

DOCTRINE
AND THE
CHURCH

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***HUMAN RESPONSE
TO DIVINE TEACHING***

HUGO LJ ODHNER

General Church of the New Jerusalem
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania
2010

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Preface

For many years Dr. Hugo Odhner's series of ten lectures given in 1944–1945 on "Doctrine and the Church" has been used in the Academy of the New Church Theological School as part of the course "The Nature of Revelation." Dr. Odhner saw these lectures as "a general precursor" to the entire course of study of the Word.

The universal theme is our human response to the Word's teaching, to Divine "Doctrine"—hence the subtitle "Human Response to Divine Teaching" (added by me). How are we to be the Lord's "church" in the light of the conviction that this Divine Doctrine is now represented not only in the Old and New Testaments, but in the revelation given in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (aka "the Writings")? How are we to respond to this united body of revelation? How are we to approach it to gain light and direction from the Lord? Dr. Odhner addresses many issues that arise as individuals and groups of people make this effort. How is faith formed and how does it progress with individuals and with the collective church? What is the role of the priesthood? What are the scope and limitations of human beings' reception of a truth that is in itself *Divine*?

More specifically we find here a systematic effort to articulate the view of those who have believed that the Lord has made His second coming in and through the Writings, and that this revelation marks a new dispensation that will result in a new era of the church. Dr. Odhner explores the nature and purpose of the Writings, and their relationship to the Old and New Testaments. He deals with these issues

and more with his characteristic talent for documenting his understanding from the Word.

In articulating the general position of the historic Academy/General Church Dr. Odhner understandably has in mind the contrast with other views of the theological Writings of Swedenborg. A doctrinal controversy that loomed large in Dr. Odhner's experience was the one that led to the secession from the General Church of "The Lord's New Church which is Nova Heirosolyma." Some have felt that Dr. Odhner's "closeness" to this issue results in a belaboring of some points, particularly in chapter nine.

These notes have been edited very slightly over the years by a long series of Theological School teachers. A few additional references have been added here and there. Occasionally a quotation has been expanded to provide a bit more context. Rarely a word or phrase has been added for clarity. I have reworked one paragraph and added a brief transitional one. In general, having looked at the oldest version I could find, it would appear that "99.9%" of the present work is Dr. Odhner's. All the footnotes, however, are mine unless noted.

The idea of publishing Dr. Odhner's study came to the General Church Publication Committee from a group of lay people who read it for a series of classes. As the one currently teaching the Theological School course in which it is read, I agreed to help prepare it for publication. The language in this edition has been revised by Robert Gladish, Vera Glenn, and myself. Two areas of focus were making the language more gender inclusive and changing passive voice to active.

In adapting this book and offering it to a wider readership it is our hope that it will serve as an interesting

and useful historical document. But more, the hope is that it will inspire new commitment in people who share a conviction that the Writings are part of the Word for the New Church, with the power to define and establish that church—a church in which the Lord can be present in a new way and in whose streets the nations will walk in harmony and light.

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. . . . He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:17, 20)

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Key to abbreviations used for works by Emanuel Swedenborg:

AC = *Arcana Coelestia*, 1748-1756)

AE = *Apocalypse Explained*, written 1758-1759.*

AR = *Apocalypse Revealed*, 1766.

Canons = *Canons of the New Church*, written 1769.*

Charity = *Doctrine of Charity*, written 1766.*

CL = *Delights of Wisdom concerning Conjugal Love*, 1768.

Conv = *Conversation with Angels*, written 1766.*

Coro = *Coronis or Appendix to the True Christian Religion*, written 1771.*

De Verbo = *de Verbo* (or *Concerning the Sacred Scripture or the Word of the Lord from Experience*), written 1762.*

DLW = *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Love and Wisdom*, 1763.

DP = *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Providence*, 1764.

D.Wis = *Concerning Divine Wisdom*, written 1763.*

Faith = *Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning Faith*, 1763.

HD = *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, 1758.

HH = *Heaven and its wonders and Hell*, 1758.

ISB = *Interaction of the Soul and Body* (also *Intercourse between the Soul and Body*), 1769.

Inv = *Invitation to the New Church*, written 1771.*

LJ = *Last Judgment*, 1758.

LJP = *Last Judgment Posthumous*, written 1762.*

Life = *Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem*, 1763.

Lord = *Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord*, 1763.

SE = *Spiritual Experiences*, published first under English title, *Spiritual Diary*, written 1747-1765.*

SEm = *Spiritual Experiences Minor*, repeated passages 4545-4792 in Swedenborg's Journal *Spiritual Experiences*, written 1747-1765.*

SS = *Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Sacred Scripture*, 1763.

TCR = *True Christian Religion*, 1771.

WH = *White Horse*, 1758.

* published posthumously

Key to abbreviations used for other works:

Documents = *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, R. Tafel, Swedenborg Society, London, 1875.

NewSearch = a computer program that enables one to search Swedenborg's theological Writings and other related documents. Available on web at heavenlydoctrines.org. Can be purchased as "NewSearch CD" from New Church bookstore online.

NCL = *New Church Life*, official periodical for the General Church of the New Jerusalem.

Chapter One

The Advent of the Lord—in Doctrine

The preface to the *True Christian Religion* notes that unless the Lord should come again into the world no one could be saved, and that this, His second advent, is His coming “in Divine truth, which is the Word” (n. 3). Later, the same volume states that this second coming “is effected by means of a man before whom He has manifested Himself in Person, and whom He has filled with His Spirit, to teach the doctrines of the New Church through the Word from Him” (TCR 779). This man was Emanuel Swedenborg, and he wrote that from the first day of his call he had not received anything which pertained to the doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while reading the Word. These doctrines he received with his understanding, wrote them down and published them by the press.

One of these published works was entitled *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine: From Things Heard out of Heaven*. In it he states that this doctrine is “for the New Church” and is called the Heavenly Doctrine because it was revealed to him out of heaven (HD 7).

It is clear from this and many other statements that these doctrines, contained in Swedenborg’s theological writings, both those printed during his lifetime and those left in manuscript form, were the means by which the Lord made His second advent “in Divine truth which is the Word.” Swedenborg made this clear when, by express

command of the Lord, he wrote on two copies of the *Brief Exposition*, “This book is the Advent of the Lord.” Only common sense is needed to see that it was not the paper and print, but the truth contained in the book that was the Lord’s new advent.

That His coming was “in Divine truth which is the Word,” is clear from the fact that the Doctrine—although received by Swedenborg with his understanding—was inspired by the Spirit of the Lord, and obtained while reading the Word. Indeed, the Writings teach that “by the Holy Spirit, is properly meant the Divine truth, thus also the Word” (TCR 139). The Holy Spirit is indeed the Lord Himself, or His Divine operation. The Lord operates for a human being’s regeneration “by means of Divine truth, and with Christians by means of the Word; for this is the only medium through which man approaches the Lord and into which the Lord enters” (TCR 142).

It was therefore the Lord as the Word, or as the Holy Spirit, that inspired Swedenborg in his writing the Doctrine. And another phase of the same teaching appears when it is said that this Doctrine “is from heaven because it is from the spiritual sense of the Word, and the spiritual sense of the Word is the same with the doctrine that is in heaven,” the Heavenly Doctrine (HD 7).

The Lord thus made His advent in the Word and as Doctrine. “As the Lord is the Word, He is also Doctrine; for there exists no other doctrine which is Divine doctrine” (AC 2533e). We cite this to show that the Word is the only Divine doctrine, and that the church must regard the Word as the only source of its faith. The Word is the “doctrine of faith” for the church. And we are told that although in its origin, and thus “in itself,” the “doctrine of faith is Divine and thus above all human apprehension,

even angelic, nevertheless it has been stated in the Word according to the apprehension of people in a rational manner” (AC 2533:2).

The doctrine of faith thus exists within the Word, and in itself it is incomprehensible. It is said to be “spiritual from the celestial origin.” And the *Arcana* adds, “Be it known that it is Divine truth from Divine good, and thus wholly Divine” (AC 2531). But in order that this Divine truth may become comprehensible to people here and to angels, the Lord accommodates it to human reason, as in the Word which is on earth and in heaven. He does this through appearances, rational, natural, and sensual. “When truths Divine are with [angels and people] in such appearances, they can be both received and acknowledged” (AC 3362).

The doctrinal things that are from the Lord—insofar as they appear before created beings—are not truths purely Divine, but are appearances of truth; nevertheless within such appearances there are the truths Divine; and because they have those truths within them, the appearances also are called truths. (AC 3364)

The Word—the written Word of Divine revelation—is therefore Divine doctrine clothed in appearances of truth; and this is true not only of the Word in the sense of the letter on earth, but of the angelic Word or the internal senses of the Word. But it is to be observed that the Divine doctrine is present throughout all these forms of the Word and in all its appearances. In every case, the Lord gave the Word to convey this doctrine, and it is in an order which is the Divine order, adapted to convey the Divine presence to various human states and indeed to mold or create human

states which might receive the Divine doctrine of faith and charity. Hence we read:

the Lord is doctrine itself, that is, the Word, not only as to the supreme sense therein, but also as to the internal sense, and even as to the literal sense, for this sense is representative and significative of the internal sense, and the internal sense is representative and significative of the supreme sense; and that which in the Word is representative and significative is *in its essence* that which is represented and signified, thus it is the Divine of the Lord; for a representative is nothing but an image of him who is represented and is in an image the Lord Himself presented to view. (AC 3393, emphasis added)

Thus “the Word, even in the letter, is Divine” (AC 3393).

This being so, “Divine doctrine is also the Word in the literal sense in which the things that are in the world and upon earth are treated of.” Doctrine proceeding from this sense contains within it the interior sense, and therefore is Divine (AC 3712).

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We have cited these teachings to show that it is not the external style or form of the biblical books which endow the Word with Divinity, nor the symbolic language which the sacred writers anciently employed. What makes the Word Divine is the presence of the Divine Doctrine. This Divine Doctrine, being infinite and in itself incomprehensible, has to be accommodated to our apprehension, or expressed in terms of the human mind. In the Writings, the Divine Doctrine is adapted to the rational mind in terms of abstract thought, in sequences of rational ideas couched in correspondent or fitting words,

and then illustrated by examples and comparisons for the sake of our simpler states. The Writings are thus another accommodation of the Divine Doctrine, and the Lord, the only Teacher, in this His second advent, stands within them to instruct His church.

The Need for the Heavenly Doctrine

All Divine revelations of the past were given for the sake of the regeneration of humankind. In the case of the Writings we find, however, a Divine revelation given in so utterly different a form from that of the Hebrew Word and the Christian Word, that many who have accepted its truth still hesitate to class it as part of the “Word of God.” Why were the Writings given in so singular a form, resembling in great measure the dogmatic literature of modern Europe? It is not sufficient to point out that every revelation has been written in the literary forms typical to its age and country. There must be other reasons.

The Old and New Testaments were couched in legends, history, laws, poetry and prophetic allegory, and in biography and parable. And both utilized the language of sensual and natural correspondences. The Old Testament makes an appeal from sensual beauty: we feel the breath of miraculous awe, the power of direct command; and in the Gospels we are stirred with moral emotion, and have the sense of the persuasive dignity of the Divine person of Jesus the Christ walking among us on earth. But in the Writings these elements are largely absent. Swedenborg might have been a poet who would paint visions of heaven with persuasive allure and carry us off into states of ecstasy, away from the problems and concerns of external life. Instead, he is a plodding scientist and

a practical thinker, who records his spiritual experiences in unadorned narratives, who analyzes human states like a realistic physician, and who lists the elements of every doctrinal point with patient precision and circumstantial logic, without appealing to any other emotion than that love of truth which he expects in fair-minded readers.

If the biblical Word had been adequate to meet the needs of humankind, the Writings would not have been needed. But new states had arisen which were not met by the Old and New Testaments. Falsities and evils had developed, against which the symbolic and correspondential truths of the Word provided no defense. The Word had become a closed book because the Christian Church had become influenced by people who were in a love of dominion and a love of self. This caused false doctrines to obscure and pervert the meaning that had at first been seen in the Gospel. In addition, rational minds had turned against the Word and the teachings of its literal sense, attacking the symbolism of the Word which had come to be believed only as literal and factual truth. Human reason, impressed by an expansion of scientific knowledge about the natural world, began to reject the literal sense of the Scripture and with it the authority and holiness of the Scripture itself. Through many centuries, as the history of philosophy testifies, faith had struggled to maintain itself against a tide of growing unbelief, but human reason could furnish no refuge for the religious thinker. Religion could give comfort only to the fanatic, to the ignorant and the simple good, to the mystically-minded pietist, or to the blind believer and the satisfied literalists who shut their eyes to the world's knowledge; and also to a host of hypocrites and self-seekers, who found in religion a way to notoriety or fame or power or homage.

Here we find at least one reason why the Lord would give a new Revelation which was not written in parables but would speak of God plainly, as promised in John: “The time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in parables” (16:25). The Writings therefore address the rational mind, opening the correspondences of Scripture and stating in plain words the Divine Doctrine which had been hidden therein.

The Form and Purpose of the Writings

It is obvious that no church can accept as Doctrine anything which it cannot know or discern. No church obtains, or ever has obtained, doctrine from the hidden sense which is in its sacred books. It sees as authoritative doctrine the truths which are expressed in the words of its revelation (De Verbo 10:7).

It is true, of course, that in the Ancient Church, when the language of correspondences was known and currently used, symbols and correspondences often conveyed a clear meaning to people, as our poetic expressions do to us. But since that time, the truths known to the Ancients became among things unknown. Only a few general truths remained, and these appeared in the Hebrew Word openly stated, and became available as doctrine for the Jewish Church:

- the concept of one God, who was the Creator and the omnipotent Ruler of the world and its events
- the Ten Commandments
- the duty of worship and love to God, and of love towards one’s neighbor
- the need of repentance
- vague hints of life after death

These were almost the only spiritual truths that the Jews could discern from their Scriptures; everything else was hidden by a symbolism which they could not penetrate.

The Christian Church also obtained from the New Testament only the doctrines given in its literal sense: teachings concerning charity and faith and Divine providence; concerning the Lord as the incarnate Word; and concerning the Son of God who was somehow a one with the Father. The Gospels openly expressed moral ideas, and the parables of the Lord suggested a deeper wisdom present in His teachings than humans could at once understand. Still, Christians were not expected to penetrate with their understanding to the spiritual sense itself, but only to reach the truths which a careful and prayerful study of the various open teachings of the Gospel texts brought into focus. They knew that very many things in their Testament were not to be taken literally, but were to be understood in the light and spirit of the clearer passages.

It was, however, different, when they read the Old Testament. In it they could recognize a prophetic sense, and they could see that it was full of types and symbols which prefigured the life of the Lord and the establishment of a spiritual Israel and a new Jerusalem above. While on earth the Lord opened the Jewish Scriptures to His disciples, and revealed certain interior truths which had formerly been hidden in the Law and the Prophets, so that those interior truths might serve the Christian for doctrine and for life (AE 641).

Let us note, however, that the internal progress of Christians, their normal growth in spiritual knowledge, was to be accomplished first through the open doctrines given in the New Testament, and second, through the seeing of

an interior sense in the Old Testament when the symbolism of these ancient Scriptures was viewed in the light of Christian doctrine. There need have been no end to the spiritual progress which Christians could have maintained by this mode. But it was not to be accomplished through any discovery of a mystical sense in their own Gospels. When they attempted this, heresies arose which distorted the Christian doctrine.

And at the end of the Christian dispensation, the Lord came again and revealed the interiors of the Word and worship of the past churches so that these interiors might serve the New Church for doctrine and for life (AE 641, 670). The truths of this new Doctrine—hitherto hidden in the Old and New Testaments—are said to be “still more interior Divine truths” than the things revealed for the Christian Church, so that “people can now become wiser” (AE 948:2, 641e). The New Church, from its revelation, receives the arcana of heaven and of the church and of the Word “revealed” or “disclosed” and presented not as “a sense merely natural, in which the spiritual sense lies concealed,” as in the Old and New Testament, which the Writings call “the Word of the letter,” but as “*a natural sense from the spiritual, which is called the internal sense, also the spiritual-natural sense*” (AE 1061, emphasis added). The Divine purpose for the Writings’ being written in a doctrinal style seems therefore to be, *not* to provide us with another literal sense or a “letter” of the Word (which we already possess), but to convey to the rational mind directly and clearly the Doctrine of heaven hidden in the Scriptures.

Children and immature minds cannot receive the Writings rationally. They can delight in the Memorabilia and obtain useful ideas from the doctrines and be inspired

to understand more. But the Writings are addressed to an adult state. And what adults who affirmatively read the Writings see is a luminous system of truths which stand forth as a consistent doctrine that seems to explain the nature of all past revelations and gives them meaning and holiness, sheds light upon the problems of life, and reveals God as the Divine Human. This body of clear truth gives us rational peace and intellectual satisfaction, uplifts our thought and stirs our inmost affections, so that we recognize it as a rational doctrine of Divine origin—revealed, not thought out by mortals.

Those who are born and reared within the New Church may have some difficulty in seeing the Writings in as distinct a perspective, because they may not have realized the deficiencies of the world or the helpless spiritual condition of those who do not have this Doctrine.

For let us realize that while the those of the church—in their various states—may know their evils and are given the means progressively to struggle against them, the world outside welters in evils which are unrecognized and are progressively destructive. The worldly-minded can scarcely see any real purpose in creation or in human life. They may know nothing but irrational doctrines which offer a slim hope of salvation to those who hold their understanding captive to formulas and phrases or to the ritual demands of various churches. They may—from ignorance and hopeless weakness—have become immersed in follies and evils of life. They may be driven to desperation by a fear of damnation, or be depressed by an utter ignorance of what may come after death. Stifled by the stultifying evasions and worse hypocrisy of the churches, they may drift into idle speculations and phantasies—seeking an outlet of their inner longings in

séances or the vaporings of mystical movements. They may grow indifferent to religion and, beginning to doubt the Word and the very existence of God, turn to science as the only hope of humans, who, they feel, are kindred of the beasts. They may take recourse in a proud sophistication, as cynical onlookers. Or they may persuade themselves, as many others do, that they are sparks of the Divine life and need but shut their eyes on evil, glorying in their own inner purity!

Such people, if the bounds of their habits could be broken and if willing to follow the call of the love of truth, might see in the Writings the glorious fulfillment of a hope which they had hardly dared to harbor.

The Bible which was lost, would be found, the proofs of its Divinity disclosed by the revelation of its internal sense and by the fact of the consistent law of correspondences!

The mystery of the Godhead resolved into the simple truth that in the Lord Jesus Christ is the Trine of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—even as Soul, Body, and Operations exists as a trine of essentials in humans, God's image!

The essence of God seen as Divinely Human—Love itself and Wisdom itself, Source of all life, of all creation, and of all good and truth!

Regeneration recognized, not as a moment of emotion or as a magical act of ritual, but as a reorganization of the natural mind around the love of the Lord, a process open to all! Faith, not founded blindly on mystery, but on a seeing of truths, would release the reason from its bondage under the dictates of popes or councils!

Mortals, not the prey of a cruel Divine predestination but responsible and free, and protected by a Divine government of ordered laws, a government which extends its mercy even over the hells!

Heaven—not a dream-like vision or a vain hope, nor a place on earth or in the sky! But a state of blessed purpose and active social uses in a spiritual world of substantial and objective reality, unhampered by the bonds of space and time.

The last judgment—not the end of the material world, but a normal crisis in the spiritual evolution of the spirit after death, for the preservation of human freedom and for the maintenance of spiritual progress for angels and people on earth!

Science—not discarded as the devil’s own tool nor exalted as the panacea for all human ills! But restored as one of the foundations of truth, along with the symbolic and representative truth in the Word of God!

Human uses, however humble, dignified as the fields of human regeneration! And, in their complex, rising by degrees into discrete forms of society which finally—in a spiritual view—form the Grand Man, the eternal kingdom of uses which is the City and Bride of God!

And lastly, the assurance of a Doctrine not made by short-sighted humankind, but one which comes with Divine authority and is so full of truths that eternity would not suffice to exhaust its many facets and its new applications!

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Only truth in the form of rational doctrine could bring about the reestablishment of faith on a lasting foundation. We must recognize the Doctrine of faith as the Lord’s unchanging way to our salvation, and come to love that way. The fallen and broken canons (or pillars) of faith can be reestablished only through the “self-evidencing reason of love” (Canons, Preface)—and the love which

is displayed and recognized in the Doctrine is the Lord's *Divine* love, which shines through all His provisions, as is manifest to those who have a love of truth.

The doctrinal form of the Writings serves to discourage many, save those who *love truth for its own sake*. It helps to protect us from all manner of spirits who seek to stimulate in us various sentiments and emotions which produce phantasies in religious thought, especially the phantasy that a person is led by the Holy Spirit. When Christians, and especially preachers, come into the other life, they are promptly warned against "enthusiastic spirits," who insinuate the wild fancy that they themselves are the Holy Spirit. This happens

because many of the church, who in the world believed that the Holy Spirit spoke through them, terrify others by the words of the Lord in Matthew, that to speak against those things which the Holy Spirit inspired into them, is an unpardonable sin. (TCR 138)

Some clergymen indeed believe that they are inspired when they speak from zeal, and that they can even "feel the influx" of the Holy Spirit. And some say that no good works are matters of charity unless a person at the time feels the operation of the Holy Spirit and "from perception of this operation, does good" (TCR 146; SE 6104). The Doctrine therefore adds:

But they should be very cautious how they persuade themselves that this zeal . . . is the Divine operation in their hearts; for a similar, and even a warmer zeal is excited in the breasts of enthusiasts and also in those who are in extremely false ideas of doctrine. . . . For zeal, viewed in itself, is a violent heating of the natural man . . . , [and when this zeal is from infernal love, as in many

cases,] they shout the more vehemently and fetch deeper sighs from their breasts, than those who are in zeal from heavenly love. (TCR 146)

Reliance upon doctrine is a protection against such emotional states which upset the rational mind. It is interesting to note that the Quakers, who place much importance in “the immediate personal teaching of the Holy Spirit, or ‘Light Within’ or ‘Inner Light,’” have no fixed doctrine.

For doctrine necessarily checks our vagaries of thought and limits mystical tendencies. On the other hand, this tendency had no sure check in the Ancient and Christian Churches, in that the Old Testament and the New both abounded in symbolic language and prophecy which were not in the form of open doctrine, and which therefore invited endless speculation and many claims to a mystical insight into their hidden meaning. And so far as the original true Christian doctrine lost its power, the way was therefore opened to a quagmire of emotional and enthusiastic movements—as many as are the cupidities of human vanity and the ambitions of selfish loves. Paul warned against this when he wrote: “I had rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue!” (I Cor 14:19) And John warned, “Believe not every spirit” (I John 4:1). Yet into the web of Christian Church-life there entered mystical persuasions without number—Gnostics, Docetists, ascetics and celibates; quietists and Quakers, pietists and religious brooders, spiritists and Christian Scientists—all of whose reliance on the Word was sacrificed to a reliance on the perceptions and persuasive visions supposedly given to the devout person from within and by the “Holy Spirit.” And even the most doctrinaire church of all—the

Roman Catholic—places final authority not in the Bible but in tradition which, it claims, is the deciding voice of the Holy Spirit in the church and is formulated by popes and councils.

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The New Church cannot be founded on fickle human states, or on what anyone from particular loves and fancies sees in the Writings. It is the Writings *as a spiritual whole*, unalloyed by human interpretations, which must be accepted if we are to receive the Lord in His second advent as the Divine Doctrine.

Chapter Two

The Acknowledgement of the Lord in His Second Advent

When affirmative readers of the Writings have grasped the extent and universality of the principles presented in those pages, their minds are confronted by something which appears as a miracle. For they recognize that no one, however intelligent, could in a brief lifetime and with limited knowledge produce out of reasonings a system of doctrine which not only has an internal coherence, being perfectly consistent, but which also is a key that unlocks the arcana of the prophetic Word and opens the doors upon a new understanding of history, of philosophy, of science, and of life itself. It strikes readers—unless their prejudices are incurable—that Swedenborg must indeed be credited when he repeatedly disowns the authorship of these Writings, and states that he received nothing of the doctrine of the New Church from any angel but from the Lord alone by inspiration. “No spirit has dared, nor has any angel wished,” he wrote, “to tell me anything, still less to instruct me, about what is in the Word. I have been taught by the Lord alone” (DP 135; see also AR Pref; TCR 779; De Verbo 13:2). “What has come from the Lord has been written, and what has come from angels has not been written” (AE 1183). “They are not my works, but the Lord’s” (SE 6101).

If we do not accept this testimony of the revelator concerning the nature of his Writings, we have no alternative other than to regard him either as a deliberate deceiver or as a dupe of evil spirits—an insane and disordered mind. But even the skeptics have failed to point out any mental disease which has clarity of rational thought and integrity of character and a tremendous working-capacity as its symptoms!

Swedenborg's inspiration was obviously different from that of the ancient prophets, although he was on certain occasions permitted to experience their state. It is notable that he claims for the Scriptural Word a verbal inspiration, and states that the prophets, who wrote in mere correspondences, received a verbal dictation. As to his own Writings, he clearly describes a dictation of the spiritual sense into his rational mind—and a reception of the Divinely given Doctrine in his understanding; but he makes no claim of verbal infallibility, but simply of the Divinity of the Doctrine.

Yet he speaks of the revelation or disclosure of the spiritual sense by the Lord through him as “excelling (*praestat*) all the revelations that have hitherto been made since the creation of the world,” because that sense is the very sanctuary of the Word (Inv 44). For the Lord is in the spiritual sense with His Divine, while He is in the natural sense with His Human.

Nor was the New Church to be established through miracles, which tend to compel. Still the manifestation of the Lord to Swedenborg and his consequent introduction into the spiritual world as to spirit, sense, and life—so that he was granted to be in natural and spiritual light at the same time—surpasses all miracles. No such complete

interaction was ever before granted to a mortal, not even in the golden age (Inv 43, 52)!

One who receives the Writings must come to acknowledge the further truth stressed in them: the Lord, through and in the Doctrines, has fulfilled the prophecy and promise of His second advent. For the Lord—whenever He comes to the church—comes as Teacher, as Divine *Truth*. Only as *truth* can He actually enter into a person more intimately than by any personal presence. It might seem a marvelous miracle to Christians, if the Lord in Person would appear some day in the sky amid the clouds, and set aside all the laws of nature, rousing the dead from their graves! But how far more glorious is His real second advent—as Divine Truth breaking forth from the clouds of misunderstanding and fallacy which have alienated people from the Word and from heaven! This is the spiritual advent such as He Himself promised when He spoke of the “Spirit of truth” who should teach us all things and speak no more in proverbs but would guide us into all truth, adding: “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). *That* would be a revelation of His Spirit, of His Mind; not only of His Person. It would make clear the *laws* and *reasons* behind His government of the world and His modes of salvation, as well as the *ends* of His creation and the goals of human life. This real advent was to be a revelation of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the Divine Human, so that God could at last be made comprehensible to people’s rational minds. Its purpose was not to add to the mysteries of religion, but to disperse doubts and reconcile discrepancies.

Nature of the Truths of the Writings

When we thus come to see in the Writings the Lord Himself coming again to His church, and are moved by the conviction that it is the Lord who speaks in them from His Divine to teach His church we need to go further and attempt to realize what kind of authority is here implied and what kind of truth is here offered. When we accept the Writings, we accept them as a whole. We accept them—not for what we, for private reasons, might wish them to be, but—for what they claim to be. We cannot claim for them anything less or anything more. If there are qualifications, it must be the qualifications they make for themselves. If we are not ready to listen to their own claims and qualifications, we cannot justly be said to accept them. Whatever divergences there may be, as to the nature of the Writings, between different individuals and between different general bodies of the New Church, there does not exist anywhere any criterion by which the merit of any of these views can be primarily judged, except the actual and plain statements of Swedenborg. And whatever goes beyond this—unless it contradicts these statements—is a conclusion of the rational mind, enlightened or unenlightened, and thus rests on human rather than Divine authority. If it actually contradicts the various statements of the Writings, it should be regarded with doubt.

This is what I understand to be the general position of “the Academy”¹ in its battle for the authority of the

¹ The “Academy” refers to a movement among nineteenth-century readers of the Writings who wished to stress the Divine authority of those works. Some of those believers ultimately formed a separate organization of the New Church.

Writings. The Academy did not rest its position on any one isolated phrase or passage from the Writings—for it is thus that heresies arise. Such “literalism” would be unfair even in judging the meaning of some human author. Every rational person, from a sense of justice, is averse to a merely literalistic interpretation of anyone’s speech. Fairness also dictates that we cannot “read into” anyone’s words something that is not said or clearly implied. This, equally, would be a misinterpretation which is contrary to equity, or perhaps a misrepresentation, which is contrary to charity and to the love of truth. And the first thing needed for the interpretation of anyone’s meaning is an attitude of charity. The Academy’s position therefore—that “one truth does not make a doctrine”—was to collect all the statements of the Writings concerning themselves, so that they could be compared and reflected on, and each be viewed in the light of all the others, as well as in their own original context or series, where other truths qualify them and explain their intended meaning.

The general nature of the truth that the Writings convey should be seen from the preface to the little treatise on *The Lord (De Domino)*, which opens as follows:

A revelation has been made by the Lord concerning Heaven and Hell, concerning the Last Judgment which has been accomplished, concerning the Spiritual Sense of the Word; thus has been revealed the way to salvation, and what concerns the state of man after death; and this has been done fully and manifestly (*plene et manifeste*), so that any one who understands the Latin language can know. All this was done and published a year ago. But still the church does not care for this.

In commenting upon the words in the Apocalypse, “Happy is he that keeps the words of the prophecy of this book,” Swedenborg was inspired to point out that although John was told, “Seal not the words of the prophecy of this book,” yet there are few things there that could be kept, since it was a sealed or closed book not understood. But he also noted that they are happy who observe and do the truths or precepts of doctrine *now* “*opened*” and “*manifested*” in the giving of the spiritual sense of this book, and that this opening was necessary at the end of the church that any might be saved (AR 944-947).

And in the preface to the *Brief Exposition*, Swedenborg says:

Several works and tracts having been published by me, during some years past, concerning the New Jerusalem, by which is meant the New Church about to be established by the Lord; and the Apocalypse having been revealed, I have come to a determination to bring to light the entire doctrine of that church in its fullness. But, as this is a work of some years, I have thought it advisable to draw up some sketch thereof, in order that a general idea may first be formed of that church and its doctrine; because when general principles precede, each and everything will afterwards appear extant in its breadth in light, for these enter into generals, as things homogenous into their receptacles.

Throughout, the Writings claim that the spiritual sense of the Scriptures is “disclosed” or “revealed,” and this for the first time and for the New Church (AC title, 3398:4; HH 1; LJ 73; AE 260:2, 957, 641:3, 948; AR 1; TCR 508, 669). Similarly, the doctrines of the New Church are said to be “continuous verities disclosed by the Lord through

the Word,” and “confirmations of them by rational things cause the understanding to be opened above more and more, and thus to be elevated into the light in which the angels of heaven are. . . . Wherefore it is now lawful to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith” (TCR 508:5, 3).

All this indicates that the Writings are for the instruction of our understandings—written in plain language which is directly addressed to the rational mind.

They further teach that Swedenborg received the spiritual sense by dictation. “The internal sense,” he wrote, “has been dictated to me from heaven” (AC 6597e). Yet it appears that it was not dictated as it was to the prophets, word for word (cp. SE 6062), but was a dictation into the understanding—as an influx of enlightenment. Nor was it a dictation by angels or spirits, but from the Lord. Swedenborg thus formulated the spiritual sense which is known and drawn out by the angels of heaven, formulated in doctrinal language, which he refers to as “the internal sense.” He heads the expositions in the *Arcana* and other explanations of Scripture as “The Internal Sense” or “The Spiritual Sense.” Although all the books of the Scriptural Word were not expounded verse by verse, Swedenborg states simply that “the spiritual sense of the Word has now been disclosed” (LJ 73), and this because the whole Doctrine of the New Heaven and the New Church has been revealed, and the means provided for seeing this Doctrine in the Word everywhere.

After making certain summaries of the internal sense from the prophecy of Ezekiel, Swedenborg makes the remarkable observation: “These summaries have also been collated with the Word in heaven, and are in conformity with it” (SS 97). As we know, in heaven it is only the spiritual sense that is seen in the Word there. The *Arcana*

passage already cited teaches that the “Heavenly Doctrine” delivered in one of Swedenborg’s books is “for the New Church,” and is from the spiritual sense of the Word, and this sense “is the same with the doctrine that is in heaven” (HD 7).

Yet it also says that while in the world we cannot comprehend the kind or degree of thought which the angels enjoy. “Sometimes” Swedenborg was allowed, by a miraculous elevation of state, to hear the higher angels conversing among themselves, and then he “heard things unutterable and inexpressible.”

Sometimes I was let into the perception and understanding of the subjects they were conversing upon [which were full of arcana about the Lord, redemption, providence and regeneration] after which I was given to understand that I could not utter nor describe them by any spiritual or celestial expression, but that nevertheless they could be described even to a rational comprehension of them by words of natural language. And it was told me that there are not any Divine arcana which may not be perceived and even expressed also naturally, although in a more general and imperfect way. (De Verbo 3:4)

It was therefore not impossible for the spiritual sense to be revealed on earth. The quintessence and elusive fragrance and profounder depths of angelic wisdom and thought could not of course be conveyed in blunt Latin. But the doctrine of heaven in its general form could be expressed in human words quite understandable by any rational person, and the general subject matter of the internal sense of the Scripture could be disclosed so that people might see *their* own conscious states in the light of heavenly principles which allow of the widest practical

application. Indeed, the maxims of angelic wisdom, the general laws of spiritual life and of the spiritual world, could be stated to our full comprehension of their significance. And if, from an affection for truth, we perceive such heavenly truths naturally with our rational understanding, we may—the teaching adds—perceive and express after death the same things by a spiritual or a celestial mode.

For one Divine truth naturally perceived and loved, is like a crystal or porcelain vessel, which is afterwards filled with wine, and with such wine as was the quality of truth, and as it were of such a taste as was their affection for truth. (De Verbo 3:4)

The “vessel” referred to is rational truth, which is abstract and largely devoid of sensual imagery or of notions of space and time. The Writings employ many terms of philosophical thought, and their language endeavors to lead us away from mere symbolism. The distinction which *Apocalypse Explained* n. 1061 draws between the “merely literal sense” of the Scripture and the revealed explanation of Swedenborg which constitutes “a natural sense from the spiritual” or an “internal sense,” is the distinction between representative truth in which the heavenly doctrine lies concealed and rational truth by which the heavenly doctrine is disclosed.

Where, then, does the “authority” of the Writings lie?

First of all, it must be an authority that is above our own personal or group opinions. An authority is something to which one refers with deference, something outside ourselves by which our own thoughts must be judged continually—a final court of appeal.

Into its verdicts we must not read alien things which we desire to see in them, so that they may favor things to

which we incline. And since all people are prone to do this, our concepts of the teachings of the Writings must continually be modified and corrected by new truths and restatements of familiar truths which we encounter.

Secondly, the authority of the Writings stands whether we understand much or little of their teachings. Yet as to ourselves, the Doctrines would have little authority over our minds if we were ignorant of their contents. It would be as if we were willing to obey the Lord, but did not know what He wanted us to do. To accept the Divine authority of the Writings, yet make no effort to read them and find their meaning, is therefore an anomaly. On the other hand, if fallacies and even falsities enter into our understanding of the Writings, their authority is also rendered ineffective or annulled, even if the Lord should forgive us our errors so long as they do not confirm us in our evils.

Whatever our states, the Writings remain a center of reference in the Church. Those who acknowledge their Divine authorship will be in the “affirmative principle,” the essence of which is to believe that their doctrine is true “because the Lord has said so” (AC 2568, 2588). This opens the mind to receive the Holy Spirit which inspired these doctrines and which dwells in them and proceeds from them in the form of Divine truth. This affirmative principle inculcates humility, modesty; it breaks down some of the pride of our self intelligence. What we come to see and understand will increase our vision of the Lord, but the authority will still lodge, not in the things we know, but in the Writings themselves.

It is curious how in past ages Divine authority has been misplaced. Among the Jews and Christians, the Divine authority ascribed to Scripture was turned to defend as a scientific fact that Eve was formed out of a

bone taken from Adam's side, and that the earth was flat and had four corners. Among Catholics, the authority of Councils and papal edicts derived from the idea that the Holy Spirit spoke through the Church as well as through the Word, and that the Word was indeed a dead letter which could be interpreted only by the Holy Spirit thus voiced (see AR 742e).

By the placing of authority in the appearances or symbolic expressions of Scripture, the authority of the doctrine of charity and faith was actually lost. Doctrine was gradually elaborated out of correspondential expressions and symbols, rather than from naked truths, and the result was a medley of heresies.

In the New Church, we do not anticipate such dangers to the same degree, although parallels exist. The Writings formulate their Doctrine so plainly that it would seem to be difficult to evade the authority of their clear statements. Yet, it is remarkable that—by considerable labor—it can be done. Charles Augustus Tulk did it when he interpreted the Writings through the philosophy of Idealism, which denies the existence of a material world, claiming that world to be a projection of our thoughts. Thomas Lake Harris did it when he simply claimed a further revelation—one of celestial truths—which was to amend and elaborate Swedenborg's doctrines. In each case—and there have been many—the Writings have been approached with a prejudice, an interpretative theory, and have not been allowed to speak for themselves.

In every age or generation, the principle of the Divine authority of the Writings needs to be restated, so that it may not become vulnerable to subtle attacks and gross misunderstandings, and thus become of no effect. The Writings, in testifying about themselves in their relation

to the New Church, do not actually use the expression “authority.” The term implies the respect of the Church for its Divine Doctrine, but it tends to emphasize the necessity of discipline and judgment, rather than of love and enlightenment. It is in times of doubt and temptation, of struggle against infesting falsities, that we go to the Writings as an authority and lean upon the strength of their very statements.

But these Writings are more than an authority. They are a source for light and of love. In the Old Testament, Jehovah spoke to the Jews in tones of command, demanding obedience, and there He still speaks to us in the same tone of authority. In the Writings, the Lord is seen in His Divine Human, allowing us to cooperate with the ends and laws of His creation—the ends of the Divine love and wisdom. He points to uses of charity and to the road to heaven; He also gives us to realize the miseries and the insanities of the hells. Always He appeals to our reason, offering enlightenment, but stressing our freedom. He speaks to us not as children, but as men and women. And to those who receive His Divine truth in doctrine and in life, He speaks graciously, as if in fulfillment of His promise: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15; AE 409:10; AC 51:2).

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We have attempted to point out that the Writings address us with doctrines which give interior Divine truths from the spiritual sense of the Scripture in a complete and manifest form, without any other veiling than that of ordinary human language and the terms of rational thought.

The Writings, like the Scriptures, were expressed in words which are printed as objects before the sight—as letters and sentences. But it is notable how very differently such objects or letters and words can be understood, even in human literature. It is the order among these letters and words that makes all the difference (AC 5094). The letters are the same letters. But in the order of the letters and in the order of the words we can perceive the intentions of the author—the ideas which the writer wishes to convey.

We see this as we read or hear the stories of the Jewish Scripture and when we read the Writings or hear them read. Both are written in literal form. Our eye sees the same type of objects, our ears perceive the same type of sound waves. In either case something enters into our memory and remains there. Yet when we read the Scripture story, the objects as it were enter only into our *sensual* degree of the mind and are there translated into sensual ideas, into ideas of places and persons, of material things, scenes and events from the natural world, whereas what we read in the Writings does not thus linger on the threshold of the mind, but goes immediately into the *interior natural* and is converted into rational ideas.

Objects from the world enter into the external or natural memory of a person through these sensuous things on the one hand, and objects through rational things on the other. These objects separate themselves in this memory. Those which have entered through rational things take a more interior place, but those which have entered through the sensuous things have a more exterior place; hence as before said the natural becomes twofold, interior and exterior. (AC 5094)

Therefore a human being has been equipped with two memories: one is called corporeal or external, which is intended for the storing up of sensual ideas; and the other is called an interior natural memory, and is used to preserve rational ideas or abstractions into which the notions of space and time and person do not so much enter, and which can therefore be used to comprehend and describe spiritual things in the form of doctrines and principles.

When we say, then, that the Writings are addressed to the rational mind, we simply state a fact: immediately on reading their terms and sentences we translate them (without any effort of our own or any conscious process) into rational concepts, or into doctrines. If we are novices, we may occasionally have to consult a dictionary, but fortunately it does not have to be a dictionary of correspondences! And if we find in the Writings any teachings which seem obscure, it is not because they are veiled in sensual appearances but because they are too abstruse. The obscurities are only in our own minds and are caused partly by our ignorance and partly because we have difficulty in holding our earth-bound thought in a state of rational elevation.

Chapter Three

Formation of the New Church

In considering the relation of the Doctrine to the Church, we have discussed the reasons why the second advent of the Lord took place by the new revelation of interior truths from the Word, and thus by the formulation of Divine Doctrine. We pointed out that the reestablishment of faith in the Lord and in the Word on a lasting foundation required doctrine plainly addressed to the rational minds of human beings, and that the truth offered in the Writings fulfilled this need. “Falsities that have been confirmed close the church,” Swedenborg wrote, “wherefore truths rationally understood have to open it” (Documents 232)². Acceptance of the Writings is the acceptance by the rational mind of these manifest teachings as a whole, which are self-named “The Heavenly Doctrine” and also “the universal theology of the New Heaven and the New Church” (TCR Title).

These interior truths of Doctrine are said to be revealed “*for* the New Church” (HD 7, emphasis added). It is notable that Swedenborg did not at any time make any effort to organize a church in this world. He wrote the Doctrine with such a church in view—a church which would use these revelations “for doctrine and for life” (AE 670, 641, 948). In the spiritual world he witnessed the formation by the Lord of many angelic

² See Letter 6 in NewSearch.

societies, called the New Jerusalem—societies wherein the heavenly doctrine was acknowledged. Whether his own books as such were known or not by all these societies is not directly stated. The Heavenly Doctrine being the spiritual sense of the Holy Scriptures, their teachings or their spiritual contents were known; and we have instances to show that Swedenborg's works were available to spirits in the other life—and were consulted even by gentiles. In the natural world, Swedenborg distributed the Writings quite generously, although their sale was slow. He was in personal contact with a number of receivers, and corresponded with others. But we have no record of his having discussed the organization of the New Church with those receivers, beyond saying that after the new heavens had been formed, the New Church would begin to be established on earth, and that this could not be done through the clergy of the old church. He suggested that the universities in Christendom were beginning to be instructed and that “thence should come new ministers” who would take a leading part in this work (Documents 234)³. Some of the notables among early members of the New Church were indeed university products. But because of the opposition of the established church and the skeptical world, Swedenborg's hope, of establishing the New Church through an educated clergy, can now be fulfilled only through New Church universities. The principle still holds true.

Swedenborg thus trusted that the reception of the Doctrine would result on earth in the formation of the New Church, wherein the Doctrine would be the rule of life. Each one of the earliest receivers was indeed a church in particular, insofar as his reception was genuine. However,

³ See Letter 7 in NewSearch.

the establishment of the Church means the establishment of its *uses*, and the uses of the Church relate to Worship and Instruction—worship of the Lord in His second advent and instruction in and evangelization of the Heavenly Doctrine (AC 9925). The Writings themselves give an abundance of teaching about the need of a church which is both internal and external. They define uses which are to be administered by a priesthood within which there is proper subordination. The role of priests is to teach the people and to lead them by truths to the good of life, yet without compulsion and without claiming “any power over people’s souls, since they do not know in what state the interiors of a person are” (HD 316). This latter teaching is especially given at the close of the *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, which book is explicitly said to be “for the New Church.”

As to the purpose of a new, distinct church organization of the New Church, it is obviously to give freedom and opportunity to perform the uses of the Church as these are seen from the Writings. Where the truth is opposed, it cannot be taught and lived. We therefore are shown that a last judgment had to be performed in the spiritual world to restore freedom—spiritual freedom—in that world, and this by the separation of the good from the evil. Thus we read:

When the end of a church is at hand, then the interiors of the Word, of the Church, and of worship are revealed and taught. This is done that the good may be separated from the evil; there is a separation because the interior things of the Word, of the Church, and of worship, which are celestial and spiritual, are received by the good but are rejected by the evil. Moreover, the interior things of the Word, which are revealed at the end of a church, are

serviceable for doctrine and life to the new church which is also then established. . . . The like has been done at the present time; for it has now pleased the Lord to reveal many arcana of heaven, especially the internal or spiritual sense of the Word, which has heretofore been wholly unknown, and with that He has taught the genuine truths of doctrine. . . . A revelation is necessary at the end of the church, in order . . . that by means of it the good may be separated from the evil, and a new church established, and this not only in the natural world where men are but also in the spiritual world where spirits and angels are; for in both worlds there is a church, and revelation takes place in both, and thereby separation, as also the establishment of a new church. (AE 641)

This judgment and separation in the spiritual world is a final judgment on spirits, and it leads either to heaven or to hell. In the natural world there is also a separation, very much more gradual and far from universal. Neither is it a final judgment. It affects only those who are brought into a knowledge of the Heavenly Doctrine in a state of freedom and reason. With those there is either a rejection of the truths from a love of the opposing falsities which favor their evils, or else a defense of the Heavenly Doctrine from a love of the truth for its own sake, which is a love of the Lord or charity or spiritual uses.

Those who accept the Writings and come together to study their meaning and to carry them out in the uses of life, thereby proclaim their good intentions. Their purpose is to be on the side of heaven and the Lord and, in their own sphere of responsibility, to combat the evils and falsities which threaten the life of charity. Thus the *objective* of the Church is to rally the good, the simple good, the well-disposed, those who are teachable and not in the pride

of their own self-intelligence, to rally these around the banner of the Lord's Divine truth as newly revealed. This objective holds true no matter how few of the salvable remnants of the simple good the New Church is actually able to attract. It holds true even if evil people join the work of the Church for purposes of their own. It holds true even though the sincere members of the Church are from the first burdened with evils of heredity as grievous as those of others, and come into states of vacillation and temptation, and have to start afresh again and again in their endeavors to follow the Lord's teaching and leading.

Nor does the teaching just cited (AE 641) involve any claim on our part that we can know the state of the interiors of any one. But everyone who enters the Church by adult baptism or confession of faith, confesses faith in the Lord in His second coming, endeavors to repent, desires to be regenerated, is anxious to assist in the work of the Church and in the extension to others of the means of salvation as well as in profiting themselves by this. They also wish to protect the sphere of the Church from the evils that may arise from the self.

Thus the organized Church includes all manner of men and women and all manner of states, for no one can measure the extent of any one's regeneration. This is known to the Lord alone; it is true also for one's spiritual failure. Nonetheless, the Church is organized and separated from the world in order to draw to itself those who are in the good of obedience to the Lord as He comes to us in the Divine Doctrine. To belong to the Church is therefore a sign of a conscious intention to such good, even though it is not a proof of possessing it. The members of the Church therefore take for granted that their fellow members have the good of doctrine and the love of truth. So far as the

Church persists in teaching the revealed Doctrine boldly and clearly, without compromise, and so long as the truths of regeneration are kept as the main subject of its thought, there will be a constant purging of the Church. Those will leave who are not in the good of doctrine or who do not aspire to seek in the doctrine their bread of life or at least to be supported by the sphere and life of the Church in their simple efforts to live from a religious conscience.

There is but little lasting attraction in the Doctrines of the New Church for those who are averse to the spiritual life to which the Writings point on every page. For to understand the subject matter of the Writings and persist in their study requires a certain elevation of mind which calls for a constant rebuke of our impatient and self-seeking sensual will. To receive satisfaction and delight from the perusal of the Writings was therefore cited by Swedenborg as a “sign” that the reader was in a state of enlightenment from heaven. “For the matters which are there treated of,” he wrote, “cannot be comprehended without enlightenment, since they do not belong to the external understanding but to the internal” (Documents 217)⁴. It is this enlightenment which those of the New Church seek when they study the Writings—not to confirm opinions of their own, but to learn what the Lord there teaches. And they do not like to question its existence in others.

Individual enlightenment and regeneration could exist even if there were no organized Church, so long as the Word and the Writings were available. But the Church has to be established to promulgate the Writings and to protect and promote spiritual progress, which is provided by the Lord through the *uses* of the Church.

⁴ See Letter 1 in NewSearch.

In appearance, and so far as history records, the New Church was established by certain people, receivers of the Writings, who met for mutual instruction and for common worship and later recognized some of their number as ministers and undertook various uses—preaching, lectures, publication, education. But in reality, the origin of all these uses is found in the Writings themselves, or in the Lord’s teaching concerning the need for and order of the church. Only so far as this church originates in the Writings, *is* there a New Church. The Lord alone can build the Church. And the primary thing of the New Church is therefore the acknowledgement of the Writings as the proximate source of its distinctive doctrines and life, and of all its uses.

The Writings and the Word

From the beginning of the New Church, receivers hesitated to define the place of the Writings in relation to the Church. They dissented little in recognizing a new Divine revelation, even among those who saw no need for a separate Church, though some were inclined to regard Swedenborg more as an enlightened exponent of the Word, inspired as to his *seeing* of certain truths, but not as to his recording of his spiritual experiences. On the other hand, some boldly asserted that the Writings were as much the Word of God to the New Church as were the Gospels to the Christian. If it did not owe its foundation to the voice of God, or to His Word given in a new form, how could there be a new dispensation, a New Church? Would not then the New Church be a mere reform within the old, a new Christian denomination, such as the Lutheran Church or the Quakers or Methodists, movements founded

upon the work or writings of men? Many New Church people were quite satisfied to have the Church regarded as a Christian denomination, and indeed nourished the vain hope that all the “old” Christian churches would eventually be permeated by the spirit of the “New Age” and gradually accept the essentials of Swedenborg’s teachings. Mostly the New Church organizations avoided making an issue of the question about the status of the Writings, especially since the Writings themselves used the term “The Word” to refer to the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and made no direct claim to the title. Many loyal receivers feared that if a custom of calling the Writings “the Word” were adopted, confusion would follow, and the unique character of the Writings as the *final* revelation might be lost from view.

It was not until the development of the Academy that these objections were met. At that time it became obvious that many in the organized New Church had left their first love of the Writings and, while vaguely acknowledging Swedenborg’s inspiration, did not regard the teachings of the Writings as of Divine authority. The result was that the uses of the Church suffered and various heresies began to invade. Those who then began to associate themselves into the “Academy movement” recognized the need of stressing before the Church that it is not Swedenborg who speaks in the Writings but *the Lord*, and that to put aside any of their plain teachings is to evade the Lord’s Divine authority. Therefore, the Academy pointed out that since “the Divinity of the Word resides in its spiritual sense” (SS 18, 19), and since “the spiritual sense of the Word is the doctrine of the New Church” (SS 25, 79), “this doctrine must be the Divine and infallible Word of the Lord” who had “come again in the Word, not as to the letter, but as to

the spirit of the letter” (“The Standard of Authority in the New Church,” Rev. W. H. Benade, NCL 1902:365ff).

Let us note that there is no confusion here between the Writings as the Word and the Scriptures as the Word. It is not their literal form but their internal contents of Divine Doctrine which makes each of these revelations the Word of God. And lest there be any misunderstanding, Benade’s previously cited paper—an address given before the Council of Ministers in 1873—answered the question, “How is the second coming of the Lord in the Word accomplished?” by saying:

Not by the giving of the Word in the letter, for this had been done long ages before. Not by the fulfillment of the Word, for this had been accomplished centuries before. Not by the provision of a new Word in a literal form, for this was impossible, seeing that the Lord had filled every jot and title of the Word full of a Divine life, and so had made it Divine truth itself in last, as it was in first principles. Not thus was His second coming effected, but by the opening of the Word as given and fulfilled by Himself; by a revelation of its spirit and life to the understandings of men; by the unfolding of its spiritual sense. (NCL 1902:368f)

The Writings do not make any claim that they are the Word in a literal sense, or a new Letter of Scripture. But the Writings do claim to be the Divine Doctrine given from the Lord’s own mouth. They claim that they reveal and give the internal sense of the Word of Scripture, and that the Doctrine conforms with the Word in heaven which presents the spiritual and celestial senses of the Scripture before the angels.

The Writings thus may be called the Word of the Lord, even as the Word in heaven is called the Word and even as the Divine truth proceeding from God to create the world is called the Word (AC 2894, 5075, 5272). The Writings teach that every Divine revelation is the Word in that wider sense. Each contains the same Divine truth and thus the Divine Doctrine itself. To believe that the Revelation which excels previous Scriptures—defines their canon, and opens their internals and reveals their meaning—could be anything less than the authoritative Word of the Lord, was seen by the Academy to be incredible.

The Academy did not pretend that the Writings were identical as to the form with the Word existing in the heavens. *The Word in the heavens* is written in an angelic language in which every letter or symbol stands for perceptions and affections of the internal sense, and the angels see no other sense—see nothing from any natural sense (SS 71). The form and the writing differ in the various heavens, yet “the Word is the same everywhere,” as to doctrine, although the angels have thence perceptions of wisdom and ideas of spiritual thought that are incomparably superior to those of people in the natural world. But the angels do not know that this Word is not similar to the one which they read in the world, nor are they conscious that they are wiser than they were when on earth (De Verbo 14:2). *The Writings* are also written or printed in letters and words, which—like the angelic Word—express the Heavenly Doctrine or the spiritual sense of Scripture in direct fashion, but in natural words. Thus those who read the Writings may receive ideas of doctrine, of principles of life, of laws of the Divine providence and of influx. They receive these ideas and their associated affections into their rational minds and perceive them simply or wisely according to

their states. The Writings arrange series of truths according to a rational order, in which one point of doctrine follows another with a definite logical purpose. Sometimes, as in the *Arcana Coelestia*, this logical series evolves from the literal sense of the Scriptures. At other times, incidents from the spiritual world illustrate these series or confirm them from the Word or from the sciences. Elsewhere, as in the *True Christian Religion*, they form a balanced system of doctrine in which all the teachings are made into a universal whole. But as a whole and in every part the Writings reveal the spiritual and celestial senses of the Word in “a natural sense from the spiritual” (AE 1061). It is the *rational* form of the truths of the Heavenly Word which is there given, not their sensual or merely natural form such as is presented through sensual correspondences or moral parables.

Within its rational teachings, the Writings contain infinite truth—all the ineffable arcana of the heavenly Word, whence angels derive their wisdom. The Writings express Divine arcana as to their generals (De Verbo 3:4). And those who on earth, from an affection for truth, perceive these generals by their rational understanding, can, when they become spirits or angels, perceive them and express them in a spiritual or celestial manner. Thus they perceive unending particulars and singulars within these doctrinal generals (*Ibid.*). But while on earth, their conscious perception is limited within the natural rational forms of the Writings themselves.

Much of the confusion of thought which has attended the discussion of the Academy’s acknowledgment (and I cite from the “Principles of the Academy”) that in the Writings “is contained the very essential Word, which is the Lord” and that “the Church acknowledges no other

Authority, and no other Law,” is due to our natural habit of thinking from appearances. In appearance, the Writings are books—utterly separate from the Scriptures. But in reality the Writings are an organized form of Divine truth. It is the same with the Word of the Scriptures: they in reality are not material books, but a Divine organization of truths—in a form more external. As long as we think of these revelations as books, we cannot see their mutual connection except vaguely. But if we regard them spiritually, apart from the illusions of space and time, we can see that they are not separate, but are revelations of distinct phases of, or planes within, the one God of Divine truth which was indeed made incarnate in Bethlehem. The Word is the Lord in His Divine made Human and is His Human made Divine. In general it may be said that the Lord Himself is in the spiritual sense with His Divine “and in the natural sense with His Human” (Inv 44). The Word on earth is His revelation of Himself to us here. There we see Him in His accommodations to our natural minds, in His Human, in His embodiments of truth.

Although this body of truth Divine is in itself eternal and was the Word which was in the beginning with God and was God, and indeed created all things, yet it was revealed to human apprehension only by degrees and stages. As to its Sensual it was revealed through the correspondential Word of the Old Testament, in sensual ideas molded in a prophetic order to represent the coming of the Lord in the flesh. As to its Divine Natural it was revealed by the appearance of the Lord on earth and by the testimony of the New Testament. As to the Divine Rational, it was revealed in the Writings, which describe the glorification of the Lord’s Human, trace the mental life of the Lord on

earth, and make apprehensible the laws and reasons of the Divine economy of heaven.

One's natural mind contains and can contain only these three degrees, the Sensual, the Middle Natural and the Rational. And when the New Church is called the crown of all the Churches, a dispensation which will endure to eternity, it is also obvious that the rational truths which its revelation (the Writings) presents are of the highest degree which the mind of people on earth can perceive. It is therefore the final revelation of God to the human race on earth, and will not be followed by another which shall interpret it.

But it would be an error of tragic consequences if we attempted to divorce this plane of rational truths Divine from the New Testament which presents the Lord as He lived among us here, or from the Old Testament which in sensual imagery prophesied His Advent. This would be as impossible as to withdraw the brain and the nervous system from a human body and present it alone as a man—without heart and viscera and without skin and bones! (See NCL 1938:164-167 for a development of this line of thought.) The Writings, in all their teachings, imply the acceptance of the Scriptures and terminate their teachings in confirmations from the Word in its literal sense, just as the nervous fibers of the brain are terminated in the skin, the muscles, and the organs of sensation.

In spiritual aspect, therefore, the Writings are not separated from the Word in the sense of the letter, but are its interior contents. In our thoughts the Word of Divine revelation is a one coherent whole, in which every part has its eternal function.

§ § § § §

When the Academy voiced its faith that the Writings contain “the essential Word,” it did in no wise set aside the Old and New Testaments as of no further use. But with the revelation of the Heavenly Doctrine, these Testaments underwent a transfiguration. Their Divinity was made clear. Their purpose and special function became apparent when they were seen in the light of the Writings. Their *power* over our minds was then increased rather than diminished. We saw them to have an authority as the ultimate embodiment of Divine truth—which before we had vaguely sensed but which we could now understand—since in the sacred words of Holy Writ was gathered all the wisdom of God. This the *Arcana* teaches in these words:

The literal sense is by no means annihilated by the internal sense, but is rather confirmed and strengthened thereby; for every single word of the letter obtains weight and holiness from the internal sense which is within. Besides, the literal sense is the basis and fulcrum by which the internal sense exerts its power, and with which it is so intimately conjoined that there is not an iota, point, or tittle in the letter of the Word which does not contain within it what is Divine. (AC 9349)

Now, the teaching is that *illustration* is effected by means of truths nakedly seen, but that the *conjunction* is effected through truths clothed in ultimate appearances and correspondences, such as are in the sense of the letter. The sense of the letter effects a conjunction of heaven with those of the Church. Swedenborg refers to having a thousand experiences which proved to him that “the sense of the letter of our Word” produces this effect; and he adds that “the spiritual sense, without the accompanying natural sense, does not communicate with heaven” (De Verbo 18:3).

He observed that when spirits in the world of spirits bring forward any passage according to the sense of the letter they immediately excite some heavenly society to conjunction with them (AE 816:2), although this is not the case when they bring forward something from the spiritual sense without the sense of the letter (De Verbo 20:2). The reason, of course, is that the appearances of the letter are sensual correspondences which suggest to the angels infinitely more things of the spiritual sense than human or spirit apprehends as naked truths. “If the Word had been written otherwise, no conjunction with man would have been possible” (AE 816:2). Sometimes evil spirits and those in various heresies abuse this communication and thus seek a temporary favor and protection from heaven (AE 832:2).

In the acceptance of the literal sense of the Word, all the states of the Church and of heaven find a common field of use and cooperation. Conjunction is effected through common externals. This is a law of life. Love has this law inscribed upon it, when it desires the physical nearness, the actual touch of the ones it loves, and longs to build a common home for them. And because the power of conjunction lies in externals, in ultimates, the Lord came on earth as a Man among mortals, and gave His teachings a fulfillment of symbolic prophecy, yet one veiled in parable. To all well-disposed people He presents Himself in the Word as to His Divine Human, as Jesus Christ, offering them conjunction with Himself. Sensual people apprehend sensually what He is and what He offers. Natural people apprehend Him naturally, and those who are truly rational can be taught from His Divine Rational (AC 4715). But all see Him in the literal sense in the ultimate Human form common to all people.

As to this general truth concerning His first advent, the New Church draws its doctrine from the literal sense of the Scripture. Indeed it was so that the Lord drew all the doctrines of the Writings at the hands of Swedenborg. The Writings also repeatedly stress that the doctrine of the Church, unless collected and then confirmed from the sense of the letter of the Word, has no value, no authority, no power, because it does not then “communicate” with heaven (De Verbo 18:4, 20:2-3, 5).

It is of vital importance to the Church that this teaching be clearly understood:

All things of the doctrine of the church are to be confirmed by the sense of the letter of the Word, and whatever of doctrine is not confirmed from the sense of the letter of the Word has no power. Doctrine confirmed by the sense of the letter as to *genuine truth*, has power. The appearance of Divine truth also has power, though less, so far as it can agree with genuine truth; but the sense of the letter of the Word falsified has no power. It closes and does not open heaven. (De Verbo 20:5 emphasis added)

This is one phase of the teaching. The other phase is that the *genuine* truths in the literal sense are from the *spiritual sense*, while the appearances themselves constitute the merely natural sense. It is further disclosed that the doctrine of genuine truths is now revealed and already gathered into the Heavenly Doctrine given to the New Church.

To the New Church, then, is given the threefold Word, the doctrine of genuine truth, and also something of the science of correspondences whereby the externals of the Word may be understood. What use is the Church to make of these revelations? How can we receive their

internal content? What are the orderly modes by which the Church, its priests, and its people, are able to draw their water of life and their bread of life from the Word? How can the New Church avoid the tragic perversions of doctrine such as overtook the Christian Church? What are the conditions for enlightenment and what is the function and place of our rational minds in the process?

In later chapters, I shall attempt to give some of the answers which the Writings offer to these questions.

Chapter Four

Doctrine and the Church

We showed in a preceding section that the Writings, when viewed interiorly, are so organically connected with the Old and New Testaments that these Three Revelations make one body of Divine Truth: the Writings being the external presentation to our rational understanding of that same truth which in the Scriptures lies concealed as an undercurrent of a spiritual sense.

It is upon this entire threefold Word that the New Church is founded. No one can dispute the general statement that “the church is from the Word” (TCR 243). Every church is distinguished primarily by the revelations which it acknowledges as containing its charter and the source of its being. Christian churches are all founded on the testimony of the Gospels and on the Old Testament prophecies, and Jewish churches on the Law given through Moses.

“The Church is from the Word.” Yet it must also be admitted that, in a sense, “the Word does not make the church” (TCR 244)! The Christian Church has always been nominally founded upon the New Testament; yet in the course of the centuries it split up into many churches of very different character both as to teachings and as to life. The church, *as to state and quality*, is according to the *understanding* of the Word among those who are in the church. Indeed, the state of the church is determined by those truths of faith and goods of charity which it

apprehends as taught in the literal sense of the Word. If the people of the church do not read the Word, the states among them are not states of the church, but states of alien origin—states of the world, states which partake of ignorance and error; and the same is the case when the Word is read but not understood. And the Word is not understood if it is read in the light of false doctrines or false principles of interpretation.

Therefore the *True Christian Religion* states that although a church is according to its doctrine, “still doctrine does not establish (*instaurat*) the church, but integrity and purity of doctrine, consequently the understanding of the Word” (n. 245). Doctrine must be “integer,” untouched, undiminished, complete, whole, entire, sound, if it is to establish the church among people! The church is not instituted by those who pick out specific points of doctrine that carry some particular promise or appeal to some passing state, and then ignore other phases of the teachings. This is one reason why a priesthood must be placed in charge of the instruction of the church, a priesthood whose office it is to see to it that not only the truths which appear to us are taught but that the whole doctrine is presented. The revealed Doctrine must be “untouched”—must be handed on from generation to generation so that its spiritual truth can be rendered up immune from the rational (AC 2533). Purity of doctrine is said to establish the church, not doctrine mixed up with human opinions and novelties which cover over the purpose latent in the original Revelation. Human opinions and interpretations must indeed be resorted to in our thought, but these must never be confused with the Divine Doctrine itself, but must be under constant judgment and scrutiny and must never lay claim to any other than rational authority.

Since it is “integrity and purity of doctrine” which institute the church, this calls for a true understanding of the Word. It implies that we must place our faith in the revealed Doctrine as an untouched whole and allow that Doctrine to speak to us and influence our thinking and acting. For while it may be said that sound and pure Doctrine is what makes the church in general, it is faith and life according to faith that institutes the particular church within each of us (TCR 245). Each must have an understanding of the Word and obtain this understanding in the first instance from the church as a whole or from doctrine as this exists in the church, and in the second instance from doctrine which one finds in the Word (AC 5402, 6047.2-3, 6822, 8993.4).

The Word is the Word whether anyone understands it or not, since in the supreme sense it is the Divine Doctrine itself which is above the comprehension of any finite person or even angel, being the infinite understanding of the Lord Himself. The Word in the forms that we know it—as the Scriptures and the Writings—is the Divine truth in accommodated forms, and is likewise the Word whether we understand it or not. Yet the Word, if not understood, becomes to us a dead letter, and if falsified as to meaning, it becomes no longer truth with those who falsify it (SS 77). The Lord is indeed present in the Word with those who read it, but cannot conjoin Himself with them except so far as they understand something of what they read (SS 78). For it is by understanding that we see the Lord in the order of the inspired ideas of the Word. The understanding is our spiritual eyes.

Be it known, that all the truths of the Word, which are the truths of heaven and of the church, can be seen by the understanding, in heaven spiritually, in the world

rationally. For a truly human understanding is the sight itself of these truths, for it is separated from what is material, and when separated from what is material it sees truths as clearly as the eye sees objects; it sees truths as it loves them, for as it loves them it is enlightened. (AE 1100e)

Truths in the heavens are spiritual objects which appear before the angels more clearly than natural objects do before men. (AE 831:4; cf. 260)

From creation, the human body is equipped with the organs of sight and the faculty of seeing in natural life. Similarly the mind or spirit is also given a faculty of seeing—but of seeing in spiritual light. The faculty is given for us to use, but is not from us nor is it ours; it belongs, like every faculty, to the Lord. The seeing is ours but the power is the Lord's. We are therefore taught that the eyes really do not see from themselves, but from the spirit, and the spirit does not see from itself, but from a still more interior sight, that of our rational.

Nay, neither does this see of itself, but does so from a still more internal sight, which is that of the internal man . . . And even this does not see of itself, for it is the Lord who sees through the internal man, and He is the Only One who sees because He is the Only One who lives, and He it is who gives man the ability to see, and this in such a manner that it appears to him as if he saw of himself. Such is the case with influx. (AC 1954:2)

The understanding is our organ for spiritual seeing, and all the truths of the Word are spiritual objects which by a spiritual mode affect the understanding, and cause the understanding to assume the form or image of some

aspect of Divine order, so far as we consent. We then feel that we see truths, or receive truths. Actually, however, what occurs is that our mind has been affected or modified by the truth. Just as physical objects which we see do not, on account of our seeing them, enter into our brain but remain in the outer world, so, in our spiritual seeing, the truths of the Word remain in the Word, and the mind has merely been furnished with a new state. This impression invites an influx of life from heaven, but in a different form, a new life—an influx of good and truth from the Lord. For we are only vessels receptive of life. We are not the “influx” which affects the vessel. And indeed, since we—as organic vessels—have not made ourselves, we are not even the vessels, but merely the state of the vessels, such as they are at any given time. (See chapter 10 below.) And this state is the product of our exercise of liberty and rationality. It is built up by our consent or refusal to be influenced by the truth which affects us from without and by the good which affects us from within.

Thus the understanding of the Word makes the *state* of the church with us.

Appearances and Naked Truths

The Word is Divine, and so are the infinite truths which it contains. Indeed, every truth is Divine and infinite, even though presented in the Word through finite accommodations which enable us to distinguish it from other truths so that it may affect our finite understanding. And when we read the Word, the Divine and infinite truth proceeds from the Lord to us to build in our understanding an abode for its influx and Divine presence. Thus the Word radiates light and heat. And we are taught that

from the Word the Divine teaching of Doctrine proceeds on every plane; and even the Doctrine which proceeds from the literal sense of the Word is wholly Divine—in its proceeding (AC 3712).

It is by means of its finite accommodations or by its being clothed in sensual, natural, and rational appearances, that the Word can affect our understanding, or—what is the same—that we can understand the Word, or see its meaning, just as pure light reveals nothing to our eyes unless it is refracted in colors and reflected from objects. This, we are informed, is the primary reason why the Word of the Scriptures was written by correspondences and representations, symbols and parables. And for similar reasons, the Writings are couched in rational language with arguments and expositions, and the angelic Word is written in finite symbols of a still higher type. All these things are accommodations to finite minds—minds which live in the realm of appearances, either natural or rational.

At the same time, appearances are necessary to prevent the thoughts of human or angel becoming, as it were, lost in infinity—which would lead to insanity. The literal sense of the Word, as it exists in the Sacred Scriptures, is also filled with grosser sensual appearances to prevent us from entering into its interior truths without due preparation lest we should profane these interior truths.

Nonetheless, “all the things which have to do with man’s life and thus with his salvation, are *naked*” in the Scriptures; and in many places where they are clothed by mere correspondences these essential truths “show through, as objects are seen by a woman through a thin silk veil before her face” (TCR 229). The Word in the sense of its letter is therefore likened to one clothed whose face and hands are bare (SS 55). “Hence it may be evident,” we

read in *De Verbo*, “that there is no lack, but that man can find and see naked truths even in the letter of the Word. These parts of the Word serve for the church’s doctrine, because in themselves they are spiritual-natural truths” (n. 10:7). Thus “the doctrine of genuine truth may also be fully drawn from the literal sense of the Word” (SS 55).

On the other hand, heresies arise from mistaking the appearances of truth, or the clothing, for the naked truth (AE 816, 1089:2). This mistake is pardoned when committed innocently. In fact, heresies do not by themselves condemn a person; but an evil life, and confirmations of the falsities in the heresy from the Word and by reasonings from the pride of intelligence—these condemn. People are born into the religions of their parents and on account of their later occupations they are usually unable to withdraw from its falsities. But to live wickedly, and confirm falsities to the destruction of the genuine truth, that is another matter; since the falsity then coheres after death with the love of what is one’s own and with pride in one’s wisdom (SS 92).

We are therefore forewarned to see whether a thing is true before we begin to confirm it, and not to rush to confirm everything we happen to like (SS 91). There is no great hurry in spiritual matters, and common sense can often come to our rescue in recognizing the difference between appearances and genuine truths. To speak according to apparent truths is allowed to all of us, for obvious reasons. But to think from *confirmed* appearances against the truth is to blunt and darken the understanding (SS 95).

The appearances, comparisons, similitudes, and correspondences used in the literal sense of the Word as an accommodation to simple states are particularly likely to be adapted to confirm any principle of religion and thus

also any heresy. This has caused the Bible to be derided as the “Book of Heresies” (AC 10276:8). But it is not the function of correspondences to teach, but only to corroborate what is already taught. The teaching is to be found in the naked truths, and “appearances of truth can be understood only from passages where the naked truths stand out; out of these doctrine can be formed by one who is enlightened by the Lord, and according to that doctrine all other things can be explained” (AE 816:2).

Why, then, was it necessary that the Word be written in appearances and correspondences, and not in naked truths? Several reasons have already been alluded to, but in addition this is given: through the Word in its literal sense there may be a conjunction with heaven. For humans have few truths in common with the angels, and can receive but relatively few; and if, through the Writings, they receive many, yet they perceive only their most general aspects. In the Old and New Testaments, however, infinite truths are represented in the correspondential symbols of the literal sense, and these form a medium by which the heavens, who understand the spiritual meaning, can cohabit with all who think of the natural sense (AE 816:2).

It is important to notice that people could always find naked truths in the Scriptures, provided there was with them something of innocence and a willingness to be led—a simple faith in the Lord. These truths of saving power also entered into the teachings of consummated churches, which still teach the ten commandments and the duty of repentance, and many other truths, to which the simple good listen with eager hearts, while the falsities of these churches make only a superficial impression upon them.

But it is not a sufficient protection against falsities to know a few naked truths. The Word in its letter cannot be understood until the clear and patent truths of religion are gathered together into a *doctrine of genuine truths*, in the light of which the Word can be read and interpreted. And when false doctrines have usurped the throne and rule the thinking of a church, the Word is more and more shut up, until it becomes full of apparent contradictions, and doubts begin to tear down faith. It then becomes more and more difficult to distinguish naked truths from apparent truths, and still more difficult to gather up a doctrine of genuine truth. But “the things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

This was why the Lord raised up Swedenborg and enlightened his mind by a special Divine inspiration to see and collect out of the Old and New Testaments the naked truths which were required, and from these formed for the New Church a doctrine of genuine truth in the light of which the Word could be understood. The Lord did this according to the very order in which people should proceed to find genuine truth. Even as the Lord as the Word was made flesh by being born and educated in human fashion, so He now came again in the Word of the Scriptures by the very mode in which people should have sought for Him. In both these cases, however, He did what no human could ever do. At His first advent He glorified His Human. At His second advent He revealed the spiritual sense of His Word and laid bare the arcana of the spiritual world.

The Doctrine of Genuine Truth

The Writings contrast genuine truth with truth not genuine. They show that the truths and goods with those outside the Church are not genuine, and that only within the Church which has the Word can truth and good be genuine (AC 9255, 10212). Truth is not genuine where there is ignorance and falsity, as with the Gentiles. Yet good can lie concealed in truths even if they are not genuine, and these non-genuine truths can then be accepted by the Lord as genuine (AC 9258), although it is intimated that one who is devoid of any genuine truths can advance only to the threshold of heaven (AE 798:8). The Writings also mention that

... there are some who are in genuine truths, some who are in truths not genuine, and some who are in falsities; and yet they who are in genuine truths are often damned, while they who are in truths not genuine, and also they who are in falsities, are often saved. (AC 9192)

We cite this “paradox” in order to show that genuine truth can be with a person irrespective of his or her interior state. It can come to the understanding without affecting the will. It can be seen and even acknowledged, yet never be lived.

It is important to make this clear, since the Writings state definitely and repeatedly that “*the doctrine of genuine truth has now been revealed*”—a statement which would be considerably weakened if this doctrine were not intelligible to every rational mind. The Writings give the doctrine of genuine truth in a series of volumes which contain one doctrine after another, each point being drawn from naked truths found in the Holy Scripture and then confirmed by other Scriptural teachings either naked or clothed. But

the fact that the Writings cite these passages in groups or singly, does not take them out of their original context in the Scriptures. It merely establishes new connections between the various truths in the literal sense and places them in mutual relations to some central principle. It reveals an order of truths not before recognized, an internal substratum of meaning which binds them all together as a living body with a Soul and Spirit not manifest before.

The “doctrine of genuine truth” is therefore nothing else than the naked truths visible in the sense of the letter of the Scriptures placed in their proper connection and order. When so ordered, these truths appear as a doctrine of love and charity, which is the sum and substance of “all the law and the prophets.”

This is the true doctrine of the literal sense of the Word, consistently taught as the two great commandments. And it is again and again emphasized in the Writings that doctrine is and must be drawn from the *literal* sense of the Word. It may therefore be surprising that we should come across repeated teachings in the Writings which state what appears to be quite the contrary, namely, that “the internal sense is the genuine doctrine itself of the church” and that “they who understand the Word according to the *internal* sense know the true doctrine itself” (WH 11:3), nay, that the Heavenly Doctrine which gives the doctrine of genuine truth, is from the spiritual sense (HD 7). “The internal sense teaches this doctrine itself; and he who knows this doctrine has the internal sense of the Word” (AC 10276:8).

But there is really no contradiction here. For the doctrine of genuine truth is formed from passages in the letter of the Word where the truths of the spiritual sense stand forth naked without clothing; and “where the Word

is thus naked, there its goods and truths appear naked as in heaven, thus such as they are in the spiritual sense” (AE 778:6). And these naked truths “are in themselves spiritual-natural truths” and “serve for the church’s doctrine” (De Verbo 10:7). This is exactly what is said of the Writings, which consist throughout of naked truths which the rational mind can grasp (AE 1061; HD 7).

Since the naked truths in the Scriptures are really the shining forth of the spiritual sense in the natural sense, it is permissible to speak of them as belonging to either. Thus the Writings sometimes urge the necessity of drawing all doctrine from the literal sense of the Word, and at other times show the danger of forming doctrinal opinions from the appearances or the correspondential clothing of the literal sense.

The naked truths which make up the true doctrinal contents of the literal sense are therefore identified as the outcropping spiritual sense, or the natural form of the spiritual sense. All the clear teachings about the unity of God—about love to the Lord and charity to the neighbor, repentance, the incarnation, the existence of heaven and hell—are of the spiritual sense in the letter. And when we read the rest of the Scripture in the light of such teachings, many of the parables and symbolic representations of the letter become transparent from within. When, for example, we see the clear teaching that God is love, a heavenly Father, we also see that when we read that God punishes and that He is angry and even creates evil, this is according to the human appearance.

The doctrine of the church in many things therefore “recedes from the literal sense of the Word” (AC 9025:2). The literal sense—in such a context—means the clothing of sensual correspondences. When the literal sense means

this, we can say that “the spiritual sense does not appear in the sense of the letter” (SS 5).

Since there are two different usages for the phrase “literal sense,” there are also two different definitions given to the expression “the spiritual sense.” In one set of teachings, the spiritual sense is described as hidden within the letter and known only in heaven. In another, the spiritual sense is defined as identical with the true doctrine of the church (AC 9025:2). Thus we read:

From the sense of the letter of the Word any doctrinal thing whatever can be hatched . . . but not so if doctrine is formed from the internal sense. The internal sense is not only that sense which lies concealed in the external sense . . . but is also that which results from a number of passages of the sense of the letter rightly collated and which is discerned by those who are enlightened by the Lord in respect to their intellectual. For the enlightened intellectual discriminates between apparent truths and real truths, especially between falsities and truths (AC 7233:3)

And those are enlightened who see that love of the Lord and charity are the essentials of the church. These people learn, and priests teach, from doctrine and not merely from the appearances of the letter. Thus, by unfolding the literal truths, they come to understand also things which belong to the spiritual person, whereas others are inclined to invalidate spiritual truths by insisting on the appearances of the letter.

Doctrine can unfold external truths, such as are of the literal sense, so that spiritual-natural truths become visible. A priest does this when he collects and compares various open teachings in the Word and by the doctrine thus formed

explains some obscure text or parable or some symbolic or prophetic statement not before understood. For the New Church, the doctrine of genuine truth has already been thus collected in the Writings, and therefore the Scriptures can now be unfolded with ease by anyone whose intellectual is enlightened and who knows something about the science of correspondences.

The Writings give the spiritual sense of certain parts of the Word directly and clearly. Other parts of Scripture they do not directly explain; but still they give the doctrine of genuine truth in fullness, and from this the spiritual sense can be unfolded, although many human elements may interfere: incomplete knowledge of the doctrine; lack of illustration; or ignorance of the correspondences employed in the text.

The spiritual sense revealed in the Writings is not the internal sense itself such as the angels see it, which is couched solely in spiritual ideas, but is the “spiritual-natural sense” (AE 1061; De Verbo 10:7). Nor could any preacher presume to claim that his expositions of the Word, or his doctrinal presentations—which have authority only so far as they consist of acknowledged truths—are anything more than truths from the spiritual-natural sense of the Word—that sense in which angelic ideas can be rationally conveyed to people in the general forms of doctrine (see AC 8443).

The Danger of Drawing Doctrine from Correspondences

The Writings give particular warnings against the notion that doctrine can be gathered by means of correspondences; or that one can construct a spiritual

sense from correspondences. True doctrine comes from naked truths which are visible to the church and which cannot be disputed. What is obscure or questionable is therefore to be left for further examination and should not be made essential. Perhaps the time will come when it will be understood, when enlightenment will be increased.

It would be the height of folly to interpret any one's thought from one's most obscure words. Fairness dictates that we judge meaning by clear and explicit utterances. In the same fashion, it is unfair to formulate doctrines from the correspondences of the Word, instead of attempting to interpret the doctrine from clearer statements. The Writings therefore teach that the function of correspondences is simply to illustrate and corroborate and confirm what the doctrine teaches (SS 56). Unfortunately, they can confirm falsities as well as truths.

No one can see the spiritual sense except from the doctrine of genuine truth; from this doctrine the spiritual sense can be seen, when there is some knowledge of correspondences. He who is in false doctrine cannot see anything of the spiritual sense. He draws out and applies the correspondences which he sees to the falsities of his doctrine; and thus he can still more falsify the Word. Wherefore the true spiritual sense of the Word is from the Lord alone. This is the reason why it is not permitted anyone in the natural world, nor in the spiritual world, to investigate the spiritual sense of the Word from the sense of its letter, unless he is wholly in the doctrine of Divine truth and in enlightenment from the Lord. Wherefore from the doctrine of Divine truth confirmed from the sense of the letter of the Word, the spiritual sense can be seen, but doctrine can never first be seen from the spiritual sense. He thinks falsely who says within

himself, I know many correspondences, I can know the true doctrine of the Divine Word, the spiritual sense will teach it to me. This cannot be done. But, as has been said, let him say with himself, I know the doctrine of Divine truth, now I can see the spiritual sense, provided I know correspondences. But still this must be in enlightenment from the Lord, because the spiritual sense is Divine truth itself in its light, and is meant by glory, and the sense of the letter by a cloud in passages in the Word where these are mentioned. (De Verbo 21:1-2)

Chapter Five

The Derivation of the Heavenly Doctrine from the Literal Sense

In connection with the New Jerusalem, the *Apocalypse Explained* states that “the doctrine of the New Church which is signified by that city, is solely from the sense of the letter of the Word” (898). For this reason “the wall of the city had twelve foundations,” to signify that “the Word, in the sense of the letter, contains all things of the Doctrine of the New Church” (AE 902), and that in these foundations were “written the names of the twelve apostles, to represent “all things of doctrine” (AE 903). The wall of the city was of jasper and the foundations were adorned with precious stones, to signify that, with those of the New Church, all things of doctrine from the literal sense of the Word will be translucent and will appear in light, according to reception (AE 911, 914). Elsewhere the *True Christian Religion* states that the external of the Word, or the sense of its letter, “is like a wall with foundations, which encompasses a city and protects it” (n. 217).

The Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, as to its structure, its walls or fundamental tenets, was derived from the literal sense, thus from the Old and New Testaments. From other teachings it is evident that it was constructed out of the naked truths or genuine truths which actually are from the spiritual sense shining through the heavy veil of correspondences, even as the soul manifests itself in the human body. It is also said that the New Jerusalem

descended out of heaven, but it had to *descend into the Word in its literal sense* and manifest itself there, for the soul cannot manifest itself except in and through its body.

This may be illustrated by an infant whose bodily form we see and whose human soul we discern in various ways, but whose *mind*, spirit, or character we know little of until he or she grows up and begins to express them in speech and writing. All the potentialities were there from the beginning, but lay hidden.

In a similar way, the same Doctrine which is given as new to the New Church, “was indeed given before in the Word [but] could not be seen” (Lord 65). In the Old Testament, interior truths rarely stand forth to view (AC 3373:2); the New Testament gives more interior truths (AE 948, 641, 670). But the Writings now present all the open truths of the Word in fullness, organized into a doctrine of genuine truth, in the light of which the literal sense itself becomes translucent and begins to speak with greater and deeper meaning. And the truths which are nakedly visible in the literal sense of the Scriptures are the same with those seen in the Writings, and have the same spiritual-natural quality and carry the same conviction to our rational minds. It is also true that every genuine truth in the Writings is not only drawn from open Scriptural teachings but is confirmed and corroborated by a number of passages from the literal sense, both open and clothed, so that the doctrine of the Writings is intimately interwoven with the rest of the Word. Even abstruse doctrines, such as those of creation and of the spiritual world and of the discrete degrees of the mind, rest upon Scriptural evidence.

No Christian, without the Divine leading and inspiration which the Lord vouchsafed Swedenborg, could have constructed a New Jerusalem, or a doctrine as

comprehensive, from the naked passages of the Scripture. But the New Jerusalem was held up as a distant goal before the early Christians, and, although they were unable to see any spiritual sense in their own Gospels or in the Apocalypse, yet from naked teachings in the New Testament they did see something of a spiritual meaning in the Law and the Prophets (see Hebrews 8-10). And they could, and to some extent did, construct from the naked truths a doctrine of genuine truth adequate to their spiritual needs. If heresies had not torn the Church asunder even in its tender beginnings, they could have come into increasingly greater spiritual light (AC 4489:3; TCR 109, 378). When Christianity declined and the charity of many waxed cold and faith became mostly blind and verbal, the open truths of the Word were more and more hidden by false interpretations, and the literal sense became only a field of confirmations for contending heresies. Therefore Christians could not any more construct any adequate doctrine of genuine truth, and the Lord made His second advent to restore this doctrine in its Divine clarity.

The Lord then did what humans could never have done. He restored the knowledge of correspondences and through this revealed the spiritual sense of the entire Word.

It is important to observe the manner in which the Lord introduced Swedenborg into the science or doctrine of correspondences. He gradually opened Swedenborg's spiritual senses so that he could compare spiritual and natural things and see how spirits and angels rest their thoughts upon the corresponding natural ideas of people in this world. At the same time, the Lord also led Swedenborg to study the Scriptures, to compare all the passages where the same symbols appear, and thus

to recognize the consistency of their usage. And by this mode of comparing passages, Swedenborg was led to an increasing understanding of the naked or genuine truths of doctrine, which furnished the key to the meaning of the correspondences. This part of Swedenborg's preparation occupied many years and involved his making an biblical index in which he noted the correspondences of names and words, and also provided a running commentary now known by its English title, *The Word Explained*.

The spiritual sense and the doctrine of genuine truth were disclosed to Swedenborg by Divine inspiration while he "read the Word," and not merely read, but *studied*. For knowledge comes by study, not by inspiration. Knowledge was necessary before inspiration could become Revelation!

Drawing Doctrine by Comparison of Passages

Even as the inspired Swedenborg was led to find the spiritual sense through a comparison of those passages of the literal sense of the Word in which the genuine truths of the internal sense are not covered up by symbolism but are openly addressed to human reason, so the Writings direct all of us to go to the Word and draw out thence doctrine which may serve us to see something of the spiritual meaning of the Word, and aid in the life of regeneration. For without doctrine constructed from the naked truths we will be led away into all manner of errors to which ignorance and willfulness draw us. Without such doctrine as a lamp we would remain in whatever ideas have been given us and would never progress to understand the less obvious truths of revelation (SS 41). Without doctrine formed by comparing the truths of revelation with each

other and by reading doubtful passages in the light of clear doctrines, we would remain in confusion as to the meaning of much in the Word which yet might assist us greatly to see the will and the way of God.

The priesthood (which is given the chief responsibility for maintaining the integrity and purity of this doctrine of the church) therefore proceeds in the study of the Word by *collecting and comparing all the clear teachings which bear upon each subject*. To proceed in the opposite fashion, and seize upon some strange or obscure statement and twist all other teachings to agree with it, or to nullify those clear teachings by reading some arbitrary correspondential meaning into the text, would lead to endless confusion and error.

The genuine truths of the Word, in contrast with the appearances or sensual correspondences, are of the spiritual sense in the letter, and are called spiritual-natural truths (De Verbo 10:7). It is from these that doctrine is to be formed or drawn, and when rightly formed it is really doctrine from the internal sense of the Word, and serves for building the conscience of the internal church.

Consider whether anyone can know the Divine truths of the Word in the literal sense, except by doctrine drawn thence; and that if he have not doctrine for a lamp he is carried away into errors.... The doctrine which should be for a lamp is what the internal sense teaches, thus it is the internal sense itself which in some measure lies open to everyone who is in the external from the internal, that is, whose internal man is open, although he does not know what the internal sense is. (AC 10400)

Even in this world one is in the internal sense of the Word when he is in the genuine doctrine of the Church

as to faith and life; for by means of this doctrine, the internal sense of the Word is then inscribed on both his understanding and his will. (AC 9430)

He who knows this doctrine has the internal sense of the Word. (AC 10276:8)

The truth of the internal sense of the Word is the same with the genuine truth of the doctrine of faith of the Church. (AC 9035)

And nothing else of the spiritual sense can be seen by those on earth!

For this reason we are told that a conscience can be formed with those in every dogma, even with gentiles, but that it is better in proportion as its truths approach more nearly to the genuine truths of faith (AC 2053:2). Those of the internal church know more things of the internal sense of the Word and their good is therefore qualified by interior truths such as are of the internal sense, by which their conscience is formed (AC 7840, 1098). In every case, conscience is formed from truths seen and known. Even interior truths can of course be known by the evil, but they are not received and therefore they do not form any conscience (AC 2531).

The Word is said to be *supported*—or its power in the church is said to be supported—by doctrine, which, however, must be *drawn from the Word*. This is represented by Aaron's and Hur's supporting the hands of Moses when he held out the rod of God during the battle with the Amalekites. The literal sense, separated from the genuine truths of the spiritual sense which shine forth through it, is not doctrine itself, but consists of correspondences which can be twisted to confirm any fanatical idea. If we read Scripture from a doctrine that comes from some other

source than the Word, we do not support the Word, but pervert it, and we pass by its real teachings (AC 9424). On the other hand, they who, in a state of enlightenment, have collected genuine doctrine from the Word, when they read the Word

see truths everywhere which agree and see nothing at all repugnant: for they do not stick in such things of the Word as are expressed according to appearances and according to the common apprehension of man, because they know that if the appearances are unfolded or as it were unswathed, the naked truth is therein laid open. (AC 9424)

With them, therefore, doctrine supports the Word, and defends it and the Church from the ravages of those evil spirits who are called “Amalekites,” who infuse falsities of interior and hidden evil which especially assault the goods of faith. And this happens suddenly, in the moments of our greatest weakness, never when we are in the vigor of resistance (AC 8593). Against these genii, who attack the good of the church and indirectly the Word, doctrine from genuine truths is the only defense. For those of the spiritual church, and the church in general, alternately come into states of obscurity and thus into weakness of faith, since self and the world are considered; and then, unless there is a renewal of genuine doctrine from the Word, the Word loses its power—as with Moses when his hands were not upheld by Aaron and Hur (AC 8607).

Drawing Doctrine from the Writings

When instructing us that doctrine is to be drawn from the naked truths which stand forth in the sense of the letter of the Word, the Writings specifically refer to the Old and New Testaments. But since the Lord has now Himself drawn forth these naked truths and presented them as a doctrine of genuine truth in the Writings, those of the New Church go directly to these Writings for their doctrine, rather than collect Scripture passages. In our childhood, we learn the open teachings of the Scriptures, and we build up our first doctrine from the literal sense. But the adult who draws doctrinal concepts directly from the Writings, does not thereby divorce them from the whole field of thought which the literal sense presents. The Doctrine of the Lord's Glorification cannot be divorced from the literal facts of the incarnation. The Doctrine of Regeneration is simply drawn from the naked truths concerning how a person is born again of water and of the Spirit. The Writings make this clear by constant citations. Thus we draw doctrine *through* the Writings *from* the literal sense of Scripture. The body of Divine Revelation is one and indivisible.

This is recognized by the priest who, in preaching, collects spiritual-natural truths both from the Biblical Word and from the Writings and by their means opens the selected text of the literal sense, so that we may see the doctrine of love and charity in its accommodation to progressive human states and in its place in the symbolic order of regenerate life. It is in the literal sense of the Word that the naked spiritual-natural truths of doctrine can be seen in their ultimate order and human connection, in their holiness, and in their power (De Verbo 18:4, 20:2-3,5; AE 1087, 1088).

Enlightenment and Doctrine

In all the teachings about the presence of naked truths in the Word and our ability to draw these truths from the Word and to form a genuine doctrine sufficient for our needs so that we actually see something of truth from the spiritual sense, there is a special proviso—a condition. This condition is not that we should know that there is an internal sense within the Word or know what it is like; for even those who do not have the doctrine about the spiritual sense can perceive spiritual-natural truths, which are mainly truths of the doctrine of love and charity (AC 10400). Nor do we need to know the doctrine of correspondences in order to see such truths. But the condition is that we should be in something of *spiritual light*, light which comes from the Lord out of heaven and causes what the Writings call “illustration” or “enlightenment” or “illumination.”

Common sense tells us that for seeing there must be light! It also tells us that light derives from heat or from an inner activation of a substance. For any kind of mental or spiritual seeing there must be some kind of mental “light.” And this mental light must also originate in a spiritual heat—a flame of interest, affection, or love. The old saying that “the wish is father to the thought” is usually employed as a warning that our thoughts are apt to be bent to fit in with the dictates of our heart; but nonetheless it illustrates the universal law that some affection or love is necessary if we are to think. What we have no affection for, or what our loves or ambitions have no use for, we discard from our thoughts.

Humans find this very convenient. When they are in the delight of some evil love, truth has little weight with them. They dismiss facts which “stare them in the face,” while confirming their intentions or bolstering up their

position with specious arguments based on appearances. They view all things, all people, in the deceptive light of their ruling love, and find actual pleasure in deluding themselves and others. If they could not, they would find themselves in misery.

But if this were the whole picture, the human lot would be hopeless. For from heredity our love is evil, and from that love we could see nothing but phantasies—the phantasies of self. We would view the world as revolving around ourselves and as a servant of self, and value others only so far as they did us honor. For this reason, the Lord provides that we should be furnished with “remains” or deep-seated states of innocence and charity unconsciously formed in infancy, which enable us to think as of ourselves from others or from truths of civil, moral, and spiritual origin, and to be affected by the loves which other people and spirits have, and thus to view things in a light borrowed from others. By this means we are enabled to have our understanding built up separately from our own selfish will.

Much is said in the Writings about this human faculty to “understand what is good and true even when we do not will it.” This is provided in order that we may become free to be reformed and regenerated, and therefore this faculty exists with the evil as well as with the good (AC 3539:6). The understanding can be elevated into the light of heaven and we can thus appear as wise; yet whatever of the understanding transcends our love, is not really or permanently our own (DLW 368). This elevation is possible from a love of knowing and being wise even when there is no love of applying the truths to life, or of shunning evils as sins. The light by which we see is indeed from heaven, but heaven is not in us.

As soon as our own love is aroused, and our own will or ambition asserts itself, another light is kindled which distorts the truth. It may indeed appear as a very brilliant and exceptional light which brings with it a sense of flattery and achievement, and even leads us into fanatical enthusiasms (AC 6865:3).

When the Writings speak of enlightenment being necessary for the seeing of truths and goods from the internal sense, which stands forth when a number of passages of the letter are rightly collated (AC 7233), they refer to enlightenment by the Lord. And a person is so enlightened “when he is in the love of truth for the truth’s sake and for the sake of the uses of life, and not merely for the sake of self and the world” (AC 9424:2). For genuine love of truth has charity in it, and love to the Lord; and thus it communicates with heaven.

Now the *Arcana* notes that “they who are enlightened concerning truths are *those few* who are in the doctrine and at the same time in the life of truth” (9186:3, emphasis added). They who are in the true doctrine are indeed few, when the large mass of humanity is considered. And among these few not all are regenerating. Still fewer are those who actually gather and construct for themselves doctrine from the Word in order to read the Word in its own light. For mostly, those who seek enlightenment inquire from the Word only to learn whether the doctrine given by others and received by the congregation, agrees with the Word. If they find that it does not, they dissent, but take care lest they disturb the church. To the things which agree with the Word, they assent. In such a way a doctrine develops which they take as their own (SS 59; AC 6047:2, 6822, 5432e).

But this takes place only with those who, not being distracted by the affairs of the world, have ability to see. These, if they love truths because they are truths and make them uses of life, are in enlightenment from the Lord. Others who are in any life according to truths, can learn from them. (SS 59)

It clearly appears from this that not all who are within the church are necessarily “enlightened.” And of course there are various kinds and degrees of enlightenment. One type is that which is proper to the clergy who are not “distracted by the affairs of the world” (SS 59; cf. Faith 30; TCR 354:3; AC 1295, 8981:3-4) and who, by virtue of preparation and ordination, consultation and study, have a professional illustration, which becomes genuine only if they love truths spiritually. The enlightenment in their case, as always, comes from their putting the truth before self. Similarly, all those of the New Church have a type of enlightenment by virtue of the Writings. One can claim to be a New Churchperson, but one does not in spirit belong to the New Church unless one has a love of truth and—so far—is in some state of regeneration, at least as to the rational, which is the first thing to be regenerated. Hence we read:

It is granted to the people of the New Church that is called the Holy Jerusalem to behold the Divine truths that are in the Word, not sensually, that is, according to appearances, but spiritually, that is, according to their essences; for this reason the internal sense of the Word, which is spiritual and is solely for those who will be of that church, has been disclosed . . . Those who are of that church are enlightened by the spiritual light of the Word by influx from the Lord out of heaven, for the reason that

they acknowledge the Divine in the Lord's Human and are in the spiritual affection of truth from Him. They and no others receive the spiritual light which is continually inflowing . . . with all who read the Word. From this they have enlightenment. . . . All who are of that Church have the understanding enlightened. (AE 759)

It is sufficiently clear that this does not refer to the membership of any church-body, but of all in this world and in the spiritual world who receive the Lord in His second advent. For what other purpose did the Lord come if not to enlighten humans and spirits?

Every receiver of the New Church, while reading the Writings and the Word, may at times experience the feeling as if his or her understanding were elevated and illustrated by their truths. The light of heaven and something of its heat seem to affect us; but only so far as we think as from ourselves, from knowledges, which are in natural light. We cannot perceive the influx or its origin. Yet there are indications—however elusive—that we have been in enlightenment (AC 10551:2, 346; SS 41; DLW 252, 256; DP 169). What we are unable to determine is whether this state of illustration was due to a temporary elevation of the understanding in the sphere of others or was due to the opening in us of the spiritual degree by a love of spiritual uses which the Lord causes to be formed with the regenerate. The humility which comes of self-knowledge makes us hesitate to do more than hope that the light will prove constant, or will at least return.

It is notable that the Word instructs each one “according to his ends and affections” (AC 3436). Illustration is therefore applied to the uses of people, making it possible for them to recognize the truths and principles which might assist them to apply charity with judgment in the

varied situations of their lives. A clergyman, therefore, would pretend to little illustration as to the many fields of secular life, except so far as they concern him as a citizen; and the laity would hesitate to formulate abstract doctrine, since they have only a private responsibility in matters of doctrine (AC 6822). It is the love of uses which determines the field of one's enlightenment.

The illustration of the clergy is also modified by the *perception* which each priest has according to the states of his mind formed by doctrinals. If these doctrinals be true, the perception becomes clear from the illustration of the Divine light; but if false, there will be obscurity, although by confirmations it may appear clear in the light of infatuation. Illustration may also be turned into various kinds of heat, according to a one's *disposition*, for evil delights excite a zeal which is inwardly unmerciful, while the delights of a good love, though they may outwardly blaze and thunder, contain charity and kindness within. Thus, with the priest, illustration, which is from the Lord, is qualified by his perception and by his disposition, and these three elements determine the instruction which he receives and imparts (TCR 155).

Self-conscious “Enlightenment”

Enlightenment is a gift of God—like the manna of Israel, fresh each morning. It cannot be obtained by solicitude (AC 8478) or hoarded by the self-conscious *proprium*⁵

⁵ The word “*proprium*” is taken from the Latin. It means “what is one's own,” or “what belongs to one.” It is used to refer to our sense of self, that sense of our personal identity. This sense of self is corrupt from birth by virtue of our hereditary inclination for evil. It causes us to instinctively attribute life to ourselves, and causes us to suppose

for later states, for thereby it breeds falsities (AC 8481). And—like the “good of truth”⁶—it “cannot long remain pure” with one of the spiritual church (AC 8487:2). As soon as we claim to possess it, it vanishes away.

To receive illustration, therefore, we must shun the temptation of regarding truths from ends of honor, gain, or reputation (AC 10551:3). In seeking the truths which are of life, our task is simply to “gather the interior sense of the Word from various passages where the sense of the letter is explained” and to compare them carefully, reflecting upon them with a prayer to the Lord for leading (AC 10028:2, 6222:3, 7233, 3436). We are careful not to

that we are the source and judge of good and evil. With regeneration we are given a new proprium that acknowledges that all good is the Lord’s. This is called the “heavenly (celestial) proprium” (see chapter 10).

⁶The “good of truth” or “good from truth” is a term that the Heavenly Doctrine uses to characterize the first phase of regeneration with us. In this phase, through the discipline of our understanding we are given a good in our life and will that is a result of our efforts to apply the truth. The “good of truth” is contrasted with the “truth of good” or “truth from good.” This term characterizes the second phase in regeneration, when we are able to act more spontaneously from a new will. We then see truth in a new way from the state of good that we’re able to receive from the Lord. (See chapter 8, section on “New Truth—the Only Truth of the Church,” pp. 121-125.) This process of having a new will of good given through the work of the understanding is the way of the spiritual person—as opposed to the way of the celestial person of the Most Ancient Church. The “good of truth” is also called “spiritual good,” because the spiritual person is regenerated (given good) through the understanding of truth. The celestial person, by contrast, began with a sound will and grew from there in the perception of truth by which he affirmed the good that flowed in to the will.

rely too confidently on our own state. We humbly grant that others, who may differ from us, might also enjoy the gift of enlightenment.

And yet! How we have conjured with that word! How often have we not sought to overawe each other by the claim of being more “enlightened!” How apt are we to fawn before someone who assumes a pose of greater profundity or makes the pretense of greater sanctity or more interior perception!

When arguments from common sense run out, we will therefore attempt to dismiss all opposition by the bold claim that we are more enlightened or have a deeper insight into the matter; or, perhaps, that we are guided by an inner light which none but we and our kind can see. In the Christian Church there arose repeatedly teachers and sects which claimed special enlightenment. Some called themselves “Gnostics” and some “Illuminati.” All tended to set aside the naked teachings of the Word, sometimes by substituting an inner or mystical sense or some idealistic philosophy by which they even denied the Lord’s sole Divinity or the actuality of His advent in the flesh. For when dependence is placed upon an alleged illustration or an *inner light*, the authority of the Scriptures is shattered. Such movements contributed to the decline of Christianity as much as did crude literalism. The Lord had already warned that this would be the case:

For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you “Look, He is in the desert!” do not go out; or “Look, He is in the inner rooms!” do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes

to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
(Matthew 24:24-27)

The doctrine of Divine truth is one of naked truths which shall be clear as lightning, and perceptible both to the good and the evil, even though the evil will not receive it, nor even retain it, because with them it will dissipate. Doctrine in the church must therefore be judged by its fidelity to the naked truths of revelation, and not by the supposed enlightenment of its proponents, or by whether it is put forth as "interior" or "spiritual" or "celestial." What is in the "secret chambers" of others' minds we do not know—nor what is their state of good from which their perceptions spring or by which their enlightenment is conditioned. Besides, even those who are interiorly in illustration may be sadly misinformed and ignorant and mistaken. They may be in enlightenment about some things, seen in certain states, and be in obscurity about other things, or while in other states. Especially are we warned against judging one's spiritual state (which is known to the Lord alone) or the state of the church around us, since this no one on earth can do and only the Lord can reveal it (CL 523; LJ 41: AE 453, 386:10).

If we accept doctrine on the testimony of only those whom we regard as "enlightened," faith becomes mere persuasion. And since we cannot know for certain who has genuine illustration and who does not, the truth of a doctrine taught in the church cannot be ascertained to our rational satisfaction except by our going to the Word for ourselves and seeking enlightenment from its naked truths. This is impossible for many, who because of simplicity prefer to rely on others. Nor can it be done in childhood or before the rational mind has become stabilized and knowledge and experience have increased so that mature

judgment and discernment are possible. Until that time, our faith is largely a faith in authority, or a “historical” faith.⁷

⁷ “Historical faith” (*fides historica*) is an immature faith, based on what others have recounted to us (—perhaps why called “*historica*”) rather than on our own investigation, experience, and rational conviction (see Faith 1; AR 838; AE 242.5, 250.9, 815.4, 9).

Chapter Six

The Function of Historical Faith⁸

In all phases of human life, there has always been, and will continue to be, a subtle conflict between the Past and the Present, between tradition and independent thought, a conflict which sometimes breaks out into open rebellion while at other times it ends in the surrender of the mind to the dead hand of dogma or custom. It is the ancient rivalry between society and the individual, between order and freedom. Every generation comes to recognize not only that the Past is its mother and teacher and guide, the source of a greater store of wisdom than any one generation can garner, but also that people indisputably inherit the faults of the Past and suffer from its mistakes. And even under the best of circumstances it is plain that human beings are not responsible solely to guard the wisdom of the Past and to hand it on blindly, but also to appreciate and understand it and apply it to the problems of Today with a new illustration.

There is not much to choose between a blind insistence on custom or dogma, and a contemptuous rejection of that tradition which embodies the experience of the past. Tyranny and rebellion are equally ugly, and each is permitted only because of the hardness of human hearts. Growth does not come from such cruel combats, but from the gradual adjustments between the new and the old. In the tissue of every normal life the free patterns of our

⁸ See p. 82 for a definition of this unique concept.

thoughts are—like a weft—interwoven upon the warp of tradition, and both are, firmly but gently, stretched over the loom of experience.

Therefore the only commandment which carries a promise says, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” Each generation must respect the past, must learn from its parents, must have an affirmation toward their faith, their opinion, and the customs and ways which they approve. It is so that the foundations of human life are laid in an atmosphere of confidence and trust.

The Lord has provided that the proprium of children, their self-will and desire for self-leading, should not assert itself at once in tender years. If it did, and children claimed independence prematurely—before they could learn that in reality all independence is merely relative and an appearance—they could learn nothing and would not even survive the results of their own mistakes. The Lord therefore leads infants into delights of innocence—delights which come when others do things for them or tell them what to do. The “remains” of such states linger throughout life, and are the basis for an affirmative response towards parents and teachers and towards those in authority. Inmosty, this is a beginning of a love of the Lord and an obedience to His commandments.

Along with this, there begin by degrees to form in the child’s mind a loyalty and affection for the church and its instruction. It is necessary that this confidence in the church should be free of all doubts and reservations, and parents must be on guard lest their own critical comments should confuse the minds of children in whom the foundations of faith are being laid.

There is special need for care that the faith of the young should not suffer when they are becoming aware of the apparent contradictions in the literal sense of the Word and yet are not ready to enter into the interior truths of the spiritual sense. The church is the spiritual Mother, but the Word is the heavenly Father. Both must be honored, the Word because it is the Divine source of all truth and good and the church because, through her, we receive nourishment and protection in adaptation to our state. It is the function of the church to feed the minds of those who depend upon it, or—as we say—who “belong” to the church. And for this reason the priests of the church are called “pastors” or shepherds, and the people are called a flock.

The Priesthood

The church is organized with this use in view—that we may be led by truths to the good of life. This use is the essential use of the priesthood. And the love from which the priesthood is to perform it is the love of the salvation and health of souls (Life 39; Charity 160). This love ought to be present in all those of the church. If it were not, the priesthood would receive no support, and there would be no church and no organized uses. But in the priesthood this love takes a specialized form, as is necessary whenever a use is to be preserved and perpetuated.

The Writings point out that the use exists before the form (DLW 46), as the soul before the body. In fact, the use, or the need, is what creates the form. It is so with all the organs of the human body, it is so in the development of human society, and it is so in the church. The need of a priesthood is obvious. In patriarchal times, the oldest

man or the head of the clan or tribe, served as priest; later, the responsibility for ordering the worship and spiritual instruction of the people was placed upon men specially prepared and ordained. The priestly office, as every other use, office, or profession, has frequently become perverted, by a love of dominion or a lust for lucre or worldly honors. But this fact does not take away the need for such an office. In the present state of society, the interests of religion could not be maintained without an organized church, which sees to it that what is Divine and what pertains to heaven and thus spiritual and moral life may be among us (Charity 130, 131, 135). And the Heavenly Doctrines teach that order cannot be kept in the world without governors who are to observe all things which are done according to order and those which are done contrary to order, and who see that rewards and punishments encourage good and restrain evil. Governors of ecclesiastical affairs are called priests, who among themselves also have order and subordination, lest, from caprice or ignorance, someone permit evils which would destroy the proper order (HD 311-319).

The function of priests is to teach people the way to heaven and also to lead them there. And they ought to teach them according to the doctrine of their church from the Word. This doctrine they should find in the Word by comparing the lucid teachings in the literal sense with each other; and if they do this in a state of illustration, or from the affection for truth, the resulting doctrine will indeed disclose and embody something of the spirit of the Word. "The true doctrine of the church" is indeed "the internal sense," and it is from this that priests ought to teach, if they are to teach from the enlightenment of their office (AC 9025). A clergyman is therefore inaugurated at his ordination by a promise of the Holy Spirit and by the

representation of its transfer, by the laying on of hands; but enlightenment is received by him according to the faith of his life (Canons 36:7; TCR 146, 155).

We are therefore taught that, if the church is in a state of order, the Holy Spirit, or the Divine truth of the Word, which is the source of enlightenment, passes from the Lord into the clergy and through them into the laity⁹ (Canons 36; see also Canons H.S. iv. footnote). For doctrine which is drawn in enlightenment is the doctrine of love and charity, and this opens the minds of those who receive it to illustration from the internal sense of the Word, or from the very spirit of truth which shall guide us into all truth. This Spirit is indeed the Divine, proceeding as spiritual light and heat. And according as we receive the doctrine of truth taught from the Word through preaching, we may thus be affected by enlightenment. This is the essence of all priestly uses. If the church is not in order (either because the clergy is not in illustration or because its uses are not recognized), this channel of enlightenment is closed, and the Holy Spirit can then proceed only through individuals who may be in illustration while they read the Word.

It is notable that “the Word must needs be taught mediately through parents, teachers, books, and especially the reading of it. Nevertheless it is not taught by these [agencies], but by the Lord through them. And this preachers know . . . They are able to declare the Word, indeed, and to bring it to the understanding of many, but not to the heart of anyone; and what is not in the heart

⁹ More accurately: “passes from the Lord *by means of* the clergy to the laity” (*a Domino per clericum procedat ad laicum*). *Per* is better translated “by means of” here rather than “through.” The clergy are not so much a *conduit*, as “through” might imply, as they are a *means* by which the Lord passes *directly* into the laity, as suggested in Canons 36.5.

perishes in the understanding.” Thence it is clear that “one is led and taught immediately by the Lord when this is done from the Word” (DP 172:6).

The Doctrine of One’s Church

The office of the priesthood is of Divine origin and has a Divine representation. But its uses are performed by fallible men who cannot invariably be in equal states of illustration nor in the clear sight of all aspects of doctrine and life. Even in a truly living church, not all of its priests are necessarily in illustration from the Lord; those who are not take the doctrine of their church from others. If this be a doctrine of genuine truth, priests may still be the medium for transmitting illustration to the people. For it is the doctrine, not the priest, which evokes an influx of spiritual light. “The priestly office itself is holy, whatever be the quality of him who ministers. Hence it is that the Word which an evil man teaches is equally holy, also the sacrament of baptism, and the Holy Supper, and the like” (AC 3670; cf. 10309). Such priests “have no communication with heaven in themselves; but those who hear and take in the words from their mouths have it, if they are in a pious and holy internal; for it matters not from whom the voice of good and truth flows forth, provided their life is not manifestly wicked, for this causes scandal” (AC 4311:3; cf. AC 10735). Scandal breaks down all respect for the church and thus destroys the affirmative attitude which is essential if instruction is to be received.

Despite the fallibility of the men who are in the office of the priesthood, it is an institution which protects the doctrine of the church from perversion. It is thus directly stated:

Good can be insinuated into another by any one in the land, but not truth, except by those who are teaching ministers. If others do it, heresies arise, and the church is disturbed and torn asunder. Charity is practiced, if through the truth which is of the church, the neighbor is led to good. . . . Everyone must first obtain for himself truth from the doctrine of the church, and afterward from the Word of the Lord; this must be the truth of his faith. (AC 6822)

What is here called “the doctrine of the church” refers to the doctrine of people’s own church-body, the doctrine actually taught by its priests. Such doctrine is necessary, and this even if it is accompanied by false teachings. For it is still bound to bring out certain general truths from the Word, by which the simple can profit. Thus the Lord said, “the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Matthew 23:2, 3; cf. LJ 59). It is in mercy provided that something of the good of truth, or spiritual good,¹⁰ can be formed with every person if he lives according to the doctrine of his own church (AC 8042, 8521, 8311). When the end is to do what is good, even falsities, believed from the innocence of ignorance, may be accepted by the Lord for truths (AC 7887, 9258).

Falsities of doctrine do indeed tend to confirm evil rather than good. Yet we cannot be introduced into any truth whatsoever unless we are first induced to think from others. And since “those of the spiritual church have no perception of truth Divine,” the people of our present race must instead be furnished with “conscience, which is formed

¹⁰ See footnote 6 on page 79 *re* the term “good of truth.”

from the truth and good which they have acknowledged within their own church, of whatever kind these may be” (AC 7233). No one can know from intuition, nor from perception, whether a “truth” is true (AC 4844:3, 3388). And especially in adolescence, one “ought” therefore to procure the truths of faith from doctrinal things, having faith in those who have drawn them from the Divine Word, “because as yet he has not the judgment which will enable him to see them for himself from the Word” (AC 5402).

It is especially dangerous to spiritual life lightly to extinguish a faith so formed, even though it be a faith in the teachings of others, for along with what may possibly be erroneous, we might thus cast away the very truth itself. Especially in youth, we need a doctrine—even if it be borrowed—by which to maintain our faith in the Word, for doctrine is required to explain the many appearances and apparent contradictions of the literal sense without injury to the holiness of the Word (AC 9039). And it is most likely that if we reject the doctrine of our own church, or the “faith of his fathers,” we are only placing ourselves under the tutelage of others or of some other church—those in whose enlightenment we trust. For historical faith is the only faith of which we are capable until we attain to a rational perspective and are able to commence regenerate life.

For this reason, we learn that, the Lord never breaks the faith of childhood, but as far as possible bends it (AC 9039). He bends our faith by leading it by natural affections and delights—by “intermediate goods.” Childhood and tender years are overshadowed and protected from violence by natural loves for family and friends, by loyalties and by social bonds of various kinds. These affections or “domestic goods” are corporeal and natural and worldly,

and interiorly they center—more or less unconsciously—around self. Yet they serve as bridges by which adolescents pass over into an appreciation of others and of their social, moral, and spiritual environment, becoming affirmative to the church and to the spiritual gifts which the church offers (AC 3518, 4063, 3982, 4145). But it is also important that these mediating goods do not become so confirmed that they come to dominate life. For this would arrest spiritual development. The purpose why children are held so dependent upon home and school and are so immersed in these natural affections, is that they may thereby be led to an affirmative attitude towards the doctrine of their church, which must be the starting-point of spiritual life.

If, on the other hand, youths simply accept what others tell them to believe, and do what the moral code dictates, yet never from choice reflect about eternal life or think about the salvation of their soul—but indulge only in worldly loves, in dreams of pleasure, and in ambitions for prosperity and success—then the path of reformation becomes arduous. For then, the *Arcana* informs us, they can be reformed only through combats and struggles, anxieties, hardships and misfortunes, which cause worldly loves to subside so that they can be touched by spiritual good—not deeply enough so that they will make such good their own, but enough to *confirm* themselves in the truth of the doctrine of their church (AC 8981). Thus they may be “reformed,” yet not “regenerated.” They cannot be brought into an affection for truth, but only into obedience to the doctrine of their church. They cannot be led to the good of spiritual life, but only to certain good delights of natural life (AC 8987).

Human states are so varied and so complicated by hereditary genius and temperaments as well as by

circumstances and free decisions that they refuse to be neatly classified. Gradations and kinds of faith, too many by far to enumerate, differ in their content of truth or in their spurious or persuasive character (TCR 344-346). Reception of the teachings of one's church will always be partial, as far as the understanding is concerned, and one carries into life only what one understands. Faith may be only apparent, or of the memory alone. It may even be hypocritical. It may be forced, or persuasive. People may read their own misunderstandings into the tenets of their church, either perverting its truth into dire falsities and fantasies, or reading their own truths into some creed that reeks of falsehoods; or they may modify its falsities in the light of common sense to turn a deaf ear to what might be contrary to their concept of charity or reason.

When people become adults and the rational mind begins to rule thinking, they may come to recognize the simple fact that the doctrines of a church are not true merely because the heads of the church have said so and their followers affirm it (AC 6047). They may realize that the tendency of those in a church is to acknowledge the principles which its founders have promulgated (AC 7233), and they may suspect that very few read the Word from any affection for truth but that most do so from an affection for confirming from the Word the doctrines of the church within which they were born (AC 6047). They may see that the true function of the "doctrine of a church" and the function of its shepherds is to lead people to the Word, the fountain of living waters, the wells of salvation.

The Danger of Confirming

To all who are in truths it is allowable to confirm them by rational and sensual things, and particularly by things from the Word (HH 455e; AC 5008:6). But throughout, the Writings warn against confirming the doctrine of one's church from the Word *before one inquires whether it is true*. There is of course nothing dangerous in desiring to begin to support the uses of the church-body to which we belong as soon as we are able to do so and begin to see the spiritual purpose behind them. To delay giving support and cooperation until we can be assured in our own minds that we no longer depend upon the faith of others but have expunged everything of "historical faith" from our minds, would be singularly foolish, and is likely to be only an evasion of responsibility. For all our lives we will bear the marks of historical faith, and will be somewhat influenced by tradition and education.

But we are warned not to be satisfied with merely second-hand instruction, not to accept our religion merely as a hereditary prejudice. If we confirm truths of doctrine without inquiring from the Word whether they are really the teachings of Revelation, we can have no clear sight as to what we should build up into a conscience to furnish spiritual motives for our actions. In order to purify our motives, we must analyze our reasons for doing things, and learn to love truth and good for the sake of truth and for the sake of the uses of life, and not merely because the acceptance of the truth caters to self-respect or reputation or furthers our social advantages. No matter how true the doctrine of the church may be, it is easy to confirm it merely from reasons of proprium and to wrap it up in our natural affections and to defend it from personal prejudice or because it is the easiest thing to do or because one's

pride of expressed opinion dictates it. Everyone associates pride and self-intelligence with what one has once said or thought.

Such confirmation of doctrinal opinions by the Word is done, usually, by the selection of passages which are out of their context and not connected with all the other teachings on the subject. They are therefore “one-sided,” or viewed obliquely. The light in which such confirmation is effected is called “sensual lumen,” and appears dark in the view of heaven. But, to those who are in it, it appears resplendent, and falsities viewed in its light appear exactly like truths, “and even more true than truth itself,” because the fallacies of the senses join in (AC 5008:6, 6222:2, 5, 6865:3).

If we simply confirm the doctrine of our historical faith from natural loves, our faith becomes not only unperceptive and external, and unable to see into the real essence of things, but it becomes brittle and vulnerable. It becomes such that it cannot apply itself to varying circumstances. It makes externals unduly important and tends to judge others without mercy. It will be sensitive to any criticism, and tends to divide the church into partisan groups. And since such faith rests upon personalities, it may perish—and with it perhaps the hope of ever reaching the truth—in which case one’s confidence in the leadership of the church could be shaken.

Confidence in the illustration of others is in itself necessary and wholesome. It keeps the mind receptive. It inculcates humility. It is the beginning of faith. But it does not furnish a lasting criterion of truth, nor does it make faith spiritual and rational. It does not make faith one’s own.

The Use of Doubts

Therefore it is permitted that at the beginning of adult life, when we begin to feel responsible for the use of spiritual gifts of freedom and reason and truth, we are wont to come into states of doubt. If we are affirmative to spiritual truth, this doubt is not a critical attitude but essentially a realization that we have accepted truth from what may be merely selfish and worldly motives. This may blind us to the truth or to some aspects of the truth, and possibly cause us to misunderstand the instruction which we have received. And we are then moved to go directly to the Word and search for the truth therein, making sure that we read the Word in *its own* light, from the naked truths therein, and not from any doctrine or principle of alien origin, nor from mere appearances which would tend to confuse and distract.

It is according to the laws of order that no one ought to be persuaded about truth in a moment . . . Nor ought truth be so confirmed in a moment as to leave no doubt whatever about it; because truth so impressed becomes persuasive truth, and is devoid of any extension and of any yielding quality. (AC 7298; for a more complete explanation, see entire number and Exodus story regarding Aaron's rod becoming a serpent.)

The rational mind needs time to digest calmly what is offered it. And therefore, when a truth is presented to good spirits in the other life, something opposite is soon afterwards presented which causes doubt and affords a contrast, so that they can "collect reasons and thus bring the truth into their minds rationally" (AC 7298).

There should be no haste in so important a matter as that of finding the real truth (AC 9039). Haste and impatience

belong to time and space, and take away illustration. Impatience is often a sign of immaturity, for the rational mind suspends judgment to allow for sufficient reflection. It does not act on impulse. Nor should there be undue concern or anxiety, since if the Lord is approached and petitioned, He will give leading and enlightenment in His good time. No time is lost, for people have many things that they can do from charity to others and from love for the Lord and the church; and in all their life-time they will never settle all the questions of doctrinal truth. Indeed we are warned that the ability to settle differences between matters of faith *within* the church, comes by degrees, and is given only with those of more advanced age who may have the interiors of their minds enlightened (AC 6766).

Yet any rational person can explore the Word and thus form a faith in genuine truth which he or she feels to be the doctrine taught in the Word by the Lord Himself, and which therefore rests on one's pronouncement. All that is required is the desire to have the Lord teach us. Our object then is not to prove or disprove what we may have been taught, or to bolster our conceit by finding novelties, or to settle the more intricate questions which perhaps puzzle the more mature minds of the church. (*Spiritual Experiences* notes that new scruples and difficulties will continue to occur to our finite minds even to eternity. No truth can be understood infinitely! nos. 3667, 1955) But our object is to find a doctrine *of life*—that doctrine of love and charity which is the very spirit and purpose of all Revelation, and which is the spiritual sense as it stands forth before those who seek it from a love of truth for the sake of the uses of life.

And those who seek shall find. How much of spiritual-natural truth we may find while here on earth,

will however depend on many things. Worldly duties and occupations are a limiting factor (TCR 354; SS 59). If the doctrine of the church is not one of genuine truth, our mind will also be held back, for it is not possible for us to divest ourselves from all its falsities. Besides this, the *good* within a person—the good of truth¹¹—is formed by conjunction with the truth received within the church; and thus—even though we may see new truths from the Word by an enlightenment of our understanding—our new *will* cannot be affected by it except as we progress in regenerate life and are at the same time enlightened “in a special manner” (AC 7233:2).

But what we cannot receive in this world, in a conscious way, may yet be inscribed upon us interiorly—and stored up as heavenly riches which will await us in the other life. The important thing is that we have received faith in the Lord from the Lord, not from others. Truth seen in the Word from illustration is seen in freedom, because it is seen from the love of truth. This love opens the mind to the Divine truth proceeding from the Lord.

¹¹ See footnote 6 on page 79 *re* the term “good of truth.”

Chapter Seven

The Formation of Faith

We have pointed out in previous sections:

- a) that the Heavenly Doctrine is the revelation of the spiritual-natural from and in the Word
- b) that these spiritual-natural truths appear in the literal sense of Scripture as naked truths
- c) that these truths are one with the spiritual sense of Scripture
- d) that doctrine for the church and those of the church is to be drawn from these spiritual-natural truths and thus drawn out of the literal sense, yet may also be spoken of as doctrine from the out-cropping spiritual sense
- e) that doctrine cannot be rightly drawn unless we are in a state of illustration from the Lord;
- f) that doctrine drawn from the Word by enlightened people is a doctrine of genuine truth, and thus a medium for the enlightenment of those of the church according to their state
- g) that the priesthood should serve as an orderly medium for the promulgation of the doctrine of genuine truth and thus for enlightenment
- h) that when the doctrine presented in the church is first received it is taken on historical faith, or on the “say-so” of those who are considered to be enlightened

- i) that this historical faith is normal and necessary in childhood and youth, but that it is no test of truth and is not yet our own
- j) that historical faith (which is possible even with the evil) can be confirmed from merely natural affections and in a merely sensual light, which is disorderly and dangerous
- k) that we must therefore go to the Word ourselves and search it with a prayer to the Lord for enlightenment
- l) and, lastly that it is not the Word as such but the understanding of the Word—or the purity and integrity of doctrine—that makes and establishes the church. But in the individual the church is instituted by “a faith according to the truths, and a life according to the goods, which [one] derives from the Word and applies to oneself” (TCR 245).

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Thus the church is varied in every person according to one’s faith and life. Yet there are two ways of procuring the truths which are of faith: one way is through the doctrines of the church, confirmed because others have taught them; the other way is through the Word, which we consult when we have sufficient judgment to be able to see truths with our own eyes (AC 5402). The first way does not lead into a faith of one’s own, nor actually into a faith in the Word, but into a faith in others; and this is not permanent. But whatever truths we procure for ourselves from the Word, we come to believe because they are from the Divine, and thus we believe and confirm “from a faith given from the Divine” (AC 5402).

There is no pretense in the Writings that people can suddenly free themselves from all that they have been taught by others and approach the Word with an altogether empty mind. Not only would this be impossible, but it would be unhealthy. For through the teachings of others many remains are implanted which in providence guide one's whole life. But a church may be judged by its willingness to lead its people to the Word of God. The true function of "the doctrine of the church" is to open the Word for all, and this occurs when genuine truths are taught and when the Word is given as the final authority.

This is the reason why the first "principle" of the Academy proclaims that in the Writings "is contained the very essential Word, which is the Lord," and that "from them the Lord speaks to His church," and that "the church acknowledges no other authority and no other law." All the Academy "principles" are thus relegated into their place, as a statement of various "doctrinals" which the church has recognized as taught within the Writings and has preached as a protection against various falsities and evils which infested the church. Such principles are not a "Divine" doctrine, but have weight and validity because each of us may for ourselves draw them from the Writings and then confirm them further by the Writings, by the literal sense of the Word, by reason, and by experience. Only what we see for ourselves in the Writings as a part of the Divine Doctrine partakes of the Divine authority which the Writings possess.

The first acknowledgment which the doctrine of the church should inculcate is that we should believe the Word:

The acknowledgment of what is Divine is the first thing; for then an idea of holiness is present which gives

universal confirmation to each and everything that is said, *even though it be not comprehended*. (AC 3388, emphasis added)

[Truth] for the first time becomes manifest when [a person] believes from a simple heart that it is truth because so said by the Lord. Then the shades of fallacies are dispersed, and then nothing in him prevents him from apprehending it. (AC 1911:6)

The true order is that a person should know or be wise from the Lord, that is, from His Word; then all things follow in proper order, and then he is also illustrated in rational and scientific things. [One is therefore not] forbidden to learn the sciences, since they are useful and pleasant in life; [nor is one] prohibited from thinking and speaking as the learned do in the world; . . . he must do so, however, from this principle, that the Word of God ought to be believed. (AC 129)

“A person is ruled by the principles he adopts, even though they be most false” (AC 129). It is vital, therefore, that he should approach the Word with this as his only principle: that all principles should be formed from things seen in the Word.

We are taught that those who read the Word without doctrine as a lamp “are in the dark concerning every truth, and their mind is wandering and uncertain, prone to errors. They easily fall into heresies which they also embrace if favor or authority supports them and their reputation is not endangered” (TCR 228; SS 52). But the same is said of those who read the Word from a false principle previously assumed, whether it be some doctrine adopted from others or one invented by themselves. The doctrine which must serve as a lamp must be drawn *from* the Word—from the

Word in its clear and naked statements. It could not be expected of us that we should form our conscience and faith except from such truths as plainly appear in the Scripture and in the Writings. What seems difficult, uncertain, or obscure, we should set aside for future meditation and study, confessing it to contain truths which we are not yet ready to understand. It is from clear and transparent teachings that we build our faith, conscience, and conviction. These truths we see to be from the Lord, and not from any human. These truths are also spiritual-natural truths—truths from the spiritual sense. Those of the external church see few and gather few such truths, and few make up their conscience. But those of the internal church, who are moved by the spiritual affection for truth, receive many such truths into their conscience.

We are cautioned against thinking that the spiritual sense of the Word is that sense which we would draw to confirm the ecclesiastical dogma of our denomination (TCR 194). As we have shown, it is easy to confirm views in which one has pride or to which one has been committed. But the spiritual sense can be seen as genuine truths in the literal sense when an affection for truth leads us to hear from the Word the Lord's directions as to how to live a life of charity and use, and thus come to love the way of the Lord and the Lord Himself.

No special "open sesame" is required for us to be instructed by the Lord from the Word, no complicated credal formula, no high degree of learning. Indeed the Writings frequently state that the simple often see the essentials of the Word more clearly than the learned. The Word is not closed to those who look for the doctrine of charity, and who search it from the affection for truth. For each of us is instructed according to his or her state.

Natural Faith and Spiritual Faith

It is a law of order that a person by his own exertion and power should procure for himself faith by means of truths from the Word, and yet should believe that not a grain of faith is from himself but from God. (TCR 71:3)

This power or faculty is from the Lord, yet we feel it to be our own. What we thus procure from the Word, by thinking of its truths naturally and, so far as he can, rationally, is *natural* faith, and is at first knowledge, thought, and persuasion. But in those who believe in the Lord and shun evils as sins against Him it becomes conviction, trust, and confidence; it is filled with the Divine Spiritual essence—and becomes “spiritual-natural and, through charity, living” (TCR 137:5, 339). It is perfected according to the abundance and coherence of truths, and thus becomes luminous, more evident, clearer, and more and more alienated from evils, from the allurements of the eyes, and from the lusts of the flesh (TCR 352). It becomes “not only a treasure in the heart but also a jewel in the mouth” (TCR 379).

Those who search the Word from an affection for truth, imploring the Lord that in His light they may see light, procure the things of faith “from the genuine fountain”; and those things which people thus acknowledge as God’s own teaching, build up the conscience and “are appropriated to [them] by the Divine” (AC 5402). And since they recognize the right of every individual to do the same, “such do not disturb any one within the church, nor ever condemn others, knowing that every one, who is a church, lives from his own faith” (AC 5432). This freedom of conscience is also protected in the church. A person should be pardoned for “denying this or that to

be Divine truth from the Word in the Church, provided he believes that in the Word are Divine truths” (Canons 37:9). Therefore the Lord said that “whosoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him” (Matthew 12:32). “The Son of Man is the Divine truth from the Word in the Church, and this can be seen by all” (Canons 37:9). And “he who believes otherwise than the priest,” we read, “and makes no disturbance, ought to be left in peace; but one who makes a disturbance, ought to be separated; for this also is of order, for the sake of which the priesthood is established” (HD 318; AC 6047, 6822; cf. SE 3462 for an example of evil priests).

Interdenominational Relations

In this connection we must emphasize that the civil state usually guarantees religious liberty or tolerance in varying ways. The existence of many religions and of denominations within these religions affords an ultimate for the spiritual which should be respected in everyone. The church must also recognize that doctrinal errors do not condemn people, even if—through such errors—they injure the spiritual life of others, so long as this injury is not done from purpose and with knowledge of its evil effect. Those who have entire faith in their religion though this is based on falsity, and who reason against truths and goods and persuade “as heretics often do who by scruples of conscience become zealots,” may not be doing so from any evil affection. For such, charity dictates that we prepare “cities of refuge.” The order of the church must of course be protected when disturbance arises: for without order there is no true freedom; but that same order makes clear that we have no right or power to decide the inner

motives or the spiritual state of those who differ from us (AC 9011).

At times we may indeed all need such cities of refuge; for we cannot always discern when we do some injury to the minds of others, especially by truth separated from good. Truth, when we take merit in it, is like an axe-blade which may fly off the handle during the hewing of wood; and when we are deep in some religious controversy, as in a deep forest, we might harm the spiritual state of others by too much zeal—wounding them unintentionally (Deuteronomy 19:4-5; AC 9011). If we do, we must take refuge in the understanding charity of others.

Intellectual differences alone do not cause schisms and divisions within a church as long as the Divinity of the Lord and the holiness of the Word are acknowledged as well as a life of charity (AC 3451). There may, however, be many organizations in the church, and yet—as in the Ancient Church—a general state of harmony (AC 1799, 2982). Such variety would bring perfection, and is comparable to the various diadems or jewels in a king's crown (DP 259; AR 66, 73; TCR 763). This is possible so far as the church refrains from claiming a Divine authority for the teachings of its leaders or priests or for the special principles of its founders or for the ideas and opinions of any person, but places Divine authority in the Lord's Revelation—the Scriptures and the Writings—admitting that others also may have illustration from the Lord, and refraining from the spirit of accusation and internal judgment. Fairness and appreciation—and forgiveness—are ultimates of charity which we must never forget. "It is not angelic to enquire into the evils with a person unless the goods be enquired into at the same time" (AC 10381). It is so that

we should judge, for it is so that we would wish to be judged.

Controversies

The Writings also warn us against the loss of enlightenment which may come to those who engage in controversies. After witnessing a debate among spirits, Swedenborg says: “I noticed that some, after the disagreement, were so much in the dark that they did not know what was true—something that is likely to happen with truths that are argued about for a long time, which are darkened, so that the debaters are afterwards blind to the very truth” (SE 1937). He speaks of “those who work hard in disputes, who present, and even make up as counter-arguments, countless points that agree with their premises and propositions, and in so doing, more and more close off the inward meaning” (SE 1953). In such debates the general truth which should be held as the key premise “is overshadowed when one is too intensely bent on disputes, for then the truth is obscured” and so far is lost (SE 1955). The truth is obscured because there can always be more objections raised than there is time and possibility to answer! And there is also the tendency to pay more attention to people’s words, than to their meaning (SE 1955). The same occurs also with learned critics who in studying the Scripture gather a false sense from the bare words and so spoil the contextual meaning (SE 2041, 1950).

Individual Faith

All who, from an affection for truth, explore the Word to see whether the doctrines they have been taught are true, and then find that these do not coincide with the truths which they see in the Word, are warned to “take heed lest [they] disturb the church” (AC 6047).

But in a genuine church, the results of one’s sincere and rational search for truths in the Word are not likely to be such that such a search causes disturbance. Individual study results in a faith which does not any more depend on the opinions of others or the leadership of others, but still accords with the doctrine of the church in all essentials, and differs only in respect to those fields of inquiry which are not yet clear, and which need to be the subject of further study within the church. We must not think that because our faith is no longer dependent on others or on the authority of others, we are no longer dependent upon the administrations of the church and upon its teachings. A babe in the womb depends on the blood-supply of the mother. When born it suckles her milk. When weaned, the child must still look to the mother for food. When, therefore, we read in an isolated passage in the *Arcana* that one “who has attained to spiritual good has no more need of doctrinals which are from others”—being in the end to which doctrinals are the means—we cannot infer that the regenerate have no need for doctrine but see doctrine not in the light of others, or as an imposed rule of thinking, but seek the truth from a love of charity and use (AC 5997). And they find this truth—which is the doctrine of their life—in the Word and *thence* also in the doctrinal instruction of the church, seeing it there with a greater perception of its truth than before. They then

return to the Word to confirm it so that they may see it not as the doctrine of any person but as the truth of God.

The Function of the Rational

The formation of a personal faith and free conviction comes about when we have acquired knowledge and judgment, and thus when we come into adult life. Age is necessary to mature the reason, for while from birth a person has the *faculty* of rationality, there is only a rudimentary development of it in childhood (AC 1893). While children also have freedom, they do not attain to rational freedom until they have become civil, moral, and rational, which they do by a right education (TCR 564; DP 317; AR 161e).

It is through the *rational* that we are introduced into the Church. By the rational, the natural self can think from cognitions¹² and knowledges, and thus set things in their proper series and relationship, “and analytically dispose, discuss, separate and join, and at last draw conclusions.” This rational develops according as we use it for the ends which we love. The interior thought of the natural self from the influx of the life of heaven introduces us into spiritual thought, and makes us a church (AE 569:6).

Rational people are able to understand truths if they so wish—even if they are evil. But evil causes the rational to be closed up by falsities. Swedenborg was therefore permitted to use rational arguments to confirm spiritual truths in order to disperse such falsities (HH 455). The rational is built up by means of instruction and through the

¹² Swedenborg distinguishes *cognitiones* (“cognitions”)—higher level knowledge, concepts—from *scientia*, knowledge that is simply held as fact.

elevation of the understanding above the native will which is evil and sensual. Through this elevation we can see truths which are opposed to our evil ambitions and lusts, and a new will (which begins as the “good of truth”¹³) then may be formed by the Lord in our understanding, from which we can enter into states of repentance and reformation.

It is clear, therefore, that no one can become spiritual unless one first becomes rational. For the Spiritual itself is the Divine light of heaven, and this must inflow into us through the rational if we are to be affected by it (AE 654:15-16, 731:31, 995). We become rational through truths, civil, moral, and spiritual, and from the spiritual truths we obtain from the Word and through doctrine. “In things purely rational, moral, and spiritual, truths are seen from the light of truth itself,” if we do not confirm ourselves in falsities. Thus we can “think analytically, can form conclusions about what is just and right in judicial affairs, can see what is honorable in moral life, and good in spiritual life” (DP 317). The perception of justice and rectitude is called “common sense,” because it exists “naturally”; but at this day—owing to inherited evils—the perception of spiritual truth and celestial good do not exist naturally but can be given only as the fruit of regeneration (SEm 4644).

Although the rational mind is needed to *see* truth, it does not follow that it is to be the final arbiter and judge of Truth itself, anymore than the eye is the judge of natural truth. The rational is only the receptacle of the light of heaven, or the vessel which is affected by truths. And it receives truths only when it is permitted to function normally, or when it is not closed by falsities or impeded

¹³ See footnote 6 on page 79 *re* the term “good of truth.”

by ignorance or diverted by evil loves. And even in its most perfect state, the human rational is finite—limited; it can be affected by the Divine truth which is infinite, but it can never comprehend it or come to possess it.

Doctrines and Reason

The Writings therefore show that a person cannot, by reason alone, obtain faith, nor construct a religion by systematic reasonings on the basis of merely sensual evidence. What is called “natural theology” does not exist, for spiritual truths come only by way of Divine Revelation (De Verbo 6:1-5). Yet Swedenborg, himself fortified by a belief in Scripture, did seek to establish by reasonings that God, or the Infinite, was the final cause of creation (see *De Infinito*, published in 1734), admitting, however, that while the existence of the Infinite could be proved by rational arguments to one willing to follow them, the *quality* of the Divine could be learned only from the Word. The will to believe can alone open the rational to receive the truth. Such a willingness to see implies a certain innocence and humility, which is needful for learning.

For the formulation of faith, the Word and its Divine Doctrine must be accepted as something that is above one’s human reason. One must see “that the doctrinal things of faith are in their entirety from the Divine which is infinitely above the human rational” (AC 2519). It is this process of conviction—not only that the final truth is higher than our understanding, but that God has actually revealed His essence of love and wisdom and the laws of His government in the revealed Doctrine—that makes for faith. Spiritual truth may at first be received because it is *called* Divine, and later because it is *seen* as Divine.

But “the beginning must not be made from scientific” or by reasonings about the Divine from earthly, corporeal, or material things; for thus truth is brought into negative light from a sense of the pride of one’s opinion and a love of self and the world (AC 6047; HH 353). For reasoners then do not want to see truths from the Lord, but from themselves.

Still the Lord wills that one should not only think and speak about Divine things but should also reason about them . . . and this . . . reasoning, provided that it has for its end that the truth may be seen, may be said to be from the Lord with a person; but it is from the person until he sees the truth and acknowledges it. (DP 219)

“To look upon the doctrine of faith from the things of reason is not to believe in the Word or in the doctrine thence derived, until one is persuaded from rational things that it is so” (AC 2568). The *Arcana* states that this is the wrong order, and that “the doctrine would become null and void, if the rational were consulted as to its content” (AC 2516, 2538). The doctrine here meant is the Divine Doctrine, or the Word and the Writings. Human teachings, which rest upon the rational abilities of those who propound them, must be subject to rational criticisms as well as be compared with the Word itself. But the spiritual truth of the Word “must be rendered up without taint [*immune*] from the rational” (AC 2538). For Divine doctrine is null and void so far as we take what is human as the ground of belief.

What then is the function of the rational? It is to receive the doctrine of faith (AC 2519). Truths of doctrine are therefore rational in form. They are accommodations of spiritual truth to human reason, as rational appearances

of truth, or truth stripped of merely sensual appearances such as characterize the literal sense of the Word of the Old and New Testaments. The doctrine of genuine truth which agrees with the spiritual sense, also agrees with sound reason, with the laws of thought impressed by creation upon the rational mind, and with the order of the influx of life through every human soul (TCR 8, 10, 12; AC 1308). Every falsity goes counter to the laws of the rational mind.

The final source of all falsity is *evil*. Evil invades the rational, and seeks to divert our powers of thinking into confirmations of selfishness and pride, using sensual appearances as its special tools. Instead of rational thought, it substitutes “ratiocinations.” This apparent “rational” may indeed make use of truths, but it weighs the teachings of Revelation by its own measure and selects only such truths as will condone its own states, prejudices, and opinions. It can do so in a number of ways—by adding as well as by subtracting, by insufficient analysis or by false synthesis! It can do so by blinding itself to the context-meaning and connection of the revealed doctrine. It can find some mode of interpretation which renders the doctrine void and null. It can insist on drawing doctrine by “correspondences”—or claim inner meanings which reverse or nullify the sense of the naked teachings or genuine truths of the Word. All such modes are condemned because they involve “consulting the rational,” and thus they contort the doctrine.

For this reason the Writings say that when the church is being established, the doctrinal things of good and truth must be collected into a one—lest there be a defect and the human rational begins to supply what is lacking. For

this reason the church is provided with a Divine revelation which contains *all* such doctrinals (AC 3786).

Nunc Licet!¹⁴

The general truth which reconciles all these teachings concerning the rational is that there are two principles of thought—the affirmative and the negative. The negative principle is to deny everything, unless convinced by such things as may be comprehended or felt; and this leads people toward stupidity and madness, which increases the more they consult rational, scientific, and philosophical things, since no one can from lower things comprehend higher things, such as celestial and spiritual, and, still less, the Divine things which transcend the understanding. But those who, from an affection for truth, are in the affirmative principle, begin by affirming what belongs to doctrine from the Word, and their ideas become fuller and wiser by the things of reason, philosophy, and science (AC 2568, 3913). They do not deny a thing merely because they do not fully understand it, and therefore they can continue to learn (see SE 2651, 2545, 3602, 3614; AC 129, 6047, 1072).

For where an affection for truth is present, spiritual truths *can* be comprehended, recognized, and received more and more fully, although never infinitely! The angels therefore totally reject the dogma that the understanding is under the obedience of faith. For they say, “What is a belief, without seeing whether a thing is true?” And if anyone demands a blind acceptance, they reply: “Do you consider yourself God whom I ought to believe? Or do you think me so insane as to believe an assertion in which

¹⁴ “Now it is permitted.”

I do not see any truth?” And so the dogmatist has to retire. “Angelic wisdom consists in this uniquely, that they see and comprehend that which they think” (Faith 3, 4)

Nevertheless, those who are anchored to an historical or persuasive faith in the doctrine of their church are afraid of using their understanding in matters of religion, but believe that such doctrine should be received without any mental view on the part of the rational (AC 3394). This attitude protects the simple against attacks upon their faith, and is urged by many churches. Indeed the Writings point out that because the doctrines of the old Christian churches are formed not from the Word but from one’s own self-intelligence, it is very dangerous to enter into them by the understanding, which would thus either confirm these falsities by the Word or else reject religion along with them. Hence in Providence it was permitted that the Catholics took the Bible away from the laity and that the Protestants told their people that doctrine is not necessarily rational (TCR 508). But to those who are in the affirmative to the Lord, this advocacy of blind faith is both unfair and hurtful, since it takes people’s freedom of thought away and may bind their conscience to ideas that are most heretical (AC 3394).

In the New Church “it is permitted to enter with the understanding and penetrate into all her secrets and also to confirm them by the Word.” The reason is that “her doctrinals are continuous truths, laid open by the Word,”(TCR 505:5) They are not cryptic sayings, hidden in parable, nor ambiguous in meaning, but bare truths in rational form, intended to elevate and enlighten the rational mind. Within them shines the light of heaven and the glory of God who provides humans with reason. This is meant by the inscription on the temple in heaven, “NUNC

LICET,” and by the fact that the veil of its sanctuary was removed (TCR 508).

Chapter Eight

Doctrinal Progress

The New Church is assured that it is now allowed to enter intellectually into the mysteries of the Word which has heretofore been closed up, and to confirm the arcana of faith by the Word and by rational things, and that this will open the understanding more and more, and elevate it into angelic light (TCR 508). This is an encouragement for those of the New Church—laymen as well as ministers—to make a progressive study of doctrine. The New Church is to endure forever, and the wisdom of the future will rest upon the interior Divine truths given in the Writings. These teach that “in the measure that interior things are revealed can a person become wiser; for to become interior is to become wiser” (AE 641e, 948e).

The Church cannot at once comprehend all the teachings given in its Revelation. As a matter of fact, few have even read all the parts of the Writings, and still fewer have studied them. Many of the Writings which Swedenborg himself did not publish found their way into print quite late. The *Spiritual Diary* (now referred to as *Spiritual Experiences*) was first published in Latin nearly a century after it was written, and translations into English followed slowly.

It is natural that the doctrinal understanding of the Church was at first confused. Generations of systematic teaching by the priesthood were needed to counteract the influence of alien doctrines and philosophies and to

guide the organized Church into a progressive study of the Writings. From the beginning, movements, both within and outside the Church, mingled the teachings of the Writings with various fads, fancies, and prejudices. Thus we find groups devoted to Mesmerism and Faith-cure, Free Masonry and mysticism, Theosophy and Spiritism, Idealism (Tulkism) and Phrenology. “Christian Science” was strongly influenced by Swedenborg. Modern Spiritualism claims him as its father and prophet. We also find Non-separatists and Anti-ecclesiastics among New Church receivers. Various communitarian ventures like the “transcendentalistic” Brook Farm and the Fourierism of last century were colored by New Church thought.¹⁵ We find “Celestialism” of varying types parading in Swedenborgian garb, as in the case of Thomas Lake Harris and Wm. Henry Holcombe; or in more moderate and intellectual form, in that of Thomas Worcester. In those cases, the authority of the Writings was either rejected and questioned, or else invoked only when convenient, or, as in some instances, annulled by a novel mode of interpretation.

Generals and Particulars

“Wherever there is any church there arise heresies, because while people are thinking about one article of faith they make it the chief thing” (AC 362).

It is with the beginning of a Church as it is in the first states of a person who is to be regenerated, that doctrinal

¹⁵ HLO refers us to M.B. Block, *The New Church in the New World*, chapter 4, New York, 1932, Holt and Sons. See also R.W. Gladish, *Swedenborg, Fourier and the America of the 1840's*, Swedenborg Scientific Association, Bryn Athyn, Pa, 1983.

things are being amassed in the memory without any order. The *Arcana* likens this chaos to “a mess of pottage” and teaches that only *good*, in the form of the affection of truth, can reduce doctrinal concepts into order (AC 3316). It also explains that the first truths to be ordered by this affection are general truths; and afterwards the particulars and singulars within these generals are introduced into good and thus ordered (AC 4345). So it is when a person is growing up. So it is when a person begins to regenerate. And so it is in the growth of the Church, and in the understanding of doctrine.

No progress into interior truth is possible until the generals are reduced into order. Generals are what hold the particulars together in order (AC 3057:3). If the generals are destroyed, the particulars also dissipate and seep out, like wine from a broken bottle (AC 7646e). The most ancient people readily perceived that whatever did not agree with the general was wrong (AC 597:2).

The first general of the Church is affirmation (AC 3923). The general acceptance of all things in the Word is thus the first, and hence no doctrinal thing whatsoever from the Word is to be denied (AC 3452). To start with denial is to close the understanding. For this reason we inculcate a faith in the holiness and truth of the literal sense of the Word, and commence with the Scriptures when we teach children doctrine. And all the things of the literal sense may be called generals, for it abounds with general truth, as concerning the omnipotence of God, concerning Providence, Creation, and obedience to His laws (AC 245). These generals must first be learned, and we continue to speak according to them, even when they have been infilled with myriad particulars which qualify them and give them deeper meaning (AC 6071).

The letter of the Word, couches these generals in worldly appearances, to which many fallacies and sensual illusions adhere. Thus, while showing that God in an omnipotent Creator, the Word also describes Him as punishing, and as being pleased with the odor of sacrifices, and as repenting that He made humankind. It is allowable to speak and think in terms of such appearances, so long as we do not intentionally deny the interior truths—that He is mercy and justice itself. Innumerable undiscerned particulars of spiritual truth are here presented only as a general concept or as a whole. People can sense the drift or *order* of these particulars in the general, and this *order* is what affects them as “holiness” (AC 3438e). But they cannot see the particulars themselves—unless they come into greater enlightenment.

The Writings reveal the internal sense with its innumerable particulars. But even these particulars—scattered over a great many volumes—need to be contained in generals of doctrine, and are therefore arranged under general headings, each doctrine being presented in compact generalized statements. In the introduction to the *Brief Exposition*, Swedenborg explains that this work was published so that “a general idea” might be formed of the New Church and its Doctrine, “because when generals precede, each and everything will afterwards appear extant in its breadth in light, for these things enter into the generals as things homogeneous into their receptacles.”

There can be no affection for particulars, unless generals have first entered with affection (AC 5454). Particulars would otherwise cause boredom or tedium—or may not even be received. This is so in every field of knowledge. We could not grasp the higher mathematics unless we had first learned arithmetic; nor would we willingly listen to

some detailed lecture on pathology unless we had some interest in anatomy.

It is said of a church founded on false principles, that, in its beginning, it knows

only the generals of doctrine; for it is then in its simplicity, and as it were in its childhood. But in course of time it adds particulars, in part confirmations of the generals, and in part additions (which however are not contrary to the generals), and also explanations to reconcile open contradictions and to prevent clashing against what common sense dictates. (AC 4720)

A church founded on genuine truth follows a parallel course, in that it also begins with generals and proceeds into particulars. Each general principle or doctrine is like a father, and the particulars are its offspring.

New Truth—the Only Truth of the Church

A church cannot remain in generals alone, without danger of stagnation and eventual decay. Health is indicated by growth, external and internal. General concepts of doctrine will indeed remain the same from age to age, even as our human form does not essentially alter as we grow to maturity. But the understanding of these general doctrines must be infilled with continually new perceptions of truth—drawn from the Word itself. There is need for continually new truth. The Lord in His second Advent said, “Behold, I make all things new”!

The word “new” is very enticing. It suggests novelties, innovations, surprises, something different and unheard of, something which makes what we already possess worthless and superseded. But it also means “fresh,” as water from a living fountain. And it is in that latter sense—I believe—that the New Church can be perpetually

“new,” however many centuries and millennia may go by. As to its doctrines, they were once new when the Writings were published, but are no longer new to the world which passed them by long ago in a hurry for other novelties and inventions. To the Church, the Writings are and will always be new, because through them course the fresh currents of living waters, of light which pours out from the Sun of heaven, to renew and refresh and create and regenerate.

And the Church will remain the “New Church” just so long as it goes to this fountain head for its doctrine of life and faith. And this must be done by *individuals*. No generation can rest upon the traditions of the past, or merely accept—passively—the doctrine of the Church as delivered by its teachers and priests. Generals of doctrine must indeed be so delivered and accepted; but for the life and growth of the Church there must be continually *new* illustration directly “from the genuine fountain,” by a new analysis of the meaning of the Writings for each new age and state, from an affection of truth which will discern visions of new uses to the neighbor and new ways to express love to the Lord.

This is what the *Arcana* means in noting that “Benjamin” signifies “new truth,” which “is the only truth of the Church,” because only it can “make man to be a church” (AC 5806). This “new” truth is the *truth from good*. For when we, by truths of doctrine drawn from the Word, have been led to good, we then view things from this good, which is called “spiritual good” or “Christian good.” And then one “not only sees from good the truths which he knew before, but he also produces from it new truths which he did not and could not know before”—“truths which differ greatly from the truths he knew previously:

for those he then knew had but little life, while those which he now acquires have life from good” (AC 5804).

Common sense tells us that it is the love of uses, the desire for charity and the life of religion, that can open our eyes to perceive the real meaning of the things we may read in the Word and the Writings. And when the Church undertakes new uses—such as those of education or worship—it brings into focus new fields of doctrine which formerly had been passed by. Where previously we had noticed only generals, we then will find many particulars. We will find them in the Writings, but it will seem as if they were our own productions—our own thoughts.

To each individual, the Word becomes a *revelation* when read with something of illustration. The Word then speaks to each in a new way. But the teaching is, that those who are in truth and not in good, go to the Word to *confirm* by its Divine authority the things which they have been taught by others, while those who are in good (i.e., an affection of truth or good) are actually “taught” from the Word. To the latter there is then “revelation,” which is manifest as a certain internal consent that a thing is true, and as a setting of the mind at rest in an acknowledgment of faith (AC 8694). This comes from heaven where the angels perceive the *spiritual* sense of the Word and communicate something of their delight to us, who—in accordance with our knowledge—see only what appears from that sense in the literal sense.

The *Arcana* distinguishes between two kinds of truth, both of which proceed from the Lord. One is truth proceeding *mediately* through angels or through the learned and enlightened, and this may enter the understanding even of those who are not regenerate, and who are in historical faith only (AC 7055). The other kind of truth is said to

proceed *immediately* from the Lord, and appears in heaven as *light united to heat* (AC 7056). It is Divine truth, but it inflows into every one's inmost, furnishes the faculties of willing and thinking, and gives light but not perception. It flows into one's will, by an interior way, acting as good, not as truth (AC 8690, 6148, 8707, 7056). Such truth proceeding *immediately* from the Lord is that Word which is the light of humans, which shines in darkness and the darkness comprehends it not, but which yet is "the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world" (John 1:4-9).

Neither of these influxes, by itself, can give us any perception of the presence of the Lord in the Divine Word. One gives the faculty by which we can elevate our understanding into the light of heaven, and be free to use our will as of ourselves. The other gives us knowledge of doctrine. But so far as our will is *conjoined* with our understanding so that the will wills good and the understanding confirms it by truth, so far the truth proceeding immediately from the Divine of the Lord is conjoined with the truth which proceeds mediately, and we then become *perceptive* and can be instructed by the Lord in the particulars or singulars of doctrine (AC 7055-7058).

The truth we thus perceive from the Word is that *new* truth which is "the only truth of the Church," and is signified by "Benjamin." It is what continually renews the vitality of the Church and will lead into new and ever clearer perceptions of uses. It is the only measure of the internal progress of the Church. The signs of its presence are that we see truths with clarity, and see that we perform uses from affection. But no one can judge the state of the

Church in this respect. All we can do is to rejoice in these indications or be warned by their absence.

Growth in Doctrinal Knowledge

The “new truth” signified by “Benjamin” may not be new in form. Familiar truths found in the Writings may appear as quite “new” when read in the light of affection. But besides this internal progress, a healthy Church must maintain a tangible development in the knowledge and application of Doctrine. The various fields of doctrine present in the Writings need to be studied, especially in respect to the uses which the Church undertakes, and also with reference to new situations and new worldly knowledge and changes in popular thinking.

The teaching that doctrine is to be drawn by a careful comparison of many passages in the Word in which the internal sense is clearly stated (AC 7233, 9025; De Verbo 10:7), gives us the principle for developing the intellectual of the Church (AC 6222). We find these naked truths, called spiritual-natural, in profusion in the Writings, and they are first to be drawn and studied by analysis and then ordered into a synthesis. Analytical thought is the sign of the rational faculty, and the Writings constantly utilize and appeal to it. It is from spiritual light that the understanding “sees and perceives rational things analytically” (TCR 365e). True doctrine is always rational, and must be studied by rational processes.

The early Academy teachers therefore employed the analytical method in doctrinal studies, gathering from the Writings *all* the teachings on any subject in question—with due respect to the context—and drawing interpretative conclusions only after the whole evidence was examined.

In each field they allowed the clear or indisputable teachings to serve as a key for the understanding of what was more obscure or paradoxical, and were careful to preserve the *general* truths. Sanity as well as safety lies in not denying generals. As a result of such studies, many particulars and many universals came to light which have enriched the thought of the Church. But the chief fruit of this professional study of theology was the crystallization of a clear and incontrovertible body of *general doctrine* which serves as a strong bulwark against the intrusion of falsities into the Church.

These generals of doctrine can be apprehended by all, and in them there is agreement, for they can easily be seen in the Writings. If any contradict or deny such generals, the Church is likely to be disturbed. But as to the particulars which illustrate, explain, and infill these generals, there may be divergence and difference of opinion, and tentative interpretations may be advanced. For these particulars cannot be seen by all, nor are they known by all, nor are there any who know them all!

Yet it is in the field of these particulars that progress will lie. For the known generals will grow to embrace more and more particulars as the study of the Writings develops. Every field of inquiry will also uncover more particulars, and these will in turn form new generals. New uses—such as that of education—will call forth from the Writings new general doctrines containing particular truths not before noticed. And in all the ages to come, these *generals* of truth will not alter, even if their contents be understood and applied with ever more interior wisdom and in widely different ways.

Applications of Doctrine

It is understood within the Church that while priests should be put under no external bond in the exercise of their office, and especially in the preaching of the Doctrine, so “they ought to compel no one.” They should teach what the Word and the revealed Doctrines contain and by truths lead to the good of life (HD 318). They are, of course, to maintain the order of the Church. But if the clergy were to make particular applications of doctrine to the lives of individuals—telling them what to do under specific circumstances—this would savor of compulsion. Applications to the uses of life are therefore left to each individual of the Church, so far as this is possible. The freedom of the individual is necessary for true reciprocation.

This same freedom must be observed in the field of natural truth. The Church cannot dictate the application of Doctrine to the realms of medicine, or law, or the natural sciences. This in no wise means that Doctrine has no relation to these fields of knowledge. Revealed principles are universal and have application to every use and to every science. But this application must be made by the medium of an interpretative *philosophy* which the laborers in each field must form for themselves, a philosophy which not only reconciles the things of their experience with their doctrinal understanding, but which also *enlightens* them in their use to see the manner in which it may best serve the life of charity and the glory of God.

But by the same token, it behooves those who labor in the fields of science and the uses of the world to be cautious how they seek to impose upon the Church the special theories of the individual philosophy which they may have drawn from their experience. For these

things—if insisted on—may bring in doubts, perplexities, and divisions which injure charity and faith. In the realm of natural truth the Church must be held in freedom not only from priestly domination but from lay dogmatism and professional dictation. There must be room in the Church for a variety of philosophies, for several schools of medical opinion, for diverse brands of social and political thinking, for different interpretations of natural science.

The matter does not rest here, however. To place religion in one compartment of the mind, and to think, each one as one pleases, with the rest of the mind, offers no solution. For freedom—and much patience—are necessary in the thought of the Church on these subjects, especially in order that progress may be made towards a gradual unification: the formation of New Church philosophies which will increasingly allow the light of the universal truths and principles of the Writings to shine upon all fields of knowledge and *order* them in such a manner that they will confirm Revelation and illustrate it on the natural plane. “Scientifics, in themselves, are neither true nor false.” They are likened to spiritual wealth which becomes true or false, depending upon its application and use (AC 6917). When the sciences confirm truths, we are illuminated by them; otherwise, they make us blind (SE 2523).

Two Foundations of Truth

The Christian Church, especially in modern times, has seen a severe conflict between science and religious faith. Such a conflict is in part the result of the inevitable opposition between appearance and reality. In Christendom the struggle was mainly occasioned by the fact that science

had penetrated beyond some of the grosser appearances of nature and discovered certain natural truths, while the Church had failed to penetrate the sensual appearances of the literal sense of the Scripture, and thus failed to see the doctrine of genuine truth for the sake of which the Word was given. Therefore the Church insisted that Faith demands a blind acceptance of the literal statements of Scripture concerning the manner of creation, geology, the early history of humankind, the flood of Noah, and the motion of the sun and the planets, and insisted that Science was the foe of Religion. Science, on the other hand, encouraged a rationalistic attitude which tended not only to modify religious beliefs but also to deny the need of religion altogether.

The Writings, however, show that there is no real contradiction between natural truth and spiritual truth, or between true Science and Divine Revelation. The Word of God is the primary foundation of truth. But nature, which is the creation of God in which He also reveals Himself, is the second foundation of truth (SE 5709, 5710). Both the Word and Nature are swathed in appearances which must be opened up if we are to see the genuine truths.

It is well known that the sensual appearances or seemingly contradictory phenomena of nature must be studied by careful analysis in order that we may assume hypotheses and formulate physical laws. We then test these by experience against all given data before we confirm and adopt them as explanations of the workings of the universe. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are written in sensual and natural appearances taken from nature, but with the purpose to convey and clothe the genuine truths of the spiritual sense. They are therefore representative truth, or symbolic truth, not intended to teach physical

laws but spiritual laws. And when the Writings were given to reveal these spiritual laws openly to the rational mind and in terms of genuine truths, their object was not to disclose new physical facts, such as people can discover for themselves, but to convey *principles* or *doctrines* by which such facts may illustrate spiritual laws, and the universe be increasingly a mirror of the purposes of God and of the ways of His Providence.

The Writings convey their doctrines by what is called “rational appearances” and also refer for confirmation to the sensual appearances or “correspondential” expressions of the Scriptures. Rational appearances reveal rather than hide genuine truths but utilize both the truths and the appearances of nature to illustrate the principle which is set forth. Things of science and of legend, of experience and reason, of law and appearance; parables and comparisons, history and human instances from both worlds—the Writings use all to make the spiritual truth clear to people’s natural minds. The rational person can see spiritual truth only by its relation to such things. But if we are rational we will also seek to distinguish between facts of true science and confirmations from appearances. What we today may regard as a fact may in years to come be regarded as an appearance. And yet many scientific allusions in the Writings, which a century ago were in doubt, are now accepted as factual in the learned world.

We would be bold indeed to attempt to define the lines within which theology and science should confine themselves lest one transgress upon the precincts of the other. But between the doctrines of religion and the investigations of science there stretches the broad field of philosophy where both may forage and explore and meet each other on mutual ground. It is the hope of the New

Church that in this free field of thought “rational things” may confirm the opened mysteries of the Word and may elevate the understanding of the natural self “into the light of heaven” (TCR 508).

Chapter Nine¹⁶

The Search For Interior Truths

Growth in the understanding of doctrine is associated in our minds with an advance towards interiors (AC 4345; AE 641e). Even as the individual passes on from the generals of childhood into the particulars of adult comprehension, or from external truths to interior truths, so the Church looks to an ever more interior understanding of the general doctrines of the Scriptures and the Writings.

But this search for interior truths is attended with many dangers, invited by the impatience and vanity of the natural self which detests to acknowledge ignorance. All the hells also conspire to break down the protection offered by general truths, either by having us reject them or by changing their meaning, or by throwing in the doubt that they are no longer needed.

It is sometimes suggested that the Writings, despite their comprehensive and universal nature, could not suffice to serve all the generations of the unending future as their source of spiritual light. Thousands of years from now, would not the truths of doctrine which these Writings disclose be so familiar and hackneyed that they would no more inspire us? Would their truth not be exhausted? Even now, do not we in the Church sometimes come to feel a boredom in reading the Doctrines, with their frequent repetitions?

¹⁶ This chapter was not part of HLO's original work, but he added it later.

The question has its parallels: How could two conjugal partners¹⁷ consort to all eternity without becoming wearied? Or how can anyone live in heaven forever without losing the zest of life? It must be conceded, however, that the same sun and the same earth bring much variety in the course of a lifetime. The variety is especially traceable to the fact that we change and are, as it were, reborn continually. The Writings yield new meanings to us in our shifting states and advancing years, although their doctrines remain precisely the same as when we were young. The laws of nature give us no less satisfaction after they have become familiar—so why should the principles of spiritual life give us less? In the vast future people will still need to repent and to regenerate by the same mode as we. And whatever the increase in their perfection, there could be no revelation given to their rational minds in any other than doctrinal or rational terms.

Not satisfied with “complacency” about the people of the future, some have advanced the idea that the Writings are written in correspondential form, so that there is a great deal more truth contained in them than can be seen by a study of what they plainly express: deeper truth which cannot be mined except by translating the Writings with the help of the science of correspondences into an entirely new series of ideas. This would be a discretely higher degree of truth, constituting a new “spiritual sense” such as that in heaven, and so be suitable for the regenerate and for future ages.

¹⁷ “Conjugal” is a rendering of the Latin *conjugalis*, which means “married love.” Since this is not a very common word in classical or neo-classical Latin some have supposed it was used to convey the special concept of married love which is taught in the Heavenly Doctrine, and set it apart from common conceptions.

Involved in this reasoning there are many difficulties—a few of which will be noted.

The first of these is that the Writings do nowhere teach or even intimate that their text is to be treated as a new literal sense to be interpreted by correspondences. To make such an assumption is of course easy enough, and it is similarly easy to confirm it by various appearances. But this nullifies the teaching concerning the nature and purpose of the Writings. Instead of showing how the Writings “surpass all the revelations that have hitherto been made since the creation of the world,” it reduces them to the plane of a merely correspondential ultimate such as we already have in the prophetic Word (Inv 44). In practice, the theory that the Writings—like the Old Testament—can be understood only by the science of correspondences, will lead to the rejection of any teaching in the Doctrine which happens to come into doubt, as the doctrine of the priesthood or the doctrine of the incarnation, or the doctrine concerning the differences between the spiritual and the natural, or the doctrine concerning conjugal love.

Common sense realizes that if the Writings do not make a functional one with the Scriptures (as the brain does with its body) but are only another literal sense that is still veiled by sensual correspondences, a further Divine revelation will be required to open their inner meaning. And it may be observed that the scarcity of genuine truths in the Old Testament is due to the veiling of the doctrine in sensual correspondences, while the New Testament presents many more genuine truths because this veiling, in the Gospels, is thinner. The Writings clearly reveal not only general truths but innumerable particulars; and they also give the science of correspondences, but with the avowed purpose of opening the sensual veiling of the

literal sense of Scripture so that its spiritual sense may be disclosed in terms of rational thought.

The employment of the science of correspondences in its proper plane, for the removal of the sensual appearances of the Scriptural Word, is indeed part of the function of the Church. The priesthood consistently expounds the Scripture in the light of the naked teachings found therein and in the Writings, and thus displays the “internal sense” of some chapter or text. But *no new doctrine* is obtained by this exposition. The science of correspondences is not intended to disclose new doctrine, but only to illustrate and corroborate doctrine already known (TCR 208, 230; De Verbo 21:1, 7:6-8; SS 26, 56). Since the Word is in the form of the Divine Human of the Lord, when we see the spiritual-natural truths of doctrine reflected and mirrored in the series of things in the literal sense, we can also see how the states of our spiritual life progress in their order. The connections of all human states become more clear when they are brought into reference with ultimates. Therefore all the Writings, and indeed all the wisdom of the heavens, rest upon the Word in its literal sense as upon a common foundation wherein all things of heaven and the Church are conjoined with power and holiness.

The internal sense seen from the exposition of Scripture is as “interior” as any truth which humans can perceive while on earth. Even if we should disregard the purpose of the Writings and the true order of drawing doctrine, and reduce them to a merely literal sense, translating their words as if they were “mere correspondences,” and reading some new doctrine out of them, this doctrine would have to be expressed in the same rational language and could not convey any truth higher or more interior than that which is actually already expressed in the Writings themselves,

and which can be evolved from the Scripture by ordinary exposition.

The Limitations of Human Thought

The reasons for this lie not only in the nature of the Writings but also in the differences of human thought before and after the death of the body, and also in the degrees of truth. There is truth that can be perceived by angels, but not yet by humans on earth. Thus we read in the *Arcana Coelestia*:

Truth Divine in the *first* degree and also in the *second* is what proceeds immediately from the Lord. This is above the angelic understanding. But truth Divine in the *third* degree is such as is in the inmost or third heaven. This is such that it cannot in the least be apprehended by men. Truth Divine in the *fourth* degree is such as is in the middle or second heaven; neither is this intelligible to man. But truth Divine in the *fifth* degree is such as is in the ultimate or first heaven. This may be perceived for a while (*aliquantisper*¹⁸) by a man while he is in illustration, but still it is such that in great part it cannot be expressed by human words; and when it falls into ideas it produces the faculty of perceiving and also of believing that a thing is so. Truth Divine in the *sixth* degree, however, is such as is with man, accommodated to his apperception; so is the sense of the letter of the Word. (AC 8443; See the diagram in appendix 1.)

¹⁸ (Chadwick) *aliquantisper* For a short time, for a while: CL 7.1; to some slight extent: HH 210.

Although in states of illustration we may feel something of affection and conviction from the “fifth degree”—which is that of the lowest heaven and yet so ineffable that it cannot be put into adequate words—while on earth we are thus limited as to our conscious thought to what is called the “sixth degree” of truth Divine.

How can this be while yet the Writings give the spiritual sense in plain language—sometimes the spiritual-natural sense, sometimes the spiritual, sometimes the celestial or Supreme sense? The answer is that the Writings express the subject matter of the internal sense as it is seen in the various heavens, yet express this in terms of natural-rational ideas, adapted to the rational thought of our natural mind. No one on earth—even if inspired—could express the spiritual truths of heaven in terms of angelic ideas, or even consciously perceive truth Divine of the third or even the fourth degree! No angel—even if it were possible for one to descend on earth—could impart to us the truths of the spiritual sense as the angels conceive it by ideas of angelic wisdom, for such ideas would be beyond our conscious grasp (CL 326-329).

Yet a partial exception is made in the case of the ideas of the lowest heaven. These may—we surmise—affect our conscious states under certain conditions. The reason for this is that in the ultimate heaven the Word is seen as to its “internal-historical” sense, which is spiritual-natural (AC 4279, 9407). Truth, in that heaven, is seen in its relation to persons, times, and places. The angels of that heaven indeed think spiritually, but their thought depends on objective representations. They have charity, but it is attached to personal loyalties and associated with friendship and the thought of something of reward or

merit. In many ways, their life resembles the states of the regenerate on earth (AE 834).

For human ideas about spiritual things develop in historical fashion—as the internal history of our life—on the background of personal situations. Our ideas about charity, justice, wisdom, about evil and falsity, repentance and regeneration, will and understanding, the Word, influx, degrees—all these take form along with our human experiences; we know them as the internal phase of natural life, and they are inseparable from attached ideas of time and space and person.

But although there is some kinship between a person's rational thought and the thought of the angels of the first heaven, there are also marked differences. For from being "natural," *every* one becomes "spiritual"—by death:

The natural man, in everything of his thought and speech, and in everything of his will and action, has, *for a subject*, matter, space, time, and quantity, these things with him being fixed and static (*stata*), while without them he would have no notion of thought and speech therefrom, nor any affection of will and action from these. The spiritual man, or spirit, does not possess the above things for subjects, but only *for objects*. (D.Wis 7:5 emphasis added)

This means that the objective creation that surrounds angels and spirits in apparent space and time, can be thought of only as the appearances of states of love and wisdom, so that the notion of space and time is not involved in that *from* which spirits and angels think. Their ideas are therefore so wholly different from ours that "they entirely transcend them and do not fall into natural ideas, except sometimes into the interior rational

sight, and this no otherwise than through the abstraction or removal of quantities from qualities” (*ibid.*). Thus angelic wisdom is incomprehensible and ineffable to us. And the employments and functions of the angels can thus not be described in words of our mortal tongues.

The Quality of Natural Thought

The Writings show that “all the thought which man has” in this world is “founded” upon ideas of time, space, and natural things (HH 169). Thus “the idea of space and time is in almost everything of thought with man, so long as he is in the world” (AC 3387:3). Without such an idea we “cannot think anything at all,” nor comprehend anything of Divine things (AC 3938). On earth, spaces and times enter into our thoughts and bind them and distinguish them from the spiritual thoughts of the angels (AE 1219:5). “To think spiritually is to think without time and space, and to think naturally is to think with time and space; for to every idea of natural thought there adheres something from time and space; but not to any spiritual idea” (CL 328:2). Thus space and time cannot be divorced from a person as a thinking “subject” (D.Wis 7:5).

As soon as we tried to think without some basis for our thought in time and space, we would lapse into unconsciousness; our thought would turn into a blank, and we would be unable to distinguish any ideas (AE 625:4). But this does not mean that our thought consists solely of sensual or material ideas, which even animals have. Human beings are also capable of *abstract* or *rational* ideas, which however have to be sustained and connected by means of the sensual ideas of space and time and

person and quantity, if they are to be conscious of them (AC 5110:3).

In the “higher thought in which we are when we revolve natural, civil, moral, and spiritual things in interior rational light,” ideas of time and space have been removed to the side and spiritual light allowed to flow in and enlighten (AR 947). We can thus think “almost abstractly from natural things” (AC 9828). We may entertain ideas about God and heaven: as when we think of God as love itself and wisdom itself. Yet this abstraction is attached to a mental picture of the Lord as finite Man or to a visualization of His love as a fiery Sun and His wisdom as proceeding light—thus to natural ideas acquired from correspondence and resting in space and time (AE 1124:2). We cannot think of spiritual and Divine things except *analogically* or in an image (AC 2520). But we are encouraged to remove from our thought—by acknowledgment and rational consent—the idea of space and finiteness which adhere from nature to our idea of God:

Every one who has understanding is able to *transcend* in thought these things which are proper to nature. (DLW 69, emphasis added)

Creation itself cannot be brought within one’s comprehension unless space and time are removed from the thought; but if these are removed it can be comprehended. Remove these if you can or as much as you can . . . and you will perceive. (DLW 155)

Do not, I entreat you, confuse your ideas with time and space . . . for the Divine is not in time and space. (DLW 51, cf. 285, 81, 82, 111, 7, 71, 300; DP 46-51)

A part of the mind, called the interior natural memory, is especially devoted to abstractions and thus to doctrine, to philosophical things, and other immaterial ideas. It supplies “the objects for interior speculation” (SE 3258).¹⁹

But rational speculation and the attempt to remove sensual ideas, do not by themselves make our thought spiritual. We can go insane by too much abstraction (CL 207). And in the attempt, abstract not only time and space from spiritual things, but also substantiality! This makes these spiritual things a vacuum—a nothing—of which nothing can be predicated (DLW 373e, 81, 82; LJP 263, 265).

The ambition to lift oneself into exalted states beyond ordinary human experiences, has caused many to turn “mystics,” who believe that they have foretastes of heaven in states of ecstasy where the mind goes blank—as with the contemplation of the infinite—and the soul is enveloped in an aura of visionary bliss. The state of the mystic, like that of various religious fanatics, is induced by “enthusiastic spirits” who roam the world of spirits in search of adulation. The exaltation which the mystic feels is an imitation of an angelic state, a sense as if heavenly wisdom and a beatific vision were at last attained. But no clear or expressible ideas ever crystallize out of such sensations.

¹⁹ Though SE 3258 does not mention “immaterial ideas,” it is speaking of spirits from “Mercury” which are said elsewhere to correspond to the “memory of immaterial things” (AC 7170).

Note that the general teaching is that we do not think consciously in immaterial ideas until after death (AC 10604.2, 3223). We do *think from* immaterial ideas (AC 4408, 5497); yet they are in spiritual light which falls into natural light and there becomes conscious (AC 5614:4, 10551:5; HD 39).

The Interior Degrees of the Mind

The Writings bring the mystically inclined among us back to common sense when they state that “the natural mind of a person can be elevated even *to* the light of heaven in which angels are, and can perceive naturally, thus not so fully, what the angels perceive spiritually. Still the natural mind of a person cannot be raised *into* the angelic light itself” (DLW 257, emphasis added). Since all are endowed from creation and thence by birth with a mind of three degrees—answering to the three heavens—they can indeed be elevated into angelic wisdom and possess it even while they live in the world; but it is only after death, and only if they become angels, that they “enter into that wisdom” (DLW 239) “perceptibly and manifestly” (DP 32:3). Swedenborg tells of a man of mediocre learning whom he knew on earth, who later, in heaven, spoke with a profound wisdom beyond the grasp of mortals. Because he had on earth worshiped the Lord and applied to life the precepts of the Word, he had been raised into the third degree of love and wisdom (DLW 239). Probably ignorant of the Writings, he had seen genuine truth in the Scripture from a celestial love of uses.

Every normal adult is equipped to be elevated to receive light from the heavens, even if the spiritual or celestial degrees are not opened in him or her. For the natural mind can “rise up by continuity around the two higher degrees” which are transparent to heavenly light, and thus it receives through these higher degrees an illumination which grows steadily more lucid and pure as it ascends (DLW 259, 266, 255, 256, 258).

Illustration is thus given, at first, as a free gift (DLW 150). People may apprehend truths of celestial degree and type—truths such as a love to the Lord would

perceptively accept. Or they may admire and understand truths of charity, which are in origin spiritual. All this however “in a natural manner.”

It is the human rational that can be so elevated. Therefore the rational of the natural self “is *in appearance as if of three degrees*” (DLW 258, emphasis added), since it can perceive naturally what the angels of the three discrete heavens perceive spiritually. This is only an “appearance,” for in the unregenerate mind they are not discrete *inter se*.²⁰ The fact that our thought can be elevated warrants no conclusion as to our being “rational from the celestial” or “rational from the spiritual.” *This* no one can know of oneself or of another. It would be high presumption to decide whether one’s will is raised into spiritual heat and thus whether the interior degrees are opened (DLW 258).

Only in heaven does it become clear what degree has been opened in someone while on earth (DLW 203). “So long as man lives in the world, he knows nothing of the opening of these degrees within him,” because he thinks, wills, and acts consciously from the natural degree, and the communication of the spiritual with the natural is not felt, not sensed (DLW 238, 252; D.Wis 8). Yet, unbeknownst to such a one, the spiritual mind, if it is opened, is being filled with thousands of arcana of wisdom and thousands of delights of love into which one will come after death. These are the treasures laid up in heaven, where moth and rust cannot corrupt (DLW 252).

Supersensible Thought

Modern writers sometimes refer to our “subconscious mind,” into which they roughly group not only slumbering

²⁰ Latin for “between themselves.”

memories and certain unconscious rational processes, but also the hidden instincts of heredity and the suppressed passions of the will. But since the term “thinking” is usually associated with “consciousness,” it may be surprising to find in the Writings a large body of teachings which show that there is an interior *thought* active in the mind of which we are utterly unaware. It is this *supersensible thought* that furnishes the interior and unconscious degrees of our mind when these have been opened by regeneration (AE 625:5). It enables us after death to think and speak like the angels, without any instruction (AC 4104), and to know the internal sense of the Word. Even during our earth-life our internal self receives the internal sense unknowingly, while we take the Word according to its literal sense (AC 4280, 5614:3, 10551:5). Our internal self is thus in like perception with the angels, and “is of itself in the internal sense of the Word” although we may not even know what the internal sense is, but see some of its genuine truths only in the literal sense in our states of illustration (AC 10400). Such truths are elevated from our memory and transformed into spiritual ideas (AE 790:8).

But we cannot perceive those things which we think in our spirit (HH 356:2); because the ideas of such angelic thought are intellectual or spiritual, and are devoid of such objects as are in the natural world (AC 10237).²¹ They are therefore incomprehensible to the natural self (HH 314; AE 625:4). This is indeed provided, lest there be an interference between the thoughts of people and of spirits, and they would become conscious of each other (SE 199; TCR 475). Yet these super-conscious spiritual ideas

²¹ HLO seems to be taking “intellectual” here (*intellectuale* in AC 10237:3) in a more specialized sense than simply pertaining to the understanding. cf. AC 1901, 1904, 2053.

(which come to us though the angels among whom we are) flow into our natural thought and clothe themselves in correspondent natural ideas, which thus “overshadow the spiritual” (AC 5614). In these natural forms they can come to our manifest perception and can be “*purified by truths of faith*” (AC 10237 emphasis added; AE 790:8; cf. HD 39; LJ 18). It is reasonable to suppose that those of the New Church would here be at an advantage, owing to the abundance of spiritual-natural truths in the Writings. We are aided to think spiritually by the assistance of abstract or immaterial ideas such as those of the doctrines when we see these in spiritual light.²² Spiritual light can then inflow into rational light and rational light into sensual light. The influx of spiritual ideas into our supersensible thinking we would feel only as affection (TCR 475; DLW 252); but the perceptions which would spring from this affection would be continually *purified* by a conscious reference to the general doctrines which the Writings lay down as the criterion for all our ideas (AC 10237).

Interior Degrees of Truth with the Writings

The ineffable interiors of the Word, although implanted while we read it in the world from an affection for truth, are not opened for our conscious use until after we have been separated from the natural degree, which is effected through the death of the body (DP 172:5; D. Wis viii).

The Writings, in their relation to the Sacred Scriptures, are the *interior-natural degree* of the Word. [See diagram in Appendix 1.] Therefore the rational ideas in which the Writings are formulated must also contain discrete degrees

²² We think *from* immaterial ideas while in the natural world, but not *consciously* in them. See footnote 19 for refs.

of truth imperceptible to a person on earth, and answering to the three heavens. This discretely higher content is a one with the Word in heaven—the third, fourth, and fifth degrees of Truth Divine. The Writings, with their abstract doctrine never quite separated from a framework of natural illustrations, comparisons, and confirmations from the literal sense and from nature, belong within the sixth degree (AC 8443).

In reading the Writings in a state of illustration, we would perceive something of the truth Divine as it is in its fifth degree or descent, or in the ultimate heaven. But this comes mostly as an internal, clear, and joyful consent to the truth which we see taught, and is scarcely expressible in words and can hardly be conveyed to others in this world. Such enlightenment, however, is necessary if we are to understand the substantial reality of the spiritual world which is beyond space and time, or the character of the angels and the meaning of charity, mutual love, forgiveness, innocence, etc. Rational ideas must become converted into spiritual-rational ideas! Without such illustration what would the *Arcana* exposition of the Lord's glorification and of the process of regeneration become, except so many words! We would not receive the real idea-contents of the internal sense, and the doctrine would not "live."

Those in heaven understand every doctrine given in the Writings more interiorly and wisely than on earth. Even an abstract truth, such as "God is One," would have a discretely different meaning and be associated with a different but corresponding and enriching field of concepts in each heaven; yet all accept the same doctrine. Both the celestial doctrine of love to the Lord and the spiritual doctrine of charity are in all the heavens, but they affect

the angels differently according to the *quality* of their ideas (cf. HD 107). The angels of the third heaven think from ends, those of the lower heavens from causes or from effects, but all can think about ends and about causes and about effects (DLW 202). The celestial have no thoughts as we understand thoughts, but perceptions of what they see and hear, and variations of affections. The spiritual have only immaterial ideas, and the objects of their thoughts are spiritual. The ideas of the higher angels entirely “transcend” those of the lower heavens (AC 8920). Yet these angels do not realize that such discrete differences exist; nor are angels aware that they are any wiser than they were in the world (De Verbo 14:2; CL 326-329).

Each truth within the Writings, as seen from heaven, is full of arcana within arcana, which Swedenborg could describe only as “variations and changes of state of heavenly light and flame by which angelic speech and thought are carried on” (AC 8920e). And if the reader be enlightened, these things would become implanted in the internal self. “But what is there transacted, is unknown to the natural, for it is above its sphere of observation. . . . The Lord disposes all such things entirely without man’s knowledge” (AC 3570:2; cf. AE 625:5).

Development in Doctrinal Understanding

Apart from this field of angelic ideas, the Writings contain no “internal sense.” To attempt to expound their text by the science of correspondences, is foreign to the nature of the Writings; it would open them to perversion by irresponsible and fanciful ideas, and destroy their function and authority.

Progress in doctrinal understanding lies along other lines. The rule is given that the interior meaning of Scripture should be gathered from various passages where the literal sense is explained. It is thus that general doctrine is formed, sound and pure, by the enlightened, for those of the external church. But “truths still more interior are afterwards drawn forth by those who are enlightened,” to serve as doctrine for those of the internal church (AC 10028:2).

The same general principle applies in the study of the Writings. The “truths still more interior,” to which such studies lead, mean truths divested of natural ideas—of time, space, and personality—such as adhere to our thought from the natural world and from sensual cupidities. For such gross ideas tend to obscure our recognition of *universals*, and to limit the applications of the truth to temporary circumstances.

But note: This process of freeing our thought from grosser things is an elevation of the understanding by continuity, not by any discrete degrees, nor with any pretense of arriving at the angelic ideas which must remain imperceptible in the world. The enlightened readers of the Writings seek for principles. They do not stick in mere illustrations or historical details and draw not only direct information but the principles or the governing universals which cast a new light upon all the doctrines and upon all human life. For until we see the “universal,” our applications of general truths remain awkward and insufficient to changing states. These principles are the eternal things which know no age or clime: the keys of the wisdom of life; the gates of the future; the windows of eternity.

This recognition of universals is the fruit of illustration and the way of progress. It does not dishonor the general truths, for it confirms them and sees their power and place. It does not destroy, but widens, the authority of the Writings. It points to new uses of charity and gives a new insight into the infinity of the revealed truth and its sufficiency for every age to come, demonstrating, as nothing else, that the Writings contain the very wisdom of God, the Divine Doctrine for the ever-New Church.

Chapter Ten

Human Reception of the Divine Doctrine

The Divine Doctrine which is within the Word and is the Word, is given to humans and angels with the end in view that it may be the medium of conjunction between God and humankind. The reciprocal conjunction of the Lord and His creatures is the end and purpose of creation. It is, to us, unthinkable that a merciful God should create humankind and then fail to provide the necessary medium by which He could reveal Himself and the purposes of life to them but leave them alone in darkness and confusion. On other planets, He reveals Himself in various ways through angelic media, and also—as in most ancient times on earth—through the order of nature itself and of unperturbed human life, an order which represents Divine and heavenly laws. But in our earth, after the celestial seed perished, the Word was given in written form, as doctrine that could reform the understanding and thus provide a new basis for the Lord's influx with people.

Thus we read:

There must be something from the Lord which can be received by a person, by which there can be conjunction and thence eternal life. (AR 200)

By the Word there is conjunction of the Lord with a person, and of a person with the Lord, and by that conjunction there is life. (AR 200)

No one however feels and perceives the Divine life in the Word but he who is in the spiritual affection of truth when he reads it; for he is in conjunction with the Lord through the Word. (AR 200)

The Lord's conjunction with a human being is by means of His Divine truth, and this truth is of the Lord in a person, thus is the Lord, and is by no means the person's, consequently is not the person. One, indeed, feels it as his own, but still it is not his, for it is not united to him, but *adjoined*. (AR 222, emphasis added)

Thus the Divine truth of the Word is with humans, yet is never to be confused with them. Indeed, all good and all truth are from the Lord, and "what is from the Lord remains the Lord's with the recipients. For what is from the Lord is Divine, which can never become man's own" (AR 758).

It is of utmost concern that this Divine presence with us—the Divine which is adjoined to us—should be distinguished from that which is a recipient. For we are warned that "he who attributes to himself what is Divine as his own (*ut proprium*), not only defiles it, but also profanes it" (AR 758). And in distinguishing the Divine from the recipient, we must take account of the teaching that "the Divine can be with a man, but not in the man's proprium, for man's proprium is nothing but evil" (*Ibid.*).

The Idea of One's Inner "Divinity"

The Writings often stress the necessity of understanding the manner in which the Divine is present within us. For from a false notion of this relation of God and humans, flow all the main errors of religion (Inv 26). We may

ignore the Divine as the source of our life and confirm ourselves in the belief that we will, think, act, and speak from our own power—thus that we live *from ourselves*. This would cause us to ascribe merit to ourselves for all good done, and this amounts to a denial of God.

But this supposition (that we live from ourselves or that the life which is within us is *our* life) may take another form. We may come to believe that we, as thinking and willing subjects, are Divine; that when we think what we believe are truths, or when we do good, it is the “Divine-in-us” that is thinking or acting. Such people thus identify their *states* of thought and affection with the enabling influx, and thus with the Divine source of life, which is God. This idea causes the thoughts to tie themselves into “a Gordian knot” of fallacies, entangling in it all the judgments of the mind or “constructing a labyrinth from which the mind can never, by any thread of reason, retrace its way” (ISB 11). It even results in the monstrous error of the Antediluvians and of many at this day, especially in nations descended from the corrupted Ancient Church, that God transfused or transcribed Himself into humans, or that life was so “increated” in them that everyone is or can become a Deity, possessing a Divine essence (TCR 461, 470; DLW 116, 130; Inv 26; ISB 11). This was the whispering of the Serpent—people would “be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Thus we read of the perverted Nephilim—the “giants” who lived before the Flood: “They were of such a genius as to imbue direful persuasions . . . supposing themselves to be as gods, and that whatever they thought was Divine” (AC 562; SE 3583).

The “Total Depravity” Doctrine

On the other hand, some may so insist on the idea of our “total depravity” as to deprive us of any free agency in spiritual things, claiming that we are stocks and stones in all matters relating to salvation, and unable to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our conversion (TCR 464). From such conceptions flows the belief that every one is predestined by God either to heaven or to hell, and that one has no part in determining one’s ultimate fate: thus making God responsible and thus the Author of evil as well as of good. This doctrine—which logically implies that, at the Lord’s arbitrary pleasure or by a special gift of grace, humans may be imputed with the Lord’s merit, whether they have lived well or ill—the Writings call “the fiery flying serpent in the church,” since it abolishes religion and makes the Commandments of no effect (TCR 487; DP 322-330, 338-340). For, according to this “total depravity” dogma, if we are saved it is not because of our free choice or our voluntary reception of the influx of Divine power, nor because every one has the freedom to shun evils and to think and obey truths, but because God grants to His elect by a special favor “grace” to believe and freedom to cooperate. The Lord would thus not only inflow with good and truth, but would also in humans *receive that influx!*

Humans as Receptacles

Against both those extremes of fallacy—the one, that people are in inner fact, Divine; and the other, that they are totally depraved and devoid of the freedom to receive good and truth from God—the Writings lift a voice in solemn and definite warnings. It is notable that while the latter of these views is held as dogma by “orthodox” Christian churches

(compare also the views of scientific “determinists”), the first is that to which incline the more speculative systems of thought, such as Theosophy, Pantheism, Mysticism, and Christian Science. Both extremes—which have a strange tendency to meet—are founded on a truth which is wrongly applied and thus has been falsified. It is a *truth* that the Divine operates within us. It is also a truth that we in ourselves are dead and have no life in ourselves, and that our proprium is nothing but evil. But no one truth can make a doctrine. The quality of a doctrine depends on how we coordinate truths and see them in relation to each other. The Writings develop a doctrine of human reception which not only satisfies the requirements of philosophy, taking into account the abstract relation of the Infinite to the finite, but also satisfies the practical requirements of religion and common sense, by which we may see our relation to the God whom we worship. Having to do with the presence of God, this doctrine must be approached in elevation of mind and in utmost humility.

But human life, with its obligations, is not conducted in the rarified realm of abstractions. Humans, as they know themselves, are complex beings. Into one’s conscious mind, which one feels as one’s “self,” there enter the influxes of life which manifest themselves as manifold and contradictory impulses; and upon this “self” presses from without the equally varied afflux of sensations. Yet we feel all these as parts of ourselves, and when we act we seem to ourselves to act from our mind as a general whole, in freedom and as responsible beings.

Life is not *in* us, but flows in from God, and “is varied and modified according to the organization induced on man through his love and attitude” (AR 875). Everyone is born with a soul or inmost in which the Lord’s life

is received without perversion, but with a hereditary proprium in which the inflowing life manifests its action as “self-love” and “love of the world,” thus as evil affections. This native will, and the thoughts which flow from it and gather around it, is what we regard as “ourselves,” as our own, our “proprium.” This “proprium” is the abode of evil and of falsity, and receives an influx of life as it has been perverted in the hells. But besides this, we are given—through the soul—the ability to separate the understanding from this native will, and to think from others, to learn truths of doctrine from the Word and from teachers and associates. This teaching, which we can receive under the influence of certain “remains” or unanalyzed states of good which affect us from heaven (mostly while we are unaware), forms in the understanding certain knowledges and states of thought that are not under the dominance of our evil will, but can be an ark of salvation for us, a means of contact with heaven and the Lord.

And through this truth in the understanding—just so far as we will shun the evils of our “proprial will”—we can receive (we are told) a *new* will, which is born not of man, nor of the flesh, but of God; a new will which we feel to be our own, but which is not from our “proprium.” It is, instead, from the influx of the Lord’s life, and we feel it as charity and faith and innocence—thus as good affections and as true thoughts.

This is a gift of God. It is *the human* consciousness—but lifted up among the things of Divine order, thus among truths and goods such as are taught in the Word. These things, which are of Divine order, we thus feel as part of our own life. We accept the truths of doctrine as our own ideas, yet we know, on reflection, that they come from the Lord. We strive to see these truths more clearly

and seek to separate them, so far as we can, from the preconceptions to which the pride of our own “proprium” or self-intelligence leads us and from the fallacies which the senses induce and worldly appearances and ambitions engender.

The Writings describe this new will as a “*Conscience of good and truth*” (HD 139). But as if to emphasize that we are aware only of a superficial part of this new will, they teach that our conscious cooperation with the Lord’s work of purification is confined to the natural mind, and that—so far as we shun the evil intentions which we discern—the Lord at the same time removes the lusts of evil from the unseen interiors which are beyond the sight of mortals, preparing and furnishing the spiritual degrees of the mind unknown to us, for use hereafter in the eternal world.

The Celestial Proprium

The new will, and the new character which develops around it, is called a “*new*” or “*heavenly proprium*,” or “the angelic proprium”—always in contrast to the unregenerate proprium or the native will, which even with angels remains nothing but evil and falsity. It is the “new proprium” of the regenerate individual. Yet the Writings note that angels are withheld from their own proprium and “are kept in the Lord’s Proprium which is good itself” (HH 591), and also that “in proportion” as the old proprium is removed, so far the angels can receive love and wisdom, that is the Lord, in themselves; but if they should believe that these are in them they would fall from heaven (DLW 114, 116). Angels are in fact “lifted” by the Lord into His Proprium. The celestial proprium is therefore

said to be “the Lord’s alone,” but to be “appropriated to those who are in good and thence in truth” (AC 3813). When we are in the freedom of self-compulsion, the Lord can then operate into us, and can “*create*” a new proprium which we “acquire” while it is “formed in the endeavor of thought” (AC 1937). The Lord wills this to appear to us as our own, although it is not ours (*Ibid.*).

Now let us not be mystified by words. The word “*proprium*” simply means *own*, that which belongs to one, is proper to one, one’s property. It may mean one’s own will, one’s own wisdom, one’s own plan or design, or (literally) one’s own house or possession or kingdom. “From Divine Love, the Lord continually wishes to give what is His (*suum*) to man; and, according as man is able to receive, He gives” (SEm 4681). He wishes to introduce us into the world which He created, into the heavens which He has prepared, into the wisdom which He continually reveals and into the love which He unceasingly pours forth. He desires to lift our life and consciousness into a new and perfect order—place us in the realm of Divine laws of order and charity and truth—so that finite minds can find the protection, health, and blessedness which only what is *the Lord’s own* can furnish. Hence He desires that we may leave selfishness and self-delusion, which are the only things we have ever considered as “our” own and as really worthwhile. To remove us from that “possessive” attitude which we from ourselves always adopt and which never leads to blessedness (even in heaven), the Lord asks us to *use as our own* all the things of Heaven and earth, all the things, the laws, the substances of creation, but to remember, on reflection, that, after all, they are all *the Lord’s own!* We may use all the truths of the Word as our own ideas, as part of our thoughts; we may use the

influxes of love and charity as our own affections. But we must use them as gifts of God—giving Him all the praise, the credit, the glory and thanksgiving.

The Lord—if we do this—will (*mirabile dictu!*) count what we do and think and will as “ours”—as a *new* “*proprium*.” The character we form by regeneration will be counted as ours, although all that we do is to consent to truth and to receive good and use powers given from above!

Angelic Imperfections

But we noted here that the old “*proprium*” is not utterly removed from regenerate people, nor even from the angel, when the Lord elevates them to heaven into the things which belong to the Lord’s “own.” It is true that by regeneration they are given not only a new will and a new understanding, but also—“if you will believe it”—a new body for their spirit (D. Wis 4:2). “The former things are not abolished, however, but removed in such a way as not to appear” or interfere.

The angel, as a personality, is therefore not described as having any Divine perfection or purity. Human states are never Divine. Human reception of Divine truth and good is ever imperfect. “With man there is no pure good, or good not mingled with evil; nor pure truth, or truth not mingled with falsity” (AC 3993); “no truth Divine,” but only appearances of truth to which fallacies of sense and falsities of evil loves adjoin themselves (AC 2053). Yet the Lord conjoins Himself to people in this their impurity! (*Ibid.*) Innocence makes truth seem pure (AC 7902). But “neither with a person nor indeed with any angel are any truths ever pure” or devoid of fallacies (AC 3207; cf.

2053). Heaven is not pure in the Lord's sight (AC 2249:4, 4295:2, 6373, 4803). "With people or angels, no love can ever become pure" (CL 71:2; cf. 145, 146). "Every angel . . . thinks truth and does good as if from himself, and this, according to the state of the angel, is mixed and not pure; wherefore the wise in heaven must judge when the simple are in doubt or swerve from what is just" (CL 207).

The teaching therefore is that the new proprium of humans arises by the Lord's vivifying their proprium by His Own²³—thus by the Divine insinuating charity and innocence into the deformed human proprium (AC 164, 149), so that it may appear good and beautiful. Thus there is a continuity of our sense of personality: we do not feel conscious of the changes in ourselves. We retain all the good and all the evil which we have ever done—inscribed on memory and disposition. Still, goods are never so mixed with evils that the Lord cannot effect a separation (DP 227; AC 2256). For the Lord disposes our faults into so wonderful an order that they are associated but not linked—that is, "not *conjoined* together, still less *united* into a one," but only "*adjoined* and applied to one another." The evil and false things remain at the circumference of our minds and the good and true things hold the central position (AC 3993:13). So far as we detest evils, the Lord raises us above our proprium into our spiritual internal, although we perceive this only by our turning away from thinking evils and by a new delight in uses (AE 945:2).

Each angel, as well as each person, possesses a natural mind which is vitiated by evils and falsities, but which is reformed through regeneration (D.Wis 4) and reduced by the Lord into partial correspondence (SE 2157-2159).

²³ Or "by His proprium" (cf. AC 149:2, 8409, 10035:2; HH 341, 591).

This natural mind is made obsequious to the things which the Lord has stored up in the spiritual and celestial minds; thus the state of the angel may be compared to a rainbow in which the colors arise from interacting black and white—the black coming from one’s evils (SE 3473). The angelic life is one of variable light—from the glory of morning to the relative obscurities of evening states (AC 8487).

No angels therefore would claim to be infallible, even though they, far more keenly than people in the natural world, can perceive when they fall back into proprial states (Faith 4).²⁴ The angels are humble people and know that there is nothing in them that can be conjoined with the Lord, and nothing which is Divine. But they also know that the Lord has given all a faculty to be affected by Divine truths and that the Lord, through these, can furnish a place for Himself in them.

The Writings speak of God’s presence with men and angels in different ways: the Lord is said to abide in the *inmost* of the spirit, which is called the human internal and which is above the heavens and beyond the reach of thought and will (AC 1999). The Lord is said to inflow with mutual love through this internal causing an utter self-abnegation with the angel (AC 1594, 1745). The Lord is present in the *faculties* of liberty and rationality with a human being—for these are “of the Lord” with a person on earth, an angel, or devil. But the Lord is also present in whatsoever is in Divine order; and this, in the mind, consists in truths rightly disposed under good (AC 5703:2). By creation, we were “made Divine order in form”—i.e. formed as an image of God (LJ 9; TCR 65, 66). After the

²⁴ HLO notes that an exception should be made when an angel serves as “an Angel of Jehovah,” when his own personality is put to sleep. See AC 1745, 1925, 6831; AR 938.

Fall, this order had to be reconstituted by means of truths, for Divine truths are laws of order (HH 523).

The whole universe was created into Divine order, and is therefore “as to essence and order the fullness of God” (TCR 63:2). But this never meant that the universe was Divine! or that any part of it, spiritual or natural, was or is the *Divine*, proceeding! For the created universe is not “continuous” from God, but is a production from the Divine; and the Divine cannot produce another Divine (DLW 53, 55; DP 219).

Neither were humans ever Divine in whole or in part—nor can they ever become so. Yet the impress of the Divine truths of the Word upon them is the operation of the Divine, proceeding to restore the Divine order in their minds, as it already exists in their *souls*; so that they may be images and likenesses of God.

The “Esse” of Humankind

A person is “not life, but a receptacle of life.” “The whole human being is nothing else but a form organized for the reception” of love and wisdom from God. The material body is not the person, and is only a temporary loan. The spirit is also made of finite substances, but from the spiritual world (TCR 470). It would seem that we, then, are spiritual organisms. But the Writings probe even deeper than this. They show that this spiritual organic which passes for “human” is really not one’s own, but a tool provided for one, and that the only thing that can be called one’s own, is the *quality* which has been impressed upon this organism of the mind owing to one’s individual *reception* of life (DP 308, 309). “The *esse* of a human being,” the Writings teach, “is nothing else than *receiving*”

(AC 3938:2; Conv 9). Nothing of will and thought are a part of the individual “*except the state of receiving what flows in*” (TCR 461). Good and truth are Divine, and the evil and the false are infernal, and all flow into humans. But these formative forces do not constitute them. The human is reception—a finite state of reception, formed with the individual’s own consent (AC 3157e). Reception is the reciprocal response to influx (AC 8439).

Reception of the Divine Doctrine

Because the human is finite, one might doubt that one could become a receptacle of the Divine which is infinite, or of the *Divine Doctrine*, since the finite cannot “contain” or “comprehend” what is infinite (TCR 33; DP 53). Yet the Divine Doctrine proceeds from the Lord, is accommodated by the Word, and is received by human understanding (see AC 3712). This is indeed a reception of what is eternal and infinite. For the Divine Doctrine is the Word in its *esse*, in its *existere*, and in its proceeding.²⁵ It is the Infinite *a se*²⁶—God with us (DP 52). It reaches human beings; yet we are not made either infinite or eternal by this, nor does our thought “contain” the infinite, but merely recognizes it. The truth *affects* us—and there is created in us, *if we consent in freedom*, a state which we feel as a reciprocal response of acknowledgment and affection, by which we seem to receive the truth as our own. Nevertheless, being

²⁵ “In its *esse*”—i.e. in its being or essential nature. “In its *existere*”—i.e. in its coming into expression. “In its proceeding”—i.e. in its adapting Itself to “reach” those outside of Itself.

²⁶ *a se*—“from itself”—that is, the Divine not as it is in itself but as it makes itself present in finite things.

Divine and infinite, it cannot be appropriated to us but can only be adjoined (Charity 102; DP 285:2; AR 854:2).

The Divine truth, and the Divine good within it, are not made ours nor part of us; for they are an influx. What is appropriated is a free state of response. Good and truth are Divine. But the human's responsive state, which one calls "good" and "truth," is not Divine. It is a state of the new angelic proprium, which is a lifting up of finite humans into that order which is the Lord's: a state of conjunction (or "adjunction") with the Lord, which we feel and use as *our* love, *our* wisdom, *our* understanding, *our* delight, *our* human life. This is the reason that the angelic proprium is said to be "created" by the Lord (AC 1937:6). And it is these angelic states of reception of good and truth which are seen as real and substantial creations around the angels in heaven, reflecting every shade of variety in the mixed states of the angels. Even in hell, such distorted creations as are there derive substance and a measure of reality from an involuntary reception of the Lord's life in the souls of the devils.

These states of reception with angels and humans are called by the name of that which is received, or that which is the *cause* of their existence. Thus the Writings speak of the finite wisdom of the angels, of our ruling love, of human good and human truth (D.Wis 12:4:2; AC 3362, 3387, 3408, 3175). And so we ought to speak (DLW 53). Even the angels speak so. But insofar as angels believe that this state of reception *is* the Divine good or the Divine truth, or that anything of their state is really Divine, so far the angelic is no longer in them (DLW 116).

It is equally fatal to attribute the *reception* to God. It is indeed taught that the "reception and the reciprocal in man are *from* the Lord" (Life 102), but this is explained to mean

that the power or the faculty of liberty and rationality, and “the reciprocal regarded in its own faculty,” are given by the Lord²⁷ (DP 88; AE 644:23; DLW 116).

If the reception of heavenly things were the Lord’s, or were Divine, we would have no freedom. Our only choice would be evil; if we chose good, it would be the Lord choosing in us. Certain spirits were infested by the idea that “all that proceeds from a human being proceeds from his proprium, and this from birth is evil”; but they were reassured that we are neither the good inflowing from the Lord, nor the evil inflowing from the hells: we are nothing “except the state of receiving what flows in.” How, Swedenborg asked them, could the Lord have told us to produce works of charity and told us that we would be judged according to our works, “if all that proceeds from a person were meritorious and thus evil”? (TCR 461) This does not mean that we do good from ourselves: “if you do good from the Word, do you not do it from the Lord, from His mouth and will?” (TCR 506)

Thus the Writings allow no place in our thought for the old doctrine of total depravity. We are given the freedom to think and act as if of ourselves either from the Lord or from the hells. Our choice is our own. If the Lord could do our choosing, every one would be saved! But this would make us inanimate machines—puppets, incapable of reciprocating the Lord’s love.

²⁷ *”reciprocum in sua facultate spectatum”* (DLW 116). We might translate this: “the reciprocal viewed in respect to its ability.” This phrase actually continues “*non sit ejus sed Domini*”—“is not his (i.e. the angel’s) but is the Lord’s.” “Is *the Lord’s*” sounds stronger than HLO’s “[is] given by the Lord.” But HLO stays closer to the wording of this passage when he returns to it in the final section of this chapter.

Conjunction with the Lord²⁸

The Lord can dwell with finite beings only in what is His Own with them—not in their proprium, for even if this proprium were good, it would be *finite* (DLW 114; cf. DP 53:3). The Lord is present with a human being through His infinite proceeding, or the “Infinite from itself” (*a Se*), which is “adjoined” to the finite by contiguity or touch. There is no commingling or confusion between the infinite and the finite. The life from God is thus constantly “adjoined” to us (TCR 718; Charity 102; DLW 52, 53; DP 52-54, 57e, 58e, 285:2).

What then is it that “proceeds” from the Lord, that is adjoined to us and resides with us, that enables Him to be present with us and forms the basis of conjunction between us and the infinite God? The answer is knowledge from the Word, when it is understood, loved, and lived.

“The Lord does not dwell with an empty person, that is, with a person who does not know His truths and do them.” He dwells in “truths from good” (AC 10645:3; cf. deV 12). He “flows into those things in a person which the person knows, not into things which he does not know” (AC 9088:2). “The conjunction of the Lord with a human being and of a human being with the Lord is in those things of the Lord which are called ‘His words’ (John 15:7)” (DLW 116). The truths of Divine Doctrine are the Infinite and Eternal things of the Lord that are accommodated for our reception. These may be in an individual’s mind—in his or her understanding—as mere knowledge. In this case it may be said that “He came unto His own, but His own received Him not” (John 1:11). The Lord can present

²⁸ In the mimeographed Theological School Notes the page on which this section begins is marked “(Revised 1957).”

Himself to a human being in such knowledge. He “can be present and dwell in the ultimate truths from the Word, inasmuch as ultimate truths also are His, and are Himself” (AE 726:7). This passage is referring to people who live according to these truths, yet the Lord’s Divine power in ultimates can “infill those who are in knowledge of the Lord even if in a contrary faith” (SE 5934). By means of the truths of revelation—which are appearances of truth within which the Infinite truth Divine is *present*—the Lord can approach every human being. But if any *conjunction* is to take place, an individual must receive in freedom and thus *respond* to the Lord’s love.

For conjunction, there must be love. And since *innocence* is the essence of all good and of all love, it is therefore also said that “the good of innocence is the only thing that receives the Lord” (AC 10131). The Lord is innocence itself (AC 2305) and “the good of innocence is Divine good itself from the Lord with a human being” (AC 9262:2; cf. 9338:6). By innocence is meant a willingness to be led by the Lord: for this ushers in a state of consent and reciprocation, by which reception takes place. The reciprocation is not Divine, although “the reciprocal considered in itself”—the power to reciprocate or the faculty of liberty and rationality—is the Lord’s and is the Lord with a human being (DLW 116; cp. DP 88ff; AE 644e).

The angels of heaven are recipients of truth in good . . .
 The Lord does not dwell in an angel except in His own with him. It is the same with a person in the natural world, for the Divine must be in what is Divine, not in what is proper (*proprio*) to any other. (AC 9338:6)

The Lord's conjunction with a human being is by His Divine truth, and this in a person is the Lord's, thus is the Lord, and is by no means the person's, consequently is not the person. The person indeed feels it as his own, but still it is not his, for it is not united to him but is adjoined. (AR 222-223)

It is this state of finite reception or response which the Lord can love. The essence of love is to love others outside of oneself (TCR 43). The state of reception, which is the *esse* of a human being, is not Divine, but is "outside" of the Divine—thus not continuous from God. For people in the natural world and angels "have in their *esse* nothing of God which is God" (DLW 55, 56; AR 55, 222:3; DP 58e, 285). The Lord cannot love or be conjoined with others in whom there is anything of the Divine! For this would be God loving Himself in others: a "Love-of-Self-itself"—of which not an iota could possibly exist in God! (See DLW 47-49.) The Lord's love of humankind must therefore be a love of *that in us* which is neither Divine nor infinite, but which is yet made possible by the Divine. It must be a love of that finite state of free reception of good and truth which He fosters in us and gradually builds up as a new and angelic proprium in which goods and truths may appear as if our own, so that we may as of ourselves depart from our evil nature and cooperate mutually and reciprocally with the spiritual laws of God. In this way we can enter freely into the joy of our Lord (TCR 371).

§ § § § §

The appropriation of the Lord's life comes from His love and mercy toward the universal human race, in that He wills to give Himself to everyone, and all that is His, and in that He actually does give them insofar as they receive, that is to say, insofar as they are in the life of good and in the life of truth, as being likenesses and images of Him. And since such a Divine endeavor is continually proceeding from the Lord, . . . His life is appropriated. (AC 3742)

§ § § § §

Appendix 1 - Degrees of Truth Divine (AC 8443)

First & Second Degrees: Above heavens and angelic understanding

Third Degree: For CELESTIAL HEAVEN, imperceptible to man
Inscribed unconsciously on celestial conscience or
Internal Rational
Celestial sense of Word

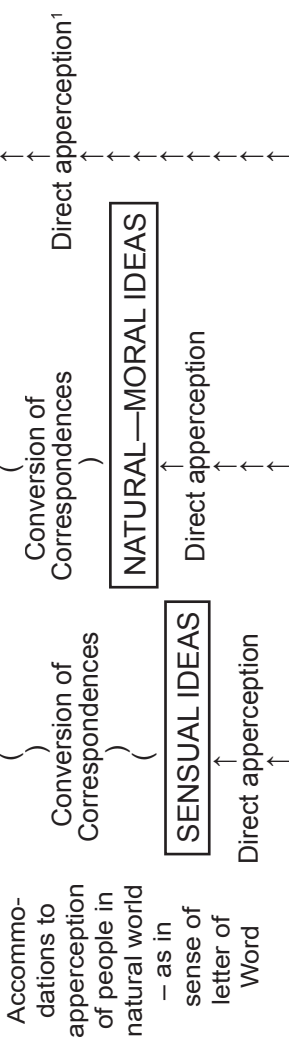
Fourth Degree: For SPIRITUAL HEAVEN, imperceptible to man
Inscribed unconsciously on spiritual conscience or
External Rational. Spiritual sense of Word

Fifth Degree: For NATURAL HEAVEN, perceptible to man in part
in states of enlightenment
Inscribed on interior memory or Interior Natural.
Internal-historical sense of Word

S P I R I T U A L R E C E P T I O N

Sixth Degree:

Spiritual-natural truths to serve for doctrine (De Verbo 26) couched in NATURAL-RATIONAL IDEAS and thus appearing as naked truths in text of the various Revelations



.....: Rational terms, etc
 //////////////// Parabolic speech /////
 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 XX Sensual imagery XXX
HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT **GREEK NEW TESTAMENT** **LATIN WRITINGS**
 Letters, paper, and print — same material ultimates in all Revelations

¹ In his original diagram HLO refers here to AC 5094, which speaks of objects from world entering the memory either through *rationalia* or through *sensualia*—perhaps a way of understanding direct apperception of rational terms vs. that of natural and sensual ones.