

Some of the Erroneous Opinions commonly  
Held about the Lord's New Church which  
Is Nova Hierosolyma.

by the Rt. Rev. Philip N. Odhner  
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The opinions about this Church which are discussed in these notes have for many years been widely circulated and received in other bodies of the New Church. They have created a silent background of prejudice in which everything coming forth from the Church is rejected before it is even considered. Most of them have not been publicly stated and have come to our notice only indirectly. The members of the Church should know what they are and be prepared to answer them, if necessity should arise.

1. "They think they are regenerated."

The first thing with any member of this Church is to be in the order in which he can be regenerated by the Lord. In no other way can a man be brought to receive the Lord's Love and Wisdom and genuinely serve Him and the Neighbor. For anyone to hold that we think we have already attained that for which we are striving is absurd.

The most important thing in life is man's cooperation with the Lord in His work of regeneration. For this reason the Church has sought and continues to seek the trues of the order of regeneration contained in the Third Testament. It seeks to see more and more clearly the steps of that order so that all may understand them and see and shun the evils which attack man in each of them.

The effect of this study and work is not to make a man suppose that he has been regenerated. It is just the opposite. It relieves man from many fallacies as to the state of his spirit. One example of this is that it shows man that he is not in the internal sense of the Word just through reading and believing in the literal sense of the Third Testament, and that there is an extensive order of regeneration through which he must be led before he can be given the perception of the internal trues that are in it. Another example is that such a fallacy as supposing that the rational represented by Ishmael is the wild-ass rational of youth is quickly put aside. The effect of this study is to open the eyes to the immensity and eternity of that Divine operation of the Lord which is called regeneration, and this seeing is accompanied with the acknowledgment that what has been so far seen is only a drop in the ocean compared to that which can and must be seen in the future development of the Church.

This Church has brought forward from the Third Testament the teaching that the internal sense of the Word can be seen only by those who are regenerated. (Arcana Coelestia 6222:3; 8106, and other numbers.) This applies to all three testaments of the Word. This is no reason for supposing that we think we are regenerated. Would it not rather follow that they who suppose that they are in the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments through the reading and believing of the literal sense of the Third Testament must presume that they are regenerated?

This Church holds that certain essential doctrinal trues which have been seen and brought forward in the New Church are of the internal sense of the Third Testament. They have been seen in that Testament out of perception granted by the Lord, and this perception has been given through the opening of the mind to Heaven. One such truth is that the Writings are the Word. This is seen out of a perception of the Divine in those Writings. That truth was seen in the beginning of that movement from which sprang the General Church.

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To say that this truth was seen through the regeneration of those in the Church does not mean that those who were in the Church before that truth was seen and expressed were not being regenerated, nor does it mean that all who accept that truth now are regenerated. Such a truth can be recognized as being in agreement with the Word by those who are not at all in the enlightenment in which were those who first saw it. They receive it externally, but it is of the greatest aid in protecting them from many fallacies and in giving direction to their own understanding of the Word. If this were not the case, the wisdom of those who are wiser in the Church would never be of any use to those who are not so wise. I do not believe that anyone in the General Church would deny the benefits which arose from the seeing and expressing of that truth.

Another such truth is that the Writings are a revelation of the Divine True of the Divine Human of the Lord, that they contain in their literal sense all the Trues of the Divine Human from firsts to lasts, and that the Church must enter into their internal sense for its life. This truth was seen out of perception given by the Lord to those who devoted their lives to the Lord in the Third Testament, thus through the operation of the Lord with those who were being regenerated by Him. This does not mean that there were none being regenerated in the New Church before that truth was seen and expressed; nor does it mean that those who now see and accept that truth are regenerated. Yet none in this Church will deny the benefits accruing to them through the seeing and expressing of that truth.

Every truth of the internal sense of the Third Testament given to the Church will be given out of a sphere of regeneration by those devoting their lives to the Lord in that Testament. Should this idea shock anyone? Is it not openly taught in the Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture, numbers 57-59? Would it not be far more shocking to assume that in the whole New Church there has never been anything of regeneration out of which such truths can be seen in the Word?

This Church has brought forward from the Word many things about that which a man can know about his regeneration. This is not to claim that we, personally, know such things about ourselves or others. It is only a pointing out that the Word teaches that such a knowledge is possible, and that man is not necessarily to be left in that total blindness as to all spiritual things which some presume to be his lot. It is remarkable how often it has taken place that the showing from the Word of the possibility of something has been twisted to mean that we claim for ourselves that which has been shown to be possible.

Concerning the use of the term "regenerated," in the past tense, as if it were something finished and done with, it must be pointed out that while the Third Testament often speaks of those who have been regenerated, it also teaches that the regeneration of man proceeds into eternity. (Arcana Coelestia 10048:2.) It is obvious therefore that regeneration is never finished. "Regenerated" in the past tense, is used in the Word to denote those who have been regenerated as to a certain state or degree, as for example those who have been regenerated as to the rational, and not yet as to the natural, and so forth. The regeneration of man in one state makes possible the influxes from the Lord whereby he can be regenerated further, and this into eternity. We point this out here because sometimes those in the New Church use the word "regenerated" in the same way in which those of the Old Church use the word "saved." Eternal life is successive regeneration by the Lord into eternity.

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Also we would here point out that in the New Church it has become customary to speak of "regenerating men," using the word in the active voice in relation to man, as if it were the man himself who was doing the regenerating. In the Third Testament the word is used in the active voice in relation to the Lord, namely, that the Lord regenerates man. In relation to man it is used in the passive voice, namely, that man is being regenerated by the Lord. Only in two or three places is it said in the Word that man regenerates. In those few cases the word is used to denote the things man does from the Lord in preparation for his being regenerated by the Lord. Thus the True Christian Religion numer 73 says: "God cannot regenerate man spiritually except insofar as man regenerates himself naturally." The spiritual regeneration of man by the Lord is in the conjunction of the good and true effected in one of his states through the combats of temptation in which man's part becomes passive. It is not in order for the Church to speak of regenerating men, unless qualified by the idea presented in that number.

2. "Some of them think they are Divinely inspired."

About thirty years ago a minister of the New Church asked me whether I thought that what I preached was the Divine Truth. I answered that if I did not think it was the Divine Truth I would not preach it. In recent years this has come back to me, indirectly, as the opinion that I suppose myself to be Divinely inspired. This is presumed to be one of the dire consequences, one of the pitfalls, of believing in "De Hemelsche Leer."

All my life I have been taught that a priest should preach the Word of the Lord, and that the Truths of the Word are Divine. This belief was instilled into me while I was in the General Church. My conscience as to what is to be preached, in that regard, was formed there. The teachings of the Lord's New Church which is Nova Hierosolyma have infilled and reinforced it.

My statement has been taken to mean something that refers to me alone, or to the ministers of this Church alone. That is not true. As I see it, any minister of the New Church who preaches anything that he does not believe to be the teaching of the Word is not a true priest and is not worth his salt.

For many years Bishop W. F. Pendleton's "Science of Exposition" was the text book from which ministers of the General Church learned how and what they should preach. Consider the following things said in that work:

"The Word in its bosom treats of the Lord and of the things which are from Him in heaven and the Church. These are the spirit and life of the Word, or its spiritual sense. The New Church sermon should set forth in the form of doctrine or teaching this inner spirit and life of the Word." (p. 1. par. 1.)

"...there is to be in the New Church a continual opening of the Word, a continual revelation of its internal sense, and thus a continual coming of the Lord, with each and all of the individual members of the Church who receive the Writings and instruction therefrom with spiritual affection." (p. 2. par. 2.)

"Entrance into the interiors of the Word by means of the three essentials (enlightenment from the Lord, Doctrine of the Genuine True and the science of correspondence), aided by the principles of exposition, is still the work of the Lord in His Second Coming, as He has revealed Himself in the Writings, and not the work of man,

even though apparently effected through human agency. For doctrine is from the Lord and is the Lord, correspondences are also from Him, and illustration is His gift to all who seek Him in the spirit of truth which leadeth unto all truth." (p. 3. par. 2.)

"We are not to import into it (the text) what belongs elsewhere, or in some other series, and above all not to insert something that is a mere product of human intelligence, something not inspired by the Word of God... He will thus be introduced into the stream of the Word, and will be led to expound only that which is in the Word, speaking from the Lord." (p. 280. par. 1.)

Any priest of the New Church who seeks to abide in the above quoted principles will not teach anything but that which he sees to be the teaching of the Word, and thus the Divine Truth. It is possible that he may be mistaken, and that what he preaches is only an apparent truth and not a genuine one. For this he can be forgiven, provided his love is to come to the genuine true; but he cannot be forgiven, if he preaches that which he does not think is the true teaching of the Word.

The term "Divinely inspired" as used in the Third Testament to denote that inspiration by which the Word in its letter was given on earth, the inspiration through which the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Third Testament were given. The sense of the letter of the Word contains within it all the Divine True from firsts to lasts. Obviously a sermon of a minister is not a new sense of the letter of the Word, and is not Divinely inspired in that sense at all. His sermon sets forth some truth of the sense of the letter of the Word or some more interior truth seen there. This does not make his sermon a new sense of the letter of the Word.

The essential means for entering into the spiritual sense of the Word as described in the Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture and quoted in "The Science of Exposition" apply to all those in the Church, whether priests or laymen; the enlightenment there described can be given by the Lord to all who follow Him. A priest should indeed seek this enlightenment, but it is not the prerogative of his office. As seen in this Church, the special enlightenment which the priesthood can receive has reference to the trues of life, by means of which those of the Church can be led to the good of life, that is, to conjunction with the Lord. A priest is ordained with the promise of the Holy Spirit. His inspiration can and ought to be from the Lord's Holy Spirit. (See Canons of the New Church: The Holy Spirit, chapter 1v.) In the True Christian Religion, number 810, it is said that some preachers in the Spiritual World were deprived of the priesthood because they did not form their sermons out of the Word, and thus out of the Spirit of God, but out of their own rational lumen, and thus out of a proprial spirit.

In the Apocalypse Explained, number 825:3, where "the Laws of our Religion" are given, it is said of those who shun evils as sins against the Word and thus against God, "daily also he is taught by the Lord what must be done and spoken, and what must be preached or written, for evils having been removed he is continually under the auspices of the Lord, and is in illustration." This is the inspiration for which the priests of this Church must look, and for which they must pray.

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The wiser answer to anyone asking "Do you think that you preach the Divine Truth?" would have been to ask them what kind of truth do they think they preach. If he should say that it was anything but the Divine Truth, one could then point out to him how far he had departed from the avowed purpose of a New Church sermon as set forth in the "Science of Exposition," namely, to set forth the inner spirit and life of the Word.

3. "They are going to rewrite the Writings."

This opinion arises from the generally held idea that the Writings are the internal sense of the Old and New Testaments, and therefore if anyone is to give an exposition of their internal sense, then this exposition will necessarily hold the same position in relation to the "Writings" that the "Writings" hold in relation to the Old and New Testaments. In other words, the doctrinal papers of the Church will become the source to which the Church looks, and not the "Writings."

If it is seen that the Third Testament is the Divine True of the Divine Human of the Lord revealed in His Second Coming, then it can be seen that its natural sense in which it is presented before man in the natural world is the containment of the infinitely many truths of the Lord's Divine Human. Thousands of the trues of its celestial and spiritual sense will no doubt be seen shining through the ultimate bosom of the Third Testament in years to come, but the Third Testament, together with the Old and New Testaments, will forever remain the only Divine basis from which all trues are to be drawn. Nothing can replace it.

The idea of rewriting this Divine basis is sickening to a man of this Church. This is why this Church insists upon the preservation of the original Latin of the Third Testament without any change whatsoever. This also is why we strive for translations of the Word which are as faithful as possible to the original.

To give a comparison in merely natural things, consider nature and science. Science is a growing body of knowledge of the interior things of nature. It can never replace nature, but it certainly aids in the understanding of it. So also with the Word and the Doctrine of genuine trues drawn out of the Word. The Doctrine does not replace the Word, but it certainly helps in the understanding of it.

4. "They place the authority of regenerating men over the authority of the Writings."

The Divine authority of the "Writings" refers in the first place to their authorship. It means that the Lord is the author of the Third Testament, not Swedenborg. It means that they are the Word of the Lord. It means that they are the only source of the true for the Church and that anything that has another source should not prevail in the Church.

The "authority of the Writings" has also come to have a more external meaning as an authority between men of the Church when they differ with one another, or when they seek the answer to some difficult question together.

In this Church there is no question of the Divine authority of the Third Testament in either of these senses. There is, however, a more interior idea of the authority of the Third Testament. This is its authority or power against the evils and falsities in man, the power of its trues to regenerate man.

It is taught in the Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture, number 77, that the Word is not the Word with man if it is not understood, still less, if it is falsified. If the Third Testament is not understood, if it is misunderstood, if it is falsified, it has no authority internally in man. A man may accept the "Writings" as his only authority, but if he does not understand what they say, then he does not see the trues in them, and those trues have no authority with him.

Some take the understanding of the "Writings" for granted. As seen in this Church the genuine understanding of the Third Testament is given to men according to the laws laid down in the Doctrine concerning the Sacred Scripture, and in other teachings on that subject given elsewhere in the Third Testament. If man lives in the order there revealed, the genuine trues of the Third Testament will be seen and received by him, and the Third Testament will be in its authority, in its power in him.

The opinion that this Church looks to men who are being regenerated as an authority in the Church has no basis whatsoever. The fact that we believe that the internal things of the Word can only be seen by those being regenerated, and that certain essential trues which have been seen and received in the Church are of the internal sense of the Third Testament, is no excuse for holding such an opinion. This can easily be seen in the case of the doctrinal truth that the Writings are the Word. I doubt if anyone knows the name of the man with whom that idea was first seen. It is even possible that the name of the man who first gave expression to it is not known. Nor does it at all matter who it was. Nor does anyone think of that man as another "authority" in the Church. All that matters is that it is true, that it is seen to be in agreement with the Third Testament and is of that Testament. The same thing applies with regard to every other essential true of Doctrine that has been seen and will be seen in the Church.

Anyone in this Church who does not see that its Doctrine is taught in the Third Testament does not yet really believe it. To believe something because it has been said by some man whom one regards as a wise man, or as a man who is being regenerated, is a faith of authority which is a merely natural faith. (See Arcana Coelestia 8078:3; 10124:3; Divine Providence 168:4.) It is an historical faith only. (Doctrine concerning Faith 1.)