

## **Being Spiritually Washed by the Lord**

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When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." *Matthew* 3:16-17

Before Jesus began His public ministry, He went to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River. A person who believes that Christ was born perfect and was completely Divine from His first breath might find this an odd action. Indeed, John the Baptist himself was hesitant to baptize a person that he knew was far superior to himself. Concerning Jesus baptism, we are told the following:

It must also be stated briefly here why it was that the Lord, when He was in the world, was Himself willing to be baptized, when yet baptism is the sign of a person's regeneration by Him. The reason was that the baptizing of the Lord Himself was a sign of the glorification of His Humanity. Anything in the Word that means a person's regeneration also means the glorification of the Human within the Lord; for a person's regeneration is an image of the Lord's glorification. This is why the Lord, when He allowed John to baptize Him, said, "Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all the righteousness of God." *Matthew*. 3:15. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10239:4)

Jesus was born with a natural human mind like yours or mine. He needed to gradually learn all of the things that each of us learned as little children. He had to learn how to talk and walk. He had to learn how to read. There would have been a time that He would have heard the Ten Commandments for the first time and would have only gradually come to understand their literal meaning and only gradually would have come to see ever deeper meanings within their dictates. This process in Jesus' life is described in much of the volumes of the *Arcana Caelestia* in considerable detail. For example:

The verses which follow immediately after this describe the preparation further - the light of heaven, which is the Lord's Divine light, flowed into the ideas formed in the light of the world in His natural person so that He might bring forth from there the truth that was to be joined to good in the Rational. Thus it was to be brought forth in what is the ordinary way. Therefore to make His Human Divine the Lord came into the world in the ordinary way, that is, He was willing to be born as any other person is born, to receive instruction as any other does, and to be born again as any other, but with this difference: A person is born again from the Lord, whereas the Lord not only regenerated Himself from Himself, but also glorified Himself, that is, made Himself Divine; also a person is made new through the influx of charity and faith, whereas the Lord was made so through the influx of Divine Love that was within Him and that was His own. From this it may be seen that a person's regeneration is an image of the Lord's glorification, or what amounts

to the same, that in the process of a person's regeneration as the image one can envisage, though remotely, the process of the Lord's glorification. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3138:2)

The Lord, in the world, chose to be baptized by John because this act represents the spiritual washing that each human being needs to undergo if he or she is to become an angel of heaven. In the Lord's case, He had hereditary inclinations to think and will false and evil things from being born of a natural mother. These inclinations would have encouraged Him to think superficially, to be too focused on natural issues, to be too concerned with short-term goals. Although He inherited from His mother an inclination to love evil and to think false ideas, He never acted on this inclination. We are told:

With the Lord no evil of His own doing or that was His own was present, as there is with all human beings, only hereditary evil from the mother . . . The Lord's heredity from His Father however was Divine, while the heredity from the mother was the hereditary evil referred to here, through which He underwent temptations . . . But, as has been stated, He had no evil of His own doing or which was His own, nor did He have any hereditary evil from the mother after He had overcome hell by means of temptations. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1444)

How did Jesus overcome His hereditary inclinations to evil? He overcame His inclinations by learning, understanding, and living what was true and good. His baptism was an image of this process. The truth that He gradually came to know and understand ever more perfectly allowed Him to recognize and reject the siren callings of His natural heredity.

It is the same work that we have to do ourselves with His help. The Lord invites each of us to be baptized as a sacrament but even more importantly as a real and daily practiced part of our lives. Without knowledge from the Word a person can indeed learn pragmatically what works well and not well in his interactions with other human beings. But this knowledge doesn't necessarily change a person's motivations. The Lord calls us to learn the path of life that He can teach us in His Word. He reveals things to us that we by ourselves could never know and even more importantly He reveals to us that certain principles of behavior are not just pragmatically desirable; they are fundamental rules of His creation. When we follow them, with the prayer for the Lord's help, this effort allows us to be changed. It gradually allows the Lord to withdraw the attractiveness of evil and the inclination to think false ideas from our lives.

Consider the situation in which we are hurt by what another person has said. For many people their natural heredity leads them to be angry at the person who has caused this. It leads them to desire some form of punishment or revenge on that person. It brings to mind all sorts of thoughts, which are in reality false ideas, about that person and why we are justified in our own hellish state of response. The Lord would gradually lead each of us away from all of this. He would lead us to a state in which we truly can love even our enemies. We will seek their welfare. We will be better able in many situations to be forgiving. We will be better able to help them reflect on their words, deeds, thoughts, and motivations.

When Jesus was baptized, we are told that two things happened. Firstly, as He was coming up out of the water of the Jordan River, a dove was seen descending upon Him. Concerning the meaning of this we are told:

“[A] dove” means the true and good things of faith residing with a person who is to be regenerated is clear from the meaning of “a dove” in the Word, especially from the dove that alighted on Jesus when He was baptized, as mentioned in Matthew. . . Here “a dove” meant nothing else than the holiness of faith, and the “baptism” itself meant regeneration. It also meant therefore the true and good things of faith residing with the new Church that was to arise, which true and good things people receive through being regenerated by the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 870)

The Lord would send this dove to each of us as well. He wants to bring to each of our lives as much of His wisdom and His love as we can receive. As we are spiritually reborn this happens. As the results of our spiritual baptism take place, we too have this dove descend upon us.

The second thing that happened when Jesus came out of the water was that a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” From the perspective of traditional Christian doctrine this seems to be a confirmation of the separate persons of the Father and the Son. In the teachings for the New Church, we are told concerning this:

In the church, the Son of God is supposed to be the second Person of the Godhead, distinct from the Person of the Father, from which comes the belief about the Son of God born from eternity. As this belief has been universally received, and as it relates to God, no one has had any opportunity or permission to think about it from any understanding; not even as to what it is to be born from eternity; for anyone who thinks about it from the understanding must needs say to himself, “This transcends my understanding; but still I say it because others say it, and I believe it because others believe it.” Be it known, then, that there is no Son from eternity; but that the Lord is from eternity. When it is known what the Lord is, and what the Son, it will be possible, and not before, to think with understanding of the Triune God. (*Doctrine of the Lord* 19:1)

The Lord would like us to understand that the human mind He took on in the world only gradually came to be one with the wisdom and love of the infinite God the creator. He would have us know that this gradually perfecting mind was created anew or glorified by His own power. We are not spiritually reborn by our own power, but by His. When we are born anew all parts of our new life are born of Him. This is spoken of in the following passage:

Truths are meant by “sons” because everything in the internal sense of the Word is spiritual, and “sons” in the spiritual sense are those who are born anew from the Lord, thus are in possession of truths springing from good, so that in the abstract sense - when the persons are not envisaged - “sons” are the actual truths which spring from good [loves]. These truths therefore are what should be understood in the Word by “the sons of God”, “the king's sons”, and “the sons of the kingdom”. They are also the sons of new birth or regeneration. Furthermore, the truths and forms of good present with the person

who has been regenerated or born anew from the Lord are exactly like families in wide and long lines of descent from the one same father. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9807)

In a very real sense the Lord wants each of us to become one of His children. This idea is reflected in Gospel of John with these words.

As many as received Him, to them He gave power to be sons of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. (John 1:12,13)

The Lord calls each of us to be spiritually washed and reborn from Him. He has given us His Word as a guide. He calls us to read it and reflect on its implications for our own habits of motivation, thought, speech, and action. He will ever be with us helping us to see what is true. He will be bringing us the strength to follow this sight of truth. He will gradually be leading us ever closer to Himself and His heavenly kingdom. AMEN.

Lessons: *Matthew 3:13-17, True Christian Religion 685*

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

### ***True Christian Religion 685***

The first function of baptism is to identify us as a Christian; the second function, which is a consequence of the first, is to allow us to know and acknowledge the Lord as the Redeemer, Regenerator, and Savior; and the third function is to lead us to be regenerated by Him. When that happens, we are redeemed and saved.

Since these three functions follow each other and come together in the last, and since angels see all three together as forming one thing, therefore when baptism is performed or read about in the Word or mentioned in conversation, the angels who are present take it to mean regeneration rather than baptism. For example, the Lord's words "Those who have believed and have been baptized will be saved, but those who have not believed will be condemned" (Mark 16:16) are taken by angels to mean that those who acknowledge the Lord and are regenerated are saved. This is also why the Christian churches on earth refer to baptism as the washing of regeneration. It is important therefore for Christians to know that people who do not believe in the Lord cannot be regenerated, even if they have been baptized. Being baptized but having no faith in the Lord does absolutely nothing for us.