

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

BEFORE THE ADVENT

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It is a basic part of faith to believe that unless the Lord came into the world, mankind would have perished. It is not important for us to *fully* understand this. However, it is the truth. The Writings have told us it is so.

The person who can see no evil in self is unable to know of the need for salvation. Also, if we do not see to what extent humanity was in total spiritual darkness, we cannot know why the Lord had to come to our earth.

Looking at the world in which we live, it is hard to see how life at the time of the Lord's Advent was any worse than it is today. However, when we examine the behavior of people, we can only make an external judgment. We cannot see the internal state of belief. We can look at the things that people did or do. But we cannot know what their motives were or are. Only the Lord can judge the interior states of people or the interior states of the church. And only He could see that the organized church had been destroyed so completely that there was no longer any good or truth in it. When that state of the church was reached, it was necessary for Him to come again.

There must always be a church on earth. This is because, of ourselves, we can will nothing of good and understand nothing of truth. These are from the Lord alone. The church exists whenever there is an understanding of truth and a will of good. By means of this a bond or connection is established between the world and angels in heaven. This enables angels to be present with us. And it enables the Lord to lead us through His angels.

We are told that the church on earth acts as a heart into which the Lord can inflow. It inspires us to think what is true and to love what is good. If this did not happen we would be totally buried in the things of self-love. Our self-intelligence would destroy us.

In the very beginning, the Lord's church on earth was celestial. This means that it was inmost in the love of the Lord. And the Lord led that church by means of affections. He was then able to flow right into the hearts of each person and inspire him or her with a love of good. From this grew up an understanding of truth. And so everyone was led from within, directly by the Lord. This was possible at that time because no one was in any evil. Instead, they were in the love of being led by the Lord.

Yet, people were still in freedom. And they had the feeling that life was their own. At the same time, they knew that everything they had was from the Lord. However, in the passing of time, people came more and more to love external and sensual things. They came to believe more and more that they acted from themselves. As they turned inward to themselves, they turned away from the Lord. So the Lord could no longer flow in and inspire them with love of good. This decline into evil was hastened by the fact that everyone's understanding and will were conjoined.

The two parts of the mind, the will and the understanding, worked together. When a person was in the love of good, this meant that one came at once into the understanding of what was true. However, when that person was in the love of evil, he or she at once came into the understanding of falsities in that love. The church began to rush into fantasies of evil. Church members confirmed those evils and began thinking they were God. This rush into evil is what is meant by the story of the Flood. In that flood of evil and falsity, people were actually drowned by their own lusts.

But the Lord did not allow all humanity to die in that flood. Instead, He raised up a new form of human being who did not have the will and understanding joined. This meant that the person could be instructed and could understand the truth of faith even though, from heredity, he or she was in the love of evil. Such people could understand what was true. They could be led to do what was good and also see the evil of the selfish will and shun it. In this way, a new will could be created. Humans could once again love what was good. This new creation was called “the spiritual man.” All those living before the flood were celestial, but all since the flood have been spiritual. They are called spiritual because they are led to the Lord in the spiritual way. They are led by means of the truths of faith. But the celestial men and women that existed before the flood could be led to the Lord in the celestial way. That is, they were led from within by a love of good. The process by which the “spiritual man” (which includes us and all people since the flood) — the process by which the “spiritual man” is raised out of the love of self into a love of the Lord and the neighbor — is called “regeneration,” or “re-birth.”

The first church was called the Most Ancient Church. It is represented in the Word by the stories of Adam. After the fall, the Lord made a new spiritual church called the Ancient Church. It was represented by Noah. This new spiritual church was led by means of truths – the truths of faith. However, the only truths of faith that people had were those truths of faith which had been saved from the stories and traditions of the Most Ancient Church.

Remember that celestial people were in a love of good. From this they were in the understanding of truth. However, this understanding of truth was only a representative understanding. Internal ideas of love and faith that the men and women of the Most Ancient Church had, were clothed in symbolic ideas—stories such as the story of creation and the story of the flood as given in the Word. These symbolic stories were the Word for the ancient world. It was enough for these of the Most Ancient Church whose minds were open to heaven and who could see the truth within those stories. However, such a symbolic understanding of truth is not enough for the spiritual level of the mind. “Spiritual men,” because born into love of self, need truths of faith plainly and simply stated. They need truths stated in natural ideas that they can understand. Only in this way can they see evils and be led to good.

The Lord foresaw that this would be so. It was prophesied that he would come into the world. He would teach Divine truths accommodated to people’s understanding.

This first prophecy of the Lord’s birth was made at the time of the first “fall.” Even then it was foreseen that the Lord would have to come to earth if anyone was to be saved.

There are two reasons why the Lord did not come at once. The first was in order to protect those who were in good. The Lord foresaw that many simple good people would be destroyed in a judgment. This would take place following His Advent into the world if evil were not first allowed to reach a state of fullness. Otherwise, simple souls would not be able to tell between good and evil.

The second reason why the Lord did not come at once was to protect the wicked from entering into worse evil. After the fall, people were not totally evil. Many were in some good. And because of this hereditary good, many would have accepted the Lord and His teachings when He came. But that good was not really their own. And because the love of self still reigned in them, they would soon have rejected the Lord completely. In rejecting the Lord they would destroy the way to their own salvation. They would have twisted the very truth that was meant to save them.

Before the Lord could come, it was necessary for human beings to be allowed to descend into complete darkness. This darkness was the end of a church. The Ancient Church was founded on knowledges in the Ancient Word. Gradually it fell away from any real understanding of those knowledges. All of the symbols and rituals of the Most Ancient Church became objects of worship in themselves—idols.

After the Ancient Church, the Lord made a representative church with the Israelites. They were not in internal worship. Yet, by their ritual, sacrifice and burnt offerings, they could represent the worship of a spiritual church. In this way, the Lord provided a link between heaven and earth until He came down Himself. If the Lord had not come, all mankind would have perished. People would have gradually lost all good and truth remaining from the Most Ancient Church.

The prophets of the Old Testament describe this gradual death of the church. They promised that the Lord would come. This is what is meant in Isaiah 21, verse 11: “Watchman what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” And the watchman said, “The morning cometh, and also the night.” The night is the last days of the church, a state of complete darkness. But the morning is the Advent of the Lord when there will be light. Only by coming into the world Himself could the Lord lead His people out of darkness. Only after that state of darkness can the morning come. “Even so come, Lord Jesus.”

Text: Isaiah 21:11