

THE DYNAMIC THEORY OF CREATION

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I have recently re-read the series of articles on *The Human Mind* by Dr. H. Lj. Odhner, as published in the NEW PHILOSOPHY, from January 1954 through January 1956. This is a very valuable study, including an historic survey of ideas concerning the nature of the human mind, and contrasting these with the teaching of the Writings on the subject. It is a distinct contribution to the philosophic thought of the New Church.

I was particularly intrigued by what is there said concerning "conatus" as affording a key to the rational understanding of the whole process of Divine creation, and at the same time giving an insight into the relation between the spiritual world and the natural world, and between the mind of man and the body.

This key is what I could call the Dynamic Theory of Creation. It was first propounded by Emanuel Swedenborg in his philosophical works, and later, as to its spiritual implications, was Divinely revealed in the Writings.

Up to the time of Swedenborg, and indeed up to the beginning of the twentieth century, it was taken for granted that the ultimate reality, the ultimate *substance* of nature was the atom, conceived as a solid, inert, and dead unit out of which all material things were made. These minute objects were found to be in constant motion, under the impulse of invisible forces. Because these forces are invisible, they cannot be known except by means of their effects. They are conceived as a mysterious attraction or repulsion between solid bodies. They are called gravitation, magnetism, electricity, heat and light. Because they are intrinsically unknowable, the conclusion is reached that knowable reality is confined to objects composed of atoms.

Now if the ultimate reality is death and inertia, one cannot avoid the conclusion that even the infinite substance of God must be characterized or conceived under some similar idea. The universe, then, must be thought of as substances broken off from the Infinite, separated from it into distinct parts. By the same reasoning, if there is a spiritual world this also must consist of solid particles, a kind of spiritual stuff, similar to matter, only mysteriously more perfect and wondrously pliable. In fact, some such concept

as this plagued the Church at the time of the Beekman controversy, and any effort to remove this idea seemed to many to deprive the spiritual world of all reality, and make it purely visionary.

However, when scientists discovered that the atom was not the ultimate substance of the universe, but that within it was a tremendous source of energy, which could not be explained on the basis of solid particles in motion, nothing remained except what has been called a "field of force." If this is indeed the ultimate substance of nature, then the mind is confronted with but two possible conclusions: either atomic energy is self-producing and self-perpetuating, in which case it is god; or else it is produced, and perpetually maintained by something prior to itself.

Swedenborg knew nothing of atomic energy, but he contended that inert substance could be divided indefinitely, even to the infinite, and that in the process it would approach ever more nearly to the nature of the Infinite, which he conceived of as Life Itself, the source of all activity in the entire universe. He pictured creation as a process whereby activity, which in the Infinite was called "pure and total motion," turned in upon itself to produce limits or boundaries, and at last atoms from which come apparently solid surfaces. These, however, are only appearances, for if the activity which produces them were to cease even for the smallest fraction of an instant, they would immediately be dissipated.

What is clearly revealed in the Writings is that there are two distinct kinds of activity. There is the activity of love, which, when it turns in upon itself, produces manifest qualities, apparently separate qualities, all of which in the Infinite are distinctly but perfectly One. Thus we are told that the spiritual sun, which is the first proceeding from the Infinite, consists of "discrete substances." The same is said of all the atmospheres, both spiritual and natural. Yet the spiritual sun is said to be "pure love" and "love" is identified with "life." The discrete substances of the spiritual atmospheres are qualities of love, distinguished and set apart, in accommodation to reception by human minds.

The second kind of activity is defined as "motion in space," which in its origin is the fire of the natural sun, and in its derivatives is atomic energy, which produces the appearance of spatial objects. Because all man's ideas of form are derived from these spatial objects through the bodily senses, man cannot think apart from space and time. Yet, when these mental pictures are ordered

by a love, they become ideals through which the qualities of love are perceived, which have nothing to do with space, but only of the appearance of space.

Such are all the objects of human thought and affection. They are forms of love, which are distinguished from one another, not by space but by qualities. They put on the appearance of space only because every idea of form is derived from the objects of nature. This is why the visible and tangible objects of the spiritual world appear similar to the objects of nature, when yet they are altogether different in essence, being forms of love produced by the activity of love rather than forms produced by motion in space.

There are then three distinctly different kinds of activity, related to one another only by correspondence. "Life Itself" is called "pure and total motion," which, being infinite, cannot be grasped by any finite mind. From this are produced spiritual limitations, distinctions of quality, which appear as the objects of the spiritual world, goods and truths, and their combination in spiritual uses. These are the real things of heaven. Yet they are only appearances, produced by limits and boundaries within the Divine substance. To produce such boundaries there is no dividing of the Infinite life, which is wholly and perpetually present, creating, sustaining, and perpetuating. From this activity of love then is produced energy—motion in space, the natural sun—extended by means of the natural atmospheres, and as it were coming to rest in the atom. But the activity of love is the all-in-all of material things, governing them in such a way as to produce uses—natural uses and spiritual uses—all of which are but mirrors of the Divine love and wisdom, making the qualities of God visible and tangible to human minds.

According to this universal theory, it becomes far more possible to understand something of how the mind can operate on the body, that is, how the activity of love can produce motion in space, and direct the life of the body. For this is the same as the mode by which the entire spiritual world affects the natural world—governs and directs the forces of nature to produce forms of use, through which the Lord's love and wisdom may be perceived and known and loved by men.