



Layers of Meaning

Lesson Overview

1. Think-pair-share

Discuss questions with a partner and share with the group.

2. Read

The Word has layers of meaning. The Writings for the New Church provide “correspondences” revealing the inner meaning of the Word. pp.1-2

3. Activity

Choose an activity to explore the idea of correspondences further p.3

New Church Concept Meaning in the Word

Although the style of the Word seems simple in the sense of the letter nothing can ever be compared with it in excellence, since Divine Wisdom lies concealed not only in the meaning as a whole but also in each word. In heaven this wisdom shines forth. See *Heaven and Hell* 310

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Think-pair-share

Directions

Divide students into pairs. Choose one question from the list below to ask the group to get everyone thinking. After you ask a question each student will 1. silently think up a response, 2. share and discuss their thoughts with a partner and try to come up with an answer they both agree on, 3. share their joint answer with the group as the teacher calls on individual pairs.

1. How can children, adults and angels in heaven all get something out of the same Word when they read it?
2. In what ways does knowing correspondences (associations between things in the Word and spiritual qualities) give a deeper understanding of the stories in the Word?
3. Would knowing many true ideas help you lead a better life than knowing just a few true ideas?
4. Could you figure out the deeper meanings in the Word for yourself instead of learning about them from the Writings for the New Church?

Read

The Lord can speak to everyone—children, adults and angels—through the Word because it contains infinite layers of meaning. When we read the stories in the Old and New Testaments we are reading the *letter of the Word*. As we read or listen the angels with us are not aware of the actual words but they understand the spiritual meaning that is within them.

The sense of the letter of the Word is changed instantly with angels into the spiritual sense, because a correspondence exists between every single thing in the natural world and every single thing in the spiritual world.
See *Arcana Coelestia* 5648.2

The Writings call the relationship between things in the natural and spiritual world “correspondences.” There is a similar relationship between what is written in the Old and New Testaments and the heavenly meanings that the angels understand. The Writings reveal many of these spiritual correspondences. Knowing them can help a person explore spiritual meanings in the Word. Both ways of understanding the Word are essential—each depends on the other.

The Writings compare the literal sense of the Word to a person's body and the inner meaning (or internal sense) to its soul.

Just as the body lives by means of the soul so does the literal sense by means of the internal sense. *Arcana Coelestia* 2311

A person's words and actions express his or her soul. What we think about and love motivate us to do what we do. If what we say agrees with what we are thinking and our actions agree with our feelings, they "correspond." We smile when we are happy and frown when we are worried. Smiling does not *cause* happiness, but communicates it. (If someone smiles but is really feeling angry, the smile communicates happiness, but it does not "correspond" to what the person is feeling!)

In a similar way, the literal sense of the Word expresses Divine truth from the Lord that can be understood by people on earth. People can read and understand the Word, but the stories also serve another purpose. Since there is a correspondence between what is spiritual and what is natural, every detail in the Old and New Testaments contains a deeper meaning.

Since every expression in the Word comes from the Lord and so has the Divine within it, it is clear that not one expression...is there which does not mean and embody something. *Arcana Coelestia* 771

Let's look at the story of the Lord taking the disciples Peter, James and John up on a mountain. While they were there, the Lord's appearance changed dramatically.

His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.... Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Matthew 17:2,5

The Writings tell us what these words mean.

"His face shone like the sun" because "face" symbolizes the interiors and His interiors were Divine. The "sun" symbolizes Divine love. "His clothes became white as the light" because "clothes" symbolize Divine truth proceeding from the Lord. Light also symbolizes truth. See *Apocalypse Explained* 64.2

This vision pictures the Lord giving us His Divine truth in the Word from His deep love for us. It explains why He came into the world. Up on the mountain the disciples saw something of how the Lord appears in heaven—and when they saw Him like this, they had no trouble recognizing His Divinity.

New Church Concept Correspondence

The spiritual or internal meaning of the Word is simply the meaning of the letter unfolded according to correspondences, for this makes known the spiritual content that angels in the heavens perceive when a person in the world thinks naturally about what he reads in the Word. *De Verbo* 7.2

Contents of the Word

The contents of the Word are countless, so that not even the angels can exhaust them. Anything found there can be compared to a seed, which planted in the ground can grow into a great tree, and produce an abundance of seeds. These again produce similar trees to form a garden, and their seeds in turn form other gardens, and so on to infinity. *True Christianity* 290

Interiorly the Word is spiritual and celestial. It is written exclusively by correspondences, which conceal with them all angelic wisdom.... The style of the Word is such that there is holiness in every sentence, and in every word, and in some places even in the very letters. *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 3, 8

Explore Correspondences

Choose an activity to explore the idea of correspondences.

What's Missing?

Complete the following sentences. Fill in the blanks using words from the Word Bank below.

1. A stone corresponds to truth as _____ corresponds to good.
2. Truth without good is like a _____ without life.
3. A storm corresponds to temptations as _____ corresponds to peace.
4. Bright clouds correspond to the literal sense of the Word and _____ correspond to falsities.
5. A mountain corresponds to _____ while a valley corresponds to focusing on our natural lives or what is more external.
6. A person resembles a _____ when charity and faith are linked in his life and a desert when they are not.

Word Bank

bricks	closeness to the Lord	false ideas	uncertainty	(human) body
dark clouds	mustard seed	wood	calm after a storm	garden

Is the Meaning always the Same?

The spiritual meaning of people, places and things mentioned in the Word depends on the *context*. Something may have a good correspondence in one story and another meaning altogether in a different story. This is because the functions, characteristics and qualities of natural things correspond to something spiritual. For example, the ways water is useful in our natural lives corresponds to what truth can do for us spiritually. When water is destructive—for example during a flood—it illustrates how falsity can affect us spiritually.

A lion can correspond to the power of Divine truth or the opposite—the power of hellish falsity against Divine truth (see *Apocalypse Explained* 781.12). In the story of Daniel in the lions' den, do you think lions symbolize the power of truth or the power of falsity?

Arrows generally symbolize truths fighting against false ideas but can also mean falsities fighting against truth. Psalm 127:4-5 reads, "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them." Do you think these arrows symbolize true or false ideas? Why? Does knowing the correspondence of "arrows" help you understand the meaning of this passage? Why or why not?

The meaning of a person or thing may also vary depending on whether the spiritual meaning is telling us about the Lord, or about people and their spiritual growth.