The intercessory prayer that is forbidden is *prayer that ends up as the solution*. No, prayer does not eliminate any temptations. Forget that. Even when we are on "a slippery slope" sliding down over the edge to the precipice itself to the yawning chasm of hell, "prayers are not heeded" because we have not yet "reached the limit" of our temptations. Only when we reach that limit and we "start to slip," are we "raised by the Lord and thereby delivered from despair."

This happens, out there, in life, when we are sliding down, but in the midst of avoiding something wrong, we call on the Lord's help to desist. Then He raises us up, and brings us "into

a bright state of hope and the comfort this brings, and also into a state of bliss” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8165).

But prayer never substitutes for temptation. Such prayer is intercessory, and is what we must not do, because then the temptation does not reach its limit, and salvation is postponed. Thus the person who prays *instead* of overcoming the temptation in act, then “gives in to a degree.” We could put it, “yields to some extent.” Praying before we reach the limit, prayer to ‘stop it,’ is a failure, and succumbing to the temptation. We can’t pray our way out of the temptation.

Prayer and Action. What must we do instead? Think about what is actually tempting you: What is the nature of the activity that you are praying should be ended? What is the wrongdoing? This is what we must stop doing, and so pray only for strength from the Lord to overcome it. But the prayer is for naught unless we get up from our knees and engage in an activity that eliminates the very thing that tempts us. Include the omission, and do *that* instead. I.e. stand up and go out and do “not” do the evil you are tempted to do, in the very situation where you are tempted to *include* it. Eliminate it from your activity, in the Lord’s name. Such an action constitutes “making your own the goodness and truth which flow in from the Lord by way of heaven” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8179). This becomes your own when you act, *as of self*, which means nothing more than *on your own*, i.e. off your own bat, but trusting in the Lord’s arm to actually overcome the hell which is outsourcing your temptation. Acting on your own is what is meant by “as if of self.”

Do Not Stay The Hand. We of course must also think here about praying for others. Does praying for others and for their welfare also constitute a kind of *intercession*? Is our prayer for others also included here as *prohibited*? Only if praying for others also *substitutes* for activity, i.e. if it “*stays the hand*” from

taking proper action. Why pray that a person not be struck by a car, when what you should do is to run out and pull that person to safety? That is just an example, but it extends to all circumstances where we might pray for others. Instead of praying for others, or as well as praying for them, *Help* them instead, or as well. We cannot let prayer substitute for helpful action, since it also implies that the Lord does not know how to act, when in fact He is omniscient, omnipotent. Thus there are prayers that the Lord ignores, i.e. He “does not do what the prayers ask for,” if and when it is contrary to the end which He alone sees. That is why we should end each prayer, “Yet not my will, but Thine be done.” That makes almost any prayer ok.

Pray From No Harm. And we can't forget the primary teaching by the Lord Himself on the subject of praying for others: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who hurt and persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in the heavens” (Matt. 5:43-45) Luke has it this way: “Rather love your enemies, and do kindnesses, and lend without expecting any return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Luke 6:33-36). The meaning has to do with merit! We cannot take any credit for what the Lord does. That is, we can never think that we have in any way interceded. NO! The Lord alone is the *Intercessor!* He alone *intercedes*, because He *interceded* by His Advent. To Him alone belongs all merit (*Arcana Coelestia* 848, 2196). A regenerating person consequently regards “self-merit as a monstrous wickedness” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2371). We must therefore pray for “those who hurt and persecute us” first, before we pray for good things for our friends. *First* we pray “for our enemies,” because at the heart of prayer for others is how *we* regard the Lord.

We read: “What a person is in himself determines how he sees the Lord” (*Arcana Coelestia*, 1838, 1861, 2706, 3605:4). If we have hatred in our heart, praying for others still comes *from* self, and thus is interiorly *against* the Lord. We are telling Him what to do! That is why we must pray from a heart *cleared* of sin, where “love and charity are present.” This is what Matthew means: “pray for those who hurt and persecute you.” Your heart can be guaranteed to be good only if it prays *for* those who *hurt* you! Do we see this test, how it works? Genuine love wills no harm. Prayers need to proceed from a “no harm” attitude. That is also why the Lord, who is the Divine Love Itself as a soul within the crucified body, cried out, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It was the Divine Love Itself now present on our level, crying out that no harm come to us. Even when we crucify Him, from hatred, He wills us no harm! Can we follow that? This means that the Lord does not impute a single sin to anyone, but we impute our own sins to ourselves (*True Christian Religion* 539, *Arcana Coelestia* 1590). No one can be blamed for going to hell, other than the one who goes there! (cf. *Divine Providence* 327)

How We Continue. The Lord is mercy itself, and forgives all our sins provided we stop doing them after death, in the world of spirits. We are in fact automatically forgiven all our evil deeds on earth, because the body or natural man “cannot be held guilty of any fault or crime, since it does not live of itself, but is only the servant, and instrument by which the spiritual man acts” (*Last Judgment* 30; *non reum alicujus culpa aut criminis est, quia non vivit ex se, sed est modo administrum et instrumentale*). The body is just an instrument, and not guilty of anything! The world too is just dead material, and it is “not guilty” of causing anyone to stumble! The Judgment of our earthly deeds thus depends on the *motive*, and on whether or not we are *aware* of our sinful attitude in them. That is why

everyone is judged only after death, after we leave this world and the “body has been put off.” Everyone is then judged by what they *continue* to do in their spirit, in the spiritual world. No evils “done in the world” are punished after death, only the “evils anyone continues to do” (*Heaven and Hell* 509). That is “Father forgive them,” the Lord’s Infinite Mercy. “If He should mark iniquities, who shall stand?” Only by seeing what we *continue* to do after death, when there are no excuses left, do we judge ourselves, up or down.

Pray to Desist from Evils. We should pray to desist from evils, lest we enter hell. Infernal spirits who continue to do evils after death, are first told to “desist” from their evils, but they find “they cannot”, and thus they realize they “cannot possibly be in heaven” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7795). Just prior to entering hell, only then is an evil spirit “shown” all his evil deeds done in the world, to add to what he has continued to choose (*Arcana Coelestia* 7721). He then sees his inward evil state, which is laid open. The infernal spirits then burn with eagerness to follow their evil love, and freely choose to enter hell! The fact that they voluntarily have chosen to enter hell is “clear” to the devils themselves, but “not to witnesses” (cf. *Heaven and Hell* 548). In other words you have to ask the devil himself: “Were you thrown in here against your will?” You will be met by disbelieving stares: “No way! I jumped on my own.” But if you ask witnesses, they will claim “The Lord pushed them.” It seems to even good witnesses that they were “cast into hell”! To counter this, at the end of the work *Divine Providence* Swedenborg was inspired to include the witness of devils themselves, that hell is to them as filth is to unclean animals (cf. *Divine Providence* 340e). They love it, and would never leave hell on their own.

Final Justice. Because every evil is inseparable from its own punishment, the devil upon entering hell “rushes into the evil” as well as into its penalty. This combination is concealed from evil

people while in the world, to allow for reformation. That is why evils seem *not* to be punished so often on earth! The reason is that it is “partly the same in the world,” because the law here too is seen *not* to be the *cause* of punishment (*Heaven and Hell* 550). The Judge or the law only *administers* the penalty, but the penalty stems from the wicked deed, not the law. The penalty “to fit the crime” is actually self-imposed, but this link only becomes instantaneous and 100% applicable, in hell. Only there is the pain of a crime instantaneous. The devil that strikes his fellow, himself feels the pain. That is the final justice, involved with hell fire.

The depth of every evil is an important consideration to take up, since we pray to be saved from such a fate. We should know that most of the penalty or pain from evil deeds in hell, actually comes from retaliation from the victimized devils themselves! (*Arcana Coelestia* 8232) Can you imagine wicked people only being able to harm each other? Its *pandemonium!* It is also instant justice, something we often wish could happen here on earth. Once in hell, a devil rushes against fellow devils to take “what the other had, from deadly hatred” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6832), with the love to torment others. The devils’ lust to torment others can “increase to infinity,” and is still not be satisfied (*Heaven and Hell* 695). It is referred to in Mark quoting Isaiah, as “their worm never dying, their fire never being quenched” (Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:44, 46, 48. *Arcana Coelestia* 8481).

Once in hell, devils alternate between “the fire and the torment of their lust” (*Arcana Coelestia* 825). Both the fire and torment are inherent in the wickedness of the evil deed, but they are separated from the deed here on earth. Who would be reformed of evil if the pain were instantly felt? No one. The entire world-population would plunge to hell in moments! No, the pain is separated here, so we can repent even of “mistakes.”

Not so in hell. At length, the punishment becomes “greater than the delight of evil” and they abstain from doing the evil (*Arcana Coelestia* 7188) and all devils buckle down to perform “vile uses” forever. No idleness is tolerated (*Arcana Coelestia* 986, 1097, *Spiritual Experiences* 1194). Once they have done their uses, they are “left to enjoy the fantasy of their evils” and to glory in it as long as they “do not do evil to others” (*Conjugal Love* 264, 461). Devils prefer their fantasies 1000 times over leaving hell! (*Spiritual Experiences* 5830)

Reminders in Hell. In such quieter moments, devils are “reminded” of their evils in the world, and that the source of their punishments are “their own evils” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7721). They need constant reminders that they are the only ones to blame for being there. A birds-eye view of their “use” is to withdraw evil spirits from good spirits in the world of spirits, or withdrawing good and truth from infernal spirits until nothing but evil and falsities are left, and thus to gather their own. One final use of evil spirits it to let good spirits witness what evil actually looks like (cf. *Heaven and Hell* 508).

Prayers from No Self-Merit. How do we pray to escape such a lot? First we must remove the false belief that the ‘Lord died for our sins on the cross’ (*True Christian Religion* 649). No, He died by “suffering from our sins” meant by “bearing them.” This means that the Lord alone has the merit for overcoming our evils, forever. We can take credit for *nothing*. Only by turning to Him, in His Word, can we hope to overcome the same evils in our lives, on our own, but from His presence.

In praying for others, we therefore do *not* take any credit when we add the words to the end of the prayer, “Not my will, but Thine be done” as the Lord Himself exemplified (*Arcana Coelestia* 8179:3). Then there is no doubt about God’s help and power, there is no taking credit, and there no consequent fear that our prayer has not been heard. Still, if we pray for someone

else's benefit, then we must make of ourselves an instrument for the fulfillment of the prayer. That is to say, you have to "do" exactly what you asked the Lord to do in your prayer. We read; "Prayer effects nothing unless man abstains from thinking and doing evils. If man then *does* these things, then prayers avail before the Lord" (*Apocalypse Explained* 248). So if we pray for others, we must first abstain from our own evils, - which again is "praying for one's enemies" - and then carry out what we pray for. Then our "prayers avail before the Lord." If we look for evidence that the prayer has been answered, however, beware: such prayers are "answered afterwards, when you are not thinking about it" (*Spiritual Experiences* 3538).

But you won't be looking for confirmation, will you? You are after all in a state of charity, not thinking of credit or reward. And since you have already acted to help the others whom you prayed for, all of the good outcome is in the Lord's hands, and we give Him thanks for it. That is also why we should never blame any bad results on Him, but only thanking Him for all the good that came along. We see people in the news who have lost limbs still thanking the Lord for saving their lives!

Prayer From the Lord. That is why the Writings explain that sins are overcome "actually" when they are shunned in life, not in *prayer* only. "How ought man to repent?" And the reply is, "Actually; that is to say, he must examine himself, recognize and acknowledge his sins, pray to the Lord, and begin a new life. Without examination repentance is not possible" (*True Christian Religion* 530, cf. *Apocalypse Revealed* 531:5). The prayer which proceeds from the man is "not heard", but the prayer must proceed "from the Lord with man" (*Arcana Coelestia* 10299:2). Only self-examination and repentance before occasional voluntary partaking of the Holy Supper, can fortify each person, so that when "one thereafter refrains from one or two sins one caught oneself committing, this is enough to start the process of

making it real” (*True Christian Religion* 530). You catch yourself doing the same thing, but this time, having taken the Sacrament, you are able to “refrain from it.”

A Pillar of a Prayer. Prayer accompanies our whole life, and the Lord’s Prayer is of course Prime among all Prayers, since it acts as a column from the Lord through heaven, widening as it comes down to earth with “deliver us from evil” (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 8864). Then the Lord’s Prayer returns to the heavens, with “kingdom, power and glory,” and finally to the Lord as Source of the Prayer, with “Forever, amen.” We can think of it as coming down to save, and turning us to heaven on the return run.

Ask From the Lord. What can we ask for in prayer? Anything? In a genuine prayer to the Lord, we only ask what the “Lord gives us to ask” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 376). The principle is therefore to pray for only what the Lord can give us. The reason is that the Lord already knows what we need, but He wills that we ask for it, for thus it can be “appropriated” to us. It can become ours by right. That is why the Lord said, “Ask, and it shall be given unto you.” We must therefore pray for what the Lord gives us, and the safeguard is to ask ourselves what the Lord wills to give us? Because those things are what we need, therefore we should pray for them, and then He gives them to us. Neat, isn’t it?

Who Is Intercessor. “The Lord as to the Divine Human is called ‘a Mediator’ and ‘an Intercessor,’ but He mediates and intercedes with Himself” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8705). There is constant intercession in all love. “It is the same in respect to the Lord’s intercession for the human race,...He does not pray the Father for them, and in this way intercede,...but He continually excuses, and continually forgives, for He continually feels compassion; and this is done on the part of the Lord Himself, for the Lord and the Father are one (John 14:8-12)” (*Arcana*

Coelestia 8573). Jesus is now the Risen Lord, who alone Intercedes for us.

He Intercedes via Good and Truth. “Jesus said, All things which ye ask in prayer, believe that ye shall receive them, and then it shall be done unto you. When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any” (Mark xi. 24, 25). We pray the Intercessor only for His good and truth, because we live by them. “Here, also, in the spiritual sense, by praying, desiring, and asking, is meant the life of love and charity; for to those who are in the life of love and charity, it is given from the Lord what they should ask: therefore they ask nothing but what is good, and that is done unto them; and because faith is also from the Lord, therefore, it is said, ‘believe that ye shall receive them.’ And because prayers proceed from the life of charity, and are according to it, therefore, in order that it may be done according to the prayers, it is also said, ‘when ye stand praying forgive, if ye have ought against any’” (*Apocalypse Explained* 325:8). Thus, again, if we wish to intercede for our friends, we must in prayer “forgive” our enemies, and thus pray from a state of no harm.

What to Pray For. We are taught specific things to pray for. We can pray to find a married partner that is to “desire and seek from the Lord a lawful and lovely partnership with one.” We can in the same prayer ask for help to “spurn and reject roving lusts as an offense to the nostrils” (*Conjugal Love* 49e)! The Lord will then lead people to find each other, and feel that dictate, “He/she is mine.” After marriage, we can certainly pray to the Lord to maintain our marriage. We should also pray that the New Jerusalem be established: “Anyone who hears and consequently knows anything of the Lord’s coming, and of the New Heaven and the New Church, thus of the Lord’s kingdom, let them pray that it may come” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 956). This is the meaning of “anyone hears, say come.” And we can

also pray for understanding the truth: “he who longs for the Lord’s kingdom, and truths then, let him pray that the Lord may come with light” (ibid.) This is a very special prayer, because it is answered right away: “he will accept them from the Lord without any exertion of his own” (ibid.) The actual fulfillment of this prayer takes place while reading the Writings, since they are already given as our permission to “understand the mysteries of faith.” Heaven’s Word has been given in rational terminology, in natural language, which every mature person can see as soon as they come across it.

“Prayer, regarded in itself, is speech with God, and some internal view at the time of the matters of the prayer, to which there answers something like an influx into the perception or thought of the mind, so that there is a certain opening of the man’s interiors toward God” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535). It is also useful to remember that the knees correspond to submission, since they give way automatically in the presence of the Divine, which involves humiliation on the knees before the Lord, as when in prayer (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 5323).

The Church is a Human Heaven: The Lord’s heaven in the natural world is called the Church; and an angel of this heaven is a man of the Church who is conjoined to the Lord; and after he leaves this world he becomes an angel of the spiritual heaven. From this it is clear that what has been said of the angelic heaven must also be understood of the *human heaven* that is called the Church. This reciprocal conjunction with the Lord, which constitutes heaven in man, is revealed by the Lord in these words in John:

Abide in Me, and I in you. He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. John xv. 4, 5, 7. *Divine Providence* 30.

HOPE

BY WYSTAN SIMONS

This is a story of hope – the gift of a visitor to our humble church building -- but it doesn't start out that way. This message starts with darkness. Dear fellow New Churchmen, it seems to me a pivotal time in the history of the General Church. On the one hand our bishop has encouraged a huge effort to facilitate the sharing of teachings about the Lord, the Word, and heaven with wider audiences – surely the result of the Lord's urging within him. On the other hand, the church seems to be torn apart from within. Instead of working together in mutual respect, too often we hear disagreement between those who love outreach and those who love in-reach, discord between the businessmen who pay for things and the academics whose job it is to do the teaching, frustration between those who like things the way they are, and those who see bright horizons beckoning. Economic crisis puts further pressure on every small society such as ours in Mitchellville. What does it mean? When longtime members and then ministers of the organization begin to leave it, we cannot help but notice and be affected.

We could respond to sad news by turning inward, for safeties, for security, to those in our inner circle who we feel understand us. This is a natural response, and I feel it myself, but I strongly urge that it is a mistake. By polarizing us into splinter groups, the hells will have achieved a step in ending a useful if imperfect organization. This is true for each church society and circle, and I believe for the whole of the General Church.

I urge that it is a mistake to turn inward for strength at this time of conflict because the hope of this organization lies outside its existing boundaries, as well as within the heart of every member of the church who strives to put love of the Lord

and the neighbor above his own agenda. The hope for the world lies with every human who longs for a deeper way to understand the Bible, to love and know God, and to understand the nature of life after death.

Each church group existing anywhere will have her own strengths, her own focus, and we should not hear in our bishop's urging a call to sameness. Sometimes the latest buzzword collects a fuzz of irritation around it due to frequent usage. But the idea of taking what is best about your own group and offering that to those who might really want it should not threaten us.

Doesn't it seem likely that a flood of evil spirits has been aroused by this new effort to help others, currently described as "meaningful contact with a million people"? Rather than picking at the words, let's consider the meaning of the phrase. The goal originally, I have to assume, was simply this: "Can we help others in this crazy world we live in?" Just that simple. Can each of us extend a bit to help those around us in different ways, either as a church or as a person within that church? This only becomes threatening when you define "helping" in certain predetermined ways. If you allow someone to tell you that "in order to be helping others you have to have this kind of front door/sign/message" then I believe you have lost the point.

Not all church groups will have the same strengths or goals – and isn't that wonderful? Wonderful because those searching have different needs to fill. Add to this that each society (or individual) has different needs itself. And, wonderfully again, the Lord provides us with visitors, or new members, or students in our schools, or sister churches with whom to do the work of external charity, and these gifts will strengthen us too if we pay attention.

A few weeks ago I had a powerfully positive experience of this, hearing the story of spiritual journey of a newcomer friend of mine. Her story is her own to tell, but it bears me up in these turbulent times. She frequently drives an hour or more round the Beltway for church supper and doctrinal class Friday nights. After a period of spiritual warfare, the Lord sent her to this little church for shelter, to find the company of people who share the ideas she discovered while reading *Heaven and Hell* on the Internet. Sitting in the ordinary supper room of our struggling congregation that evening, she put it to me this way, “I now think the evil spirits were trying to kill me before I could find Swedenborg's Writings and this congregation. What’s happening here is really important.”

We are imperfect. Sometimes we allow ourselves to become immersed in our own egos, our own timetables, our own agendas, our own visions, so that we actually do violence to each other in the name of God. Sometimes we are shy, or fearful. Sometimes the very knowledge of our own imperfections as a human being or a church or a church building can shut us down.

But hearing my friend’s story and affirmation, I find new hope for the wonders the Lord is working through and around us, all the time.

...Angels of Every Kind: In like order the angels in each particular society of heaven dwell in relation to one another. Towards the east there, dwell those who are in a greater degree of love and charity, towards the west those in a less degree. Towards the south dwell those who are in greater light of wisdom and intelligence, towards the north those who are in less. They dwell separately like this because each society resembles heaven, and is a heaven in lesser form...The same arrangement prevails in their assemblies. They are brought into this order by reason of the form of heaven, from which every one knows his own place. The Lord also provides that there may be in each society those of every kind to the intent that in form heaven may be everywhere like itself. Yet the arrangement of the whole heaven differs from the arrangement of a society, as what is general differs from what is particular. For the societies towards the east surpass those towards the west, and those towards the south surpass those towards the north. *Heaven and Hell*

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