

In His Image

by Sylvia Parker

“God created man in His own image...”

There are two essential ways that this quotation applies to the teaching profession.

First, we are potentially powerful role models. As such we must be ever sensitive of ourselves as vessels through which the students may sense the Lord's love and mercy. And they do. No one is perfect, yet the Lord guides all our efforts to the best possible outcome, both for us and our students. Our internal striving towards regeneration is the vital heart of this teaching role. It gives it life.

But external form is also vital, especially to the growing mind. Secular research can assist us in analyzing our external behavior. Current communication theory holds that eighty percent of what we convey is *non-verbal*, and is, to a very large extent, both unconsciously sent and unconsciously received. With practice we can become conscious of our body language and strive to keep it as positive as possible. We know that this takes focused, conscious energy and must be done on a continuing basis. This effort may then best serve as an outward manifestation of our internal striving toward a harmony—a match between internal and external goals through which the Lord may work.

In this process some have found that writing a personal journal or keeping a mental tape of one's own behavior in the classroom can be effective techniques. (A video can be even more telling!) It is important at a later time to analyze and reflect on what may be learned from this and then determine some specific actions to be taken. The effort to change our externals for a useful purpose is an avenue through which the Lord may enter to change our internals.

Through the actions and attitudes of all the adults with which developing students come in contact, they will be introduced to a broad spectrum of human qualities. These images projected by us will never be perfect, but our efforts can be used by the Lord as illustrations. At the same time the students' studies about the Lord, especially while He was on earth, will be providing the true and perfect image of the Human.

The second application of the opening text is vital on another level. Our internal and external efforts to model positive behaviors and attitudes can have a far-reaching effect on how students visualize the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Is teaching modeled as exciting, challenging work? Is it seen as a deeply rewarding life of service to the neighbor? Are teachers glad to be in school working with young people?

New Church education is still very much a pioneer undertaking and needs more young, enthusiastic and inspired laborers in its vineyards. It is an important responsibility to inspire the next generation. We need to remember that by our day to day modeling we can make a difference. We must believe that the Lord can work through us to light the sparks that will carry the vision of the development of New Church educational philosophy and practice to the next generation. We need many new pioneers in our ranks and we, the current teachers, are potentially prime recruiters. Are we *good* recruiters?

Man's Image

Perhaps in trying to assess and reflect on this question, we could use another perspective. Current teaching research tells us that teachers should be seen both by themselves and by their students as learners and that the projection of this image is a primary factor in effective teaching. The Word calls this willingness to be a learner discipleship. A *disciple* is one who listens and follows. The Word further tells us that an *apostle* is one who teaches from the love of being a disciple. Thus we teach truly when we teach from a love of learning (*Arcana Coelestia* 10490:7, *Apocalypse Explained* 100:2).

An understanding of this dual role of disciple and apostle, with which we are all commissioned, can give our efforts as model teachers and recruiters a stronger impetus toward the goal of becoming a useful image of God. May our prayer be that the Lord's light and love shine ever more perfectly through us each day.

"In the image of God He created him" (Genesis 1:27).

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).