

# Recitations from the Word

by Sylvia Parker

Much is said in the Heavenly Doctrines about children reading and reciting selections from the Word. Most New Church educators actively encourage and reward learning recitations by heart. The uses of this are obvious: you can have the Word always with you; you have specific teachings in your mind to call on in times of need; the passages from the Letter provide a powerful ultimate for your communication with the Lord and with heaven. But remember, none of this is possible unless the affections are totally involved both in the process and in the product.

A teacher has the responsibility to *teach* these recitations, not just assign some memory work. Using class time in this way makes an open statement about the value of learning them. Finding the most creative and effective way of doing this is clearly a challenge for the teacher. One appropriate means of accomplishing this is by integration. For example: Third graders demonstrate their new skill in cursive writing by producing an illustrated copy of the Christmas recitation; an intermediate grade explores the Scriptures for instances of the numbers 7 and 12 in the Book of Revelation in connection with their June 19th recitation—and there are many other possibilities. You can see that this is an exciting way to involve the Word obviously across the curriculum.

As we consider this important activity, questions obviously come to mind.

1. Are there effective ways of teaching recitations at each age?
2. How do we determine appropriate lengths for recitations?
3. Whose responsibility is it to teach them?
4. If they are to be integrated, how could there be more effective communication between religion teacher and classroom teacher?
5. What is the best way to coordinate the selection of recitations used in morning worship with those learned in the classroom?
6. How could parents be usefully involved?

It is important in any recitation program to build on both the affections and the knowledges established in earlier grades. For example—consciously including many of the key recitations from Matthew 5, 6, and 7 throughout the grades so that learning the Sermon on the Mount in eighth grade could be accomplished with the right balance between ease and challenge while building on their already established affections for the Word.

The truths of faith of the church, which are called doctrinal things, when learned in early life, are taken into the mind and committed to memory just like any other memory knowledges, and remain as such until the man begins to view them with his own eyes, and see whether they are true, and after seeing that they are true, wills to act according to them (*Arcana Coelestia* 5432:1).

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The words which they speak, that is, which they call up or bring forth from the man's memory, and suppose to be their own, are well chosen and clear, full of meaning, distinctly pronounced, and applicable to the subject; and, wonderful to say, they know how to choose the words better and more promptly than the man himself; and as has been shown, they are even acquainted with the various significations of the words, and instantly apply them, without. Any premeditation, for the reason, as before said, that the ideas of their language flow solely into words that are fitting. The case with this is nearly like that of a man who speaks without any thought of the words he is using, being simply in the meaning of the words; then, in accordance with the meaning, his thought falls readily and spontaneously into words; the inner meaning is that which calls forth the words. In such an internal meaning, only one still more subtle and excellent, does the speech of spirits consist; and through this a man communicates with spirits, although he is unaware of it (*Arcana Coelestia* 1638).

## References

*Arcana Coelestia* 1776, 1871, 2899, 3690, 5620:13, 8195, 9152

*Sacred Scripture* 64

*Spiritual Experiences* 3070-71

*Heaven and Hell* 258-64

"Collective Reading of the Word" by Rt. Rev. W. F. Pendleton, *New Church Life* June 1913

"Use of the Letter of the Word for Recitations" by Rev. F. E. Gyllenhaal, Education Council, April 1944