

## THOSE WHO ARE WITH US

March 1, 2020

“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (2 Kings 6:16) This the prophet Elisha said to his servant Gehazi when they found their city surrounded by a great Syrian army, an army which had come to seize Elisha in order to prevent him from continuing to reveal their plans to the king of Israel.

This incident occurred during one of the frequent wars the northern kingdom of Israel became involved in against Syria. Earlier Israel had been engaged in wars with the southern kingdom of Judah, too. Warfare was only a too common experience.

It was a trying time. And something of the same may also be said of the Church’s conflicts today. We, too, are living in trying times. Everywhere we turn we seem to see our traditional culture under assault and collapsing about us. What has happened to traditional morality? What has happened to Christianity? The precepts of yesteryear — precepts many of us were brought up with — are they no longer to be valued?

And yet....

And yet, as the prophet Elisha said to his servant Gehazi, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Elisha’s reference was to an unseen supernatural army, ready to come to the city’s defense, and we may hope that his words are still true today. But in a natural sense, it is also true that there are in this world more who are with us than those who are against us. “For,” as the Lord Himself said in His advent, “he who is not against us is with us.” (Mark 9:40)

The truth is that the world seems worse than it really is, because news outlets regularly and universally deliver news of unusual happenings and circumstances, and these for the most part represent occasions of strife and violence, crime and unfortunate accidents.

Mr. and Mrs. Happily Married are almost never reported. Mom and Dad Family Man and Woman who get up in the morning, feed their children breakfast and see them safely off to school are never reported. Faithful Servant who goes to work, does his or her work faithfully and honestly, is never reported. Mr. and Mrs. Farmer who get up early to get the farm’s necessary chores done are never reported. Mr., Mrs. or Miss Factory Worker who does his or her work competently and well is never reported. Mrs. Den Mother who volunteers her time and energy as a Cub Scout leader is never reported. So, too, the father who volunteers his time and energy as a Boy Scout leader. And so on.

Good people, the backbone of the culture, are overlooked. They are not news, because their lives are not unusual. If they appear on television it is as contestants on a game show. Or if they are famous it is because they have died and merit an obituary. Otherwise all those good people who keep the nation going, who are faithful to their spouses and children, who don’t make waves (as they say), who are not unusual in what they do or how they live — they do not make the news. They are not reported on. They seemingly don’t exist.

But in fact they do exist, and they are more in number than those who deviate from what is expected of them in their lives and actions.

Where is Divine providence in all of this?

To consider this question, it may be instructive to review the state of the spiritual world prior to the Last Judgment begun in 1756 and completed in 1757. We may find in our present western world something of a parallel.

The Last Judgment became necessary at that time because ill-intentioned people — people driven to achieve and maintain power — began to accumulate in the world of spirits and to support one another. To maintain their power they employed various arts to deceive the good into believing that those in power — namely, themselves — were wise and devoted to the people's welfare. Thus they ensnared the good. And those whom they could not so ensnare they endeavored to cast down into hell.

The latter — those they endeavored to cast down into hell — were spirits depicted in the Doctrines as protected in the lower earth — a term taken from the Old Testament — protected from further victimization by the powerful in the world of spirits, and protected from the evil already present in surrounding hells.

Thus they were protected. But protecting them may be likened to protecting innocent people by locking them up in a prison cell. Though protected, people locked up in a prison cell are not free; and so people cast down into the lower earth were not free. Therefore they are represented in the book of Revelation as souls under the altar, crying out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9,10, AR 325-327)

Some of us may be able to identify ourselves with those souls under the altar. For at times we may feel surrounded by hostile forces, forces intent on destroying ideals that we value and principles that we live by. And yet we are protected — protected by good people everywhere who share our values and principles, even though they are not often represented in the news media.

"Blessed are those who mourn," said the Lord, "for they shall be comforted." (Matt. 5:4) And so those in the lower earth were comforted. They were comforted in their new state following the judgment on the ill-intentioned and powerful spirits who had cast them down.

This last judgment was carried out, not by force, not by attack, not by any spectacular or awesome event, but by an urgent exposure of the ill-intentioned and powerful spirits' true nature, so that those they had ensnared could see their lust for power for what it was, namely a lust for power for the sake of power, and not for any useful purpose. This exposure may have been effectuated on the basis of the Latin *Arcana Coelestia*, which, translated, means *Secrets of Heaven*. It is reasonable to suppose that it was not a coincidence that the Last Judgment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the writing and publication of the last volume of the *Arcana*.

Something of a parallel may be providentially occurring in the world today. For there are many in our culture who mourn the apparent passing of Christian virtues, values and principles and who are in need of comfort. In His advent the Lord also said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...." (Matt. 5:10,11)

The possibility may be, and we can hope for the possibility, that we are living in an

age leading to a judgment, to a Divine judgment, brought about by the exposure of evils promoted and fostered by men and women more interested in power than in justice and righteousness.

It is interesting to note that Emanuel Swedenborg lived at a time and in a period termed the Age of Enlightenment, characterized by an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe during the 18th century. It was a movement that substituted human reason for Christian dogma. Philosophy pushed aside traditional theology and attempted to create a new set of values and principles founded on the ideas of men.

And yet the following century saw a renewal of interest in the Bible and Christian theology. Churches flourished. New forms of Christianity appeared. Spiritism introduced a new interest in the possibility of a spiritual world and the immortality of the human soul. The Age of Reason passed and was replaced by a theistic outlook and culture.

Throughout history a number of judgments have occurred in the spiritual world, followed by a renewal of religious faith and life in the natural world. Today we may be ready for a new judgment. Certainly we are seeing evils exposed to a degree not seen two or three generations ago. These evils horrify, not just the religious and church-going public, but all good people everywhere, wherever they may be, whatever their station in life, whatever their occupation or marital status.

Regarding the latter, people's marital status, it is true that the divorce rate in the United States hovers around 50%. However, this statistic includes second and third marriages, which for the most part do not last as long as first marriages. The divorce rate of first marriages is actually about 40%, which means that 60%, the majority, do not end in divorce but endure.

Furthermore, we read in the book of the Heavenly Doctrines called *Conjugal Love*, or alternately *Married Love*, that the marital union of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of Christian religion (CL/ML 457, 458). Traditionally, in the New Church, the statement has been taken to refer to the new, true Christian religion. But we note that the statement refers simply to Christian religion; and we note further that Christianity is the one religion in the world that teaches monogamy as an article of religion. It is this, monogamy adhered to as a religious requirement, that makes the marital union of one man with one wife the repository of Christian religion, whether it is a marriage of true married love or not. Perhaps this applies also to civil unions, provided they are monogamous and adhered to not simply for natural reasons, but as a religious obligation.

The truth is, we cannot judge of any marital union that it is one of true married love or not. For as the same book, *Married Love*, concludes, "one ought not to take the appearances in marriages or the appearances in acts of licentiousness and infer from them that someone does or does not have married love." (CL/ML 531)

Considering how many monogamous unions occur and endure, it is clear that in this respect there are more who are with us than those who side with something else adverse to us.

When the Lord made His advent into the world, He did so to occasion a previous judgment in the spiritual world. For then, as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, ill-intentioned spirits,

driven by an appetite for power, had taken over the world of spirits, either beguiling and deceiving good spirits or thrusting them down into lower earths. These ill-intentioned spirits the Lord exposed as to their true nature, setting good spirits free from their deception in the world of spirits and raising up those previously imprisoned in those lower earths. The basis of their exposure rested in the Lord Himself, as He fought against the persuasions of the hells and glorified His humanity.

So it is with every spiritual judgment. It becomes necessary when people driven by a lust for power take control over the good and persuade that virtues are vices and that immoralities are acceptable, even praiseworthy. The judgment takes place, not by force, not by compulsion, but by an exposure of false notions and practices, so that they are seen to be neither true nor virtuous. Thus the power of the ill-intentioned is broken, and the victims of their persuasions are set free.

Let us remember and consider, then, the words of the prophet Isaiah to his servant Gehazi: “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (2 Kings 6:16)

We leave you with these words of the Lord, addressed to His followers in His first advent, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

And with the apostle John we pray, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)

Lessons: 2 Kings 6:8-16, Mark 9:33-40, *Arcana Caelestia* 1032:1, 2