

## THE NATURAL BASIS OF SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE

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### **New Ideas in Accordance with Cherished Beliefs**

All Christians, and many others believe the world was created by God. The idea that creation is a continuing process is less widely held, but many people are familiar with the view that the world we see and touch is but the outer garment of a more real world of spirit. Some who believe and feel that it is so do not have any definite and detailed theory as to how this garment is worn or as to how the inner reality expresses itself in the external things which impinge upon our senses. Others have adopted clear ideas and it has been said that the world of the spirit re-presents itself in nature<sup>1</sup> and it does so in a consistent and orderly way. This means that the properties of one may be realistically illustrated by those of the other.

For this reason the Lord chose illustrations from nature to teach us about the kingdom of heaven. The obvious content of His teaching was limited to the capacity of his hearers. The less obvious content can be revealed in ever-increasing richness and detail as the human race (or at least part of it) increases in intelligence and wisdom. The work that follows will demonstrate that we are now in a position to learn much more detail about the world of spirit, for if all the world of nature is a re-presentation of the spiritual world our scientific knowledge should enable us to appreciate more keenly the relation between the spiritual and the material. We will then be able to understand more clearly what has been revealed concerning spiritual things.

*A knowledge of the relations between natural and spiritual things can be used to present spiritual truths clearly to the affirmative rational mind.*

The relation between natural and spiritual things is sometimes fairly obvious as in most of the Lord's parables, but once it is accepted that it is a consistent and orderly relationship rather than a matter of poetical imagery merely, then it becomes possible to see more clearly what is involved in many doctrines of faith by means of our knowledge of the facts of nature in which spiritual truths are represented.

A simple example will make this clear. Important teaching is presented in the parable of the sower and the explanation of it

<sup>1</sup>M. W. Stanley, "Emanuel Swedenborg, Scientist Philosopher and Theologian," *The Swedenborg lending Library and Enquiry Centre*, Sydney

(Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23). It is possible, however, to go further by considering the role of water in the germination of seed and its subsequent growth. The Lord spoke of the water of life (John 4:10,14) and our knowledge of the growth of plants makes it clear that the seed He sows will not be fruitful unless the recipient approaches Him for that spiritual thing which corresponds to water. The natural knowledge behind this is not new; what is new is our understanding of what water does for the plant in dissolving nourishing minerals out of the earth, in carrying them throughout the plant and, in part, in combining with CO<sub>2</sub> in photosynthesis to produce the actual tissues of the growing plant. The spiritual counterparts of these things will be presented in more detail in a forthcoming article where it will be shown how the processes that go on in plants can be related to those in the mind of man during his spiritual growth. The correspondence between these two different living systems emphasizes the importance of love and wisdom, shows how the Lord is all-in-all, and at the same time indicates the importance of man's own free response. At present, however, we confine our attention to a general consideration of correspondences as a whole.

*The relation between the spiritual and the natural is an orderly and consistent one of cause and effect.*

Science has advanced to its present state on the assumption that the laws of nature operate all the time and without any exceptions. Apparent exceptions have always pointed the way to further discoveries. Once it is accepted that spiritual things are within it, it is easy to adopt the view, at least as a hypothesis, that they act in an orderly and consistent way to produce effects in the visible things of nature. It is important to emphasize that the orderly and consistent operation of spiritual things directs our attention for the time being away from unusual phenomena such as ghosts, poltergeists and similar occurrences. Our hypothesis is that spiritual things do not occasionally make use of natural things present, as if they were independently, but that all the natural things are produced and activated by the inflowing of spiritual things. Thus that no flower blooms, no star glows but as a result of spiritual entities acting according to established laws. This can be a matter of faith to those who prefer to make it so rather than to think more deeply, but for those who wish for confirmation there is at least one place where happenings of this kind can actually be observed, and that is in man himself.

*The actions of human beings illustrate the production of material effects by spiritual causes.*

In a man we have many spiritual forces which are things of the mind or spirit; love, for example. Love makes a man's material body act in many ways in the material world, thus a spiritual thing causes natural things to happen. The relation between the spiritual cause or love, and the natural effect or bodily action is a relation of consistent laws. The fact that the laws are very numerous and that their interplay is complex does not take away their consistency. Even the simple act of a loving father smiling at his child is governed by consistent laws although it requires an interplay of many nerve impulses within the brain and between the brain and the face.

*There is a discrete distinction between the spiritual and the material. How they can still be related as cause and effect is illustrated by the action of nerves on muscles.*

It is important to emphasize at this point that we have just been thinking of two very different levels within a series of events following a single cause, the cause being love, the final event being a smile. The smile can be seen; the nerve impulses can be detected by scientific apparatus; the love can be inferred or deduced but not detected directly by any physical means. It is discretely different. Although it acts as a cause it is distinct and separate. A physical image of the discrete difference can be seen in the relation between nerves and the muscles they activate. Although both are physical and both use proteins, enzymes and other biochemical substances, yet they differ so markedly that one cannot pass gradually into another. Special "end-plates" with special enzymes, must be present to act as an interface. Of the more subtle interface between love and the brain we are as yet profoundly ignorant.

As with the brain so with nature. We have a philosophy by which we can relate many things in nature to spiritual things which, we believe, cause them, but as yet we do not know the mechanism of the interface. At present this is a small handicap for we have only just begun to tackle the immense but fascinating task of relating the vast range of scientific knowledge to the newly available knowledge of spiritual things. (Of this last knowledge, more below.) The much smaller range of natural knowledge that has been with men for several thousand years

has often (or even always) been more or less vaguely related to spiritual matters, as mentioned above in connection with parables. However, it can now be shown that the relationship that exists between the spiritual world and the natural can be observed in many other spheres; for example in all the divinely inspired books of the Bible, in Greek mythology, and even in common speech.

*An example from common speech of the representation of an imponderable by a physical organ of the body. The extension of this representation to spiritual matters.*

It is quite usual to say we see when we mean we understand. The eye, then, corresponds to the mind's ability to understand and the old saying "eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:24) shows that anyone who tries to destroy the ability of another to understand by misleading him will himself be misled, although the same words can have a positive meaning which is also quite well-known, namely that he who labors to encourage the understanding of others has his own understanding improved. A little thought shows that there is not and that there cannot be, any end to this kind of interpretation. The eye sees by means of light. The Lord said: "I am the light of the world." And since light comes from the sun, does not the Lord's statement suggest that He is interiorly "within" the natural sun? Moreover, as the eye corresponds to the understanding, so the anatomy and physiology of the eye can teach us much about the true function of our faculty of understanding. So we have much to think about even if we cannot say how the Lord created the material universe or how the "light of the world" produces that huge atom bomb which is our source of physical light and energy.

*It is possible to understand partially the causative relationship between spiritual and natural things although it is not possible to explain it in natural language.*

Although we cannot explain how love activates the brain to cause the face to smile, we still accept the causative relationship. It is the same with the relation between the natural and the spiritual. We may understand and accept even if we cannot explain. For a long time men have been able to see that there is a causative relationship only in general and have not realized that the general must fail if the particulars do not conform. Ignorance of both spiritual things and natural things has contributed to an

inability to relate them to one another in detail. The belief in a detailed relationship becomes a conviction when certain lines of study are followed. The need for special study is made clear when one considers how impossible it would be to believe (did we not know it already) that a complex pattern of changing electric potentials on the interfaces of microscopic fibres (the nerves) in one being could produce a sign (the smile) that would give joy to another yards away, (or even miles with the help of television). Even more so, were it not a matter of experience, we would find it quite beyond credence that a mere imponderable thing like the emotion of love could have the tremendous material consequences that often follow. It is then not surprising that we should need some preparation in order to appreciate a connection between the wonderful material universe and the even more wonderful universe of the spirit.

*The spiritual and the natural worlds are both vast and complex. A knowledge of both is required if their relationship is to be expounded, and this can only be achieved by a man whose mind is properly prepared so that it can receive Divine instruction concerning the meanings of spiritual experiences and of many other things.*

Even the ordinary material world is so vast that a detailed knowledge of it is probably beyond the capacity of any man. There is even more in the spiritual world of causes. So complex are both worlds that we might be forgiven for thinking that the connection between them is beyond the grasp of the mere natural man. However, if the Divine Who made them both would vouchsafe a few hints it might then be possible for man to see, or perhaps become vaguely aware of the connection. But the Divine can do more. In His wisdom He always adapts His revelation to the man or society of men to whom it is made, so that men can be made aware of many things they did not formerly know, if they are willing to be made aware, and are of such a character that the knowledge will not be misused. Thus it is within the bounds of possibility for God to reveal a great deal more about the expression of spiritual verities in natural and material objects and activities than the world is yet aware of.

But consider the requirements! We are not talking about a mere revelation of simple previously unknown facts, but about being able to understand subtle and complicated relationships that had not as yet entered the mind of any man. Take again the example of a smile. Even leaving out the more complex operation of the love itself we have a process in the brain and between the brain and the face that is quite difficult to comprehend.

To know how the brain activates the face to smile one must know a great deal about the brain itself; not only which parts are connected to the face, but how they are connected with one another and with other parts of the brain, including those where the memory resides, and many other details. This is one side of the necessary knowledge. On the other side one must also know a great deal about the muscles and the face; what a nerve impulse is and how it can make a muscle contract or relax, which muscles are to act, and by how much. The eyes too will be involved, and more besides. To trace the smile back to the love would involve as already mentioned even greater understanding. This example shows that anyone who is to reveal the relation between spiritual and natural phenomena must understand the natural world of effects as well as the spiritual world through which the effects are produced. Thus a knowledge of both is required. This criterion was met by Swedenborg. His experiences and his knowledge enabled him not only to look into the spiritual world but to understand what he saw.

Many people have seen the spiritual world and some of their experiences are on record, for example those of John recorded (in Revelation), Paul (a very brief experience), the disciples, Ezekiel, and other prophets. These seers, however, know little about the world of nature and almost nothing about the relation between it and the world of spirits, so that they could not at all explain what they had seen. On the other hand, Swedenborg became expert in most branches of the science of his day (it was possible two hundred years ago!), but especially in anatomy and physics. "His prophetic insight into the fundamental nature of matter" can only be appreciated now, after two hundred years of experimental science. However, although these insights were nearer modern physics than Newton's,<sup>2</sup> yet he had no miraculous knowledge of future science and his encyclopedic knowledge of the spiritual world was related to selected natural knowledge of his time. His own "prophetic insights" were largely laid aside, and knowledge that was already widely accepted among the educated was used. Some of that knowledge has been discredited, and much of the rest has been superseded by more accurate and more detailed knowledge. But how can a revelation linked with inadequate outdated knowledge remain viable? It remains not only viable but increases in vigor, for the newer knowledge is more correct and can therefore form an even better basis for spiritual truths, and shows more clearly than before the orderly links between the spiritual and the natural.

<sup>2</sup>M. W. Stanley, *loc. cit.*

*A true revelation is more and more confirmed as scientific discovery progresses, providing the relationship between scientific and spiritual knowledge is known.*

The phoenix-like renewal mentioned above is only to be expected because the revelation granted through Swedenborg was made more closely under the Divine auspices than the acquisition of natural knowledge by the world at large, which had necessarily to proceed at the pedestrian pace of experimental investigation. But the improvement in natural knowledge by two centuries of patient, painstaking experimental investigation should lead to a body of science more capable of supporting revelation than was the knowledge it displaced.

Because Swedenborg learned many things under divine auspices, he was able to reveal the relationships between spiritual and natural things, i.e., to expound the theory of correspondences. Correspondences indicate the means of creation, and also provide the interpretation of the Divine Allegory, i.e., of the whole Word of God, as we have it in the Bible. In the view of many, the work of Swedenborg in laying before us the inner meaning of the Scriptures was his most important task, and it is particularly remarkable that the correspondences by which this was done are exactly those by which the material universe was created and continues. Thus it was that although most of Swedenborg's effort was in interpreting the Word, yet so closely do the two facets of reality march together that neither can be studied without—inadvertently as it were—learning much about the other. Spiritual thought could not exist without the Word of God, and the natural basis would be pointless without a spiritual superstructure. The concepts of spiritual matters which are necessary for understanding the relationships between the spiritual and the natural are fully explained in those of Swedenborg's works written after he was called to his spiritual task, works referred to collectively as "The Writings."

### **Seeing and Understanding Require the Light of Truth from God.**

*Sight corresponds to many mental concepts connected with understanding.*

It has already been noted that even in ordinary conversation "to see" often means "to understand," and the Writings make it clear that the universal acceptance of sight as a symbol of understanding is because there is, in the human race, an awareness though vague and weak and often denied—of the most pervading effects of the spiritual world (AC 4406), so that sight is more than a mere symbol

of understanding—it actually corresponds thereto. In fact, the closeness of the correspondence and its acceptance into the language make it difficult to write about understanding without using correspondences based on sight and light. This can be seen (!) from a short list of words frequently used in relation to mental things; e.g., clear, dull, bright, short-sighted, point-of-view, imagine (from image), project, show, outline, adumbrate, and black-and-white.

The complete process of seeing involves also understanding even on the natural level, for unless the patterns of light, shade, color and the stereoscopic results of using two eyes are properly interpreted, there will be no apprehension of the surroundings; no real seeing. It is therefore true to say that sight not only corresponds to the understanding, but that it *is* understanding, though of a limited kind. This is confirmed by the experience of those born blind and later cured by modern surgery. They need to learn what the patterns on their retina mean and to connect them with their previous experience through the other senses.

*As an isolated eye cannot see, so neither can a man if isolated from influx.*

At the level of being able to interpret the patterns on the retina we have much in common with the animals, whose bodily processes are like our own; but in addition, we have more interior, (i.e. spiritual) things that correspond precisely with bodily processes. Thus we read that unless man's interior sight "continually inflowed into his outer sight, which is that of the eye, this latter could not possibly apprehend and discern any object....[I]t is his [man's] spirit that sees, not his eye; the spirit sees through the eye...The case is the very same in regard to this interior sight, or that of the spirit; this again does not see from itself, but from a still more interior sight, or that of man's Rational. Nay, neither does this see of itself, but does so from a still more internal light, which is that of the internal...man. And even this does not see of itself, for it is the Lord who sees through the internal man, and He is the only One who sees because He is the Only One who loves, and He it is who gives man the ability to see, and this in such a manner that it appears to him as if he saw of himself" (AC 1954).

*Seeing leads the attention away from self into the surroundings and can even make a man feel as though the spirit is being led out of the body.*

Sight can only take place when the eye and the brain function together, and when they do so they constitute a complicated device by which the outside surroundings are as it were brought right into

the brain. There is no communication between the separate strands of the optic nerve; they do not divide and rejoin, though it has recently become clear that their inputs are to some extent integrated in the lateral geniculate bodies, and possibly modified by an inflow from the cerebral cortex. Even so, the pictures on the retinae are transferred as a pattern of the same kind to the visual cortex, and in the brain there is therefore a stereoscopic representation of the surroundings; a little world in the head corresponding to the big world outside. It is as though we take the environment into ourselves and this, from the point of view of our own experience, is like flowing out of ourselves and projecting our being into the surroundings. We feel as though we are in the scene we are looking at.

This is an emotional, not a factual experience, but it may have its roots also in correspondence for when we study the internal sense of "He led him forth abroad and said Look now toward heaven..." (AC 1806, 1807) we learn that the eye "is properly nothing but the sight of his spirit led forth abroad." This happens whenever things seen by the eye of the body lead the man to think of things concerning the church or heaven. Perhaps it is not straining the meaning of correspondences to think that by means of the understanding one is liberated and led out of oneself to explore the natural or spiritual world.

*The personality absorbs truths through the understanding in the same limited way as the brain absorbs images through the eye.*

It was suggested above that the process of seeing is, as it were, a taking of our environment into our own brain.

This in turn suggests by correspondences that even in this world, the spiritual function of the understanding is to take into the personality a true, useful, necessary representation of spiritual objects in the form of truths. The analogy of sight shows that (in the first instance) by understanding these things we are not so much explaining to ourselves how they work as taking them into ourselves in the form of adequate images. An image is adequate when it enables the man to appreciate the real thing and to act appropriately towards it. Thus the humiliating fact is that we can have no real genuine truth in ourselves; it is a mere image; it is always limited by our own understanding or spiritual sight. Nevertheless, the image is formed according to the orderly way provided by the Lord who designed the eye and also gives the light.

*As the eye cannot function without light, so the understanding cannot function without truth.*

No one can know the excellence, paucity, or limitations of his own or his companion's sight unless he knows what there is to be seen. Similarly with the corresponding faculty of the understanding to take into itself, and to think about, truths. We have already considered how the eye takes into the brain an image of its surroundings, by means of light. Similarly there is a spiritual light by which the understanding is enabled to function. This also is called truth (because of the inadequacy of language), and in order to explore the correspondences of sight and understanding we need to turn our attention, for a while, to truth.

It is a remarkable fact, and, to those who are unfamiliar with the Writings, somewhat of a puzzle that the spiritual sense of the Word is so often shown to be merely truth, or concerning truth, for it is also said in the Writings that everything has relation to good and truth (AC 4409) and further, that truth is the form of good (AC 3049). This means that, as to essentials, everything is good. To our simple ideas this sometimes seems to add but little to the meaning. The reason for this is that it is a general statement and we need particulars to be inserted to make the meaning richer.

*The purpose of truth is to introduce good.*

Truth itself is an empty abstraction. Without some connection with good or use it means nothing. Therefore let us consider good for a moment. The purpose of truth (or its use) is that we may receive good. The Lord *is* good. It is His aim to bring us nearer to Himself that we may delight in His good. As truth is its form we may make use of the truth; by studying it with love and reverence we may approach a little nearer to the good which is its essence, and so to a life in which the truth is obeyed because the good within it is loved.

*There are many varieties of truth*

Truth is often thought to be a simple thing. It is so considered in the Courts of Law: "...the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth...etc." People tend to think like this because they tend to confuse truthfulness with truths in spite of knowing that there are many kind of truths, and correspondences show this. For example, stone, iron, silver, water, light, a son, a king, all correspond to truth, and as correspondences are not merely fanciful poetic metaphors but the relation between natural things and the spiritual things that cause them, it follows that there is a wide variety of truths.

*The lowest form of truth is about physical things*

It is perhaps useful to begin a consideration of truth by taking it first at its lowest level; stones, we suggest, correspond to this level of truth. (Yet there are also many kinds of stone. Even gems are only stones but at the moment we think of common pebbles or pieces of rock.) The lowest level of truth to which common stone, such as building stone, corresponds, is the property of an ordinary factual statement. It is interesting to note that even at this level the truth is abstract, even though the test of it is concrete! At this level the statement to be tested will be about concrete things, and if the statement is true it can be used to plan successful manipulations of concrete things. The myriad applications of scientific knowledges that we daily encounter are examples of such manipulations.

*The highest form of truth is an Emanation from God in which He is also present.*

We now contrast the above with the highest idea of truth that is available to us. The Lord Himself says He is the truth and that He is the light. We learn also from the Writings that the Divine Wisdom goes forth from the spiritual sun in which the Lord is, as light, yet it is not Wisdom merely, but, as it proceeds it is perfectly united with love. This kind of Wisdom and Love is far more than a mere abstraction. We are accustomed by the Writings to think that the Lord Himself is in, or actually is Himself His Love and Wisdom as, for example, "as all love is from the Lord it is the Lord Himself" (AC 1873); and "the things that are from Him, or which are of Him are also Himself" (AC 10, 336).

Now this may be a difficult concept. How can that which proceeds from the Lord be the Lord Himself? Obviously such divine things will always be beyond our grasp and the Writings warn us not to try too hard to grasp them. For example we read; "But how the Divine Good of the Lord's Divine Love is accommodated to reception, cannot be known by any one, not even by the angels in heaven, because it is an accommodation of the Infinite to the finite; and the Infinite is such as to transcend all finite intelligence, so much so that when the understanding of the finite desires to direct its intuition thither it falls like one who falls into the depth of the sea and perishes" (AC 8644). Such a warning does not, however, mean that we are not to attempt to form some ideas about the subject, and we are instructed that correspondences are the means whereby we can form such ideas (AC 9300).

The Writings frequently make use of the correspondence of the sun to explain the nature of the spiritual Sun and of the Divine Good of the Divine Love which is in it and of the Divine Truth and Divine

Good which are from it. Thus we may make use of our knowledge of the sun and its light to help us visualize something of the Divine Love and Wisdom even if we can never really understand them. We may, for example, form an idea of how that which proceeds from the Lord can also be the Lord Himself.

We first call to mind the present general ideas in physics about the conversion of matter into energy and of Einstein's famous equation ( $e = mc^2$ ) and we think about the sun where matter is being converted into energy and is being radiated. Thus every bit of sunshine we receive is really a little bit of the sun itself which means that the sun is busily making itself into innumerable little packets (quanta) which travel out across space (but the packets are so small and so numerous that the light appears continuous). Similarly, but more perfectly, the Lord is able to send us something of Himself in His truth and goodness. Although we could not be near the sun, the sunshine is, however, accommodated to our reception naturally; so also the Lord's Love and Wisdom is accommodated to our reception spiritually. There is, however, difference between every natural thing and the spiritual thing to which it corresponds. Thus the sun will expend itself and be used up in x million years, but the Lord is infinite. Nevertheless, the fantastically huge amount of energy in the sun compared with the tiny quantity we need for sight can give us an idea of the Lord's infinity; for although the sun is finite, the number of quanta it can produce is so large that for practical purposes we regard it as inexhaustible, and thus, as it were, infinite.

In providing us with "inexhaustible" warmth and light (including that stored in fossil fuels) the sun is like an image of the Lord's Love. He has made a device which shall show His love on the natural plane. Its distance, the intervening atmosphere, and especially clouds show how the Lord accommodates His Love and Wisdom to our reception for the sake of our freedom. In His creation, especially in the sun, we see the Lord striving with all His power to show us His Love, to woo us to Himself, yet, at the same time withdrawing and hiding lest His ardor should wipe us out, or lest it should destroy our freedom, converting us into automata in which there could be no joy of life.

*Every man needs at least a trace of the Divine Emanation to enable him to think.*

Returning now to the correspondence between the sun's radiation and the Divine Truth, we see that the highest kind of truth is something of the Lord that is continually flowing towards all of us, "for the Divine Truth which is from the Lord flows in continually with man" (AC 9399). We find that this Divine Truth not only

illuminates the mind of man but also constitutes his intellectual or his internal sight, which is understanding (AC 9399). It adapts or fits every one for reception, and without it man would be unable to perceive and understand anything whatever.

Even with the fallen natural man the faculty of thinking and speaking depended upon the influx of such spiritual light "as could enter as it were through chinks" (AC 3167), and the evil in the other life see by the light of heaven except that with them it is changed into a light like that from a charcoal fire (AC 3195, 4531). Even in hell, however, the light still comes, in the last analysis, from the Lord, but by so many derivations that its character is changed. And correspondentially, we know that coal contains solar energy trapped by plants that have then become fossilized.

*The man of the church enjoys the sight of truths according to his own quality.*

It is obvious that in ordinary daylight it is the sun's light by which we see, even if it is diffused by clouds and reflected from the walls of a room. Even so is the image on our spiritual retina formed by the radiating Divine Truth, but only after it has been reflected by spiritual objects which are truths. Our spiritual eyes cannot otherwise receive this form of Divine Truth, just as we cannot gaze at the sun without being blinded. For a healthy spiritual environment, and to provide beneficent scenery we need many truths. The Word provides them; the Divine Truth shines on them; and our understanding accepts an image of them. This is explained in beautiful and vivid language in *Arcana Coelestia* 8707, part of which is as follows:

The understanding which the man of the spiritual church has is from the immediate influx of Truth from the Lord, from which there is no apperception of truth, but a light which gives the capacity of understanding. It is with this light as with the light of the sight of the eye; in order that the eye may see objects, there must be a light from which there is general illumination. In this light the eye sees and discerns objects, and is affected with beauty and delight according to their conformity with order. The case is similar with the sight of the internal eye, which is the understanding; in order that this may see, there must also be a light from which there is general illumination, in which appear the objects which are the things of the intelligence and wisdom. This light is from the Divine Truth which proceeds immediately from the Lord (see n. 8644e). The objects presented in this light appear beautiful and

delightful according to their conformity with the good anyone has.

The last remark shows that the image we form for ourselves is always more or less inadequate since no one is perfect, but as our spiritual sight grows stronger the image becomes less inadequate. As our lives improve we move into regions where the Divine sun is less obscured by clouds or the day advances and the light grows stronger.

*The act of seeing spiritual truths is an advent of the Lord.*

In all our seeing it is really the Lord who is coming, in the form of His Light into our understandings. The reflection of daylight by objects in the world does not destroy the daylight. Neither is the Lord's light destroyed by reflection from His truths, and He chooses to reveal Himself by being reflected by all the truths of His Word. It is solely by His light that these truths can be seen, and they are there so that they may reflect His Light. Our attention focuses the light on our retina and we have then, in ourselves, an image of the truths, which image also gives the relationships among the truths, e.g. which are near each other, above, below, behind, joined or separated. And this image is not the truths themselves. We have then, in our "eye" not the truths but something of the Lord sent to us *via* the truths. In such a way even beliefs which are not correct can mediate to us something of the light which is the Lord, providing we are living where the daylight is.

There seem to be no words for this something that flows out from the Lord other than spiritual Light or Divine Truth. We usually think of Divine Truth in connection with salvation and spiritual and celestial things, and it seems very different from that quality which distinguishes a fact from a non-fact; but, all the same, it is that quality in a man which enables *him* to distinguish a fact from a non-fact.

Interior sight, then, is the sight of the spirit; i.e. intellectual sight, which, as we have seen, is understanding. Thus we arrive once more at the point of *Arcana Coelestia* 9399, namely, that without Divine Truth man would be unable to perceive and understand anything whatever.

*Even simple facts can be discerned only by means of the Divine Truth "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."*

We are now in a position to notice clearly the difference between facts and Divine Truth. The facts are the objects of the internal sight. Divine Truth is the light by which they are seen. The same applies to spiritual things. They also appear only in the Divine Light but in a brighter light by which only those who are in love to the Lord can see.

So we have the Truth which is the light, and the truths which are the objects seen by that light. (These objects are really goods but truths are their forms and appearances.) Since truths are innumerable there is no limit to the variety of intellectual objects that may be seen but there is only one Truth *by which* they are seen. This is the light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

### Thinking from Correspondences

*Thinking from correspondences is necessary because man's mental faculties begin with sense experiences and always rest upon them.*

The truth in a man's mind may seem far from the objects of the world around him. His life may be ruled by ideas of sincerity and unselfishness which seem so abstract as to have no connection with natural objects. However, the connection is really there and can easily be traced, because from earliest infancy he has learned to deal with material objects and much of his way of thinking has arisen as a result of such experience. Probably everyone who has learned not to steal has his first prohibition related to some particular object.

For it is known that man is not born into any knowledge, nor into anything rational, but only into the faculty of receiving them; also that he afterwards learns and imbibes all things by degrees, and this especially by means of the sensuous things of hearing and sight, and as he learns and imbibes, he becomes rational. That these things are effected by the way of the body, that is, by an external way, since they are effected through hearing and sight is evident (AC 2557:2).

And also:

...apart from an idea drawn from things knowable and capable of being seized by the senses, a man cannot think with himself; and he then thinks correctly, even concerning the things

which belong to faith and love when he thinks of them from correspondences; for correspondences are natural verities in which, as in mirrors spiritual verities are represented. Wherefore so far as the ideas of thought concerning spiritual things are formed independently of correspondences, so far they are formed either from the fallacies of the senses or from things incongruous (AC 9300:3).

Other passages in the Writings point to the need for an acceptance of truth in the first place *because it is from the Lord*. In the story of the sterility of Abimelech's wife and household on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife, we learn that when the doctrine of faith is viewed from Divine truths, that is from the Word, then all things confirm it, but when viewed from human things, that is, from reason and knowledge nothing of good and truth is conceived. Thus in *Arcana Coelestia* 2584:3 we read that "to view it [the doctrine of faith] from the Word is to view it from the Lord, but to view it from reason and science [i.e. external knowledges] is to view it from man; all intelligence and wisdom are from the Word, and all insanity and foolishness are from reason and science." Nevertheless it is quite clear that reason and external knowledge have a very important role to perform, and as long as they are in their proper place in subservience to higher degrees of truth, insanity and foolishness are not allowed to develop from them.

This is in marked contrast to the widespread Christian view that many religious beliefs are beyond human understanding and are to be regarded as "mysteries of faith."

Returning to *Arcana Coelestia* 9300 we note in particular that "so far as the ideas of thought concerning spiritual things are formed independently of correspondences, so far they are formed either from the fallacies of the senses or from things incongruous." This, I suggest means that it is not only allowable but necessary to think from correspondences.

*It is not difficult to think from correspondences.*

Thinking from correspondences is easy because owing to influences from the spiritual world, we all think, to some degree, from correspondences without knowing it, as when we say "see" for "understand" or talk about the warmth of love. Clearly an expert knowledge is not necessary to enable anyone to think from correspondences.

Many people have an emotional response to a glorious sunset; they enjoy the colors and perhaps the peaceful evening and leave it at that. But there is something *heavenly* about a colorful sunset and even more so about a colorful dawn. You only have to remember that the Lord is the Sun of heaven—that the light corresponds to His Divine Wisdom and the warmth to His Divine Love. You might even remember that the flaming red color corresponds to celestial love, and that the changing colors as the sun sets fill you with joy because they show the delight when celestial love flows into spiritual love. There is no intellectual exercise here, and yet merely by allowing a few such ideas to flow into your mind you are thinking with the angels! Likewise in your enjoyment of flowers; the joy you experience in them will be heightened when you think that their beauty represents the delights and blessedness of conjugal love.

Everyone who is healthy enjoys good food. People of some religions tend to feel a little guilty about it, as it can easily become a matter of self-indulgence; but if you think from correspondences you know it is an orderly matter to enjoy your food, for you can reflect that the Lord also provides food and drink for the soul in the form of good loves and truth, and that the two kinds of food correspond. We can eat wisely (and nothing destroys the enjoyment of good food more certainly than eating unwisely!) in order to have a sound body as a fitting and useful home for a sound spirit which can serve the Lord in this life and the next as well.

It requires no effort at all when you see mountains to think of their tops being in the sky and so corresponding to the loves or delights which raise us towards heaven and so nearer to the Lord. Perhaps this is the real reason why people climb mountains, and it suggests that correspondences are effective even in those people who are not conscious of them. When you see a beautiful tree and take delight in it, what you are really doing is enjoying the delight from the spiritual world which flows into the corresponding thought. In the words of the once popular song, "Only God can make a tree"; and a much older song (Psalm 1) says of the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord that "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." This unconscious appreciation of correspondences probably explains the popularity of Psalm 23. There the correspondences are easily understood and accepted.

*Correspondences are the only means used in the Word to express inner meaning in outer forms.*

Like Psalm 23, many other parts of the Bible are very poetic (whatever some people may think of the language itself), but it is necessary to realize that it is not merely poetic. The imagery in poetry can be according to the genius of the poet, but the imagery in the Word of the Lord is according to correspondences and precise representations which consistently express the internal sense in external ideas.

We conclude, then, that thinking from correspondences is for all, and is the only sound way to elevate our thought to spiritual things. We may think from correspondences either by means of familiar things of daily life or by special knowledges.

*Accurate knowledge is advantageous when thinking from correspondences.*

We have seen already that modern science forms a better basis for revelation than did the lesser knowledge of earlier times. This is because the correspondence is between spiritual things and natural things as they actually are. Thus the correspondences from which we think must be based as far as possible on true and accurate natural knowledges. Providing our method of seeing spiritual things reflected in natural things is sound, the wider and truer our natural knowledge the better will be our vision of spiritual things. If we can make proper use of the current tremendous growth in scientific knowledge the church will have a better understanding of spiritual matters than ever before; so also will its love be strengthened.

*Significatives and representatives are not always the same as correspondences.*

Since our theme is thinking from correspondences it is important to consider the meaning of the word *correspondence* and to understand it as accurately as possible. In the Writings, correspondences, representatives, and significatives are most frequently mentioned and usually the meanings appear almost the same. However, we occasionally need to distinguish between them because, although they are usually the same as to essential meaning, this is not always the case; and if we imagine they are always the same we may go astray. For example, an evil priest in his use, in the representative church was able to represent the Lord although there was no correspondence. We read for example: "evil men equally with good men can represent and have represented the Lord's Divine" (AC 3670), and

"they who are in things contrary to love and charity are not in correspondence" (AC 3484). The general law is nicely summarized as follows: "The things which flow in out of the spiritual world and are presented in the natural are in general representations; and so far as they agree together they are correspondences" (AC 2990). The words which are used in the Scriptures are symbols of natural representatives and they, (i.e. the words) are then said to signify the spiritual things. There is obviously a world of difference between *signify* and *correspond*, inasmuch as the latter relates to the relationship between two actual things, one of which is a cause and the other an effect.

*The inevitable limitations of knowledge and intelligence ought not to deter anyone from undertaking spiritual studies.*

Obviously our progress in thinking from correspondences will be limited by our own knowledge and intelligence, for our knowledge can never approach the Divine Wisdom, and our intelligence is feeble and blind compared with the Divine Providence in the design of all things. Thus in whatever subject we select for thought we inevitably reach the limit of both our knowledge and our understanding. Until we realize this, this limitation is depressing and tends to undermine our faith. It should do just the opposite! We should delight in the heavenly vistas that we know extend beyond our sight and beyond our imagination. They confirm all we have been taught about the infinity of the Lord, and we should feel secure in the knowledge that such an infinite Creator is our Heavenly Father and our constant and closest companion. We undertake our exploration then with these limits constantly in mind; we rejoice at whatever is revealed and are in no way downcast at the things which remain hidden.