

Keeping in a State of Hope

by the Rev. Donald L. Rose

It is written in the Psalms,

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him” (42:5). And again in the Psalms: “But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more” (71:14).

The Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church speak of “a bright state of hope” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8165) and tell us that the angels endeavor to “keep the person in a state of hope” (*ibid.* 2338). “If he suffers himself to be cheered by hope, he stands fast in what is affirmative.”

A valuable truth about life is that we should live in the present, and many of us consciously try to do this. But this is a sermon about hope. And hope, you may say, has to do with the future. Indeed, hope may be related to the future, but it is something you *feel* in the present. It is a present experience. Yes, try to live in the present, but live with hope.

Hope is something of both the rational mind and the heart. The book *Divine Providence* says that it is reason’s delight to contemplate a coming effect not in the present but in the future. And then it is said, “This is the source of what is called hope” (*Divine Providence* 178). We find pleasure in contemplating, anticipating, and thinking of particular things to come. We like to have things to look forward to.

Hope as expressed in the Psalms is also something that flows in and warms us. It is a heart gift. The Heavenly Doctrines speak of three things that come to a person who is praying or has prayed: “hope, consolation, and a certain inward joy” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535). When we are assaulted by evil spirits, we are told that an answer from the Divine flows in. This scarcely comes to the perception otherwise than as “hope and the resulting comfort” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8159).

The Hebrew word for hope in the Psalms is *yachal*. In a couple of contexts, *yachal* is rendered “trust.” For example, in the book of Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (13:5). It is also translated to “wait.” “Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God” (Psalm 69:3). Hope is a waiting with good expectation, like someone who, in the darkness, watches for the morning, like a person who enters a new enterprise or a new year of work with good anticipation. I will hope continually. “My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day” (Psalm 71:15).

When we speak, we know we should speak in terms of hope. We are asked how a sick friend is doing. “Well, we hope he will soon be feeling better.” And if his condition is deteriorating, we hope he will be given strength. And if he dies, we hope that his passing will be understood by us. And, of course, we hope for his welfare in the world to come. Yes, we hope and hope and hope.

Is this realistic? Is it psychologically sound? Does it square reasonably with the actuality of human life? If the Lord is all-powerful, it is realistic. If the Lord sees and knows and cares, it is realistic. He is all-powerful. He sees and knows all things, and His love is ardent and everlasting. To an extent we know this. “They know that for those who trust in the Divine, all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and that whatever befalls them in time is still conducive thereto.” “They are in the stream of Providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8478).

“Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You” (Psalm 33:22). Why are you cast down? Hope in God. The gift of hope makes life’s other gifts sparkle. Hope makes the good things of life enjoyable, and it makes adversities bearable. It makes the disappointments and apparent failures endurable. We have hope. And we note that hope is ranked with the two elements of love and faith. “And now abide faith, hope, love” (I Corinthians 13:13). “[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (*ibid.* 7).

The early Christians knew this well. The Christians who first endured in the city of Rome received word from the Apostle saying,

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...I am persuaded that neither... principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:18,35,38-39).

Perhaps we appreciate hope especially in contrast to its absence. If you don’t have any hope, your plight is grievous. It is the state of despair. Every temptation we experience is attended, the Heavenly Doctrines say, with some kind of despair (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1787). It is a diminishing of hope. And in despair, particulars that might otherwise cheer us hold no joy for us. On the other hand, when we have hope it seems to have many facets. We have hopes for country, community, and family, hopes for the church and hopes for specific uses. We look upon other people, and our love for them has specific hopes. The things they need are present with us when we are praying.

There is something special about our hopes for children, whether our own children or others. Because their life stretches out before them, we look on them with hope. We have hope for their success, for their overcoming problems and healing their woes. When children are very young our hopes for them are often much better than their own hopes for themselves.

That helps us appreciate the Lord’s view of our hopes. It helps us to think of this when we pray that the Lord’s will be done, rather than our own. For His will for us is better than our own.

In one place the Heavenly Doctrines speak of “the hope of becoming an angel” (*Heaven and Hell* 517:2). What a hope for us—hope of finding a life in which what we do is useful for others and makes a difference for good! We should all be stirred by the doctrinal knowledge that the Lord’s

purpose is a heaven from the human race and that our life is related to that purpose. The elderly, who seem to have lost much in terms of worldly hopes, should particularly know the benefit of this hope from the Lord. It is part of our identity, our destiny.

Angels are not always in an intense state of joy. Emanuel Swedenborg was given to observe at close hand a whole spectrum of angelic states—states compared to times of day: morning, noon, and evening. He was allowed to talk to angels when their zest for life was at its lowest. And it is remarkable that in that state they spoke about hope. “But they said that they hoped to return soon to their former state, and thus into heaven again, as it were” (*Heaven and Hell* 160).

We know something similar to this. We converse with each other about our disappointments, and we can do so with a smile. We are even able to say to each other, “I have been very depressed lately. I have been feeling so low.” But we can say even that cheerfully, because we have hope. There is a beautiful passage in *Conjugal Love* that says, “When the partners tenderly love each other, they think of their covenant as being eternal and have no thought whatever concerning its end by death; and if they do think of this, they grieve; yet, at the thought of its continuance after death, they are revived by hope” (*Conjugal Love* 216). They are revived or strengthened by hope.

Let us be willing that the Lord shall cheer us with His gift of hope. Remember the phrase “but still, if he suffers himself to be cheered by hope, he stands fast in what is affirmative” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2338). “I will hope continually, and I will praise You yet more and more.”

Amen.

Lessons: Psalms 43, 130; Luke 10; *Arcana Coelestia* 2338, 6144, 8165