

The Ascending Degrees of the Neighbor

The Lord teaches us that there ascending degrees of the neighbor who we are to love, starting with an individual person and continuing to the Lord. Here are some specific teachings about each of these degrees of the neighbor.

A society of many is the neighbor in a higher degree than is an individual person; our country in a higher degree than society; in a still higher degree the church; and in a still higher degree the Lord's kingdom; but in the highest degree the Lord is the neighbor. These ascending degrees are like the steps of a ladder, at the top of which is the Lord (*Arcana Coelestia* 6819).

A Person

- Each individual is a potential, unique angel (see *True Christian Religion* 32:2).
- Love to the Lord and towards the neighbor are what make a person truly human.

Family

- The family is the basic and essential unit of society (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8118; *Conjugal Love* 306,307).
- The family serves the Lord's goal of increasing the variety and perfection of heaven by nurturing each child as a potential angel with unique contributions to make on earth and in heaven.

Society

- Society is like a Grand Man, with people serving their own special use, helpful to the whole of society.
- It is good to have these things in a society, kingdom, or country: what is Divine; what is just and moral; diligence, skill, and uprightness; what is necessary for life and for all kinds of work; what is necessary for protection; sufficient wealth (see *Charity* 130).

Country

- Our country is the neighbor above society or community, because it takes care of people like a parent, feeding and protecting them (see *Heavenly Doctrines for the New Jerusalem* 93).
- Our country is the neighbor according to its spiritual, moral, and civil good (see *Charity* 83-86).

The Church

- The Lord provides that there is always a Church on earth where the Word is read, and thereby the Lord is known (see *Sacred Scripture* 110).
- All people are saved who worship one God and lead the life of religion.

Heaven

- The heavenly perspective looks to the good of the neighbor, the common good (of society), the Lord's kingdom, and especially the Lord (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1909).
- Every angel in a heavenly community adds to the life of that community, helping to perfect it (*Arcana Coelestia* 684).

The Lord

- The Lord is our neighbor in the highest degree, and we love Him by serving other degrees of the neighbor *if* we are oriented toward His goals (see *Arcana Coelestia* 6824; *Heavenly Doctrines* 96).
- To love God and to love the neighbor is nothing else than doing goods (*Apocalypse Explained* 7972:4).