

“Belief in Divine Revelation and Interacting with Others”

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In between the street, and the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2)

Last week many of us witnessed a pageant depicting the Woman Clothed with the Sun and the birth of her male Child. With the threat of the great red dragon, that infant was caught up to God and His throne. We are told that the male Child symbolizes the doctrine of the New Church (*Apocalypse Revealed* 543). Being caught up to God and his throne symbolizes “the Lord's protection of the doctrine, because it was to be for the New Church, and its being guarded by angels in heaven” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 545). It is a foundation for many in this congregation, and the church organization it is part of, that the doctrine of the New Church was revealed by the Lord by means of Emanuel Swedenborg. Although the Lord made use of a finite human being in this world to compose and publish the books containing the doctrine of the New Church, many of us believe that they are not Swedenborg’s ideas. In the lesson from the preface to the *Apocalypse Revealed* Swedenborg asserts, “Do not suppose therefore that I have acquired anything there on my own, or from any angel, but from the Lord alone.” We are invited to believe that the books of doctrine written by Swedenborg are divine revelation. Or simply put, to believe they are the Word of the Lord.

For those who accept this belief, it means that the teachings for the New Church are Divine truth revealed to help us understand the Lord, why He was born into the world, why He is our Savior and Redeemer and how His infinitely loving and wise care of our lives is unceasing, even though it does not always seem to be the case. The teachings for the New Church are Divine truth revealed to help us understand the Old and New Testament, the life after death, marriage in this life and for those in a true love of marriage to eternity in heaven, and most importantly the teachings for the New Church show us the spiritual dangers we face from our inherited inclinations, what we must shun as sins against the Lord and the good things He calls us to love, say and do. These revealed truths are intended to guide our lives even when part of us would rather not do what they teach. So, we are taught about the role of compelling ourselves to do what we know to be good and true as in this teaching.

In times of temptation, when we practice self-compulsion and set ourselves against the evil and falsity that are implanted and prompted by evil spirits, more freedom is present than there would ever be in any state outside those times of temptation, though we cannot recognize it then. It is an interior freedom, which produces in us the will to subdue evil and which is great enough to match the power and might of the evil assailing us; otherwise we would not be able to fight at all. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1937:5)

Belief in revealed truth can be a huge blessing for us in our lives. It also carries the temptation to make our understanding and acceptance of this truth to be mandatory for others. The teachings for the New Church are very clear that this is not what we are supposed to do. It can be tempting

to think that if we are compelling ourselves to avoid some evil and from this do something good that we perhaps should make others do the same.

The lesson from *Divine Providence* speaks of why the spiritual freedom of each individual needs to be maintained. Even if our thinking is deeply flawed the Lord wants us to make decisions based on our own best understanding of what is true. If someone tells us what we must do and say, it does not become attached to us as our own and remain. Picture a young person showing up at work party and being appreciate for being there who then states “My dad made me come.” While that young person is present, he feels like an agent of his father. It was not his choice. Specifically *Divine Providence* states that while this young person may be doing something good to the extent he continues to see it as his father’s dictate, it does not contribute to his reformation and regeneration by the Lord. Forcing someone to do the right thing may do no good for their spiritual development. This is not the only risk. Consider this teaching from the *Arcana Caelestia*.

The Lord in no way compels anybody. No one who is compelled to think that which is true and to do that which is good is reformed, but instead thinks all the more what is false and wills all the more what is evil. This is so with all compulsion, as may also become clear from all the experience and lessons of life, which when learned prove two things - first, that human consciences will not allow themselves to be coerced, and second, that we strive after the forbidden. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1947:1)

Each of us might think that we do not compel others, but this compulsion can be just a matter of arguing a point of view so strongly that others not only do not accept our point, but instead start thinking of reasons why they are sure we are wrong, even reasons they have never thought of before. Or they just rebel and do the opposite of what we advocated. A story written about a boarding school in the late 19th century illustrates it. The headmaster gave a rousing address to the boys against the evils of cigarette smoking. He ended his stirring lecture with the assertion that if a boy was caught smoking he would be sent home and that this would kill his mother and so every cigarette he smoked was another nail in his mother’s coffin. The anecdote states that the boys were unanimous that the headmaster had outdone himself and that night every single boy was sneak smoking cigarettes and from then on cigarettes were known as coffin nails. Would you say that the headmaster’s address accomplished its goals? He tried to coerce the consciences of the boys under his charge with the result that they were more attracted to what he had tried to forbid.

Another example of attempting coercion related to an Old Testament law about how a pledge or, as it were, a pawned item should be treated is the following.

A person should not bind or incite others to confirm one's own truths, but should hear and take their answers as they are in themselves. For a person who binds and incites others to confirm his or her own truths, causes the other not to think and speak from themselves, but from another. And when anyone thinks and speaks from another, the truths that person has are thrown into disorder, and yet that person is not amended, except in the case of one who is as yet ignorant of these truths. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9213:6)

As you would well know there is a difference between wisely guiding a person to recognize the truth of a matter and trying to compel or by strong and emphatic words overwhelm that person into accepting an idea. Note what this teaching of the New Church states about the role of priests or preachers.

Priests must teach the people and guide them by means of truths to goodness of life; but they must not compel anyone, because no one can be compelled to hold beliefs contrary to what he thinks in his heart to be the truth. Anyone who holds beliefs that are different from the priest's and causes no trouble must be left in peace. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10798)

Each of us can also have healthy roles in helping others live wiser and more useful lives. In the book of Ezekiel there is what is called the law of the watchmen (Ezekiel 33:1-6). In ancient times, if the watchman on the wall of a city saw enemies approach, he was to sound a trumpet alarm. If the people ignored him, he had done his part and was innocent of the resulting tragedy. If however he did not sound the alarm, he carried responsibility for that tragedy. In our lives there can be times that we see another adult heading toward what might be a poor decision, and we can could tell them “Don’t do that.” This is a command. On the other hand we could say something like “I’m concerned that the consequences of what you seem to be planning will be bad for you and for others.” The person may dismiss your concern and may indeed do something harmful to self and others. And the person may recognize that he or she has been heading towards trouble and change behavior.

This sermon opened with a significant observation about the leaves of the tree of life in the Holy City New Jerusalem. They were for the healing of the nations. This refers to one other use of what we for ourselves acknowledge to be divine truth. In an explanation of these healing leaves we are taught:

This symbolizes the resulting rational truths by which people caught up in evils and the accompanying falsities are brought to think sanely and to live decently . . . People caught up in evils and the accompanying falsities cannot be healed by the Word, because they do not read it. However, if they have the judgment, they can be healed by rational truths. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 936)

These rational truths are ideas that make sense. Because the listener does not acknowledge their source in Divine revelation, the appeal cannot be to that authority. Instead what we are called to do is to put what we see to be the Lord speaking to us in language that another can recognize as a wise idea. Perhaps you could make an observation to another about parenting, marriage, the role of usefulness in lasting happiness, or the idea that we are capable of experiencing negative experiences and choosing a positive and constructive response. These observations could be the healing leaves of the tree of life. Helping others with these ideas is an important part of the New Church that the Lord would like to have guide our lives.

I hope you recognize and acknowledge that the Lord has given us a powerful and broad sight what is truly loving and wise in the books revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. May we, for ourselves, accept them as Divine revelation that should guide our lives. May we also attend to what they say about not making others follow our truths apart from their understanding and free

choice. May we cooperate with the Lord as we interact with the people around us with a deep and wise kindness. AMEN.

Lessons: Revelation 21 portions, 22:1-5, *Apocalypse Revealed*, Preface, *Divine Providence* 72

Revelation 21 portions

⁹ Then one of the seven angels . . . came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. . . . ¹⁸ The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: . . . ²¹ The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass. ²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

Revelation 22:1-5

¹ And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In between the street, and the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. ³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴ They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads.

***Apocalypse Revealed*, Preface**

Everyone can see that the book of Revelation cannot possibly be explained except by the Lord alone, for every single word in it contains arcana - arcana which never would be known without a singular enlightenment and thus revelation. Consequently it has pleased the Lord to open for me the sight of my spirit and teach me. Do not suppose therefore that I have acquired anything there on my own, or from any angel, but from the Lord alone.

Divine Providence 72

Whatever we do in freedom, whether it accords with reason or not, provided it accords with our reason, appears to us as our own doing.

Whatever we do in freedom in accordance with our thought becomes attached to us as our own and remains.

It is by means of these two faculties that we are reformed and regenerated by the Lord, and we cannot be reformed and regenerated apart from them.