

Think Again

A New Church Day Sermon
by Rev. Derek Elphick

Scientists estimate that people typically have about 6,000 thoughts per day.

That's obviously more thoughts than anyone could possibly sort through...

but it raises the question,

What do we do with our thoughts?
What is the *purpose* of our thoughts?

Not all thoughts are equal - some are important, some are not.

Some are new, some are old (repeats from the past)
Some are fleeting, others stick around and won't go away

Our daily thoughts can be contradictory too...

some are happy, some are sad
some are disturbing, some are uplifting
some are true, some are false
some are clear, some are confusing...

Which ones do we pay attention to, or ignore, or welcome?

And perhaps equally important, do we have any *control* over what types of thoughts flow into our head in the first place?

Today, we're celebrating June 19th, the birthday of the New Church...

And one of the beautiful promises of this new religion, this new Christianity, is that its teachings, its doctrine, will help people "*think sanely and live decently*" (AR 936).

The one follows the other...

- we can't live "decently," that is, happy, useful, purpose-driven lives, if we're not thinking "sanely."

...If our head is full of contradictory, unhelpful thoughts and feelings, it will be very hard to "bear fruit"

...as we learned today, the Lord has a way of reaching us even if we're not reading the Word, for the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations are said to picture "*rational truths*" and the rational truths of the Writings serve as a "bridge" to spiritual truths because our "*rational mind is the first receptacle of spiritual truths*" (AR 936).

When left to our own devices, we tend to fall into negative, skeptical thought patterns which, again, the Heavenly Doctrines address:

Swedenborg says, "*I am being allowed to describe what I have heard and seen in the hopes of **shedding light where there is ignorance**, and of **dispelling skepticism**.*" He goes on to say, "*the reason this kind of direct revelation is taking place today is that this is what the Coming of the Lord means*" (HH 1).

The teachings of the New Church have been given to this world...

- 1). to shed light where there is ignorance
- 2). to dispel skepticism

Again, if we are to think sanely and live decently, is it not true that we'd want to take care of the "ignorant" and "skeptical" thoughts that clutter our mind...

- that stand in the way?

Ignorance is not a crime. We tend to think of ignorance as a weakness, as something embarrassing, but it simply means, "to not know"

- lots of things we don't know and we shouldn't be afraid to admit it

The same is true for skepticism - skepticism isn't a permanent, irreversible condition, unless we want it to be.

Well, the point of our sermon today is that...

the Lord has given us this *new* revelation to help us ***think differently*** to help us grow and change to become new people, "born again"

Specifically, we'll be taking a look at *how* the Lord reaches out to us in the Heavenly Doctrines, namely by means our intellect, and why that's important.

This is the Nunc Licet promise, invitation - to enter *with the understanding* into the mysteries of faith

- not just to us
- but all the nations, the world over
- appealing *first* to people's (our) rational mind so that they (we) can be prepared to receive spiritual truths

Step back for a moment...

The Lord's special revelations - each time, more is revealed, explained...

"You've heard it said of old...but I say to you..."

But even while the Lord was on earth, revealing the truths that would make up the Christian Church, He predicted that this new revelation wouldn't be enough, and that the Christian Church would come to an end (forecast in Revelation) and that He would come again...

Not in Person

But in the *"clouds of heaven with power and glory"* (TCR 757)

- His Second Coming would be by means of the Word (TCR 776)
 - by revealing the inner, spiritual meaning of Scripture that lies hidden behind the "clouds" in the letter, the literal sense of the Scriptures, the Word

How is this done?

The Lord appeals to our intellect. Why is that significant?

Think of other ways the Lord could try speaking to us...

He could appeal to our emotions, feelings. But these are unstable, volatile, fickle, unpredictable

He could capitalize on our fears. We might jump to attention, but we'd be responding under compulsion, not in freedom

But our intellect, where our thoughts reside, is neutral ground:

"When the will part of humanity's mind became utterly corrupted (represented by the Flood), the Lord in miraculous fashion separated the understanding from that corrupted will part, and within the area of a person's own understanding He formed a new will, which is conscience" (AC 1023).

"The Lord forms for us a new will within the understanding part of our mind" (AC 5461).

This is why we must take full advantage of our understanding, the intellect...

Now it's true, our thoughts, our intellect, have their limits...

- our thoughts can't "strong-arm" our will into doing whatever it wants
- we're not robots - love is at our core
- & our will can be very stubborn, won't be pushed around...

But...our intellect "still informs and points the way" (DLW 244). And the POWER that truth in the intellect wields should never be underestimated.

This is why it's important to pay attention to our thoughts because our thoughts gain power, and momentum, and direction by means of truth.

NOTE: here's the role of the intellect again, this time as it relates to HOW the Lord made His Second Coming - via Swedenborg, via his intellect.

Since the Lord cannot show Himself in person and yet He predicted that He would come and found a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who can not only receive intellectually these doctrines of the church, but also publish them in print (TCR 779).

What's new about the New Church?

IT CHANGES THE WAY WE THINK

Our THOUGHTS are the "nexus point" - the first point of contact with the spiritual world...

The Heavenly Doctrines act as a "filter" for our thoughts.

They help us sift through them all

- separate the "wheat" from the "tares"
- help us figure out the ones to pay attention to, and ones to ignore

This is crucial because there's a logical sequence or outcome to what we think because

**...thoughts turn into words
 ...words become deeds
 ...and deeds become habits**

In most ancient times, people didn't need a filter because their minds lay wide open to the influx of heaven.

But since the Fall, our thoughts require a filter...

- because the proprium (ego) attracts unhealthy thoughts (selfish wants and needs) which leads to a divided mind

- we can't be sure which thoughts are good or bad, trustworthy or untrustworthy.

This is one of the reasons the Lord has made His Second Coming - to give us freedom to think again!

"Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17).

The Lord's Second Coming takes place "in" the Word, not visibly in the world around us (TCR 776).

What's "new" about the New Church?

How can a church which is 252 years old still be new?

Might be tempted to say,

"I've heard it all before?"

"I was born and raised in the New Church. I have a pretty good working knowledge of New Church doctrine."

"Tell me something new?"

The Lord's Word is constant, fixed, unchanging. This is true of any written revelation and is obviously true of the Writings which Swedenborg was ordered to publish in print, to, as it were, cast in stone.

But we are *not* constant, fixed, and unchanging!

We change - our attitudes change, our loves and interests change.

This means our thoughts are changing every day...

The *quality* of our thoughts is determined by what we're feeding our mind...

We have ignorant thoughts (thoughts that need to be informed, enlightened, edified)

We have skeptical thoughts (thoughts that are holding us back, holding us back from our true potential)

Our thoughts are not static, locked in time.
 - they are changing every day - in real time

And the point is this: our thoughts are not "empty nothings" floating around our head.

They are real, have spiritual substance
 - gain their existence from either
 - heaven - love & wisdom
 - or hell - evil & falsity

A distinctly New Church idea: *"Thought brings presence"*

Our thoughts are not disembodied "nothings"
 - all of them can be traced back to a spiritual origin
 - to the spiritual world

The Lord in His second coming is re-forming us,
 our mind - it's spiritual, organic, growing, changing

These heavenly truths change the way we think.

Again, **...thoughts lead to the words we speak**
 ...the words we speak turn into deeds
 ...and our deeds over time become habits (heavenly habits)

Who doesn't want to think sanely and live decently?
 Who doesn't want to be rid of their skepticism and ignorance?

E.g. The Red Dragon w/ 7 heads and ten horns = *insanity* of the false doctrines of a divided God-head, faith alone

No longer do we or the world need to be held hostage by evil and falsity, prisoners to hurtful, damaging ideas.

The truths of the Lord's Second Coming raise our intellect *"into the very light of heaven"* (DLW 413).

So, what do we do with those 6,000 thoughts a day?

Well, the vast majority of them undoubtedly run on autopilot, in the back of our mind, helping us function in our daily routines...

But there are a few, a handful each day...

...that are very important
...that we should pay attention to (or reject)
... ..that promise to point us in a new direction
...because these are the thoughts that come to us as New Church people, people who have humbly schooled themselves in the beautiful truths of this new revelation

The Writings for the New Church are an invitation to us, and the world at large, to *think again*.

No longer do people have to settle for the status quo
No longer do people have to "own" whatever pops into our head
No longer do people have to accept religious teachings that make no sense
No longer do people have to accept the appearances of this world

Because of the Lord's Second Coming...

...every day affords us the opportunity to think again.

AMEN.