

## I THINK: THEREFORE I AM?

## THE NATURE OF THOUGHT

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As educators we have a continuing interest in thought—our own and that of our students. Unless we have brought to it sustained and disciplined thinking, our presence in the classroom is an impertinence; and unless our students find in the instruction offered a stimulus to thought, and a directed challenge to broaden the scope and increase the depth of their thinking, the work of education is not being done. So it seemed appropriate to attempt to bring together what the Writings have to say about the nature of thought and present it for your consideration. It is not likely that you will hear things you have never heard or read before; but there can be value in ordering under a single view many things which in themselves are quite well known. The educational implications will for the most part, and quite safely, be left to you, with confidence that they will be seen and brought out in the discussion that is to follow this address.

## THOUGHT IS PECULIAR TO MAN

Education is both a human and a humanizing process. Animals may be trained, but they cannot be educated. One ground of this distinction—and this, of course, is a fundamental difference between man and animal—is that man has the ability to think. Yet that is not the whole story. Man is not man from the fact that he can think! His humanness lies in the fact that he is endowed with dual thought, in the things he can think about and the things he can think, and in the fact that his thought is two-directional.

Man has both a higher and a lower thought, and in the light of the former he can view the latter. Unless it were so he would be no more than a brute, and he is above the beasts in that he can think not only about the causes of things but also about the Divine. Not only can he think, but he can think what is true and will what is good, and when he is so doing he can view the Divine and

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receive it perceptibly. By communication with the internal mind he can think about celestial and spiritual things, which animals cannot do; and by communication with the external mind he can think about worldly and bodily things. The obvious implications here are that what makes man truly a man is not the possession of these abilities but their exercise; that he is distinguished from the beasts in the actual use of them; and that education for manhood, in the generic sense, is largely training in the development of these abilities from a proper love of using and excelling in them.<sup>1</sup>

#### THOUGHT AND THE WHOLE MAN

Yet thought is not the man himself. On this point the Writings are both specific and detailed, and as educators we may usefully reflect on what they teach about the relation of thought to the whole man. Because his thought appears, whereas his love does not, there is a belief, the Writings observe, that thought constitutes the entire life of man. But, they insist, thought alone does not make man's life. There are two things that do so—the will and the understanding, or love and thought. Without the affection of love, thought does not make anything of man's life; and if love or its affection is taken away, thought ceases. Therefore the Writings conclude that love is the life of man and thought is the first effect of life. The question this raises about the validity of Descartes' well-known but variously rendered, *Cogito, ergo sum*, is what suggested the title of this address.

The will is the man himself; the thought is outside him unless it proceeds from his will. If it does so, will and thought make one, and together make the man. Otherwise the thought does not form man's spirit and it does not turn the interiors of the mind. Affection is the life and soul of thought; without it man cannot even think; and we are told that even with infants all the thinking faculty is of truth adjoined to the will which is of good. Love is therefore prior to thought and produces it. When love enters the understanding it first produces the affection of truth; then the affection of understanding that which it knows; and finally the affection of seeing in the thought of the body that which it understands.

Two sets of teachings emphasize the dependence of thought upon affection and thus clarify further the place of thought in the whole

<sup>1</sup> AR 947: 2; AC 5084: 5, 5302, 1702: 2.

man. The first is that love is the *esse* of man's life and thought the *existere* therefrom; wherefore speech and action do not flow from the thought but from the will through the thought. In other words, the *esse* of thought is will, and the form of will is thought, which therefore derives its *existere* from the will. Will is substance, thought is form; and this leads to the second set of teachings, the gist of which is that thought in its origin is the affection of love and is the form of that affection. Thoughts are the forms of the affections, and the states of thought are nothing but the various forms into which the general form has been distributed. Therefore thought is simply the affection made visible in various forms by the influx of light.

This has implications that will be taken up in a moment. But first we would note the conclusions to which these teachings lead, which are found plainly stated in the Writings. Thought is posterior to will, for the will causes man to think in one way rather than in another, and it is the will which directs the thought to its objects. Thus all thought is according to the affection. It has its belief, its life and its quality from the affections and their ends, and is such as the affection is; and nothing can possibly enter into man's memory and remain there unless there is an affection which introduces it. Without that there can be no observation.<sup>2</sup>

#### THOUGHT IS ORGANIC

With these things noted, we may turn to the implications of the teaching that thoughts are forms—forms of affection. The Writings instruct us that thoughts are not abstract things, and they warn us against the idea that, being spiritual, thoughts inflow as it were naked and not through organized forms. Thoughts, they say, are substances and forms, are organic, and not mere exhalations. Thought is internal sight, and as man cannot see in the body without an organ of vision, neither can he think without an organic substance, a subject which is a substance, in which to do so.

Although the teaching here is a familiar one, we may usefully note it again. Affections are nothing but changes in the state of the purely organic substances of the mind, and thoughts are nothing

<sup>2</sup> Wis. x: 7; AE 901: 2; AC 8910: 2, 33; DLW 2: TCR 510; LJ 36; AE 1163e; Wis. x: 2; AC 9550, 3849, 3599: 2; DLW 404, 412e; CL 36; Life 48; AC 9995: 2; AR 875: 2; AC 5102; HH 236: 2; AE 837; AC 6273; HH 532: 2; AC 2363e, 2488, 2689: 4, 2694: 3, 3336: 2.

but changes and variations in the form of these substances. Memory is the state of these changes and variations that remains permanent. Affections and thoughts are possible only in substances and forms which are subjects; and as these exist in the brain, which is full of substances and forms, the forms are called purely organic. All the operations of the mind, then, are variations of form, and the ideas of thought are nothing else; and these variations come forth according to the changes of state of affections; the changes of state of the thoughts being in those of the affections as singulars are in generals.

To follow the argument here we may find it helpful to recall the correspondence between external and internal sight. The sight does not go forth to its objects, neither do they enter the eye. Light waves, if we may call them so for the moment, emanating from the object strike upon the eye, which reacts to their activity by turning it into nerve impulses which are carried along the optic nerve to the brain, where they induce a change on the state of the cortical cells which the mind interprets as a sensation of sight. Similarly, thought is caused by influx—which should not be conceived of as an inpouring, but as an active force impinging on the organic substances of the mind, and causing variations in the forms of those substances, which variations are thoughts. That is why it is said that thoughts are substances and forms, that thought is organic; and we are taught that the organics of thought are in the brain, whence flow the invisible fibers by which the thought is led forth.<sup>3</sup>

### THOUGHT IS SPIRITUAL

Nevertheless thought is spiritual. It has a mechanism, but it is not a mechanical process. Its true cause does not lie in electrochemical or any other natural activity. Although its organics are in the brain, thought is itself spiritual. On this the Writings are quite clear. Man's natural mind consists, they teach, of spiritual substances together with natural substances, and thought comes from its spiritual substances, not from its natural substances. These recede when the man dies, while its spiritual substances do not. To think and will is spiritual, and to speak and act is natural;

<sup>3</sup> AC 3726: 4; Infl. 12: 5; DLW 42; HH 434; AC 444; DP 279: 6, 314: 2; AC 4850e; SD 3471; AC 6326.

and speech and action simply re-present in another form the thought and will which produce them.

In the minds of some there appears to be a certain amount of confusion in regard to this. They are apt to assume that thought is spiritual only when man is thinking of spiritual things. In one sense that is true. What needs to be realized is, of course, that we have here two distinct usages of the term, spiritual. According to the quality of the love to which it gives form, and the degree or plane of the mind in which it takes place, man's thought is spiritual or natural, rational or imaginative, internal or external, even corporeal or sensual. Yet the act of thinking is always a spiritual process, whatever the subjects and objects of the thought may be, for the atmospheres which transmit the forces that cause thought, and the forces themselves, are spiritual, not natural.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE SOURCES OF THOUGHT

Because thought is spiritual it is under spiritual laws. The first of these is that thought does not originate in man himself. Neither, despite the appearance, does it inflow from without; for it is contrary to order for what is lower to inflow into what is higher. All things of thought inflow from within, from the Lord, and this in two ways. Through remains the Lord inflows into the rational, and through this into the external mind. Also, intellectual truth—the spiritual itself which inflows from heaven by an internal way is like a light that illuminates; and by means of these two things man is given the faculty of knowing, thinking and understanding. Light continually inflows from the Lord into man's rational, and through that into his scientifics and cognitions, and not only adapts them to reception but also disposes them into order, and thus causes man to be able to think.

It is true that this is contrary to the appearance, for the objects and ideas of thought seem to enter from without and to be in the light of the world. Yet the reality is that they merely store themselves up in the memory under visual forms, and that it is spiritual light enlightening these forms that causes man to think, conclude and reflect; and that he can do so is solely because his understanding is separable from his will and can be elevated into the light of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> AC 5173e; DLW 257: 5.

Nothing could be further from the truth, then, than the belief that man thinks from himself. No one can think from himself, but from others, and these again from others, and so on; for all of man's thought comes from the Lord by influx through the spiritual world. As to his spirit man is in the society of spirits; as to his interior thought, which is spiritual, he is with angels; and if these societies of spirits and angels were taken away from him he would have neither thought nor will. Thus man does not have a single idea, or the least part thereof, from himself. What is evil and false he has through evil spirits from hell, and what is good and true through angels from the Lord. It should be noted, however, that although everything man thinks inflows from the Lord, He is not the cause of man's thinking evil and falsity; and that although everything that man thinks inflows from others, the responsibility, and the fault if fault there be, is with and in the receiver. For thoughts are not introduced into men by spirits, but only affections. Man has choice, and he can, in thought, receive good and reject evil. This is a vital distinction. It enables us to enter rightly into the truth that man does not think from himself, but is given by the Lord to think in all appearance as from himself.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE DEPENDENCIES OF THOUGHT

However, thought is also dependent upon other things than influx from the Lord through the spiritual world, essential as that influx is. It is dependent on interior things. Without good and truth, we are told, man could neither will nor think anything. If this seems somewhat remote and abstract, we need only reflect that all man's thinking is from truth or non-truth, and all his willing from good or non-good. Thought, speech and action, which are the ultimates of order, are nothing else than truths from good, or falsities from evil, because they are the images or forms of good or evil; and all of man's thought is employed really in concluding whether things are true or not under whatever criteria of truth he has adopted.

Thought is therefore dependent on good and truth, for without the reality the image cannot be formed, and it is dependent also on the interior memory because it is dependent on ideas. Nothing can

<sup>5</sup> AC 3219 : 2, 1707 : 3, 1901 : 2, 2004 : 2, 2619 : 2, 4042, 3938e, 3747 : 3, 3020 : 2; HH 277; Infl. 8 : 4; AC 4408, 5477 : 2; Infl. 15 : 5; AC 10215e, 2886, 2888e, 10604e, 4077e, 4067 : 2, 904 : 3; DP 289 : 2, 294 : 2; HH 298; DP 321 : 5.

be thought without an idea; and to the interior memory, which is within and above the corporeal memory of particulars and of material things, pertain all rational things, from the ideas of which thought itself proceeds. Furthermore, the understanding of any subject is according to the ideas; being none if there is no idea, obscure if the idea is obscure, perverted if the idea is perverted, and clear if the idea is clear. Here the term, idea, has two meanings. It is ideas from which thought proceeds, but ideas must also be formed by thought and reflection, and this is something that every man must do for himself. For one man cannot give ideas to another; he can only transmit knowledges and thereby enlighten the ideas which the other has formed for himself by thought within himself. To those who may not already have studied them, I would recommend a series of three articles on "Ideas" by the Rev. Elmo C. Acton, published in *New Church Life*, January through March, 1967.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE BASES OF THOUGHT

While thought is thus spiritual in its origin and is dependent upon spiritual things, it has certain very ultimate bases as long as we live in this world. All of man's thoughts, we are instructed, are terminated in natural things which are of the sensuous, and even the ideas of interior thought are terminated in material things. There must always be some appearances from sensuous things upon which the thought may lean. Thoughts and ideas with man are founded upon spaces and times; so much so that in his lower mind man can scarcely think without them. Indeed if space and time are abstracted from that thought he can scarcely perceive anything, although this is not so when he thinks in interior rational light.

Unless the external natural served the internal as a plane, therefore, man could not think at all. That is why this plane is formed first, from infancy; and its formation includes as an essential ingredient the acquisition of scientifics—the things impressed upon the memory from things of sense upon which the ideas of thought are founded. Scientifics, it will be recalled, are of three kinds—intellectual, rational and sensuous. All of these are planted in the memories; and while man lives in the body he thinks from those which are from the things of sense, for it is these things that come

<sup>6</sup> AC 5288 : 2, 5259, 3623e, 3727, 4526e, 2329 : 6, 2471, 1639.

to his perception. In childhood, indeed, scientifics are acquired for no other purpose than that of knowing, but they are disposed by the Lord in order so as to serve for use: first to give the ability to think; then that they may be of use as means of thought; and finally that they may take effect, that is, that the very life may consist in use and be a life of uses. Evidently, then, while the acquisition of scientifics should never be an end in itself, the scientifics of a subject-field must be acquired in that field if there is to be thought in it, and if that thought is to lead to use, and we should encourage the various loves which promote these ends.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE NEED TO THINK ABSTRACTLY

Here, however, there is another vital distinction to be observed. Although ideas of thought are terminated in sensuous things, the termination is not the idea itself. It is that something natural which is adjoined, that something material upon which the idea is founded, the ultimate upon which the idea rests and which makes it determinate; but it is not the idea. Analogy may be helpful here. When we first meet a person, our thought about him is largely confined to his appearance, manner and behavior. When we get to know him we will still visualize his shape; but our thought now is really of what he stands for and what he does, and the mental image of his shape serves to identify as uniquely his the character which these things form and as a focus for our affections. We think of the essence that is the real person, and from that of the ultimate.

Now this process of seeing within the ultimate form what is essential, thinking of that, and then from it to the form, is what the Writings call abstraction. It is a power of the rational mind, and as that mind is opened it must be exercised and developed gradually if spiritual things are to enter. Unless man learns to think abstractly from what is natural and sensuous, or nearly so, by means of the rational mind, fallacies cannot possibly be dispelled, what is natural cannot be removed, and what is honest, just and good cannot be clearly seen. Fortunately, however, the understanding can be elevated into the light of heaven and abstract thinking thus take place. To the extent that it does, man becomes truly rational; in proportion as it does not he remains sensuous; and in the degree

<sup>7</sup> AC 2553, 7381: 2, 2209e, 8918; AR 947: 2; AC 5165: 2, 1435, 991, 1487, 5110: 2.

that it occurs he can understand better what is honest, just and good.<sup>8</sup>

### THE PLANE OF THOUGHT

When we inquire as to where thinking takes place we encounter an apparent difficulty. In one passage it is said that thought does not belong to the internal man, as the learned have supposed; for in the internal man there are nothing but goods and truths which belong to the Lord, and in the interior man conscience has been implanted by the Lord; and yet the evil and even the worst of men have thought, and so have those who are devoid of conscience, which shows that thought does not belong to the internal but to the external man. In another passage, however, it is said that the rational or internal man is that which thinks, and not the external or natural man, although it appears to man as if thought were in his external.

Obviously the difficulty is more apparent than real. Terms in the Writings usually have more than one meaning, and it is evident that in the first passage "internal" means the internal man itself, while in the second passage it refers to the rational; and the reconciliation of the appearance and the reality is found in the teaching that unless the internal or rational thought in the external it would not be possible for man to think at all. As long as man lives in the body he thinks from the rational in the natural; in one way, however, when the natural corresponds to the rational, in another way when it does not. When it does, he is truly rational and thinks spiritually.<sup>9</sup>

### THE LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIALITIES OF THOUGHT

Admittedly human thought has its limitations, some of which are inherent in the conditions of natural life while others are self-imposed. The ancients and the most ancients, we are told, thought in the spirit almost abstractly from the body, whereas the man of the present day thinks in the body almost abstractly from the spirit. It will be the task of the church to remedy this. However, no man can ever think of himself from intellectual truth, but only from rational and scientific truth; and as long as he lives in the world,

<sup>8</sup> AC 5119e, 9828e, 5094: 2, 6598, 8985e.

<sup>9</sup> AC 978, 3679: 2, 4.

which we take to mean, as long as he lives the life of the world, he thinks from natural and worldly things and not from spiritual and heavenly ones. The thought of the sensuous man is so on the surface that it is almost in the same light as the eye. It does not go beyond the sensuous things of the body, and it has no awareness that there is such a thing as interior thought.

Other limitations also are self-imposed. The more man's thought partakes of space and time, and is directed to persons and qualities, the more limited and confined it is; and the same is true when it is directed to names and words, to terms and distinctions, and to the words rather than the meaning of a speaker. Especially, we are warned, is it limited by the conceit that springs up when men suppose that they have thought of things all by themselves! Unless these limitations can be overcome, and the thought by elevated, man cannot have a relish for anything interior in the Word.

But if thought has limitations it has also boundless potentialities. Man alone is a recipient of the three degrees of both worlds and can therefore think analytically and rationally. He has been created with the potentiality of being elevated by the Lord as to his thought, so that he can think above time, space and other natural properties, and can think of God and of Divine and spiritual things; and the more interiorly his thought goes the more perfect does it become, because it is nearer the influx of good and truth.<sup>10</sup>

#### THOUGHT IN THE SUCCESSIVE AGES OF MAN

Evidently it is not possible in one address to cover all that the Writings have to say about the nature of thought. It might be objected that much of what has been said is more applicable to adult thought than to that of children and young people. However, it is toward truly adult thinking that we are trying to lead our students and for it that we are trying to prepare them. To meet the objection, somewhat we sketch what is taught about thought in the successive ages of man.

From infancy to childhood man receives only earthly, corporeal and worldly things through the senses of the body, and from these his ideas and thoughts are formed. Communication with the

<sup>10</sup> AC 9396: 2, 1904: 3, 4857: 3, 7693: 2, 6310: 2; HH 169; AE 724: 35; AC 5287: 1, 2, 5089: 2; DLW 66; AC 4525: 2; DLW 69e, 71; AC 6007.

interior man has not yet been opened. He thinks and composes his ideas from sensuous things, and the affection of knowing then makes the internal. But as he grows up he thinks from scientifics and then, from sensuous things, forms conclusions as to causes, thus beginning to think from the interior natural. Afterwards he thinks from truths, which is the way to judgment.

Another series, evidently referring to the spiritual ages of man, puts it this way. In his first age man knows only by memory the things of the Word and doctrine, and believes himself to be good when he knows many things therefrom and can apply some of them, not to his own life, but to the lives of others. In his second age he begins to reflect upon these things from his own thought, and is in the affection of truth from a kind of worldly love, which is also the means of his learning many things that would otherwise be left unlearned. In his third age, if he can be regenerated, he begins to think from use and to reflect on what he reads in the Word and acquires from doctrine, and no longer puts truth so much in the first place. Then in his fourth age, which is that of his regeneration, he loves the Word and doctrine from it for the sake of life and use.<sup>11</sup>

### CONCLUSION

No apology is made for the amount of ground covered in this address. It was felt that what was being done was simply to marshal, survey and review teachings that in themselves are well known to the members of this faculty. Perhaps we may finish with a cautionary postscript which seems to sum up the matter very neatly. It is sometimes asked whether it is possible to think nothing, whether that would not in itself be an act of thought. The Writings say that it is and that it would be, and they supply an interesting definition. To think nothing, they say, is to think obscurely of many things at once, and not distinctly of anything.<sup>12</sup> The implications of this statement for the New Church educator require no comment!

<sup>11</sup> AC 5126 : 2, 5497, 5774 : 2; DP 105 ; AC 3603 : 3.

<sup>12</sup> AC 5185e.