

New Church Courier September 2002

Come Unto Me

By Norm Heldon

(Originally written for Christian story writing competition with the theme "Praise, Adoration and Worship". Norm didn't win but received commendation for a "significant" work.)

Kurt Sanders, Hollywood star considered where to spend the next few weeks. He'd enjoyed being Robin Hood, great fun, and the movie was a winner. He was a strong tip for the next James Bond.

The phone rang. It was Mike Attwater, the talent scout who had lured him to Hollywood, and was now his best friend.

"Hello Mike, I've heard you're going to make your own movie."

"Right, and I want you for the lead. Hold your breath, it's about the life of Jesus."

"You're joking! Crime, horror, adventure, comedy, that's what people want."

"No, Kurt, I'm a religious man, as you know, and I sense a spiritual hunger. People are asking, 'What's the meaning of it all?' 'Is this all there is? Where do we go from here?'"

"Fair enough. Who's doing the script, your sister?"

"Claire, yes, has wanted this for a long while."

"Mike, I'll do the part for Claire's sake. She's special."

"I know you're keen on her, Kurt, but she's wary – the media hype, you know."

"Sure, I'm sorry about that, in fast cars with beautiful girls. I've stopped that."

"The damage is done, though I've tried to convince her it meant nothing."

"Well, you reckon I'd be a convincing Jesus?"

"Yes, you look the part. Let that Robin Hood beard grow. You're a fine actor, and I'm sure Jesus was a handsome commanding figure."

"Thanks. Money? Have you backing?"

"No problem. There's not a million in it for you though."

"I'm not starving. Bring the script; but I have a surprise for you."

"Can't wait, Kurt."

He came right away.

"Sit down Mike. Coffee?"

"Thanks."

"Well," said Kurt, "my surprise is that I have no religious faith, now."

"Oh?"

"My parents are missionaries, so I had a religious upbringing. I had a sister too, Elsa, two years younger."

"Had?"

"She died, tragic accident. On the island where we were we found a bush pool that looked inviting. Elsa, the daredevil, dived from a high bank, hit her head on a rock. One minute a lively athletic, pretty girl, then just a body. I was shattered. I blamed God."

"Very sad; we'll talk about that later."

"Well, teen-like, I began to rebel, wanted to see the world, do my own thing. My parents sent me back to live with my grandparents. That didn't work. I left home at sixteen, worked at a number of jobs, then decided to try acting, enrolled at a Drama school. The rest you know."

"And you still blame God for Elsa's death?"

"I try not to think about it. But recently a young kid was savagely mauled by dogs and died, another young life wasted. I reasoned that if there was a loving God he would prevent tragedies like that."

"Kurt, many terrible things happen, wars, murders, robberies, tragic accidents. Believe me, God doesn't cause them; they make Him sad, I'm sure. But there is Providence and life after death. These two young lives are not wasted. Think of them as angels now in Heaven."

"Hmmm. Food for thought."

"Are you sure you want to play the part of Jesus?"

"Certainly. I see it as another challenge. I'll do my best, Mike."

"I can't ask for more."

"Another thing; I can't study the script here, too many distractions, phone calls, coffee breaks, callers. Any suggestions?"

"There's the church that Claire goes to, always open, quiet, lovely stained-glass windows. It's called The Church of the Resurrection."

"I'll try it. And please assure Claire that I'm not a Cassanova, never even had a steady girlfriend."

"Really?"

"Fact."

"O.K. I'll be off, due at the studio in twenty minutes."

Kurt liked the church, admired the stained-glass windows, especially one showing Jesus blessing little children. He found a Bible and sat down to read the Gospels and, liking it there, made it a daily visit.

One afternoon, eyes closed, deep in thought, he heard music and singing, looked up to see a choir at one side of the chancel. He had known many hymns as a child but one they now began to sing was new to him. He liked the melody and the words beginning:

*'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
Bow down before him and hallow his name.'*

More hymns followed, then as the choir began to leave Kurt was surprised and pleased to see Claire. He followed quickly and called. Claire turned and her look was not unfriendly he was pleased to see.

"I'd like to talk to you, Claire."

"What about?"

"The movie. I come to the church to study the Gospels and the script. It's ideal and I'm making progress."

"O.K. Let's go to Marco's; it's nearby and they serve great coffee."

At the table Claire noticed Kurt studying her intently.

"Well?" she queried.

"You should be an actress Claire, very pretty, intelligent, personality plus."

"Ho Ho. Mike said you were no lady killer."

"Sorry, but he's right anyway."

"The movie?"

"Right. This is the most difficult part I've tackled. I try to live parts, become those people, and thoroughly understand them. Beside Jesus I feel inadequate, for there seems to be so much hidden behind the simple words."

"Yes," Claire said, "didn't He say 'My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts.'"

"And He added," said Kurt, "'As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"

"Yes, but you don't have to be a theologian, you're just an actor."

"Just an actor," he echoed.

"Sorry, didn't mean it in a disparaging way."

"Is there something you find especially remarkable about Jesus, Claire?"

"Yes, the picture I got of Him at Sunday School was of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, but He was sometime tough, very forthright."

"Like, 'woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.'"

"And at the temple," added Claire, "His driving out the money-changers and those selling doves."

"You're very helpful, Claire; I could talk to you for hours."

"I haven't got hours; I've guests coming for dinner."

"I'm envious."

"We could come again tomorrow, and I'll bring Mike. The movie's his baby; he's the driving force."

They met as planned.

"Kurt," said Mike, "Claire said you've interesting thoughts to share,"

"She too," he said. "Well, I've read the Gospels several times, and this set me thinking. Jesus said to His disciples, 'I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' They were earnest, loyal men, but able to understand His parables only in a simple way. Can we do better?"

"Hmmm," said Mike, "He healed many diseases, but evil lusts, are they like diseases that only He can cure?"

"By our following His teachings," added Claire. "And think of the Good Samaritan; he did the good thing and so was the neighbour. Do we look for the good in people to love?"

"Interesting thought," said Mike, "but not in the scope of this movie. This is, however; the Gospels are written in a calm, almost reportorial style but I can imagine those whose life-threatening diseases were cured, and the maimed, dumb and blind, leaping, dancing for joy, praising God. I've told actors that's what I want."

"May I suggest something?" asked Kurt. "I enjoyed hearing the choir yesterday, and liked one hymn especially, beginning 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'. It seems to fit the theme of the movie, which if I'm right is GIVING PRAISE TO GOD. It might serve as theme music."

"A good idea," said Mike, "and maybe at the end the voices of the choir heard singing the hymn."

"With the words on the screen," added Claire. "A great finale."

"Thanks Kurt," said Mike. "If by this movie we can get more people reading the Bible, worshipping and letting Him change their lives, we'll have succeeded."

He added, "We start filming in two weeks, Kurt. Will you be ready?"

"I'll be ready," Kurt replied.

Driving Claire home later, Mike remarked, "I'm thinking this movie's good for Kurt."

"Another healing by Jesus?" offered Claire.

"I hope so," said Mike.



Weather cooperating, filming was completed ahead of schedule.

"The Preview," said Mike to Claire and Kurt, "will be at the Mecca Theatre, Los Angeles in a month's time. I must sit with some VIPs but I've arranged a box upstairs for you two."

"Very thoughtful of you Mike," said Kurt, as Claire smiled and nodded her approval.



The day arrives. The theatre is packed including a number of distinguished visitors. Kurt and Claire are in a box upstairs.

Music of WORSHIP THE LORD is played quietly as three scenes appear.

1. With the words COME UNTO ME above, Jesus's face is shown, looking down benignly on happy children
2. Below Him a city street crowded with people
3. Now, a wedding scene.

As a soft golden light flows down onto each scene the children look up and wave. The adults also look up, smiling.

KURT: *(quietly)* "Nice idea, Claire."

CLAIRE "Thank you. I wanted to show that Jesus is with us all, even now."

SCENE 1

Jesus walks along a seashore. Fishing boats are in the bay. Two fishermen are in a boat near the shore.

JESUS: "Peter and Andrew, follow me. I will make you fishers of men."

They leave their boat. The three walk on past their boats. To two more fishermen He calls.

JESUS: "James and John, follow me."

Immediately they leave their boat and walk with Him.

JESUS: "We go first to Capernaum, and there are others I must call."

SCENE 2

The five enter Capernaum, approach a synagogue, and go in. There are many people inside. Jesus strides to the front.

JESUS: "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent! Wash you, make you clean. Give up your evil ways and learn to do good."

"Do not lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, but lay up treasures in Heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

A man, tortured by an unclean spirit, approaches. Convulsed, terrified, he pleads for help."

JESUS: "Unclean spirit, Come out of the man."

The man falls to the floor bent up, then rises, knowing he is free. Standing erect, he throws his arms up delightedly, shouting, "Free! Free at last! Thank you Jesus."

There is great excitement.

ONE: "A wonderful new Teacher and Healer is with us."

ANOTHER: "Even unclean spirits obey Him. Spread the news everybody!"

The crowd surges from the synagogue. Groups are excitedly telling townspeople about the miracle. Jesus and His disciples walk along a road out of town. A leper approaches Jesus.

Falling to his knees he pleads, "Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

JESUS: "I am willing. Be cleansed."

Dramatically, the leper's skin changes, red and white scaly patches disappearing from his arms and legs. He looks at his skin with amazement and delight, and shows it by laughing and leaping for joy.

PETER: "Master, you are becoming famous. Please come to my house now, my wife's mother is ill."

SCENE 3

"Jesus and His disciples enter Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law is in bed, very sick. Jesus touches her face, and immediately, knowing she is well, she rises, shows her gratitude, then goes to help prepare a meal for the visitors.

A crowd has gathered outside, clamouring for Jesus, having brought many sick and demon-possessed. Jesus moves among them, touching those needing help and they are cured. Excitement is tremendous, with the cured ones celebrating, and warmly thanking Jesus. Some rush off to show and tell.

SCENE 4

It is early morning and Jesus is seen in a quiet place, praying. His disciples find Him.

JOHN: "Everyone is looking for you."

ANDREW: "You have enemies. Scribes and Pharisees are angry because they say you take away their authority. And they have told the priests."

JESUS: "They are blind leaders of the blind. I must go to other towns and preach for that is why I am here.

A young woman shyly approaches.

JESUS: "I will talk to this girl. Wait. You wish to see me, Mary?"

MARY: "You know my name?"

JESUS: "And you have a sister, Martha and a brother Lazarus."

MARY: "Jesus, you know everything. Will you come and eat with us? Bring your friends."

(Mary's home. Jesus and Mary in the garden.)

MARY: Jesus, tell me about heaven.

JESUS: "If you live well here, heaven is where you'll live forever. You will be happy, doing things you love. You are pretty but there you will be very beautiful. You will meet your mother and father again."

MARY: "It sounds wonderful. I must try to be good here."

Martha comes from the house.

MARTHA: "Jesus, Mary has left me to do all the work preparing a meal for you and your friends."

JESUS: "Martha, you are a good, hardworking girl. One thing you lack. Mary has chosen that and it must not be taken away from her."

MARTHA: *(abashed)* "The meal is ready."

JESUS: "Thank you, Martha."

SCENE 5

Jesus and his disciples, now seven, approach a synagogue. Outside, a large crowd has gathered, among them Scribes and Pharisees, distinguished by their costly attire.

Four men are carrying a paralysed man on a bed. They reach Jesus and implore His help.

JESUS: *(showing pity)* "Son, your sins are forgiven."

A PHARISEE: *(shouting)* "Why does this man speak blasphemies? Only God can forgive sins."

JESUS: "The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins." *(and to the paralysed man)* "Arise, take up your bed and walk."

The man stands, folds his bed, and walks away happily.

JESUS: "It is the Sabbath. I will preach here."

JESUS: *(inside, preaching)* "Whoever hears my words and obeys them is like a man who built his house upon a rock. Rain descended and floods came and beat upon that house, but it did not fall. But he who hears my words and does not obey them, is like a man who built his house upon sand. Rain descended and floods came and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was its fall."

Near Jesus is a man with a withered hand.

A PHARISEE: (*tempting Jesus that he might accuse him*) "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day?"

JESUS: "If a man has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not lift it out? A man is of more value than a sheep. Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

JESUS: (*and to the man*) "Stretch out your hand"

He stretched it out and it was restored as whole as the other.

SCENE 6

Scribes and Pharisees outside, are plotting how they might destroy Him. Jesus and His disciples, now nine, are in a park with children around. The children surround Jesus, but the disciples try to shoo them away.

JESUS: "Let the children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

The children have bats, balls and other playthings.

BOY: (*with ball, to Jesus*) "Catch Jesus."

Jesus catches the ball and throws it back.

GIRL: "Do they play games in Heaven?"

JESUS: "Yes, games you play here and many others, and there's lovely clear water to swim in."

GIRL: "I want to go to Heaven."

JESUS: "Be obedient, don't tell lies, don't steal and you'll go to Heaven."

BOY: "I'm a good runner."

Jesus sees a lame boy, calls him and heals him. The boy is overjoyed.

BOY: "Now I can run too. Let's race."

Several boys and girls run. The boy who was lame keeps up with the fastest and they run back.

Jesus and his disciples walk away.

SCENE 7

A woman is seen with her screaming young daughter, who falls, beats the ground with her hands and is obviously tormented.

MOTHER: "I must find Jesus and ask for help."

She finds Jesus, a crowd around Him.

MOTHER: "My daughter is tormented by an evil spirit. Please help me."

BYSTANDER: "She is not a Jew; don't bother with her."

JESUS: *(to the woman)* "Is it right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs?"

MOTHER: "No Lord, but the little dogs eat the crumbs from the table."

JESUS: "Woman, great is your faith. I haven't found the like in Israel. Go home, your daughter is healed."

The woman is seen running to her daughter who greets her joyfully with open arms."

SCENE 8

Jesus, with disciples, now twelve, among whom is Judas Iscariot, who is smaller and not of such a pleasing appearance.

JESUS: "We will go to Jerusalem."

PETER: "Master, is it wise? Your enemies now include the priests. They are plotting to kill you."

JESUS: "Peter, the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him and on the third day He will be raised up."

The disciples look sad. They are nearing Jerusalem.

JESUS: *(instructs two disciples)* "Go into the village nearby and you will find a donkey colt tied. Loose it and bring it. If someone questions you, say "The Lord needs it."

It happens as He said. They return with the colt. A large crowd has gathered. People throw garments onto the colt and Jesus mounts. Excitement grows as people lay garments on the road, cut branches from trees and spread them. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem the crowd, before and behind, cry "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the Highest!"

(Room where are Caiaphas the High Priest and other priests.)

CAIAPHAS: "Jesus must die! If the people make Him king we are finished. But it is not too late.. The people are easily swayed."

The front of the temple. On a large open area near the entrance are money-changers and dove sellers. Jesus, a short whip in hand, strides among these merchants, fiercely flaying them. They flee, terrified.

JESUS: "My Father's House is called a House of Prayer but you have made it a den of thieves."

SCENE 9

JOHN: "Master, it is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Where will we prepare the Passover?"

JESUS: "Go to the man whose house I showed you and say "The Master says, I will keep the Passover at your house. He will show you a large furnished room. There make ready."

Jesus and the twelve in the room where the Passover is prepared.

JESUS: "Surely I say to you that one of you will betray me."

The disciples ask among themselves, "Who is it?"

Judas comes to Jesus.

JUDAS: (*quietly*) "Master, is it I?"

JESUS: "You have said it. What you have to do, do quickly."

Jesus breaks the bread and blesses it.

JESUS: "Take, eat; this is my body."

The dish is passed along.

Jesus lifts the cup of wine.

JESUS: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."

They all drink. Judas leaves the room.

Judas, entering a building, comes to the room where the priests are.

CAIAPHAS: "You are Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus's disciples. Why have you come?"

JUDAS: "What will you pay me if I deliver Jesus into your hands?"

The priests confer.

CAIAPHAS: "We will pay you thirty pieces of silver."

JUDAS: "That will do."

Jesus and the eleven still in the Passover Room.

JESUS: "We will go to the garden of Gethsemane."

SCENE 10

The garden, where they now are. Jesus takes Peter, James and John a little way off.

JESUS: "Sit here while I pray."

He goes forward alone, is exceedingly distressed. He kneels, prostrates Himself and weeps.



KURT: *(to Claire quietly)* "Please come downstairs with me. I must talk to you, now."

CLAIRE: *(surprised)* "All right, it must be important to you."

They slip out quietly, to a seat in the vestibule.

KURT: "Sorry, Claire, but it was at that point in the story, (he paused) yes at that point the story changed me forever. You know I'd told Mike I'd lost faith in God. When I accepted the part in the movie, nothing had changed. It was Kurt Sanders the actor who saw the part as just another challenge; it meant no more. But when as Jesus I knelt to pray in Gethsemane it suddenly hit me what a tremendous battle was going on in Jesus's mind. He was facing crucifixion, an extremely painful death. He'd known it was coming, but now it was very near. I began to feel with Him, even to be Him, not just an actor giving a clever performance. I didn't have to face a horrible death, but He knew and did. He prayed that he might be spared that terrible end. But then He added 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'"

"After that He went back and faced his captors and accusers, as if He feared nothing. Claire, that's when my faith came back. When I was prostrate, praying, I too wept and they weren't actor's tears; they were the real thing. Then I went on to play the rest of the story as Jesus, not as Kurt Sanders."

"And further, that night, after the movie was finished I knelt and prayed before I went to bed and suddenly I was a little boy again, listening to my mother reading a Bible story to me before I went to sleep."

"Providence, as Mike said, is in all things. It was Providence leading me to accept the part of Jesus. So it is a story of Faith Regained, and I'm very happy about it. This has been building up in me and had to come out. Please forgive me."

CLAIRE: "No need to apologise Kurt. I'm very happy too that it means so much to you. Let's talk about it more later. If we go back upstairs we might still make the final scene."



The eleven disciples are in a field. Jesus approaches, but they are frightened.

JESUS: "Do not be afraid, All things prophesied are now fulfilled. Stay in Jerusalem till you are given power from above. Preach the Gospel, heal the sick. Freely you have received, freely give. But you will be persecuted. Some will be killed."

JOHN: *(firmly)* "We are not afraid, now we know you are alive."

JESUS: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you. The Lord bless you and keep you."

As He blesses them He is carried away into Heaven.

The voices of the choir are heard singing "WORSHIP THE LORD" as all the words of the hymn are shown on the screen.

Suddenly the whole audience rises and sings with the choir.



Kurt and Claire were content to wait till the crowd had dispersed before leaving the theatre.

They walked a little way, then Kurt felt one of Claire's hands clasp his firmly.

He smiled happily, and looking at her sang softly, "WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS."

And Claire joined in "BOW DOWN BEFORE HIM AND HALLOW HIS NAME."

WHY DO WE WORSHIP THE LORD?

By Rev Erik E. Sandstrom

The answer to this question is of course the third Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." This means: "[The Sabbath] represented the completion of the Lord's whole act of redemption, [and] it was for that reason the height of holiness. When, however, the Lord came into the world, so that representations of Him ceased, that day became a day for instruction in Divine matters, and also a day of rest from work, for meditation about matters conducive to salvation and everlasting life, and a day for love towards the neighbour." (TCR 301) This change of the Sabbath from representation to instruction was signalled by the Lord saying, "Take up your bed and walk", which means such instruction in doctrine. (AC 10360)

However, resting from labour on Sunday is up to each individual. (cf. AC 9349.4) Still, we are commanded to worship the Lord, so we can't skip it permanently. He wills that we worship Him, not because He wants to be repaid, nor because He just wants to be adored, which "is inconceivable" in the Lord since "the Divine has no glory" from our adoration. Instead He "demands humiliation, adoration, thanksgivings, and many other things from man, which appear like repayings, [but which is] for the sake of the man himself; for when a man is in humiliation ... the Lord can flow in with heavenly good." (AC 5957) It

is for our own spiritual welfare's sake that the Lord commands us to worship Him! The Lord meant this when He taught: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." (Mark 2. 27, 28)

Our spiritual welfare is regeneration. However, we are not regenerated just by going to Church! "Regeneration is one thing, and worship another; for regeneration is first, and the worship is according to the quality of the man's regeneration...in the proportion that he has been purified from evils and the consequent falsities." (AC 10206) So our worship depends on our state of regeneration or humiliation during the rest of the week. What then should be our attitude when going to Church? "All worship is adoration, for adoration of the Lord must be in it for it to be worship." (AC 1150) We also humiliate ourselves in worship: "Self-abasement is the essential element in Divine worship... Then he is in the right state to receive from the Lord ...and to offer Him worship." (AC 8271) In worship we lower ourselves in humiliation before the Lord, and adore Him, and so receive instruction and goodness from Him.

How does worship relate to our daily life? If we think that worship is just "going to church,... listening to preaching, & saying prayers...[we are] much mistaken." (AC 7038) This is only oral worship at Church, but "it is of no avail unless worship that belongs to the life" is the source of our oral worship. (AC 7884) Worship is not just believing and loving, but is "by a life according to His commandments." (AC 10645) "True worship of the Lord consists in performing useful services;...in a proper fulfilment of one's function...in serving one's country, its communities, and one's neighbour with all one's heart", depending on their qualities. (AC 7038) Worship clearly is not just Church attendance, but how we are charitable in our life and work. The Sabbath relates to the rest of the week, and vice versa.

Everything has an internal and an external, relating as soul and body: the Word does, and so do the Church and worship. (AC 10603) That is why the Word is at the centre of worship, because "... the church is where the Word is, and is from the Word; and worship is from those things which are in the Word." In fact, our understanding of the Word gives the quality of our worship. (AC 10707) But although not working on Sunday is up to the individual, still we "...ought certainly to participate in external worship as well; for it is by external worship that internal things are aroused, and by means of external worship external things are kept holy so as to enable internals to flow in." (AC 1618) The use of sacred rituals of worship is thus to keep things holy, and to allow internal things to flow in. That is why external rites are not the essential part, but what they contain, which are love to the Lord and towards the neighbour. (AC 1098) These and also the love of truth for its own sake (AC 10683) are the internals of worship, and are properly expressed and present in "prayers, adorations, & confessions." (AC 10177.7) The rituals keep us together and open us up for the Lord to flow in with the contents of truth and good.

The centre or core of worship is the Lord. In the New Church, the Lord's Divine Humanity is worshipped: in fact, to worship any "... God other than the Lord, the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah God Himself in human form," (TCR 296) is to break the

first of the Ten Commandments. It matters how we name and see the Lord. That is why the God we worship has the name "The Lord God Jesus Christ." (TCR 3, 791)

We may know more or less doctrine in the New Church, but may wonder why is it so important to understand so much about the Lord? Well, it relates to our worship. For in the New Church, "God Himself" cannot be worshipped directly, since "...nobody has ever seen God; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. John 1:18. Therefore the essential nature of the Divine itself is the Divine Human that can be approached and worshipped." (AC 6887) That is the Divine Human, God made visible. That is also why this New Church "is the crown of all the churches which have so far existed upon earth, because it will worship one visible God in whom is the invisible God, as the soul is in the body." (TCR 787) The Divine Human is the risen Lord Jesus Christ, whose human taken on in the world was made completely Divine, or glorified.

Is the New Church alone in worshipping the Lord as God? All world religions have ways of adoring God under various names – Almighty God, Adonai, Jehovah, Allah, Brahman, Vishnu, Manitou. God may be worshipped under any and all of these names, but only if internal things are present. Referring to worship customs, "...the vast majority of mankind do not know what internal things are, but they do know what externals are. The vast majority are also given to sensualism, low pleasures and desires, considering only themselves and the world, and are therefore easily captivated by that kind of religion." (AC 1078)

Since "the love of pleasure" is a universal idolatry (together with love of self and the world) it is clear that worship must avoid sensual pleasure, for this denies eternal life. (AC 1357) Sensual pleasures "remove any wish at all to learn of internals," or "reject them" after instruction, resulting in "forms of idolatry." The only things which "... keep a person back from idolatry" are the internals of worship. (AC 1205) We should therefore be very leery of anything which "captivates" our pleasures and desires in our worship!

Instead, rituals of worship are holy, or sacred. How do we ensure their holiness? We do so by taking the wording of all rituals from the Sacred Scriptures: "Truths that inspire worship of the Lord should be derived from nowhere other than the Word; for in every single part the Word has life from God." (AC 8941.2) "What springs from the Word, only this can be of service for offering worship to God, since this is in itself living.... This is the source of the holiness and life of the Word; it derives them from no other source." (AC 8943) But even sacred rituals by themselves are just externals! Their internal contents are to be love to the Lord and the neighbour.

Externals are from Sacred Scripture. What about doctrine? How do we use the Writings themselves in Worship? Doctrine is a important part of worship: "The things which are of doctrine come first, and those that are of worship follow, because the quality of the worship is from the goods and truths of doctrine; for worship is nothing but an external act, in which there should be the internals, which are of doctrine. Without these the worship is without its essence, life and soul." (AR 777)

Without doctrine at the centre, worship has no essence. This teaching applies specifically to the New Church, since later it says "...these things are said of the Lord's New Church, which is the New Jerusalem, concerning those there who are in the understanding of the Word and in doctrine from it." (AR 781)

It is quite clear that no one knows who is a member of this New Church, or who is not. Membership is voluntary. We can only attend to our regeneration, and also attend Church to adore the Lord with humility, and look to the Doctrines for instruction. No one can compel adults to such worship, since "...forced worship is...of the body and not of the mind, lifeless..., vague, ...and gloomy.... Worship that is not forced [on the other hand], when genuine, is... spiritual, ... living, clear..., and joyful because there is heaven from the Lord in it." (DP 137)

Although it is a law of Divine Providence that no adult can be compelled to the things of religion, still everyone should at times "compel himself" to them! (DP 137) Everyone "SHOULD PERSUADE AND AT TIMES COMPEL HIMSELF TO" the things of religion. (DP 129) To compel oneself is not to be compelled, but is the very peak of freedom! "In self-compulsion there is freedom, i.e. what is willing and spontaneous, and this distinguishes self-compulsion from being compelled." (AC 1947) Self-compulsion is to "... act from freedom according to reason, but from an interior freedom," (DP 148) because "... IT IS NOT CONTRARY TO RATIONALITY AND LIBERTY TO COMPEL ONESELF." (DP 145) Everyone knows that to serve at something "of your own accord" is to do it of your own free will! Making yourself go to Church is to go freely. Remembering the Sabbath is a commandment, but it can only be answered voluntarily. Freedom to worship is thus a bit of a paradox, since we would not do it freely unless we were also commanded to do it.

Finally, the end result of worshipping the Lord and living by His commandments, is conjunction with Him, and consociation with the angels of heaven. (AR 851) Angels know the exact level of holiness in anyone who worships the Lord, even if we don't. (AC 2190) These are some of the teachings which ensure that services of worship will continue from ages to ages.

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This site functions as an on-line family magazine, with a new topic every month. Please check this out. Any enquiries:

Rachel Glenn
General Church Office of Education (Ph. 215-914-4959)
rglenn@newchurch.edu

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