NOTES FROM OUR READERS

New Illustrations Needed

The interest in New Church philosophy and Swedenborg's philosophy seems at the present to be at a low among New Church people at large. The reasons for this may be several and difficult to define. One of them is, however, a vague feeling that New Church philosophy is antiquated. This attitude is noticeable particularly among young people, but it seems to be rather widely spread in older groups too. The root of this attitude is largely one of confusion. Swedenborg not only developed philosophical doctrines and principles with eternal validity; he frequently illustrated and confirmed them with appropriate parts of the scientific knowledge of his day. Now, principles and doctrines are often difficult to understand and not easily absorbed and memorized, while illustrative material of more practical character is easily committed to memory. To young minds, and probably unconsciously, these more accessible practical illustrations give their color to the principles and become a part of them, to a degree which Swedenborg did not intend. Science has developed tremendously since Swedenborg's day, and many of his illustrations are no longer valid. The impact of today's rapidly developing science and technology on young minds is very great. They look with suspicion and contempt on everything "ancient." Since the illustrative material often is foremost in their minds and must be discarded, the same fate easily befalls the principles and doctrines themselves, or at least they are suspected of being antiquated.

It is therefore important that the present confusion be eliminated and the principles and doctrines be given their distinct place in our minds as the platform from which we should judge and evaluate and direct the happenings of today.

Certainly there are several ways to attack the problem. Here only one will be suggested, which at the same time (we hope) will give this journal new and interesting articles and thus make it the mirror of the new philosophy that it is intended to be.

Most New Church men have at least a vague idea of the more important doctrines and principles of New Church philosophy, but they have great difficulty seeing how those apply to modern life. For instance: What does modern cosmology and physics say about "the open world theory"? Is there evidence for a continuous

creation or preservation of the known universe from an "outside" source? Does modern research indicate the probability of universal atmospheres? How do the doctrines of Degrees, Series, and Forms apply to modern physics and chemistry? What do modern psychology, biology and medicine say about mind and body and the intercourse between them? End, cause and effect constitute a fundamental trine in New Church philosophy; what do modern philosophy and science say about this law of events? These are only a few of the questions which could be asked.

We have surprisingly many New Church men working in prominent positions in various fields of modern life. It would be of great interest and value to hear their views about how the developments in their respective fields relate to New Church philosophy. Let us bring out our philosophy and confront it with modern experience!

LENNART O. ALFELT

TELEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS—SHALL WE AVOID THEM?

In *Science Education* for February 1960 is an article by Mervin E. Oakes, Queens College, Flushing, New York, called "'Watch Your Language'—How to Avoid Teleology." This is one of a number of articles pleading for the elimination from science teaching of any explanations or expressions that imply a purpose or plan in nature. Oakes cites the following as bad examples: "Birds build nests *in order to* have a safe place to lay their eggs"; "Glucose is burned *for* energy"; "The leaves of the plant turn toward the window *so that* greater surface will be exposed to the light." "Blood *must not* clot inside the blood vessels, as it would block the circulation." The author also objects to animistic and anthropomorphic expressions in the physical sciences such as, "The solution is *itching* to grow crystals" and "So *eager* are sodium atoms to lose electrons, so *anxious* are chlorine atoms to receive them that. . . ." He would like to do away with loose and vague terms which are often misleading, as in "the blood *rushes* through the heart," and "food is manufactured with the *aid* of chlorophyll."

The philosophical writings of Swedenborg are full of such expressions. "The cortical substance contracts . . . *in order that* active forces and their endeavors. . . ." "The cause of this . . . is evident, for in this way and no other can the cortical

origins bring forth their offspring." Not only did Swedenborg believe that things were created in order to perform certain functions, but: "From a distinct knowledge of the ordination of this substance we may conclude concerning the offices which each one of its congeries . . . is to perform in the body." "The connection between ends and means forms the very life and essence of nature." He frequently speaks of parts of the human body as lesser monarchs in their own realms, and of inanimate particles as having conatus.

Some of Swedenborg's expressions are obviously poetic analogies, as in his personification of nature and of organs in the human body. Such expressions, common in Swedenborg's day, are not today, and we should, I believe, avoid them unless the meaning is clear to the audience.

We should also, I think, avoid the implication that molecules have human intelligence and loves; for example, that air molecules see a vacuum and rush toward it like children to an empty playground. This gives a dramatic picture, and is all right in its place as long as the audience knows it is just a picture.

More important to avoid is the impression that animals and plants adapt *themselves* to their environment. Mr. Oakes would have us substitute the words "have become adapted." This seems to me to be a good idea, especially if the students are taught that the adaptation came about according to the plan of the Creator, whether through the process of natural selection or not.

As for statements containing the words "in order to," "for," and the like, it is important to impart the idea to our students that the purpose and planning are not in the plant or animal or organ, or molecule, but from the Divine Creator. In science we are looking for the means which God has used to achieve His purpose. We may say that leaves turn toward the window so that greater surface will be exposed to the light, or, as Mr. Oakes would prefer, "Unequal growth of the leaf-stem or petiole by the action of auxins results in turning of the leaves toward the light." The important thing is to acknowledge that this turning is not a lucky accident, nor something the leaf thought of, but that it is part of the whole scheme of Divine creation.

Our effort in science teaching should be to emphasize teleology, to search for causes and purposes, and to study the evidences of design in nature, but we should avoid the impression that the

purpose lies within the things of nature. "The sign that we desire to be wise, is the wish to know the causes of things" (*Pr.*, p. 2).

MORNA HYATT

FORMS OF MOTION

The study of molecules and atoms is a very old one which has been brought to a fine point in this century. Though minute atoms and their parts cannot be seen they can be studied, measured in various ways, classified and, more recently, split and fused. These studies indicate that all matter is made up of the same things, namely electrons and the several things in the nucleus or center of the atom.

Most of the atom is space and what matter there is, is at times difficult to distinguish from motion. All material things, the ordinary objects around us, a wooden chair, a glass, a clock, a metal table, even a human hand, are essentially the same thing, namely forms of motion. Their atoms are all made up of electrons and the minute particles of the nucleus in different combinations.

I once conversed on this point with an ardent agnostic. He used this fact as an argument in favor of the non-existence of God. If we are all, he argued—if all things are, little more than negatively and positively charged electrical impulses, what evidence is there of God? A worm, a tree, a man are all essentially the same thing!

Yet, is this not far more powerfully a strong argument in favor of the existence of God? If all things of the material world are essentially merely forms of motion does not the material world immediately seem much less substantial and the spiritual world much closer and more real? On a discretely different plane the things of the spiritual world, angels, too, are forms of motion. If the things of the material world were not reducible to anything below the different elements, lead, carbon, gold, etc., would they not seem much more substantial and to have existence from themselves?

Reduced essentially to forms of motion they seem much less to have existence. Instead they argue for a belief in a Creator of all things human and material, whose creation is characterized by a vast and complex variety of forms into which the genesis of all motion, the Divine love and wisdom, may flow.

SIG' SYNNESTVEDT