

**PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY
FROM A NEW CHURCH PERSPECTIVE**

David R. Simons*

What Is History?

The Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem give us a new perspective from which to view the past. They tell us that every man, nation, and race was created to perform some specific use in the complex organization called the Grand Man of heaven (HH 59). Men from our earth are said to perform uses related to the skin in the human body (SD 1741, 1531). As individual men grow into the fullness of use, so the human race grew. *History is the record of this growth.* The study of history puts us into communication with the past. We cannot understand ourselves, who we are, and how we became what we are, without some idea of where we came from. How did we get here? What are our origins—our roots? It has been said "that a generation which ignores history is destined to repeat the mistakes of the past." But there is far more to it—a generation which ignores the past seriously limits its own present. Treasures ignored or not understood lie buried awaiting an enlightened age for rediscovery. The Writings enable scholars to dig into the past and discover rich veins of spiritually precious metals.

Externally the record of mankind is "written in the earth" (Jeremiah 17:3) in archaeological remains and in human writings. Archaeology and related sciences work to interpret this record and continue to add pages to our information about the past. Human writings are still being discovered and deciphered, making the record more complete, yet history will always be an incomplete book. Pages are missing, gaps in our information tantalize scholars and the essentials—*what went on in the inner thoughts and affections of the earliest men*—would have been forever left in obscurity had not the Lord seen fit to reveal them in the Writings of His Second Advent. The internal history of our race was a "scroll sealed" (Rev. 5:1) which the Lord alone is "worthy to open" (Rev. 5:5).

The Writings are a new source of information about the past. They provide scholars with both external and internal information about the character of men on our planet. They reveal the *internal history* of the human race, the history of the church from its first reception from the

*Present address: 907 Levitt Parkway, Rockledge, FL 32955.

Lord by the human mind. They provide light where before there was almost pure darkness. *"Now a new ecclesiastical history can be written, because now is the Advent of the Lord"* ("Sketch of an Ecclesiastical History of the New Church," *Posthumous Theological Works* Vol. I, p. 305). This internal history, or this history *from an internal source*, traces the human mind from its very beginnings in the pre-Adamites, through all the successive churches even to the New Christianity now made possible by the Heavenly Doctrines.

In man's efforts to decipher the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt a breakthrough came when Boussard, a French Officer of Engineers, discovered the Rosetta Stone in 1799. Since this stone was inscribed in three languages, all giving the same message, it became possible to decode this ancient form of communication. This opened up treasures that had been sealed in ancient manuscripts for ages. Consequently, the Rosetta Stone is sometimes referred to as a "stone key" which unlocked the mysteries of ancient Egypt. Similarly, although providing a far wider and far deeper, philosophically speaking, scope for scholarship, the Heavenly Doctrines provide a key—a "spiritual key"—to the history of mankind on this earth. "Spiritual" in that these Writings not only give some aspects of men's external life, but give detailed information about his internal states, his affections and thoughts, his worship and his life. This "spiritual key" opens antiquity to rational scrutiny which has never before been possible. Now students can "enter intellectually into the mysteries" (TCR 508) of the past and can derive, with a certainty never before possible, new concepts concerning mankind. Now a highly reliable source of internal evidence has been revealed in the Heavenly Doctrines so that notions of early man, man-made theories with all their limitations, can be dispelled and we can look back at our ancestors as more perfect, more human than was thought possible.

This "spiritual key" which unlocks the inner ways of thought of the ancients involves the Doctrine of Correspondence which was for the ancients their "science of sciences" (SS 20). By using this knowledge scholars can decipher more accurately the intent of the ancients. For although these men spoke of external things, their affections and ideas were internal. They spoke of gold, silver, and iron, but meant spiritual qualities—love of God, love to the neighbor, and the love of self.

Correspondence is the living relation between an internal spiritual thing and an external natural one, i.e. gold (external) and the highest spiritual love, love to the Lord (internal). When "from external things a person sees [or thinks about, thought being internal sight] internal things, and from the objects existing in the world reflects on things that exist in the next life" (AC 1806), such thinking is correspondential. It has a natural object which produces its spiritual counterpart: the sight of gold brought to mind, correspondentially, the most precious of human loves. The ancients saw things correspondentially. This was the way they thought of things and for this reason correspondence was for them their "science of sciences," their way of knowing what they knew. "Such sight [from correspondences] was the sight of the most ancients; such is the sight of the angels... and such *was the sight of the Lord Jesus* [when He was on the earth]" (AC 1806; emphasis added).

"In most ancient times, the science of correspondences was their '*science of sciences*'", and it was so universal that all of their manuscripts and books were written by correspondences. . . . The hieroglyphics and mythologies... were nothing else" (SS 20). Like the angels, the ancients interpreted all nature correspondentially. Like the angels scholars in the New Church can reinterpret the past. And like the angels we can say "these things delight our minds more than our senses, because we can see the Creator in them all" (HH 185).

Since the science of correspondences was universal and since this knowledge is given to us in the Heavenly Doctrines, for this reason these Writings are the "spiritual key" which unlocks the thoughts and affections of ancient man. A new study, *spiritual archaeology*, is a challenging field of exploration.

The Writings are very specific about how the ancients thought. The dawning of a new day was a dramatic event for them which pictured in the outside world what went on in the minds of men when they received the light of intelligence and wisdom and the heat of love from the Spiritual Sun, the Lord (AC 1806). In every animal form they saw some aspect of the Divine: the lion is strong and majestic, which caused them to think of Divine Omnipotence; for this reason the Lord is called in the Word the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). He is also shown as a lamb, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). A lamb innocently follows.

Because the Lord *followed in innocence* the will of His Father (His Divine Love), for this reason He became innocence. A horse to the ancients represented the human understanding. Because the Lord is Omniscient He is pictured in the Book of Revelation as the "rider on a white horse whose name was the Word of God" (Rev. 19:11, 12). These few examples illustrate how the ancients thought, since internally they viewed all things from heaven. They willed to look towards heaven, towards spiritual things rather than natural.

'Looking towards heaven' means a representation of the Lord's kingdom in a mental view of the universe. . . . The reason why all things in the sky and on the earth are representative, is that they have come into being, and are constantly coming into being, that is, subsist, from the influx of the Lord through heaven. . . . All effects without exception, are in the same way representatives of the uses which constitute their first beginnings. . . . People [such as the ancients] whose concern is for spiritual things never dwell on the objects of external sight alone, but *from and in those objects they continually see internal things* (AC 1807; emphasis added).

The use of correspondence by the ancients should come as no surprise to Christian scholars, since this is the method used by Jesus in His effort to lead men from the external things of this world to the internal things of His Kingdom. This is what parables are all about! Throughout His ministry Jesus led His followers to think correspondentially. "All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables: *and without a parable He did not speak to them*" (Matthew 13:34; emphasis added).

Spiritual Archaeology

One of the great and unique challenges open to New Church scholars is that of becoming a spiritual archaeologist. A spiritual archaeologist is a scholar who from revelation *and* from science probes into the past and seeks to discover the spiritual ideas and values in the writings, art, and artifacts of ancient times. Religion and science together provide the whole truth. Science alone is barren of content and purpose, and religion alone gives only unconfirmed doctrine. But together, the truths of nature and the truths of the Word make possible an enlightenment of the human mind unattainable by any other means.

As the archaeologist needs special tools i.e., tools for digging, metal detectors, instruments which can test the age of a given object; as he must mark off the site of his investigation with a grid so he may piece his findings together into meaningful relationships, and as he seeks to identify and type, that is, show the approximate dates and sequence of the things he unearths, so the spiritual archaeologist must use special tools, must define the era (church) of his investigation and must fit his findings into the sequence of developing—or retrogressing—ideas and values. In this way he can piece together the internal, as well as the external, history of mankind—the whole story!

The scholar of the New Church has been given special tools for unearthing the spiritual wealth of the past. He has the power to interpret the facts *with confidence and accuracy*. He can know of what spiritual quality a specific idea, superstition, or speculation is. He is in a position to evaluate the quality of thought processes and the dominant affections present at any given time. The Writings tell us three things which make spiritual archaeology a fascinating and rewarding pursuit. For our use in retrieving and making use of the wisdom of the ancients, the Heavenly Doctrines provide:

1. the Doctrine of Correspondences;
2. the internal history of mankind, the history of the churches i.e., the Most Ancient Church, the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, the Christian Church, and now the New Christian Church (see TCR). This knowledge gives us our spiritual grid marker which enables us to place philosophies and cultures in their proper place;
3. and they provide the Doctrine of Genuine Truth, a bench mark by which all spiritual values are to be measured—seen as true or false, pure or impure, genuinely spiritual or base and materialistic.

In rediscovering the meaning and power of the past—early man's ideals and aspirations, his values and culture—we have a new basis for evaluating and revitalizing our own. Spiritual archaeology not only will provide a basis for understanding our cultural heritage—the origins of civilizations—but it will provide the key and inspiration for us to develop new forms of worship and life, forms which better express the qualities of the internal, rational, spiritual man.

In contrast to the scientific findings and theories of our day which have traced our beginnings to primitive ignorance and fearful superstition, New Church scholars will develop a wholly new scenario. From the Word a reordering of the evidence into its true alignment is now possible. From the two foundations of truth the full picture can emerge, the external and internal history of mankind can be brought out. The teaching is:

All the Churches that existed before the Lord's coming were representative churches; and only in shadow could Divine truths be seen by them. But after the Lord's coming into the world a church was established by Him which saw, or *was able to see*, Divine truth in light. . . . In the world the Lord put on also the Divine Natural, and from this not only is the internal spiritual man enlightened [which was the case in the ancient churches] *but also the external natural*. Unless these two [the external and the internal] are simultaneously enlightened man is in shadow, but when both are enlightened, he is in the light of day. . . . *The Lord having now put on also the Divine Natural, enlightens both the internal spiritual man and the external natural man* (TCR 109; emphasis added).

An Overview of One Aspect of History

From the Writings, from a knowledge of how the Lord in His Providence is constantly leading the human race from externals to internals, from lower things to higher things, from earth (materialism) to heaven (spiritual insight and values), we have attempted to put together one picture of the development of man through time. Teachers, all of us, need to stand back and try to see the whole picture, so that the pieces can be fitted into a balanced whole. We would suggest the following.

The Cycle of History

Human growth takes man through many stages of development from the innocence of ignorance to the innocence of rational wisdom. An infant sees everything as living; in the child the imagination develops before reason, and in the adult first the natural rational, and then the spiritual rational mind matures. Similarly with the human race. It began in the innocence of ignorance with what the Writings call the "pre-Adamites" and developed into the men of the Most Ancient Church. This development is described in the Word by the seven days of creation—

creation of the celestial man of the golden age. Then there was the fall. Man ate of the forbidden fruit. He turned more and more to external things for his daily bread, so whereas the Lord had come to him by internal means, through perceptive insight and direct contact with heaven, He now came to him by external means by the Ancient Word, which was written in correspondences. The perceptive insights of the Most Ancient Church were written down by men called "Enoch" in the Ancient Word and the basis for the Ancient Church was established. The Ancient Church also degenerated, especially from the fact that all significatives and representatives (which were true correspondences) were turned into idolatrous things" (see AC 1356).

I have been taught from heaven that the most ancient men on earth, who were celestial men, thought from correspondences themselves, the natural things of the world before their eyes serving them as means of thinking in this way; and that they could be in fellowship with angels and talk with them because they so thought, and that thus through them; heaven was conjoined to the world. For this reason that period was called the Golden Age, of which it is said by ancient writers that the inhabitants of heaven dwelt with men and associated with them as friends with friends. But after this there followed a period when men thought, not from correspondences themselves, but from a *knowledge* of correspondences, and there was then also a conjunction of heaven with man, but less intimate. This period was called the Silver Age. After this men had a knowledge of correspondences but *did not think from that knowledge*, because they were in natural good, and not like those before them, in spiritual good. This period was called the Copper Age. After this men gradually became external, and finally corporeal, and then the knowledge of correspondences was wholly lost, and with it a knowledge of heaven and the many things pertaining to heaven (HH 115).

The Israelitish church was in externals without internals, and for this reason it is called in the Writings a "representative of a church." The Old Testament, much of which was history, was valued by the Israelites not for any concept of its sacred contents as the Word of God, but only for external reasons. The people became so concerned with external things that the Lord, by His First Advent, came in externals to lead them back to spiritual things. His miracles, all of which were correspondential, attracted men's attention so He could teach His parables and cause the

internal miracles of regeneration to take place. Christianity was the Lord in the most obvious ways leading His disciples from external things to internal spiritual truth. But again men preferred material goals to spiritual ones. They became more and more engrossed with the material world and less and less interested in the words of the Lord. The authority of science grew while the authority of a fallen church dwindled. Science and religion came into conflict and science was in danger of completely dominating the human mind. To prevent men from becoming totally materialistic, the Lord has provided a new revelation of truth—of internal truth. This new Word was expressed in rational terms by the greatest scientist of his age, Emanuel Swedenborg.

One of its teachings is that there are two foundations of truth: (1) the Word, which is primary, coming directly from the Lord, and (2) the truths of nature (see SD 5709). In the light of these Heavenly Doctrines the internal truths of the Word *and* the external truths of nature discovered by scientific means become like soul and body—two parts of the whole. What is said of the relation of the heart and lungs to the will and understanding *would seem to apply to all scientific knowledge:*

From the correspondence of the heart with the will and the lungs with the understanding *everything may be known that can be known* about the will and understanding or about love and wisdom, therefore about the soul of man (DLW 394; emphasis added).

To see from correspondence is to see the lungs from the understanding, and the understanding from the lungs, *and thus from both together to perceive proof* (DLW 413; emphasis added).

In the New Church, that truth which the ancients had by perceptive insight and open communication with heaven is now given in clear rational expressions of truth. Now mankind can "enter intellectually into" not only the mysteries of the Word, but into the mysteries of nature as well (TCR 508). The human race has come full circle from perceptive insight through superstition back to science and finally, for the new age, to spiritual-rational truth. A perceptive innocence which was ignorant of the outside world has been replaced by a rational innocence which at the same time can ask itself, "what does the Lord say about this?" and "what does the evidence from nature say?" and what he hears in response will be the same voice.■