

[Excerpt from *Authority in the New Church*, by Rudolph L Tafel]

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTRINES OF THE NEW CHURCH IN THEIR RELATION TO NATURAL SCIENCE.

The fourth objection made against our position that the doctrines contained in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg are the law in the Lord's New Church, is advanced by those who say: We are willing to accept as authoritative what Swedenborg reveals to us on spiritual subjects, either in the form of doctrine drawn from the Word, or from things seen and heard in the spiritual world; but we cannot attribute the same kind of authority to what he declares in respect to the things of this world.

This position seems rational and orthodox, and also safe, and we believe that it is occupied in good faith by men who would shrink from passing judgment on the fallibility or infallibility of any portion of Swedenborg's theological writings treating on internal and external worship, and thus concerning, in their estimation, the law of the Church. By thus leaving open the ground which Swedenborg has in common with natural science, these men think that they save the Church the trouble and inconvenience, and also the disadvantage, resulting from a possible disagreement of Swedenborg's science with the science of the day.

From the benevolent opposition thus made by some New Churchmen to the natural science taught in the writings of the New Church, it would seem as if there were among these writings some works specially devoted to the study of the natural sciences which could easily be singled out from the other works. But such is by no means the case. The facts and theories of natural science contained therein are all for the purpose of proving and confirming spiritual truths; they are therefore in the place of a natural basis to these truths. Besides, the explanations of natural subjects occurring there are frequently so interwoven and logically connected with explanations of spiritual subjects, and the spiritual principles which are enunciated there enter generally so deeply and thoroughly into the natural subjects, that it is sometimes quite impossible to separate the two; and if you do succeed in effecting a separation, the spiritual truth perishes, because it is deprived of the natural basis on which it rests.

That there is such a connection between spiritual and natural things, and that natural things are altogether indispensable for the presentation of spiritual things in this world, appears plainly from the following passage from the *Arcana Coelestia*, 5373:3:

"Scientifics belonging to the natural [plane] are the ultimates of order; prior things must be in ultimate or last things, that they may exist and appear in that sphere. And besides, all prior things tend towards ultimate things as to their boundaries or limits; and there they exist together, as causes in their effects, or as higher things exist in lower things as in their vessels. The scientifics of the natural [plane or mind] are such ultimates, and hence the spiritual world terminates in

man's natural [mind], where those things are. The things of the spiritual world are presented representatively; and unless spiritual things were thus representatively presented in the natural [plane], and hence by means of such things as are in the world, they could by no means be comprehended."

And again we read:-

"The spiritual sense cannot be perceived by man except in proportion as it may be presented and expounded by such things as belong to the world and nature" (AC 6996:3).

We see, therefore, that the spiritual truths which the Lord revealed to mankind at His Second Coming in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg are there "presented representatively" by the things of the natural world, or by the natural truths which are contained in those writings. And if these natural things are removed thence, the spiritual things at once become incomprehensible; for "unless spiritual things are presented representatively by means of such things as are in the world," we read, "they cannot by any possibility be comprehended."

We see, therefore, that the spiritual things in the theological writings of Swedenborg are as the soul, while the natural things, or the natural truths contained there, are in the place of the body, and that their relation is as intimate as that existing between the soul and the body. Yea, we see further that as the soul exercises all its power in this world by the body, and upon the removal of the body becomes altogether powerless, so also the spiritual truths in the writings of the New Church derive their power altogether from the natural things by which they are "representatively presented," or in which they are presented as in an image.

This is the cause of the many illustrations used by Swedenborg in his theological writings, and this also is the cause why so many memorable relations of the other world are contained there. These illustrations and these memorable relations were required, in order that spiritual truths might be mirrored in them, and thereby brought within the sphere of comprehension of men in this world.

But it may be retorted that these natural truths or these natural facts are plainly Swedenborg's, and not the Lord's, because they existed in Swedenborg's mind, and he had acquired the greater part of them before the Lord called him to his office. These facts, it is true, existed in Swedenborg's mind before he was called by the Lord to his office, even as the man Swedenborg was in existence before the Lord called him to his work; but as the Lord adopted the man Swedenborg in order that by him, or through his instrumentality, He might effect His Second Coming, so also the Lord adopted and made use of the natural scientifics which were in his mind. Yea, as we learn that Swedenborg was prepared by the Lord "from his earliest youth" (TCR 850), so that "he could receive the doctrines of the New Jerusalem with his understanding" (TCR 779), so also his understanding was furnished "from his earliest youth "with such natural facts and truths as could" present representatively the spiritual doctrines which

he would receive from the Lord, and as would enable mankind to understand these spiritual doctrines.

Yet after the Lord had adopted these natural facts, and made them the ultimate vessels in which the doctrines of the internal sense of the Word were brought down to men out of heaven, these facts were no more Swedenborg's, but they became the Lord's; wherefore they put off the fallible quality of Swedenborg, and put on the infallible quality of God.

All the natural facts, therefore, contained in the theological writings of Swedenborg have acquired the force and power of natural truths; and by means of these natural truths the whole field of natural science may be reformed and regenerated, even as the whole field of philosophy and theology will be reformed and regenerated by the rational and spiritual truths which are contained in the same writings.

This also the Lord declared through the mouth of John, when, after the descent of the holy city New Jerusalem, by which is typically represented the descent of the doctrines of the New Church; he said, "Behold, I make all things new."

The same thing He likewise declared by the Prophet Isaiah, when he said, "In that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt into Assyria; and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land."

As all power is in ultimates, so also the strength and power of the spiritual truths in the writings of the New Church are contained in the natural things which are used in "presenting representatively" these spiritual truths to mankind, and by which they are enabled to comprehend these truths.

As many of these natural things, however, are taken from the plane of the external senses, and thus may be compassed, criticized, and judged by sensual thought, those who impugn the Divine authority of the writings of the New Church, and who deny that the Lord in and by these writings has effected His Second Coming, from the very first directed their attention to these natural things, and they have been busy ever since in trying to discover contradictions between Swedenborg's science and the natural science of the day; and whenever they have been fortunate enough to discover what appears to them a discrepancy, they have forged it into an argument against the authority of the theological writings of Swedenborg. Like crafty assailants, they do not direct their attacks at once against the citadel of the New Jerusalem, against the spiritual truths or the doctrines of the internal sense taught in the writings of Swedenborg, because in that case their shafts would recoil at once from the spiritual armour of those who have a sincere and firm belief in the Second Coming of the Lord. They therefore do not assail the soul or the substance of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, but they assail the body or the form in which these doctrines have been communicated to mankind, well knowing that if the body is destroyed, the power or the

authority of the soul is destroyed.

Like the serpent in the garden of Eden, they have assailed the New Church, i.e. the New Church in the minds of those who believe in the Lord's Second Coming, in the heel, in its sensual part, which is formed by the sensual truths of the new dispensation.

And as these truths form an integral whole with the spiritual truths which are "representatively presented" in them, the poison has gradually spread from the heel to the higher and more interior portions of the system, so that a belief in the Divinity and infallibility of the teachings contained in the theological writings of Swedenborg, and hence a belief that the Lord in and by these writings has effected His Second Coming, is treated by many who ought to know better as a dangerous doctrine that ought to be classed in the same category with the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope.

But what ought a conscientious member of the New Church to do when attempts are made, not only to show discrepancies between Swedenborg's science and the science of the day, but also to prove contradictions in the doctrinal parts of the writings? When a conscientious member of the New Church hears any charges made against the Divinity and infallibility of either the soul or the body of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, he must at once place himself on the unequivocal declaration made in these doctrines, that the Lord has effected His Second Coming in and by means of those writings which were published by Emanuel Swedenborg as His servant, that therefore these charges are not, and cannot be, true; and to prove to him that this is the correct course to follow, let him read the following passage from the Arcana Coelestia, 6479:

"Some spirits, not of those who are altogether righteous, were with me for some time, and continually injected doubts from the fallacies of the senses against this truth, that all things are able to flow in from one source, and thus from the Lord. They were, however, told that so many doubts could not be removed at once on account of the many fallacies of the senses that require to be removed first, and on account of the innumerable things that are not known, and which must be known first; yea, that with those who are in a negative state, i.e. with whom a negative principle reigns universally, doubts can never be removed, because with them one scruple weighs more than a thousand confirmatory proofs. For one scruple is like a speck of sand placed before the pupil of the eye, which, although it is only one, and so very small, yet obstructs the sight of the whole eye. Those, however, who are in an affirmative state, i.e. with whom an affirmative principle reigns universally, reject scruples front fallacies which are opposed to truths; and if there are any things which they do not understand, they reject them to the sides, and say that they do not yet understand them, and thus they remain in the faith of the truth. But these spirits did not pay much attention to this, because they were in a negative state."

So, also, if there are any charges brought against the teachings contained in the theological works of Swedenborg, by which it is attempted to prove that the Lord has not, made His Second Coming in and by means of them, and hence that they are not of

Divine, but of human authority; and if a member of the Church who believes in the Divine authority of these writings cannot at once demonstrate the futility of these charges, he will say that "he cannot yet understand" or see the groundlessness of this charge, but that he nevertheless casts it aside, and holds on to the Divine authority of the doctrines of the Church, being confident that sooner or later, when "the many fallacies that require to be removed first" are removed, and when "the innumerable things that require to be known first" are known, the groundlessness of all these charges will be made apparent.

To this we may add, however, that the charges of inconsistency and of contradiction that have hitherto been brought against the writings of the New Church have all been of such a nature that their unreasonableness and groundlessness can be proved by the advocates of the Divine nature of these revelations, even by means of the knowledge they have hitherto derived from these writings.

[Formatting of references edited to reflect modern usage. One reference corrected.]