HOW FROM A PHILOSOPHER I BECAME A THEOLOGIAN[1]

Friedrich Christoph Oetinger[2]

I was once asked[3] how, from a philosopher, I became a theologian; and I answered, "In the same manner that fishermen were made disciples and apostles by the Lord: and that I also had from early youth been a spiritual fisherman." On this, my questioner asked, "What is a spiritual fisherman?" I replied, "A fisherman, in the Word, in its spiritual sense, signifies a man who investigates and teaches natural truths, and afterwards spiritual truths, in a rational manner."

On his inquiring, "How is this demonstrated?" I said, "From these passages of the Word: 'Then the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. Therefore the fishers shall mourn, and all they that cast a hook into the sea shall be sad' (*Isaiah* 19:5, 8). In another place it is said: 'On the river, the waters whereof were healed, stood fishers from Engedi; they were present at the spreading forth of nets; their fish was according to its kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many' (Ezekiel 47:10). And in another place: 'Behold I will send for many fishers, saith Jehovah, and they shall fish the sons of Israel' (*Jeremiah* 16:16). Hence it is evident why the Lord chose fishermen for His disciples, and said, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men'' (*Matthew*:18, 19; *Mark* 1:16, 17): and why He said to Peter, after he had caught the multitude of fishes, 'Henceforth thou shalt catch men' (Luke 5:9, 10)."

1. *Soul-Body Interaction* (1768), n. 20.

2. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (2 May 1702–10 February 1782) was a German Lutheran theologian and theosopher. Biography. Oetinger was born at Göppingen. He studied philosophy and Lutheran theology at Tübingen (1722–1728), and also devoted attention to Leibniz and Wolff.

Oetinger translated a part of Emanuel Swedenborg's philosophy of heaven and earth, and added notes of his own. In 1760 he defended Swedenborg's work and invited him to Germany. His treatise Swedenborg's and other Earthly and Heavenly Philosophies was published in 1765. This and his translations of Swedenborg brought upon him the censure of his ecclesiastical superiors, but he was protected by the Duke of Württemberg, and later was appointed superintendent of the churches in the district of Weinsberg. He subsequently held the same position in Herrenberg, and afterward he became prelate at Murrhardt (appointed 1765; entered office 1766), where he died. source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Christoph_Oetinger.

3. By German mystic and pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger.

I afterwards demonstrated the origin of this signification of fishermen from *The Apocalypse Revealed*: namely, that since water signifies natural truths (nos. 50, 932), as does also a river (nos. 409, 932), a fish signifies those who are in natural truths (no. 405); and thence that fishermen signify those who investigate and teach truths.

On hearing this, my questioner raised his voice and said, "Now can understand why the Lord called and chose fishermen to be His disciples; and therefore I do not wonder that He has also chosen you, since, as you have observed, you were from early youth a fisherman in a spiritual sense, that is, an investigator of natural truths: and the reason that you are now become an investigator of spiritual truths is because these are founded on the former." To this he added, being a man of reason, that "the Lord alone knows who is the proper person to apprehend and teach those things which belong to His New Church; whether one of the Primates, or one of their domestic servants." "Besides," he continued, "what Christian theologian does not study philosophy in school, before he graduates as a theologian? From what other source is he intelligent?"

At length he said, "Since you are become a theologian, explain what is your theology?" I answered, "These are its two principles, THERE IS ONE GOD, and THERE IS A CONJUNCTION OF CHARITY AND FAITH." To which he replied, "Who denies these principles?" I replied, "The theology of the present day, when examined interiorly." ❑