

Our Attitude Toward New Church Day

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Sometimes people suggest that church festivals are for children. Our celebrations of Christmas, with its emphasis on presents, and Easter, with the hunts for baskets and eggs, tend to confirm this. And this suggestion is half true. Our church celebrations *are* for our children, but not as secular, commercial holidays. Christmas, Easter, and, for New Church members, New Church Day, are really holy days. By them we mark the miracles the Lord did for our spiritual welfare. They are special occasions, particularly adaptable to teaching our children about what the Lord has done, and is doing, for us, so that we may be spiritually and eternally happy.

As we approach the celebration of the Second Coming, it is important that we see its usefulness to the education of our children. At this point in history, we do not have a problem with commercialization of this holiday. We have the opportunity of instilling in our children the proper attitude toward this holy event. If we can bring the sphere of the Lord's Divine work of the Second Coming to our children, we will teach them to have affection for the spiritual event, which we may celebrate externally with worship, picnics and gift giving.

First, we must understand what the Lord did for us that we celebrate on June nineteenth. We do not celebrate any worldly event or even any natural organization. Rather, our worship and festivities lift our hearts in thanksgiving to the Lord for the formation of His New Church in heaven and on earth. This is a spiritual event. We gather together to praise the Lord Jesus Christ who has made His Second Coming, who has enabled us, even while we live on earth, to participate in this spiritual re-creation—the descent of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, to people on earth (Revelation 21).

The New Church established by the Lord is His Divine love and truth, united in a heavenly order and organization. We are called to enter this new spiritual environment. The Heavenly Doctrines reveal the existence of the Holy City, ready for us to enter, where we will find the peace and joy of heaven. For the Lord, through His Second Coming, has provided the truths necessary to lead us to His church and has made it possible for us to become part of it. The Lord has provided a spiritual place in which we can live in love to Him and love toward our neighbor.

This spiritual church, represented by the Holy City, descended from the Lord and came to be established among humanity. The Lord's church on earth is one with the church in heaven. They are the same church, whose spirit is clothed in a natural form in our minds and lives. Portrayed in Isaiah as the city Jerusalem, this church has watchmen standing on its walls, who never rest in their vigilant guard against attack. These guards represent the people of the church who stand on the truths that make up the faith of the church. They "make mention of Jehovah" and "keep not silent" (Isaiah 62:6). That is, those who have entered the city and walk its golden streets (Revelation 21:21) protect it from all attacks. They receive it in their hearts and obey its teachings in their lives. They make every effort to keep the church safe from the erosion of materialism and selfishness. They strive to plant an affection for the church in their children, so that they, too, will become part of the Lord's kingdom.

The Lord's Second Coming is not only the establishment of a new order in heaven and a new revelation for all people on earth. It is also a coming to each particular person of the church. The new life of the New Church begins in the mind of each New Church person. Affections and thoughts then flow into actions. As we reform our outward life, we prepare ourselves for the Lord's work of regenerating us.

By using the Lord's Word as our guide, we make His revealed truth the standard for our personal conduct. We make our life a clothing, corresponding to the order of heaven. We make our minds and bodies receptacles for the descent of the Lord's New Church. Then, the Lord can make His Second Coming within each of us.

With our sight of newly revealed truth, it is possible for us to build a society, an earthly organization, according to the laws that govern heaven. The government of the church on earth can then be in correspondence with the government of the church in heaven. This earthly church, made up of individuals who are striving to be part of the Lord's spiritual New Church, will then complete the process of the descent of the New Church. This process was begun when the Lord sent His disciples throughout the spiritual world on the nineteenth day of June, 1770, to proclaim the truth that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns (*True Christian Religion* 791).

We have already made the first steps toward this new age. But we must continually grow in our understanding of truth. We cannot stand still, for neither our understanding nor our organizations are perfect. Our responsibility is to first learn the true order and meaning of our life on earth from the Word; then, to give our children an understanding and affection for the Lord and His New Church. They will then grow up with a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, as the Lord wants them to be.

We can do this for our children by having them associate New Church Day with celebrating spiritual events: the Last Judgement when the New Church was established in heaven; the Second Coming when the Heavenly Doctrines were revealed to people by means of the Writings; and the establishment of the New Church on earth among humanity and in each individual person. The Lord has accomplished the first two events. But the third is accomplished only as each of us turn individually to the Lord and to His Word with love—with the willingness to obey.

One way we can prepare our children to do this turning for themselves, is to protect their enjoyment of the festivals of the church. Everything we do—worship, picnics, gift giving—should all have their roots in our *spiritual* celebration. These are perfect occasions for lifting our children's minds above mere earthly things. We can teach them to thank the Lord for His blessings by using all the traditional festivities of Christmas and Easter. And we can create new New Church Day celebrations, built upon the knowledge of what we are celebrating and why. These holy days will then have meaning and importance for our children. And when they become adults, they will carry the spiritual implications of the celebrations of the church in their hearts and minds always.