

General Doctrinal Class.

by the Rt. Rev. Philip N. Odhner
October 12, 1977
Bryn Athyn, Pa.

The Doctrinal Views of the Various Bodies of the New Church
Concerning the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

In this article we present the teachings of the different bodies of the New Church concerning the Writings of Swedenborg. In general, there are three distinct doctrinal views in the New Church about those Writings. One is taught by the General Conference and the General Convention. These are two distinct organizations in the New Church, but the distinction is not a doctrinal one, but historical and geographical. The second view is that taught by the General Church of the New Jerusalem. And the third view is that taught by The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma.

In setting forth the teachings of the other bodies of the New Church we recognize that there is a variation of opinion in each of them about the nature of the Writings of Swedenborg, but the general position attributed to each of them does in fact represent their beliefs as set forth in their creeds, books, and periodicals. This contrast of the doctrines of the various bodies is not made with any desire to belittle or misrepresent the beliefs of others, and we welcome any correction that others may have to offer.

The doctrinal view of each body of the New Church about the nature of the Writings of Swedenborg qualifies everything of its faith and life. It determines the interior direction of the Church. It determines the end to which the Church looks, for the attainment of which the Church must strive. It forms the idea of that to which the Lord looks in the New Church and of what He requires of the Church in love and faith. The idea of what the Writings of Swedenborg are in themselves concerns the inmost things of the Church. The question of the nature of those Writings is not to be approached lightly, but in the spirit of the love of the truth for the sake of the truth, for the sake of the good of life and the truth which is therefrom. You can see that this is so from the fact that all who believe in these Writings acknowledge that, in them, the Lord has made His Second Coming, or at least that they are about the Lord in His Second Coming. The idea of what these Writings are in themselves is one with the idea of the Lord in His Second Coming, to Whom the Church is to look and with Whom it is to be conjoined.

The Distinction between the Sense of the Letter of the Word
And the Doctrine of the Church.

In order that the different views held in the New Church about the Writings of Swedenborg may be more fully understood, it is necessary to preface the treatment of those views with the distinction made in those Writings between the sense of the letter of the Word and the doctrine of the Church.

The Word of the Lord is the Divine Truth itself accommodated to angels and to men. The sense of the letter of the Word is the Word accommodated to men in the world. This contains within it the Spiritual and Celestial senses of the Word, and within these, the degrees of the Divine Truth which are above the Heavens. In this way, the sense of the letter of the Word

contains all the Divine Truth. (See Arcana Coelestia 1870, 4642; The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 252-255; Doctrine Concerning the Sacred Scripture 1.)

The Doctrine of the Church, on the other hand, is that Truth which the Church has received out of the Word under illustration from the Lord. It is that Divine Truth which those who are enlightened by the Lord receive in their understanding through the sense of the letter of the Word. More particularly, the genuine Doctrine of the Church is the truth of the internal sense of the Word which is drawn out of the sense of the letter of the Word by those who are in illustration from the Lord. The Doctrine of the Church is not all the Divine Truth that is in the Word. It is that of the Divine Truth which the Church has received out of the Word.

That such is the Doctrine of the Church may be seen from the following teachings:

"That the Doctrine of the Church must be drawn out of the sense of the letter of the Word, and must be confirmed by it."

(Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture 50-56.)

"That the genuine truth which must be of Doctrine does not appear in the sense of the letter of the Word to others than to those who are in illustration from the Lord. Illustration is from the Lord alone and is with those who love truths because they are truths, and who make them uses of life."

(Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture 57.)

"The Doctrine of faith is the same as the understanding of the Word as to interior things, or the internal sense."

(Arcana Coelestia 2762.)

"He who does not know the arcana of Heaven cannot but believe otherwise than that the Word is sustained without Doctrine therefrom; for he thinks that the Word in the letter or the literal sense of the Word is doctrine itself; but it must be known that all doctrine of the Church must be out of the Word, and that doctrine from any other source than out of the Word is not doctrine in which there is anything of the Church, still less of Heaven; but the Doctrine must be collected out of the Word, and when it is being collected man must be in illustration from the Lord, and he is in illustration when in the love of truth for the sake of truth, and not for the sake of self and the world. These are they who are in illustration in the Word when they read it, and they see the truth, and make Doctrine for themselves thence. The cause that this is so is because such communicate with Heaven, thus with the Lord, and thus illustrated by the Lord, they are led to see the truths of the Word such as they are in Heaven, for the Lord inflows through Heaven into their understanding."

(Arcana Coelestia 9424.)

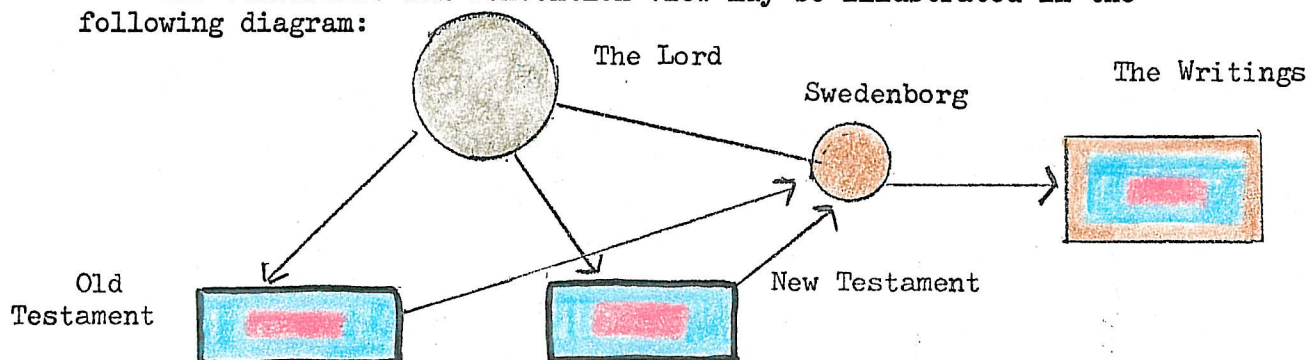
"Truth Divine is the Word, and the Doctrine of the Church is truth thence... Truth Divine is the Word, and it is Doctrine out of the Word."

(Arcana Coelestia 9222.)

The Conference and Convention View.

In the Conference and Convention it is in general held that the Writings of Swedenborg are not the Word of the Lord, but that they are Divine Truths drawn out of the Word by Swedenborg under illustration from the Lord. They believe that the Old and New Testaments are alone the Word, that these two Testaments alone contain within them all Divine Truth. The Writings of Swedenborg are Doctrine of the Church, setting forth some but not all of the internal truths contained in the Old and New Testaments. They believe that the things set forth in those Writings are a Divinely given key for the unlocking of the celestial and spiritual things contained in those testaments. The conjunction of the Lord with the Church, as far as the Word is concerned, lies for them in the Old and New Testaments. Swedenborg's Writings serve to restore the possibility of conjunction with the Lord in those Testaments. The men of the Church, according to this view, are to use the Writings of Swedenborg in opening up further truths of the internal sense of the Word of the Old and New Testaments, and to make them of life and faith.

The Conference and Convention view may be illustrated in the following diagram:



In this diagram the lines from the Lord to the Old and New Testaments represent the Divine inspiration of those Testaments. The line from the Lord to Swedenborg represents the illustration from the Lord given to him in the things taken up into his mind from the Old and New Testaments. The red and the blue stand for the Divine Truths of the celestial and spiritual sense of the Word. The black stands for the sense of the letter of the Word. The brown for the limitations of Swedenborg's mind. The Writings are represented by red and blue surrounded by brown, or the internal sense expressed in the limitations of Swedenborg's mind.

Thus, in the view of the Conference and Convention, the Writings of Swedenborg fill rather that place which is defined as the Genuine Doctrine of the Church, and not that which is defined as the Word of God. In their view, the Writings are not Divine in their letter and do not contain within them all the Divine Truth, as do the Old and New Testaments. Presumably, further truths of the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments, to be drawn out of them by enlightened men of the Church, would have a similar standing in the Church as have the Writings. In passing, it must be remarked that little, if anything, has been drawn out of the Old and New Testaments by the men of those bodies which has been recognized by them as being of the internal sense of the Word. Years ago, one prominent minister of the Convention attributed the lack of growth of that body to the fact that they had failed in their mission to draw out the spiritual sense of the Old and New Testaments.

It must be added that the Conference and Convention believe that the Lord has made His Second Coming in revealing the internal sense of His Word and the Heavenly Doctrines contained therein. And in this respect they must acknowledge the Writings to be more than the doctrine of one enlightened man.

The General Church View.

The men of the Academy movement, from which arose the General Church, perceived that the Writings of Swedenborg are more than Swedenborg's doctrine drawn out of the Testaments under illustration from the Lord. They perceived that they were more than some truths of the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments. They perceived that the Lord was the Author of those Writings, just as He was the Author of the Old and New Testaments. They perceived the Divinity of the Writings, and therefore came to call them the Word of the Lord. The expression of their perception was given in the first of the "Principles of the Academy," as follows:

"The Lord has made His Second Coming in the Writings of the New Church, revealing Himself therein in His Own Divine Human, as the God of Heaven and earth; in the Writings therefore are contained the very essential Word, which is the Lord; and from them the Lord speaks to His Church, and the Church acknowledges no other authority and no other law." (New Church Life, 1899. p.117.)

As we see it, the importance of the general perception given to the men of the Academy is very great. It is a truth of the Doctrine of the Church and was of aid in the understanding and reception of the Lord in His Second Coming.

The perception that the Writings are the Word with the men of the General Church was confirmed by and rested on the idea that the Writings are the Word because they are the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments, and upon the idea that the Writings are the Doctrine of the New Church set forth, not by Swedenborg, but by the Lord Himself. (See "Testimony of the Writings concerning themselves," 1920 edition, section Vi, p.15.) For this reason, it became customary in the General Church to refer to the Old and New Testaments as the sense of the letter of the Word, and to refer to the Writings as the internal sense of the Word, or as the Heavenly Doctrine. Even now the expression "The Word and the Writings" is in common use, in which by the Word is meant the Old and New Testaments, and the Writings mean the internal sense or the Heavenly Doctrines.

The Conference and Convention opposed the idea that the Writings are the Word on the ground that the Word on earth must be in the sense of the letter. (See Apocalypse Explained 1087.) Only in the sense of the Letter is the Word in its fullness, holiness and power. (Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 37-49.) The men of the Academy, in defense of their perception, came to see that the Writings also have a sense of the letter, but their thought was that this sense of the letter of the Writings is such that the internal sense everywhere shines through it to everyone.

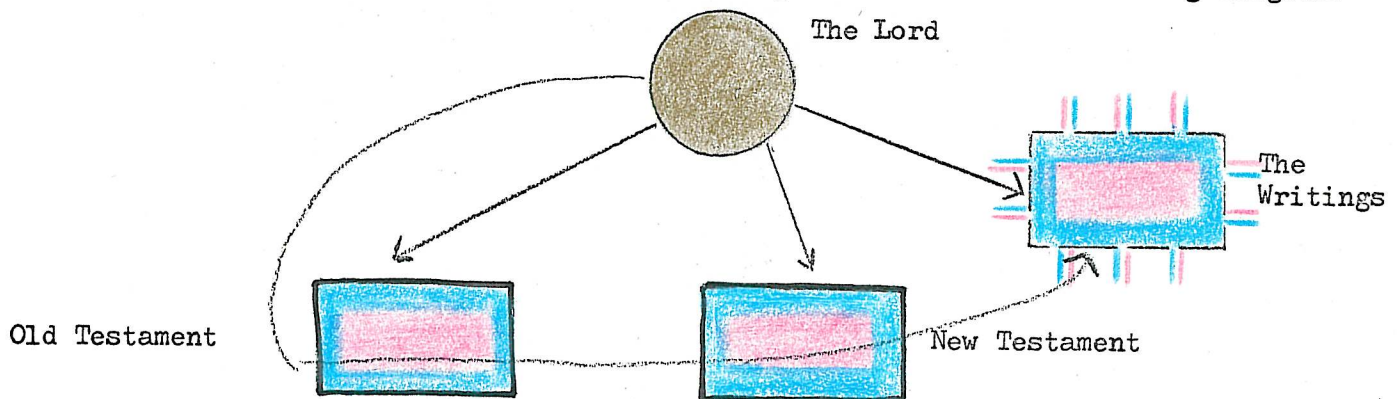
In the General Church therefore the idea is that the Writings are the Word of God and at the same time, that they are the Doctrine of the Church. They are considered as the Word of the Lord inasmuch as they

are written by the Lord through Swedenborg, and not by Swedenborg from the Lord. And they are considered as the Doctrine of the Church inasmuch as it is believed that in them the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments has been drawn forth and made plainly visible to all who read them.

Because of the twofold way in which the General Church regards the Writings, namely, as the Word of the Lord and as the Doctrine of the Church, there is also a twofold objective for that Church. One is the drawing out of the internal sense from those parts of the Old and New Testaments not unfolded in the Writings, by means of the application of the teachings of the Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture to the Old and New Testaments. (This objective is the one set forth in Bishop W. F. Pendleton's "Science of Exposition," which was taught in the courses of the Theological School on Sermon Writing.) The other objective is the reception of the internal sense from the plain teaching of the Writings without any application of the teachings of the Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture to them.

It must be noted that when the men of the General Church came to see that the Writings have a sense of the letter, their thought was that the internal sense within that letter was the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments.

The General Church view may be represented in the following diagram:



In this diagram the line proceeding from the Lord to the Writings indicates the Divine authorship of the Writings, by which they are the Word. Swedenborg is left out of the diagram, as he was not the author. The line proceeding from the Lord through the Old and New Testaments indicates the idea that the Writings are the Doctrine, or the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments, revealed in the plain statements of the Writings. The broken black line around the Writings indicates the sense of the letter of the Writings which must be there for them to be in the world, but which is scarcely to be noticed because the internal sense shines through it almost everywhere.

In recent years, in connection with the struggle made by the General Church against the teachings of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma, it has been taught by some leaders of the General Church that the Writings have a sense of the letter within which is contained a spiritual and celestial sense, but that these interior senses of the Writings cannot

be seen by men in the world except as to the most general truths of that interior sense which is seen in the Natural Heaven. And they suppose that even this cannot be given any recognizable form in the Church, remaining solely within the mind of the man who sees it. The Writings themselves therefore remain, under this idea, the internal sense of the Word in the only form that it can be presented in the world. This idea therefore does not essentially change the idea presented in the above diagram.

The View of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma.

The teaching of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma concerning the Writings of Swedenborg is that they are a revelation of the Truth of the Divine Human of the Lord. This revelation proceeded from the Lord Himself down to its own ultimate in the world, and contains within it all the degrees of the Divine Truth. Thus it contains within it the celestial and spiritual senses which can be communicated to the angels and to the men of the Church through the sense of its letter as the minds of men are opened to the Light of Heaven. Thus the spiritual and celestial things of this Word can be drawn out of the sense of the letter of it by those who are in illustration from the Lord, and may be given a form in the Doctrine of the Church. The end of the Church and of the man of the Church is to enter into the life and faith of the internal sense of this Word. From this comes all the spiritual and celestial life of the man of the Church. The Writings are thus the Third Testament of the Word of the Lord.

Some have supposed that the teaching of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma about the Third Testament is merely a logical upbuilding upon the teachings of the General Church. They suppose that the teachings of this Church have been drawn in this fashion: The Writings are the Word; because the Writings are the Word, they have a sense of the letter and an internal sense in the same way as do the Old and New Testaments; therefore they are the Third Testament. Such logic may indeed be used to support the teachings of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma, but it is not the origin of it.

The Doctrine of this Church about the Third Testament came into existence through a perception of the nature of the Writings given by means of a diligent study of what is taught in the Third Testament about the successive states of the conjunction of the Lord with the human race. The study concerned the states of the conjunction of the Lord with men before His Advent into the world, concerning the states which existed during and after His Advent, after the glorification of the Lord's Human, and of the states of conjunction which can exist now in His Second Advent.

Out of this study it was seen that the Old Testament is a revelation of the Truth of the Human Divine of the Lord, laid down in ultimates in the world. The Human Divine was that Human which the Lord then had by transflux through the Heavens. (See Arcana Coelestia 6371-6373.) The Old Testament contained within it all the Truth of the Human Divine.

When the Lord was in the world He fully glorified or made Divine His Human. At that time, however, the Lord could not reveal to men the Divine Truth of His Divine Human, because of the state of the Church and of the human race then prevailing. It was necessary first that the Lord should give a revelation of the Truth separated from His Divine Human as the Son from the Father. This is why the New Testament presents the Lord as the Son of God. Through the reception of that truth, through a life devoted to the Lord as the Son of God and His Commandments, those of the Christian Church could receive Good from the Lord. This Good was that which enabled every Christian who followed the Lord to enter into the New Heaven when that Heaven was formed at the time of the Second Coming. The New Testament was the True proceeding from the Divine Human in the form of that true which the Lord taught while He was in the world, when as yet with Him the Divine True had not yet been united to the Divine Good in Him.

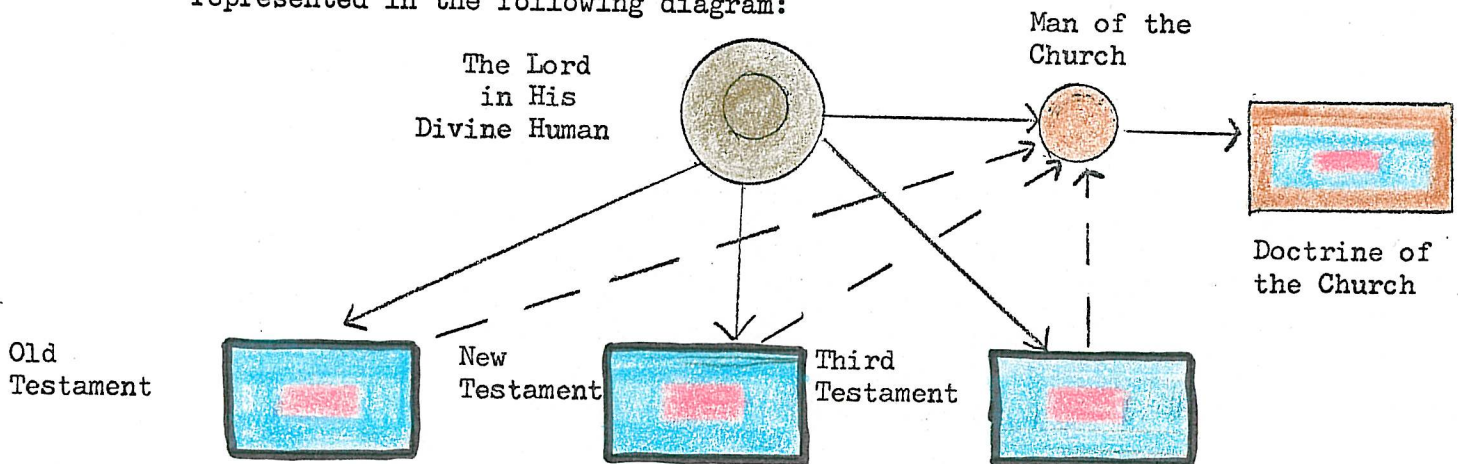
In His Second Coming the Lord revealed the Divine Truth of His Divine Human. This is the Truth of the Divine Rational of the Lord. It has been laid down in ultimates in the Writings of the New Church, which are therefore the Third Testament of the Word of the Lord. From this idea of the Third Testament, that it is the Divine Truth of the Divine Human of the Lord, and that in it the Divine Truth has been accommodated to angels and men, it was possible to see that the Third Testament in the sense of its letter contains all the Truth of the Divine Human from firsts to lasts within it, and that it is Divine even into its letter. It was also possible to see that therefore the sense of the letter of the Word of the Third Testament is representative and significative, and that it must be opened up according to the Divine Order revealed in it, if the Truths of the Divine Human of the Lord are to become the Truths of the Church.

From this it is clear that the Third Testament is not the Doctrine of the Church drawn out of the Old and New Testaments by Swedenborg under illustration from the Lord. Neither is it the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments laid bare for the Church. It is a complete revelation in itself of the Divine Truth of the Divine Human laid down in a letter of its own. It is the Word of the Lord in its fullness in the fullest possible sense. In it the Lord is present with the Church and wills to be received by His Church. And He is received by the Church more and more interiorly as the Church, under illustration from the Lord, draws forth the spiritual and celestial truths contained in this Testament in its Doctrine. The Order for the opening of the Third Testament to its internal sense is set forth in the Arcana Coelestia and in the Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture. Through this opening of the Third Testament to its internal sense, the Church will be able to see also the genuine truths of the Old and New Testaments, which had been closed to men in the fall of the former Churches.

The Third Testament is thus from a different internal in the Lord than were the Old and New Testaments. The difference between them is not just an external difference in the sense of the letter; there is an internal difference, in that the Old Testament had as its internal the Truth of the Human Divine of the Lord, the New Testament had as its internal the Truth separated from the Divine Human of the Lord, and the Third Testament has as its internal the Truth of the Divine Human of the Lord. Each Testament is a complete Divine Revelation, having all degrees of the Truth within it. Each Testament is in its own series, externally and internally.

The relation between them is not that in the New Testament the Lord merely explained the interior things of the Old Testament, nor that He, in the Third Testament, only explained some internal things of the Old and New Testaments. There are many appearances that this is the case. The relation between them is in the Lord. The Lord came into the world and took to Himself the Truth of the Human Divine and glorified it. Thus He fulfilled all things of the Word of the Old Testament, and brought all things of that Testament into the Divine Human Form. In the New Testament, He gave a revelation of Himself in the form of the Divine True as if separated from the Divine Human. In His Second Coming, He gave a revelation of the Divine True of His Divine Human. Each Testament was thus a complete and distinct revelation proceeding from the Lord.

The teaching of The Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma may be represented in the following diagram:



In this diagram the Three Testaments are represented as being alongside one another as far as their being full, complete, ultimate revelations of the Word is concerned. The purpose of the Lord in giving the Word, namely, that through it man may come into the truths of Heaven that are contained in the Word in its internal sense is made clear. And the object of the Church, namely, that from the Lord it may give form in its Doctrine to the truths of the internal sense of the Word, is also represented.

The Lord came into the world, assumed the Human and made it Divine. There is thus a great difference in the Human of the Lord, from which is His Word, before and after His Advent. From this, the internal relationship of the three Testaments, one to another, can be understood. And when this is seen, it can be seen that the Writings are indeed the Third Testament, laid down in the world according to all the laws of the descent of the Word to men, and that they are to be opened according to the laws of the opening of the Word to its internal sense.