

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

SPIRITUAL SPEECH

by the Rev. Victor Gladish

In an early chapter of the Book of Genesis, after the children of Noah had spread abroad upon the land, the “earth was of one language and one speech.” Then they began to build a tower to reach up into the heavens. It was called the tower of Babel, because there came a confusion of languages so that they could not understand one another.

And in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we are told of a miracle that took place on the day of Pentecost, the Israelitish Feast of First Harvest, seven weeks after the Passover. The Apostles were gathered together for the celebration. “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and (one) sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave to speak. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when news of this was spread, the multitude came together, and were troubled in mind, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born...We do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2: 2-11).

In the Heavenly Doctrine we are told that this was one of the “miracles for the sake of the Word.” (TCR 146, 111-112, AE 455:22, DLW 257) “The apostles could speak in every language, which was done by the Lord through spirits.” (SE 481) This is told when the speech of spirits is being explained. If it is studied and compared with other things taught about speech in the spiritual world, we find it means that the Lord opened the spiritual sense so that the apostles spoke the language of the spiritual world. The spiritual ears of those who came to hear them were opened so that they heard this spiritual speech. And each took it to be the language of the natural world, and to be his own native language that he knew best.

In the little book of the Writings called *The Earths In The Universe* there is a sentence that is a key to the whole relationship of spiritual speech to that of this world. It says: “...all spirits have one kind of speech, which flows from the thoughts and consists of ideas that are heard as words in the spiritual world.” (EU 95) When anyone in the world of spirits who is not a hypocrite speaks, the ideas of his thought take form. They are heard as words by those he is talking to, without his having to figure out words to tell the ideas in his mind. In this world we have to use a set of sounds or expressions which people have learned and agreed on in order to get our ideas to the minds of others. When we write, we use signs that can be set down on paper and read. But spoken words are also a set of signs that have a special meaning agreed on and taught as language. It is the ideas that we want to get over to people, just as the angels and spirits speak ideas. But we have to have a whole set of words, whether spoken or written, that have been worked out and learned. Yet in the spiritual world, everyone just thinks the ideas that he wants

someone else to understand, and the ideas are heard as words. We are told in the Heavenly Doctrine that spiritual speech is in the inner mind of everyone born—that is, distinct and understandable ideas. But in the natural world these inner ideas or spiritual words cannot take form in the conscious mind as they do in the spiritual world.

While we are on earth we do not know that we have this power of spiritual speech. We are not able to express it, unless the Lord grants an opening of the spiritual senses, as He has done with His prophets and apostles for the sake of the Word. But as soon as we come into the spiritual world, and into the use of our spiritual bodies, we come at once into the power of this spiritual speech without having to be taught anything about it. This is because it has been in us all the time—in our spiritual minds and belonging to the spiritual body from which our natural body acts.

Because spiritual speech is simply the ideas of our spirit going out and expressing themselves—heard as words by spiritual ears—the angels can express in a minute more than a person on earth can express in half an hour. They can also, by a few words, present and get into the minds of others what has been written on many pages. Swedenborg was often allowed to see and hear this wonderful power of spiritual speech. (HH 240, 243) Also he heard the angels express things, which could not be expressed or brought to anyone’s mind by the words of this world. There were ideas too deep, too high and too far-reaching for the words of earthly language to express. Therefore, he could not write down in earthly language all the things which spiritual speech can say. But the Lord guided him to write in the Heavenly Doctrine the earthly words that give the best possible expression of the Divine Wisdom of God, so that in the Truth that is within the words there is the Divine Truth Itself. And we can go on seeing more and more of this truth as long as we live on earth. We will see much more of it, and in a more wonderful way, when we become angels.

It may seem strange to say that words are just signs or expressions for the telling of ideas. Let me give you an example. We are apt to think that the words we use *are* ideas, except when we are trying to make someone understand an idea for which we can’t think of the right words. But think about the way ideas are expressed in different languages. If one of us wants to say to a friend, “No, I won’t go,” we should use quite different words from those that a French or Greek person would use. A French boy would not say, “No, I won’t.” He would say, “Non, Je ne vais pas.” But it would be just the same idea that he was giving his French friend as we would give to our American friend by *our* words. And so it would be with any language of the natural world. The words are just sounds chosen and agreed on by people in different parts of the world as the signs by which they wish to express their ideas. These words do express our ideas, but not nearly as well or as fully as we shall be able to express them in spiritual speech.

We are so used to expressing our ideas in words that we are apt to think that the words *are* ideas. We suppose that we think in words—that the words are what we think. Actually, the ideas in our minds are very different from our words; we can think in a minute what it takes a long time to say, or still longer to write. How much longer it takes to write out the answer to a question in an examination than it does to think of the idea of what you want to say! And when we get to the other world, we shall be able to say to others exactly what we think, what our ideas are. This will be possible at once, instead of putting ideas into words step by step.

It is valuable to learn languages and how to express our ideas in words. That helps our ideas to grow and to become clear. But the important thing is for our ideas to become true, guided by the Word of Divine Revelation. For ideas are the language of heaven. If we become angels, we shall be able to bring the understanding and love of the truth to more and more people. And we will receive from others more understanding and love forever.

**Texts: Acts 2:2-11;
The Earths in the Universe 95;
Spiritual Experiences 481**