

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Looking back on this enquiry into a theory of knowledge drawn from Swedenborg's theological works, there are some things that stand out, as follows.

1. Because man is an essentially spiritual being, all thought, even that about the most mundane things of life, is spiritual, though necessarily grounded in sense perception.

2. Man has the faculties of knowing, thinking, and understanding from the influx of "intellectual" truth from God through the internal man (AC 1901); and the ability to perceive what is good and true from the influx of Divine good into the memory (AC 3128). Our humanity, therefore, is not a consequence of an evolutionary development, but a result of influx from the Divine into forms in the human mind that can receive it. The forms that serve preeminently as vessels for the reception of the Divine life are knowledges drawn from the Word.

3. The term "truth" applies particularly to what is derived from revelation—from the threefold Word—or what is seen as a result of the enlightenment that comes from reflection that is based therein.

Truth as so conceived is not a matter of knowledge alone. Truth and falsity, good and evil, are dynamic things that are active every moment of our lives. They are active with *every man* in every pursuit of life, in every station of society. They are not things that belong alone to the judge or scholar, priest or lawyer, or other special class of humanity. Hence, Swedenborg can say that the most simple of men can be among the wisest, and the most erudite scholar among the biggest fools.

In contrast with the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, and semantic theories of truth of secular philosophy,<sup>1</sup> the view of truth presented in this study could appropriately be called "the organic theory of truth," for it is the reception of truth and good, from the

1 The correspondence theory of truth holds that there is a correspondence between our ideas or beliefs and our experience; the search for truth involves establishing a good correspondence between the two. The scientific method, involving development of theory and the testing of this by controlled experience, is an example of this theory of truth. The coherence

Divine source, in the human mind that gives to men the essential life of their humanity. At the most external level, this theory asserts that a statement is true if, and only if, it can be shown to be in harmony with written revelation, and serve as the form of good.

4. Induction—the process whereby a general principle is established by means of the study of particular cases—is not the product of the examination of particular cases themselves (what I call Baconian induction), but results from the formation of generalizations as a consequence of imaginative synthesis or leaps or guesses that have their source in the spirit of man; so-called inductive insights are imposed on sense data, not drawn from it. This applies equally to the insights of historians, sociologists, and geographers, as to physical, biological, and earth scientists.

The central theme of this enquiry has to do with the perception of what is good and true in respect to the spiritual aspects of our lives, and therefrom, what is just and equitable in civil life, and what is honorable in moral life; thus it has to do with those essential aspects of human life that are spiritual in nature, and that have to do with man's inner life, not the external manifestations of it.

Applying this idea to that vast and daily growing body of literature in popular magazines and journals, in scholarly literature in all branches of learning from the most mundane scientific consideration of, say, the earth in geological studies to the most esoteric pondering of eastern mystics, what do we find? A passage already quoted from *Arcana Coelestia* is fundamental here: "... by intelligence and wisdom is not meant the ability to think and reason on every subject, for this exists equally with the evil as with the good" (AC 10,201). This draws our attention to the fact that all men are capable of thought and reason, faculties which we have seen are derived from the inflowing of the Divine Life through the internal mind. The exercise of these faculties is what produces the vast body of

theory asserts that an idea is true only if, and only if, it coheres within a given or accepted system of thought. The pragmatic theory says of an idea that it is true if it works; and the semantic theory says that it is in our language *only* that truth can be established. For discussions of these theories, see A. D. Wozzley, *Theory of Knowledge*, and Robert C. Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy*. I am indebted to Dan Synnestevedt, Instructor in Philosophy at the Academy of the New Church College, for asking the leading question: "How does your theory of knowledge compare with those of secular philosophy?" and directing me to Solomon's treatment of the topic; and for offering critical commentary on the text.

literature referred to above. The central question then is how can the truth- and good-content of this or that be assessed? For as we have noted, truth and good are not abstractions to be occasionally pondered by an elite few, but are (together with their opposites, falsity and evil) intimately involved in a dynamic way with our very being from moment to moment.

The truth-content and potential for good of any knowledge depends not on the intellectual determination of its "truth" by some logical or empirical means, but on how well it stands the scrutiny of light shed upon it from heaven, that is, from the Word, or from ideas derived therefrom. Some examples are advanced to illustrate this.

The purpose of scientific enquiry is to find out how the world works. The publication of the findings of that enquiry serves to communicate them to other interested people and to share them with mankind in general. In themselves, the products of such enquiry do not constitute truth—or so we have argued earlier. They (together with any other secular knowledges) may, however, serve to confirm truth as seen by means of the Word, and this is a value ascribed to them in the Writings. But in addition, they serve good if they enable man to serve his fellow more abundantly in ways that contribute to his material and spiritual well-being—and we daily encounter applications of science in which this is manifested.

Other kinds of enquiry or literature have a different nature and serve in different ways; Plato's *Republic*, for example. Its central concern is to portray the ideal state, and in so doing confronts us immediately with questions relating to concepts of good, particularly. The assessment of its merit will depend on the perspective of the reader—those inclined to view state socialism or some other form of totalitarianism with favor could see the *Republic* as a blueprint for such a state, while others not so inclined would see in it the portrayal of a state system that is tantamount to a slave state. But in the terms of this enquiry, the test of the goodness of the ideal state as portrayed depends upon the assessment made of it from the truths of the Word which alone can make possible the determination of its good. This is what is meant by saying that something is seen "in the light of heaven." This could be said also of any literature of a political, psychological, or sociological nature—unless it is examined from the concepts of truth and good revealed in the Word, its intrinsic value (if indeed it has any) cannot be assessed, and views concerning it can only be classed as opinions.

But what of the literature of playwrights, poets, and novelists?

The knowledge they display is often of a very subtle kind, giving insights into the spirit of the universe and of the nature of men in ways that political, psychological, sociological, and scientific literature does not. In these kinds of works, perhaps more than in others, we are constantly touched by undercurrents that have to do with truth and good in the dynamic way that we have spoken of above; our emotional involvement in reading such literature is testimony to that. But again, our assessment of the worth of the knowledge gained in these works is dependent upon our own value-system of truth and goodness.

Can it ever be said, then, that this or that is the "truth"; that this or that is "good"? The Writings give an answer to this that says that although truth and good in the Divine are absolute, in reception by men they become relative to everyone individually, for to angels, truth from the Divine is truth, and good from the Divine is good; but these to the evil are falsity and evil. (See DLW 271, for example.) Thus "good" is what is delightful, and "truth" is what gives form to good as so defined.

Human logical analysis and empirical enquiry cannot lead us to truth, and good thereby. The Word alone can do this as expressed in the words of the Lord Himself when speaking to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13-14.)■

#### **METHOD OF STUDY**

The primary source of ideas for this study has been the theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg. The reason for this is that the author regards these works as of Divine origin in accordance both with the testimony of the writer himself and with the internal evidence of the works themselves. They are indeed a Third Testament resting on the foundations of the Old and New Testaments.

Reason alone has not in several millennia arrived at sure knowledge of the nature of man, nor of the source of knowledge of human mental processes and of the entities we call ideas, thoughts, and affections. As indicated in an earlier part of this treatise,<sup>2</sup> we believe this state of affairs to be the consequence of the circumstance that, as Swedenborg put it, "nothing can look into itself" (AC 1953). This

coupled with the teaching in *Arcana Coelestia* 5937 that "all perception is from within, and in no case is there any perception of what is interior from without; for whence the influx, thence the perception" points to the need to turn to revelation whereby man can gain something of a birdseye view of himself and the phenomenon called mind.

The enquiry began with the compilation of references drawn from New Church collateral literature described above. This set of articles was examined and some insights from them have been included in the text.

The next step was the undertaking of a study of some general literature on the theory of knowledge and of some of the seminal literature in the field, particularly works by Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley. These are included in the general bibliography.

Following this the J. F. Potts' *Swedenborg Concordance* was used as a means to compile references from the Writings, using the following words that would lead to ideas that could have a bearing on the enquiry. These were perused and formed the basis for writing the text.

#### KEY WORDS SELECTED

Apperceive, apperception (*Appercipere, appercetio*).

Enlighten, enlightenment (*Illustrare, illustratio*).

Hypothesis, hypothetical (*Hypothesis, hypotheticus*).

Idea, ideal (*Idea, idealis*).

Intelligence, intelligent, intelligible (*Intelligentia, intelligens, intelligibilis*).

Know (*Cognoscere*).

Know (*Scire*).

Meditate, meditation, meditating earnestly (*Meditari, meditatio, meditabundus*).

Memory (*Memoria*).

Mind (*Animus*).

Mind (*Mens*).

Perceive, perception (*Percipere, perceptio*).

Rational, Rationality, rationally (*Rationales, rationalitas, rationaliter*).

Ratiocinate (*Ratiocinari*).

Reason (*Ratio*).

<sup>2</sup> For an earlier discussion of this, and the problem of self-reference, see Erland J. Brock, "New Church Epistemology" Part IV, *The New Philosophy*, 90:1 (January-March 1987), pp.242-243.

Reflect, reflection, reflected (*Reflectere, reflectio, reflexus*).

Sense, bodily (*Sensus*).

Thought, think (*Cogitatio, cogitare*).

Truth, intellectual (*Verum intellectuale*).

Truth, natural (*Verum naturale*).

Truth, scientific (*Verum scientificum*).

Truth, sensuous (*Verum sensualis*).

Truth, spiritual (*Verum spiritualis*).

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The following selection of articles in New Church collateral literature was made by Sarah Waters and Julie David under the direction of the author, working through all journals in the holdings of the Academy of the New Church library, now the Swedenborg Library. Because few of these are indexed, particularly those for the 19th century, each issue of several journals had to be perused in order to find relevant material.

Articles selected were those whose contents addressed topics that could in some way be connected to a study of the theory of knowledge. Although only a few of these have been drawn on in this present study, the author regards this bibliography as a reference source and as a record of the thoughts of New Churchmen on topics related to the development of a theory of knowledge from early in the 19th century to the present day.

The journals consulted and the abbreviations used to identify them in the bibliography are as follows:

*Intellectual Repository* (IR)

*New Church Herald* (NCH)

*New Church Life* (NCL)

*New Church Magazine* (NCM)

*New Church Review* (NCR)

*New Jerusalem Magazine* (NJM)

*The New Philosophy* (NP)

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