



Words for the New Church

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"I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse." (Rev. 19:11)

"The horse which was white represents and signifies the understanding of the Word as to interior things." (WH 1)

This magazine is dedicated to the study of what the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed in the Old and New Testaments and in the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. We look to the Lord in His Word for guidance in all things of human life. He is our Life, our Light, our Father, our Teacher, our Everything!

"Even so come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20)

"Etiam veni, Domine Jesu," quae sunt verba Desponsationis ad Conjugium spirituale. (AR 960)

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"They find us everywhere."

[From the original 19th Century Words for the New Church, speaking of the Heavenly Doctrines revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg]

This Edition

Our second edition this year, published just before Christmas, contains three sermons by three different ministers on subjects related to the Lord's Nativity.

As we approach the New Year, our thoughts turn towards ways in which we can improve our lives during the coming year. We are pleased to publish an article by Gael Coffin on the subject of spiritual weeding.

In this issue we include also the second installment of the seminal paper by the Rev. Andrew J. Heilman on the subject of "The Lord's Priestly Kingdom."

We conclude this edition with an excerpt from a powerful article by Bishop W. D. Pendleton on the subject of "The Star in the East." PAR []

Advent Angels

by Fred Elphick

The advent season, when we celebrate the wondrous coming of the Lord to a dark world, is an opportunity for us to see Him more clearly – to behold Him in our mind's eye with increasing understanding and love. We see Him born as a child like any other. But we know that He became an infinitely loving and wise Divine Man; that this love and wisdom broke into this material world, restored our freedom and became visible and approachable.

It's hard for us mortals to grasp such

ideas. Being human and being God sound contradictory. But we can see more from learning about the angels of heaven. This is because angels are ordinary people that the Lord has gradually transformed during their lifetime into *extra*-ordinary men and women who live in the wonderful communities of heaven. That's the whole purpose of creation! He's even doing it with us, if we are willing to give up self-serving interests and follow His example. Jesus grew up to become God. We grow spiritually to become angels.

This is why we can use our knowledge of angels to show us aspects of the Lord Himself. They are 'images and likenesses' of their Creator. Of course we don't normally see angels, but there are many wonderful descriptions of them in the Writings for the New Church – their beauty and innocence, their power over evil forces, their love and wisdom.

An *invisible* God cannot be loved or approached in any way – certainly not with any understanding. The picture we have in the Writings, however, is unique. Here, God is supremely, infinitely Human. All that is wholesome, creative and good flows from Him. And so the Divine Human is God made visible to our spiritual sight, bathing our minds with His gentle light, radiating love and wisdom – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, if we think of Him as the Source of all that is good and true and powerful in the angels of heaven, we can see

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more of what is meant in the Word by the *Son* of God – that is, the visible aspect of God, seen with the eyes of our mind or spirit. Seeing the Lord and receiving something of His wisdom – is actually what He created the understanding part of our mind to do!

Angels too are 'sons of God' – visible reflections of the Divine Human. So in angels, we see the nature and form of *living* truth inspired by love, in endless variety. They embody, in a way we can grasp, the essential quality of this truth.

The fact that angels are spiritual beings makes them more real, not less.

who are responsive to the Lord's love. In particular, we see it in the *use* they serve.

The fact that angels are spiritual beings makes them *more* real, not less. We *ourselves* are spiritual beings after all – potential angels – though clothed in a physical body so that we can respond to events around us. And since angels always belong to some community of heaven - large or small – they can also represent the *function* of that society. They're like ambassadors or messen-

gers.

One example is the angel Gabriel, who first appears (at least by name) in the Old Testament book of Daniel, when predicting the coming of the Messiah. Gabriel, of course, is also the bearer of the good tidings in the *gospel* account, when he appears to Zacharias and then to Mary.

So the angel who appeared to Daniel, represented the *society* of that name from which he came. In fact all names in the other world mean spiritual functions. The Writings say that 'Gabriel' stands for those who teach from the Word. They spread the good news that the Jehovah of the Old Testament actually came into the world. They teach that the Human He then took on is the Son of God and Divine (AR 549). So telling people the good news about the Lord's coming is an example of a particular heavenly function – the use of the society Gabriel.

We might imagine that everyone in the other world already knows that the Lord was born in this world. Not so! A central theme of *Earths in the Universe* is the birth of the Lord on this planet and why it was this one He chose. And in the book, we see this good news being explained to people in the spiritual world who come from many other planets!

If this seems strange, we have only to think of all the people in *this* world, who die having no idea that the Lord was born here all those years ago or what that actually meant. When they are ready, they need to have this wondrous

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fact explained to them by someone who understands their background. So the giving of the glad tidings is a continuing need, both in this world and the next. That's what 'Gabriel' does.

This brings us to the need for us to stand up in defence of what we believe; for there is another heavenly society related to Gabriel – in fact the only other angel actually named in our Bible – whose function is to *defend* the Lord's Divinity and to show that it is *He* Who gives us new life, Who re-creates us.

His name is Michael. In fact, the meaning of 'Michael' – 'Who is like God' – again suggests the idea that angels are indeed images or reflections of their Creator.

Michael then, stands for what the Word teaches about the nature of the Lord and our own spiritual destiny – in a word, that *'the Human of the Lord is Divine, and that a life of love and charity must be lived.'* (AE 735)

It may sound strange, but because the divinity of Jesus Christ and the fact that our spiritual life is from Him is a leading or *ruling* principle, Michael – who stands for that teaching – is actually described as a *Prince* in Daniel: 'And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the sons of your people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who shall be found written in the book.' (Dan. 12:1)

Surprisingly, we discover that these

mysterious words in Daniel are looking to the time of the Lord's advent. The 'time of trouble' is when the truth about the Lord is attacked, just as Herod tried to destroy Him as a child. We also think of the words in the Book of Revelation: 'And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.' (Rev. 12:7) That was a time of trouble too, predicting what would happen at His *second* coming. Again, the truth about the Lord, and therefore our own spiritual welfare, was at stake (see AR 704, Lord 3,4). The people 'written in the book' are those who are in the life of what is true and good, thus who keep the Commandments (AC 10505:3).

This is not a joyless, duty-bound state of mind, but something wondrous that they have come to love and see to be true from experience. It was people 'written in the book' that the Lord had come to save from the powers of darkness. And in our own lives, when life from the Lord touches us more closely, it works a tremendous, uplifting change. We can see this too, in the dramatic effect on Daniel when he was touched by the angel – or rather, by the *Lord* through the angel. For when the Lord touches us, our old life so to speak dies. At the same time, though, we are uplifted. In the account, Daniel has just seen a dramatic vision of a man clothed in linen, his face as of lightning, his eyes as torches of fire, his feet as the brightness of polished brass and the sound

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of his words like the voice of a multitude. A Man with the voice of a multitude! What images this suggests! The voice of countless truths, the voice of millions of angels, the voice of the Lord!

Daniel's vision: '...I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my vigour was turned in me into frailty, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then I was in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto you, and stand upright: for unto you am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come because of your words.' (Dan. 10:8–12) The Writings say that when a person really acknowledges that the Lord has all power and wisdom while he himself has none, or that all good comes from the Lord but only evil from himself, then 'he comes as it were out of himself and falls upon his face; and when he is thus out of himself, he is also removed from his proprium, which in itself is mere evil. When the proprium is removed, the Divine infills him, and *raises him up...*' (AE 77) So here in Daniel: '...man greatly beloved, under-

stand the words that I speak unto you, *and stand upright.*'

We see the same life-changing effect – the holy fear and the comforting words – when the Lord was transfigured before the disciples on the mountain-top. Although the change seemed to be in the Lord it was actually something happening with the disciples. They were seeing Him with 'new eyes'. We read in *Matthew*: 'While He yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and lo a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. And when the disciples heard it, *they fell on their face*, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, *Arise, and be not afraid*. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.' (Matt. 17:5-8)

In the same way, when angels lift their eyes they see the Lord – the Divine Man – glowing with love, radiant with wisdom. All this creative energy pours out from Him and actually creates and sustains every single one of them. And it is in this sense that it can be said that they live not only *from* the Lord, but *in* the Lord, that is, in that wonderful warmth and light that come from Him – that sphere of use. We too can strive to live so that we can respond to this Divine influence from above and within.

Angels are angels from the Divine life within them. This is what the Lord meant when He said: 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit

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of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in Me.' (John 15:4)

We can't make other people see the Lord. But we mustn't overlook the fact that He is directly, intimately present in each person's mind, preserving as far as possible that person's freedom. We tend to forget that it is the Lord Himself who enables a person to see Him! He is at the door. He is gently knocking, infinitely patient. But He wants us to open the door, to hear our words of welcome, for He certainly comes to us when we ask!

So in this Advent season we can set our hearts to understand *Who* was born in Bethlehem. Think of all the different states of mind we have around us, the variety of responses to the Christmas story from the delight of young children to the mockery of the cynic. Many people may not be ready to hear the good news until they wake up in the next world. But in the Lord's providence some are. So take heart! The Lord is coming. His Advent approaches. May He be able to say to us, as He did to Daniel through the angel: 'Fear not... for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come because of your words.' 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!' (Rev 22:20)

Readings:

Daniel 10

Selections from AC 10505:3; AC 2363AE 1001, H 459 []

A Great Light

by Reuben Bell

Are you ready for Christmas? Don't you hate it when people ask you that? I never know what it really means; and I never know how to answer. It's still November; it's a long way to Christmas, right? Wrong. Thanksgiving has come and gone, and you know what that means. It means that if we are not careful, the interval between now and December 25 - four short weeks - will be hectic and filled with superficial things, and much too quickly gone. You know it is true. Every year we feel the same: How do we look forward to the Christmas Season to come?

Here is another, related question: Exactly when does Christmas "start"? Our secular society, driven as it is by commerce, would say that this is simple. Christmas starts one minute after Thanksgiving, in every store in America. But what marks the spiritual start of the Christmas Season? From our lessons today, this is easy too; it starts when "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light." But there is a downside to this definition, because some people never do. For some people, despite all the commercial and cultural hype, Christmas never comes. I hope you are not one of them.

Imagine with me the circumstances of God's "Chosen People" in the time of Isaiah, about 2700 years ago. What was life like, when Isaiah wrote his Mes-

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sianic prophecies of a new and happy day to come? Things were not good. During King Uzziah's reign there was prosperity in the land, but along with it came spiritual decline - a story that is not unfamiliar to our own age of prosperity. Under Jotham the spiritual corruption increased, while the threat of Judah's enemies to the north increased as well. Under Ahaz, this threat was accomplished; the Assyrians overran the land and the people suffered in their bondage to their foreign masters. And all the while, their spiritual life grew weaker and weaker, while Isaiah remained true to his message: repent and return to the Lord. Hezekiah, the fourth King that Isaiah knew, attempted reformation, but it was not enough; Judah's religion continued to decline into empty ritual and the vastation of idolatry.

But Isaiah had another message too. While condemning the state of affairs around him, he held out the promise of a Messiah to come - the Anointed One, Savior of Israel who would set things straight in a future kingdom. He gave lots of details, and he sowed the seeds of hope to the hopeless, in truly troubled times. He offered compassion in the midst of his condemnation, mercy with his judgment, in an image of the Lord Himself, who loves his errant children. Isaiah, in the name of the Lord, speaks to all people for all time; his prophecies are for us too.

There is power in the literal sense of the Word, because in this level is contained all the other senses, the celestial, the spiritual, and the natural, telescoped

into a single dynamic unit. The celestial and spiritual senses have been the domain of the angels, but in the New Revelation, the spiritual sense is now ours as well. Let's start with the literal, and let it take us into the spiritual meaning of Isaiah's prophecy of a far-off Christmas to come, now so long ago.

In Chapter 9 we read the prophecy of an end to "gloom for those who were in anguish." How wonderful that must have sounded to "those in anguish." How wonderful it must sound to those in anguish even now. "In the former time," it says, "he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in [a future] time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." Here is the location clearly identified, for this kingdom that will come. And then the famous promise: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shined.* Here is the future, so certain in Isaiah's vision that he tells it in the past tense, as something already accomplished. There is power in that promise. Who are those people walking in darkness? The people of ancient Judah, yes, but some days it's me and you. Isaiah, in the name of the Lord, speaks to all people for all time; his prophecies are for us too.

In Chapter 42 we find another Messianic prophecy, which describes the Savior to come, and tells what He will and will not do. "He will not cry or lift up

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his voice, or make it heard in the street.” Here is a picture of the nature of the Christ to come: not loud and intrusive, but quiet and humble in His demeanor; a servant, not a conqueror. And yet, with all that humility, “He will not grow faint or be crushed,” it says, “until he has established justice in the earth.” Again, here is mercy with judgment, gentleness in strength. That’s an image of the Lord. This is an image that the people of Isaiah’s time might comprehend - a Savior who will be “called in righteousness, and “given as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” Here is a message of vivid *literal* images that go deep with the *spiritual* images they invite us to see. Even the people of that time, in all their simplicity, must have seen the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the prophecies of Isaiah. Light... darkness... blindness... prisons... dungeons.... Let’s do just that; let’s take the opportunity offered in the Writings for the New Church, for depth not available to those people; for depth never available before this time. *Now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith.* Isaiah’s prophecies are no longer mysteries but spiritual fact.

Our lessons took us in, to the spiritual dimension of these prophecies. We found that “Zebulun and Naphtali” in the Word signify reformation and regeneration by means of temptations, [which is the] the conjunction of truth and good through combat against falsities and

evils. This - your own spiritual process - is the context for the internal sense here. All of a sudden this has gotten very personal. Then we find that “the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali also “signify the establishment of the church with the Gentiles who are in the good of life and who receive truths.” Now this is important because at times in our lives *we are those gentiles*, and how we receive those truths makes a difference. AC 3863 says that these truths are “the great light” - truths of faith from the Lord Himself, who is the sun of the spiritual world. And AE 526 tells us that although “darkness” in the Word signifies the falsities of evil, “darkness” also signifies falsities *not of evil*, such as were the falsities of religion among the upright Gentiles, which falsities were with them because of their ignorance of the truth.” This is major! “Upright Gentiles”... this describes any of us who wish to know the truth, and are willing to pursue it. It is the gentile state in us that receives the Lord’s church, that innocent state of reception.

Every misconception or misunderstood spiritual principle, or every false idea that we believe to be true is not by definition an evil thing. If they were, we would all be doomed!

They are the level of understanding that we bring to the process, and this is far from perfect. These are the erroneous illusions of our understanding, and the evil desires of our will. This is the “darkness” in which we walk every day. To dispel this darkness, a “great light”

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must shine; Christmas must come.

AC 25 says this about these illusions and desires:

“In speaking of the Lord’s Coming, Isaiah says,

A bruised reed He does not break off and a smoking wick He does not quench; He brings forth judgement towards truth;

[which means], that He neither shatters a person’s illusions nor stifles his desires. Instead He *bends them* towards truth and good. This verse in Isaiah continues, saying

The Lord creates the heavens and stretches them out: He spreads out the earth and what comes from it: He gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk on it. (Isaiah 42:3-5)”

What a wonderful message, tucked into the internal sense of Isaiah 42: The Lord takes us from where we are, falsities, illusions, evil desires and all - He finds us “walking in darkness,” and He gently leads us into the light of truth. If we are crooked (and we all are), He gently bends us towards truth, not hard enough to shatter the understanding or stifle the will; but just enough to bring us into a higher degree of order; just enough to keep us moving forward towards the kingdom of heaven. All that

in a “bruised reed” and a “smoking wick”... *Now it is permitted* to know these things.

The internal sense is the same with blindness. AC 2383 says that

“Blindness” in the Word is used in reference [not only] to people who are immersed in falsity, [but] also to people who have no knowledge of the truth. Both kinds of people are called blind, though who are meant in any one place becomes clear from the train of thought, especially that in the internal sense.

In Isaiah we read

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-7)

This refers to the Lord’s Coming and the fact that at that time people who had no knowledge of truth were to receive instruction.

The “blind” are those who “have no knowledge of the truth.” Is that not all of us from time to time; do we not all have “blind spots” to the truth, holes in our understanding, especially with those things that go against our “illusions” and “desires”? Didn’t the Lord come into the world to open our eyes too? Yes, He did. That’s what Christmas is all about.

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“Opening the blind eyes and bringing the bound out of prison, and out of the dungeon-house those who sit in darkness” stands for those who [lack] knowledge of goodness and truth but who nevertheless have the desire to know and be taught about these [things]. (AC 5037:2)

That’s how you get ready for Christmas: *You desire the things that Christmas brings.*

Are you ready for Christmas? In a sense, none of us is ever ready, if that means being regenerated, being finished, being perfected, and just waiting around for the Lord to come. But we have just found that that is not what being ready means at all. It means being ready for the things the Lord will bring at Christmas time: Light and love, gentle leading (not “shattering” or “stifling”), choirs of angels, quiet moments of reflection, and deep emotional vibrations for your religion, that may not vibrate all the time. It means being receptive to the truth and good that stream from the spiritual world to you, to bring light to your darkness.

There isn’t much time. Here’s a suggestion for how to use the next four weeks, so that when Christmas comes it will not pass you by. Think about these things that Isaiah promised - things that came true long ago in the literal sense. But think about them on the deeper level of the New Jerusalem. AC 8869:7 kind of says it all:

In Isaiah (42:6-8)

⁶I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

These words refer to the Lord. They declare that He is Jehovah, that He is the Source of all wisdom, and that none at all springs from man. Their reference to the Lord is self-evident, as is the truth that He is Jehovah.” The truth that He is the Source of all wisdom which has to do with life is meant when it says that He is to “open the blind eyes, bring the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness,” and the truth that no wisdom at all springs from man is meant by “My praise I will not give to idols.”

That’s who came down to earth at Christmas. That’s who comes down still. The Lord is coming. We celebrate His birth in four short weeks. What do we do in the meantime? It might be good to think about the things He came to do. It might be good to do a little good-old self-examination, in preparation for Christmas Eve.

Think about the *darkness*. Where is the darkness in your life? Can you define it? Get ready for the light. Where are your *blind-spots*? What are the things

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that you may be choosing to overlook in others, or in yourself, that could use a

Christmas is coming . . . but not for everyone.

good dose of truth and understanding? What are your *illusions and desires*? Do they square with what is true and good, or could they use a little gentle bending? Now's the time to get them ready. Christmas is coming. What *prison* are you in? What binds you, and keeps your spirit from breathing free? The Lord is coming to bring you out.

Christmas is coming... but not for everyone. The Lord came into the world to do these things, but only if we choose to let Him. There's time: Are you ready for Christmas? What was that first Christmas all about? Isaiah explained it very well:

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Readings:

*Isa. 9:1-2, 42:1-9; Matt. 4:12-17
AE 447:5; AC 3195 []*

Return Another Way

by Christopher R. J. Smith

"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." (Matt. 2:12)

Reflect on these words and see how they urge us to have Christmas, each Christmas, make a noticeable change in our lives. We are to go back to our homes, back to our everyday life, and start the new year as a different person, as someone who shows greater concern for spiritual things. If we are to be different, if we are to be more spiritual than we were, say, this time last year, then there will be a noticeable increase in the quality of good and the quality of truth that shows itself in the way we act and in the way we think.

Those things in us that cultivate goodness, that are acts of love toward the Lord or love toward any fellow man, those things are represented by the shepherds "abiding in the field, and keeping watch over their flock by night." These things are to be brought to our attention. They are to be called, gathered together, so that we can recognize their true origin - the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The states of love in us, when we are doing or rather feeling the enjoyment of doing something good, these states are very powerful. They allow us to feel

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that we are in the stream of Divine Providence and they may even give us a personal sense of the Lord's presence. This is represented by the fact

The states of love in us, when we are doing or rather feeling the enjoyment of doing something good, these states are very powerful.

that the shepherds did not see some distant star as with the wise men, but rather were given personal contact. "And behold, the angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

There is, however, one interesting factor that the shepherds

had in common with the wise men. Something changed. As happened with the wise men, there was also a difference in the life of the shepherds once they had been to see the "Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, laid in a manger." They came back from Bethlehem with a new sense of religion in their life. "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen."

The shepherds represent our states of receiving and passing on what is good. The wise men, on the other hand, represent our thoughts or our beliefs that are true. Good and truth. There must be both. For they make a one - they

come together in the same way as heat and light from the sun in the sky are united.

Both our feelings that are good and our thoughts that are true, those things in us that are nourished by the warmth and light from the Lord as the sun of heaven, both of these things are to be gathered, collected, so that we can recognize their true source, see the Lord's hand in them, and thereby make it possible for Him to abide with us and we with Him.

When we collect and react to what is good, this is done far more easily and directly than our general reaction to what is true. The shepherds saw the Lord on the same day as the announcement of His birth. It appears that the wise men also knew of the Lord's birth on the same day as the shepherds, but we can conclude that it was at least six weeks before they arrived in Bethlehem. It could not have been before the Presentation in the temple, when the Lord was 40 days old.

Let us for a moment focus on the call of the wise men - seeing how those beliefs we have that are true, that are from the Word of God, how they are brought forth and change our lives.

We are not told who exactly the wise men were. The Heavenly Doctrine indicates that there were three of them. (Coronis 41:2) We know that they were from the East, from the same general area from which Abraham was called. These men grew up with a knowledge of the Ancient Word.

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From their study of it they knew what earthly things represented or corresponded to on the higher, spiritual plane. Therefore they knew the heavenly significance of the gifts they presented: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. From their study of the Ancient Word as well as from their knowledge of Balaam's prophecy, they also knew that the Lord would be born on Earth and that the sudden appearance of a new star would signal the occasion. (AC 3249, 3762:5, 10252:6, 3242; AE 324:10)

In a similar manner we grow up with knowledge of Divine revelation. In a general way we are exposed to what is said in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrine. We also know about the Lord's birth on Earth. In our case it is merely an event that took place in the past rather than something that is yet to happen in the future. But in neither case does it make any real difference to the way we live.

What we have by way of the truth is what we have been taught by others. It amounts to what the Heavenly Doctrine refers to as historical faith. It is ours by virtue of unquestioned loyalty to the history of our past. It is what our parents and teachers believed. It has yet to be made personal to ourselves as well, so that we are truly convinced.

This historical faith, this knowledge we have of the Word and of the fact that the Lord has been born on this planet, keeps us reminded of His existence and of His commandments. But it has not

yet made the impact upon our life that brings about actual changes in the spiritual quality of the way we live. One could say that the water has not yet been changed into wine, or the caterpillar has not yet changed into the butterfly.

To all outward appearances, a person in this state, a person living by something that is not really a conviction in his own life, may actually seem to be deeply religious. But the reality is otherwise: there is no genuine religion that will make it possible to truly abide with the Lord. Who were more religious than the scribes and Pharisees? Yet when they heard of the Lord's birth, they, along with Herod, were troubled and dismayed.

Whether we appear deeply religious or not, however, what truth we do have, what we do know of the teachings of the Word, has not changed the selfish affections or motives by which we live. Even so, the appearance may be that all is well. Did not Jerusalem look like a fine city with a magnificent temple, maintaining regular worship in its midst?

Although the temple worship had been corrupted by the money changers and although Herod governed with a lust for power that justified frequent murder to maintain his position, there was still sufficient order and freedom in the city for the wise men to safely enter it and learn the final directions to find the Lord's birthplace. It is quite possible that the wise men may well have been aware of the reputation of Herod the Great. They may have known of his cunning effort

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to win the loyalty of the Jews by building the temple. They may have heard about his ruthless manner of maintaining power. Being educated men themselves, as well as being wise, they may have seen through the hypocrisy of the learned scribes and Pharisees.

In a similar way, we might be aware of how we live, in regard to one thing or another, being in conflict with what we have learned to be true. For example, we know the truth that we must do our work faithfully, sincerely, and justly, but still we may justify doing less than an honest day's work. We know the truth that we must keep chaste thoughts in our mind, but still we may dress, talk, and entertain ourselves in ways that make it difficult if not impossible to be chaste. We know about gossip. It is a form of murder and theft. Yet we still gossip! We know the truth that we must keep the Sabbath and regularly nourish our minds from the Lord's Word, but how easily we make excuses.

Whatever our lapses may be, however, whatever we may see as a conflict of natural versus spiritual interests in our life, the Lord still leads us. "We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

Because of historical faith, because we have not yet passed the test to make some particular truth a living quality within us, we are sometimes so influenced by the one thing it conflicts with that we lose sight of that truth. We even lose sight of what we thought had been the Lord's help in our lives. While in Jerusalem, the wise men lost sight of

the star.

Jerusalem at that time stood for false thinking and evil ways. While the Lord is able to bend such states so as to lead us away from them, while He is still able to use states of mere self-interest to even increase our knowledge of Him - as it was in Jerusalem that the wise men learned about Bethlehem - He still deliberately leads us to see these states in ourselves, just as He led the wise men to Jerusalem.

Although the wise men may have had an uneasy feeling in Jerusalem, perhaps by virtue of their prior knowledge of the city, or by virtue of the fact that they lost sight of the star, it was not until after seeing the Lord in Bethlehem that they knew they had to avoid the city. Similarly with us, in our journey through this earthly life, we are led to see a particular state or condition in ourselves before we can make the commitment to shun it and avoid it like the plague!
(TCR 120)

Before coming to this realization, or before making this commitment to change our life, we may go for a long time feeling perhaps a little troubled. At the same time we may still keep doing something we know is in conflict with some particular requirement that we have been taught and believe to be true.

In His wonderful ways, the Lord leads us to see that He Himself is the source of that realization. It is not some parent, or some teacher, or some book. Then

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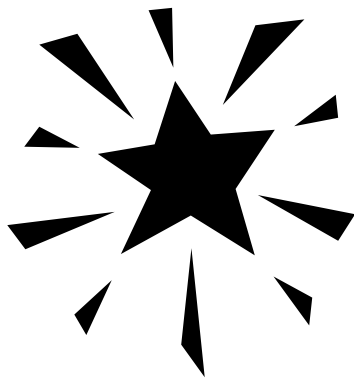
once we are convinced and therefore are ready to act accordingly, we will cheerfully make the necessary change. We will have been to Bethlehem on some particular issue and we will return, we will go about some aspect of our daily life "another way."

The Lord will have faced us with the inconsistency of our ways and exhorted us to do something about it. As a consequence we find ourselves being less natural and more spiritual. And if that is so, year by year, what greater gift could the Lord give us? Did the wise men really bring gifts to the Lord, or was it truly the other way round?

"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

Readings:

Matt. 1:1-12; AE 815:7-9 []



Your Mind is a Garden. Weed It.

by Gael Coffin

Two New Church friends were talking, and the one, a thoughtful and generous person by nature, wondered aloud why we in the church couldn't emphasize more the doing of good, which is positive, and concentrate less on the shunning of evil, which seems so negative. Her friend, an avid gardener, pondered a moment before replying, "If you want to grow a garden, you start with good soil and good stock, and you water and fertilize it and give it the proper amount of sunlight. But no matter how much you nurture the good plants, if you don't weed, the weeds will always win."

We agree that the positive should be emphasized, beginning with our children, in terms that are easy to understand and retain throughout life in this world. We have reflected on this garden analogy, and it doesn't seem to fail as a true representation of the process of regeneration. What's more, it is positive.

Consider the garden. First we prepare the soil; seeds will not germinate on hard or stony ground. Then we select and plant good seeds or seedlings. We place them in a sunny location, water them as needed, and nourish them with fertilizer, and they grow. But almost instantly, weeds that we didn't plant spring up, which, if not removed, will eventually choke out the desirable plants.

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Our garden has weeds. How terrible. We must be bad gardeners.

Of course not. We didn't put those weed seeds there. Through no fault of our own they are in the soil, but when they sprout, we ignore them at our peril. We have to identify them as weeds and remove them.

**. . . it is
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minds.**

So it is with our minds. Parents, priests and teachers try to implant in our minds good concepts, the highest of which are truths from the Word. And at the beginning, as little children, we respond with delight. But inevitably weeds spring up, evil

thoughts engendered by hell which appeal to our hereditary inclinations to evil, inclinations which we did not choose to have, but which lie buried in the soil of our natural minds from birth. It's not our fault that they are there, but we must recognize them when they sprout and pull them out, and this continually throughout life on earth.

Let us repeat: it is not our fault that evils spring up in our minds. We think it is especially important to emphasize to our children this aspect of shunning evil, and we do try. We remind them frequently that evil thoughts come from evil spirits, not from within themselves. In our experience, however, when evil thoughts and loves well up in us, we perceive them as physically attached to

our very core and as having originated there. Perhaps at such times the garden analogy can come to our aid, reminding us of what is really taking place. Weeds will spring up in our gardens, but we didn't put them there. Our responsibility is to remove them.

A newcomer to the Church was asked if she had difficulty with any of the teachings. She replied that she did. She had trouble with the "pot" theory – that we are simply vessels receptive of life from the Lord. It seemed to her too inert and unreactive. She responded favorably, however, to the garden analogy. Consider: Even though we must nurture the good plants and remove the weeds, it is really the Lord who makes the garden grow. It is He who creates the seeds, the sun and the water. It is He who creates the processes of germination and photosynthesis. All we can do is choose to cooperate or not. And if it is really the Lord who makes it grow, whose garden is it? The garden is the Lord's, and yet He allows us to call it our own. What a perfect and comprehensible representation of the as-of-self.

"But" you say, "the weeds keep coming." Indeed they do. Funny thing, too; they look just like the weeds we previously uprooted and left to die. Even in the soil of angelic minds the worst of evils, those passed on from our fathers (sorry, fathers) remain deeply buried. We cannot eradicate them, and neither does the Lord. But if we repent of them and cease to do them, we are taught

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that the He will remove them to the outskirts of our minds, where they can germinate no more.

Guilt is a useful, if uncomfortable, feeling. Without it, we would never repent. Spurious guilt, however, is not useful and, in fact, distracts us from the work of repentance. If there are some in the church who suffer from such guilt, perhaps it's because they haven't understood the nature of

Evil is the ultimate negative. Shunning it is the ultimate positive.

evil inclinations and our responsibility in dealing with them. Not one of us asked to be born into the world inclined to *any* evil, let alone *all* evils, no more than we wished for weed seeds in our garden's soil. This

should be stressed, and stressed repeatedly. *We did not ask to be born into the world inclined to evils.* Evils, like weed seeds, come with the territory. Nevertheless, it is up to us to go to an authoritative source to learn what they are and how to deal with them. And in the case of evils, of course, that source is the Word.

Weeding isn't fun. It frequently has to be done under hot and humid conditions, but it has to be done nonetheless. If we ignore them, the weeds will establish themselves, take root, grow and multiply, making it harder to get rid of them later. But if we do as we should, our gardens, both natural and spiritual,

will be things of beauty, bringing pleasure to us and to all around us.

Only the Lord can implant good in our minds. Our work is to shun the evils that otherwise would choke out that good. This is our choice then.

Evil is the ultimate negative. Shunning it is the ultimate positive. (All right, loving the Lord is the ultimate positive, but we can't do that unless and until we shun evils as sins against Him.) The hells are arrayed against us, but if in times of trouble we have a true picture of what is required of us, to tend our garden as He has instructed, we believe that the Lord will enlighten us, and that the power of the hells will be broken.

The garden analogy is not an original concept. The Lord Himself, while on earth, frequently taught by means of horticultural parables. In this, as in all things, we think that the church should follow His lead.

The Lord wishes for each of us a beautiful and fruitful garden. Your mind is a garden. Weed it. ☐



The Lord's Priestly Kingdom

*A Study of the Government of the
Lord's Church
by Andrew J. Heilman*

Part 2: Man Usurps the Lord's Authority and Government of the Church

*The Expansion of the Authority of the
Catholic Church*

Unfortunately the civil government after the Lord's Advent did not acknowledge the Lord as King of kings, and when the emperor of Rome finally accepted the Christian religion, he, and later the bishop of Rome, took on greater and greater authority and power in this church and in the world. Those famous words that Constantine was said to have seen in the sky were indeed a prophecy of things to come, "In this sign you will conquer". And conquer he did, for it was under Constantine that the Council of Nicea was called and the first Christian Church came to its demise. The early brotherhood of the church was lost, and the bishop of Rome became their father (Papa - Pope). The distinction between the kingly function and the priestly function became blurred, and the image and likeness of the Lord's celestial and spiritual kingdom in the world disappeared from Christendom.

We are familiar with the Council of Nicea, where the bishops of the Chris-

tian Church met under the direction of Constantine, and were compelled to come to a solution to resolve the growing division concerning the Lord's Divinity, and how they came up with their own solution rather than accept the answer that the Lord provided in the Word. (TCR 633) There was another Council a few years later that was again called to prevent schisms in the church and to maintain the power of the priesthood, especially that of the bishop of Rome. It was the Council of Chalcedon, in which, in a closed and dark chamber, the leaders gathered and decided that the Lord had two natures, one Divine and one human, and that thereby the Pope could act as vicar for the human nature of the Lord. (AC 4738) In fact the purpose of this council was to prevent the church from schisms, and with this they could keep complete control over the church (SD 4551) These examples, and many more show how the government of the church, with its leadership and councils, fell away from the Lord. This form of "priestly" government was the origin and means of the taking the authority and power from the Lord and His Word and giving it to man. (TCR 520, 644)

The Council of Chalcedon warns us of an even more subtle danger to which men are prone by their very nature. It is was easy for them to attribute to the Lord the generals and universals, to give Him the government over what is obviously beyond their reach and control; yet keeping the government of the church in this world for themselves. We read in the Arcana Coelestia concerning

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how Jehovah would be in the mouth of Moses and Aaron, and teach them all things which shall they should say and do. (Exod 4:15) This means that the Divine is to be in each and all things that will be done, and yet they who do not believe this, "attribute to themselves and their own sagacity the singulars, and to the Divine only the universal government" (AC 7007). And concerning those in the love of dominion we read, "All these are of such a quality, that they take away the government of the Lord from every one whom they assail; for they arrogate it to themselves, and rise up even to the point that they believe that they are gods, and that the Divine is not anything, but that the Lord rules universally and they in details" (SD 5790). This is precisely what the Council of Chalcedon did. It left the Lord with what they considered the Divine portion of his government, and took to themselves, supposedly through succession from Peter, the human government over His church in this world.

They also carried out a similar weakening of the power and authority of the Word. They only attributed to it that which is general and universal, and did not at the same time allow the Lord's words to reach into the particulars of His Church in this world. Instead they supplemented and interpreted the Lord's teachings with decisions of councils and papal edits, and gave these equal authority to the Word. Concerning this we read in the Apocalypse Explained: "That the Babylonians have subjected the truths of the Word and the

holy things of the church to their judgment, jurisdiction, and dominion, can be seen from this: they persuade the people that the Word is understood by them alone and not by any who have not been inaugurated into the ministry; and by this means they subject all things of the Word and thus all things of the church to their dominion. ... Those who arrogate to themselves dominion over all things of the church and heaven can apply the sense in its letter a thousand ways to favor their dominion. And this is an easy task, because all things of the church, which are called holy, they place above the human understanding, and when this is assented to and no genuine truth is taught, infernal falsities may be called truths, and devilish evils may be called goods; and the simple may even be persuaded that the edicts of the Pope are just as holy as the commandments of the Word, and even more holy; and yet these are from heaven, while those edicts are for the most part from hell. For every edict respecting government, faith, and worship in the church, that has for an end dominion in the world, however it may appear in the external form, and may sound as if from the Word, is from hell; while every commandment from the Word, because it has for its end the salvation of souls by the Lord, is from heaven. From all this it can be seen that 'sitting upon many waters,' when predicated of Babylon as a harlot, signifies having dominion over all things of the Word, and thus over the holy things of the church." (AE 1033, see also AE 1089)

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Gradually, through the centuries, the Pope and the Catholic priesthood held the government and the control of the church, and also of many kingdoms as well. (AR 799) Yet laymen found a way to gain the control of the church.

Through contributions and favors certain laity can gain benefits from the church. So, when Babylon fell, not only did the kings and merchants mourn, who represented the priestly leadership of the church, but so also did the pilots (gubernatores), those involved with ships, and sailors, who represented the laity who embraced this form of religion. "By 'every pilot' are meant the highest of them, who are emperors, kings, dukes, and princes. By 'everyone involved with ships' those are meant who are in various functions in a higher or a lower degree. By 'sailors' are meant the lowest, who are called the common people. ... [they] contribute the things which are above called merchandise, which are those things which they collect into their treasuries, as also possessions, and who receive benedictions and beatification in return, as merits, and other similar things which they desire for their souls. ... [they contribute] natural merchandise; and they take back spiritual, as they think." (AR 786) These "spiritual" blessings from the Pope and bishops, of course, brought with them political and monetary influence and power in the catholic countries, as can be seen throughout the history of the middle ages. In fact without such a blessing it was doubtful a leader of nation could remain in office.

The Authority and Power of the Dragon

"The Apocalypse treats of the two religious systems in the Christian world, that with the Reformed and that with the Papists, for the whole of Christianity is from these two, since they are the ruling systems. The religious system with the Reformed is a system of faith alone, which has devastated the church; and that with the Papists deals with the Lord's vicarious authority over the church, thus over the souls of men, and also over heaven, that resides with the popes and the primates and subordinate officials of the church. It is these two ruling systems of religion which [have been rejected] by the Last Judgment." (LJP 183 [184]) Both of these seek authority and dominion in the church and the world, and the Apocalypse Revealed in explaining these, shows how both the laity and the clergy get involved in this.

In chapter 13 of the Apocalypse the two beasts of the dragon appear, the beast of the sea, representing the laity or the external of the reformed church, and the beast of the land, representing its clergy or the internal of that church. It is interesting to note that the Dragon gives its power, throne and great authority to the beast of the sea, which represents the laity. And yet in the internal sense this means "When these [teachings of faith alone] prevail with the laity, the clergy have authority, veneration, and a species of adoration, on account of the Divine things which they believe they know, and which are to be received from their mouths. By 'power' is signi-

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fied prevalence; by 'throne,' government; and by 'great authority,' dominion." (AR 575)

A similar thing is seen later in the chapter, when the beast of the land appears; this beast, representing faith alone with the clergy, leads people to worship the image of the beast of the sea, and to receive its mark, and yet internally it is not the laity that are worshipped or whose mark is received, but the image and mark of faith alone with the laity, confirmed by external reasoning which can persuade the laity and hold them under its authority. (AE 774, 885) This is clear from the response Swedenborg received from the when he exhorted them to discard this false doctrine. "Why discard it? Does not the superiority of the learning of the clergy over that of the laity hang upon that sole doctrine?" (TCR 182:2, 389)

It is amazing that in the literal sense of the Apocalypse it looks like the beast of the sea actually has power and authority, and that it is the center of worship and attention, and yet it was really the beast of the land and the dragon that had control. And in the protestant church it looks as if the laity and kings and dukes gained authority and power in the church through the reformation, and yet by giving them position and honor in the church, the clergy with its doctrine of faith alone gained supremacy over the laity. (TCR 187) This can be seen by what the Writings say about the bishops of England (AR 716, SD 6101), and also what Swedenborg said about the leadership of the Lutheran

church in Sweden in his letters the king of Sweden and others. In both cases the king or civil government was the nominal head of the church, but certain bishops actually controlled its working. In a similar way a pastor or bishop can gain a great deal of power and influence and even wealth through a congregational form of government.

We are reminded here of the memorable relation of the beautiful turtles, the father turtle of which had two heads which represented the clergy. "The things they believed concerning faith alone "are the things represented by the small head, which they draw into the forepart of the body, and insert into the larger head when they are talking with the laity, for with them they do not talk from the small head, but from the large one, which in appearance is provided in front with a human face; and with them they talk from the Word about love, charity, good works, the commandments of the Decalogue, and repentance, selecting from the Word almost everything that is there said on these subjects. But in so doing they insert the small head into the large one ... And inasmuch as they talk about these subjects from the Word, especially about the Gospel, the operation of the Holy Spirit, and salvation, in a pleasing and elegant manner, they seem to their hearers to be handsome men and the wisest in all the world." (TCR 62) On the outside they give the appearance that the Lord in His Word is the head of the church, yet inwardly they make themselves and faith alone the head.

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We can see from this memorable relation how easy it is for the clergy to champion the Lord and the Word, to preach with eloquence and captivate the minds of the laity, and yet all the while be promoting not what the Word teaches but their own ideas and interpretation.

Just as many in the laity of the Catholic church gained blessings and power and riches by favoring the power of the Pope and the bishops, so the clergy of the Protestant church gained position and control through giving authority to the laity. In both of these the distinction between church and civil governments became blurred, and yet both primates and magistrates used this lack of distinction to actually increase in power and authority with the people. Such is the natural tendency of man, the love of self and the world are innate in all of us, and we need to be on guard and aware of these dangers. The Lord has given us these clear warnings so that we may follow a different path in the establishment of the New Church on earth, a path which neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church chose to follow.

The Kings of the North

Fortunately the book of Revelation and its explanation in the Apocalypse Revealed not only reveals the abuse and dangers of authority in church government, but here we also find a true and genuine answer to correct these abuses. In Revelation 17:13 we read of the kings of the north, "These have one tenet, and shall give over their power

and authority to the beast" But the beast here is not the beast of the sea, but the scarlet beast upon which the harlot of Babylon rode. This beast did not represent the laity of the church, but the Word of the Lord which had been subordinated to the authority of the Catholic church. Thus these words signify that the kings of the north "acknowledge unanimously that government and dominion over the church are solely through the Word." The kings of the north actually represented those of the kingdoms north of Rome, those who are attached to that religious persuasion only as to externals, who are especially in the kingdom of France (verses 12-14). The rest, who indeed profess that religion, but still dissent in various things, are treated of in Verse 15, and the Protestants, or Reformed, who have openly receded from that religion (verses 16-17)." (AR 740).

Those in France who were somewhat under the Roman church, had a kingdom where the country and civil government enjoyed a degree of independence from the Pope, and yet they "acknowledge the Pontiff as the head of the church; but they say that his government and dominion over the church is not like that of the head over the body, but is like one supreme over the body that does not rule and govern from itself, but from God through the Word; and that it is then to be obeyed." (AR 742, CLJ 60, DP 257:4) They could only receive general truths from the Word, and could "not progress further, and draw the doctrines of faith and life

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from the Word". This "is of the Lord's Divine Providence, because they still adhere in externals, or in formalities, to the Roman Catholic religious persuasion; lest truth and falsity should be mixed together, and thence an interior strife should arise." (AR 739)

A few verses later, concerning those further north, who actually separated from the Catholic Church, it is said, "God has given into their hearts to do His tenet, and to do one tenet, and to give their kingdom unto the beast" (Rev 17:17) This "signifies judgment with them from the Lord, that they should altogether repudiate and hold accursed the Roman Catholic religious persuasion, and should destroy and root it out with themselves; and the unanimous judgment, that they should acknowledge the Word, and found the church upon it. ... by 'kingdom' the church is signified, and the government over it," (AR 749) It is interesting that this is not only called one tenet, but also God's tenet. This removed the external forms of the Catholic Church and made it possible for them to once again draw doctrine from the Word.

If only these kings of the north had actually done this. But we know from history that when they broke away from Rome, they did indeed restore the Word to the people, but instead of giving authority and power to the Word, they actually gave this to the dragon, to the doctrine they hatched to break from Rome, that man is saved by faith alone. And as we read earlier about this doctrine, although it appeared to give au-

thority to the Word and to the laity, it actually gave supremacy back to the clergy. How did the kings of the north fall into this? How did they go from fighting with the Lamb, to fighting against the Lamb? (AE 1072)

How did the early Christian Church supplant the authority and power of the Lord in His Word with their own power and authority? Neither the leaders of the church nor the councils could keep them from back from this. In fact it is from the leaders and the councils this falsifications came forth (Canons 24, TCR 489, DP 328:7). Therefore we are taught, "The start must be made from truths of faith, in this way. First there must be learned the doctrinal things of the church, and then the Word must be examined to see whether these are true; for they are not true because the leaders of the church have said so and their followers confirm it, because in this way the doctrinal things of all churches and religions would have to be called true." (AC 6047). And we also receive the following counsel from the Lord in the True Christian Religion "But, my reader, believe not in councils, but in the Holy Word; and go to the Lord, and you will be enlightened; for He is the Word, that is, the Divine Truth in the Word." (TCR 634, etc.)

TO BE CONTINUED []

The Star in the East

(excerpted from an article by Willard D. Pendleton)

It is the primary truth of all Divine revelation that there is a God and that He is Divine Man. Yet while many at this day claim faith in some kind of deity, there are few who accept the direct testimony of the Scriptures concerning Him. But

... apart from the spiritual sense of the Word, the Lord's Divine Humanity cannot be seen ...

man is not man from himself. He is man because God is Man. That is why the Writings have been given, for apart from the spiritual sense of the Word, the Lord's Divine Humanity cannot be seen because it cannot be under-

stood. At this day, therefore, a light has come into the world, and as the Psalmist said so many years ago, "In Thy light shall we see light." (Psalm 36: 9)

Like the wise men of old, therefore, who followed the star of His birth from the land of the sons of the east to Bethlehem of Judea, let us fix the sight of our understanding upon that star which at this day shines in the east. While it is true that there will be times when its light will be obscured by intellectual persuasions of various kinds and by reasonings from the appearance of self-life, nevertheless, if we persist in the way in which it leads, the star will reappear and will bring us to Bethlehem of Judea; that is, to the perception and acknowledgment of Him who

at this day is born among us in His own Divine Human.

(From *New Church Life*, 1970; 90:553-557; downloaded from www.swedenborgdigitallibrary.org) []

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