

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

SPIRITUAL FOOD

by the Rev. Roy Franson

It is well known by all in the Church that man is a spirit clothed in a body during his life in the world. This means, among other things, that the life inflowing from the Lord is received by man on a discretely higher plane than is true of any other beings or objects of creation. Concerning this inmost human soul as the first receptacle of life from the Lord, we learn that it is the Lord's entrance to both angels and men, and His very dwelling place with them. Yet, what is arranged and provided by the Lord in this inmost does not distinctly flow into the perception of any angel, because it is above his thoughts and transcends his wisdom. Nevertheless, it is by means of this human internal that man lives after death, and can be uplifted by the Lord among the angels (HH 39; AC 1999).

All animals are born according to the order of their life and cannot violate this order. From instinct, or from the order of life impressed upon them from birth, all animals know how to protect themselves, and how to procreate and care for their young; instinctively they know and care only for the food that is proper to them. In a word, they are born with all the knowledge necessary for their entire life span, which begins and ends in this world. They cannot choose any different order of life; instinctively they turn away from any food that is harmful to their life.

If man had no hereditary evils, he too, would be born with all the faculty of knowing and living a life that is distinctly human. That is, the rational would then be born immediately, and the faculty of knowing would be born through the rational, "so that on coming into the world, a man would at once have in himself all the faculty of reason and of knowing, for this would be in accordance with the order of influx" (AC 1902). This was also true in the beginning. The celestial man, called Adam, enjoyed from the Lord a perceptive faculty which empowered him to know, not only the food proper to his body, but more important yet, the food proper to his spirit. The life from the Lord, descending to his consciousness through his soul, gave him a perception of all the things proper to man—both as a sojourner on earth and as an eternal spiritual being.

But when man fell into evil, that is, when from his Divine gift of freedom, he chose to live contrary to the order of life that is distinctly human, he lost this perception. And ever since men have often learned too late what kind of food is harmful to their bodies, and in every succeeding generation there has been an increasing number of people who have taken a perverse delight in feeding their minds with knowledges and affections fatal to their spirit.

Man, who is a spirit, does not know what to feed it! The pious Christian does indeed believe in the teaching of the Lord, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4: 4) but he has no real understanding of this teaching, and few perceive and acknowledge the genuine truth contained in this teaching even when presented with it.

The truth is that the goods and truths of heaven, as revealed in the Word of the Lord, constitute the proper food for the human spirit. In the Divine love and mercy, this spiritual food has always been accommodated to the state of man throughout the history of the race. It has been provided by the Lord in many different forms, yet always in such a way that each person is free to accept it or reject it.

There is a wealth of teachings in the Writings concerning this spiritual food—the food that to all eternity will sustain all the angels in heaven, and give birth to and nourish the spirit of a person during his earthly sojourn. They call the innumerable delightful things that exist in heaven, all of which contribute to the joy and happiness of all the angels, celestial, spiritual or natural "meats" depending on in which heaven they live. The good and truth continually inflowing from the Lord produce each and every one of these delightful things. Since a human being, as to his spirit, is in association with angels and spirits, and could not possibly live otherwise, he will partake in angelic delights and be fostered in the way of heaven just so far as he gains an affection for the Divine goods and truths which he has been given to see in the Word of the Lord. The Lord wills the salvation of all His children of men. Indeed, He wills the very highest celestial blessedness for all. To this end He provides that each individual is given his own particular food. Each person is provided with the knowledges and delights of life which can best serve him in his journey from earth to heaven. These guide him to choose, in his freedom, and according to his reason, the life of heaven, and turn away from the "food of death" which the so-called learned in the world present to him, not only as palatable but also as sufficient food for his spirit.

The unquestionable truth is that the whole heaven and the entire world of spirits "live by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord, and from this each individual has his life; not only the whole heaven and the world of spirits, but also the whole human race. If angels, spirits and men were deprived of this food, they would expire in a moment" (AC 681). This is a revealed statement of truth, but the point is that every person is capable of seeing this truth in his understanding, and he can confirm it by many things from other sources. Every person can understand this truth if he wills, but many do not will to accept it. This is the curse of man—his unwillingness to embrace by the will what his understanding can see.

As we enter the season of Thanksgiving, New Churchmen all over the world can join in offering prayers of thanks to the Lord for revealing Himself anew in the Writings. Without them, many of us, perhaps most of us, might have turned away from the Lord and His Word and been satisfied with the word of man as our spiritual food. This is a distinct New Church Thanksgiving, for it is in the light of the Writings that we can gain a meaningful and true understanding of both the Old and the New Testament—the teachings concerning the food that is proper to the spirit of man, as well as many related teachings such as famine and hunger. To eat the Lord's flesh and to drink His blood is to appropriate to ourselves the goods of love and the truths of faith. So also, to repeat the phrase contained in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," is to pray that each day we may be nourished by the goods and truths of heaven according to our ever changing states—that we might have strength to resist the attacks of hell, and so remain, as to our spirits, in the company of the angels of heaven.

**Texts: Matthew 4:4;
Arcana Coelestia 681**