

COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

FAITH AND LIFE

By the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson

Every young person must, at some time, be troubled by serious questions concerning faith. What is real faith, and how is it formed? Is faith in the Lord and in the Word really necessary for salvation? What is the relation of faith to life; can what a person believes be different from what he does? What is the relation of faith to doubt; can we have the one while still entertaining the other? And does acceptance of a religious faith inhibit freedom?

These are real questions for a developing mind, and the mere fact that they arise should not cause concern. It does not mean that a person is necessarily in a negative state and headed for denial; there are always those who doubt before they affirm, and whose affirmation is stronger because it has been reached through difficulty. But the questions remain, and their seriousness may be increased because, to many, faith has become a term of intellectual reproach.

As young men and women who have been taught to prize rationality and liberty you may suffer uneasiness under the charge that faith and reason are antitheses. The materialist claims that he alone is objective, that the person of faith has surrendered the spirit of free inquiry for bias and has become, in effect, a second-class intellect. But this assertion can be dismissed as the nonsense it is. The difference between the person of faith and the materialist is not that one believes without proof whereas the other does not, for the one is as much a believer as the other. The difference is in the things in which they believe. The materialist may assert that there is no God and no life after death, but he cannot prove these things, he can only believe them.

Faith, therefore, may reject the imputation of weakness, the tempting suggestion that to commit one's mind to faith in any one thing is to limit its range. In true faith there is strength—strength not only of the intellect but also of the will. But still, questions remain which deserve answers and which are answered in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church.

From the *Doctrine of Faith for the New Jerusalem* we learn that faith is an internal acknowledgment of truth. This cannot be made without knowledge of truth and some understanding of it. But we also see that faith cannot be separated from charity. Faith and life go together, and Divine truth is revealed solely as the means to spiritual life. The study of doctrine should not be an end in itself; yet without genuine doctrine people cannot do genuine good.

For the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that without doctrine we can never achieve the good of life. It is one thing, they say, to be in good *as to* life, but another to be in the good *of* life. The first of these goods is natural; the second is the good that people receive from the Lord through regeneration. It is commonly said that it does not matter what a person believes as long as he lives a good life, but that is a dangerous fallacy. If we aspire to spiritual good, we need the revealed truth of the Word to show us what that good is, how to make ourselves ready for it, and how to do it.

For these reasons we should read the *Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem*. And as it is read we should keep this in mind. On a certain occasion the Lord said, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Divine blessing, which is eternal life and happiness, cannot be given to those who do not know the truth. But it is also not granted to those who merely *know*. The gift is to those who, knowing the Lord’s precepts, do them.