

## THE DOCTRINE OF CORRESPONDENCES

by the Rev. Mark Carlson

The doctrine of correspondences is central to all the teachings of the New Church. Basically, the idea of correspondences is that the things in the natural world, such as trees, mountains, rivers, metals, animals, grass, flowers, insects, fish, and indeed everything that you see around you, contain within them a spiritual meaning. We often say that these things represent, or re-present, heavenly qualities or ideas in natural forms.

The knowledge of the meaning of the objects of this earth was at one time a precious and well-developed science among the people of this earth. Long ago, in the days of the Ancient Church, the science of correspondences was considered to be the knowledge of knowledges, that is to say, the most important knowledge a man could possess. The people of the church found their greatest delight in thinking about the meaning of the natural objects around them, and especially in figuring out the meaning of the things they did not already know. In fact, they were so fascinated with this idea of double meanings that they used correspondences in almost everything they wrote. It was to them like a secret code, and only those who knew the code would be able to understand the meaning of what they were writing. They loved nothing more than to write spiritual truths about the Lord and the life of charity in this code. The more deeply hidden the actual meaning was, the more they liked it, and the better they considered the writing to be.

But the knowledge of correspondences was not just a plaything with them; it was also a very serious business. The real reason they were so interested in this code was because their revelation, their Word, was written in very deep correspondences. Naturally, they wished to understand more about the Lord and the life of charity by understanding more about the correspondences in which their Word was written. To help themselves understand the Word better, they continually practiced using correspondences, by using them to make up stories for their children and by writing stories for adults to illustrate the truths from their Word.

The Word, which these people of the Ancient Church were given, was not the same in its external form as our Word today. It contained the same truths as our Word does today, but these truths were very deeply hidden within the correspondences in which it was written. Thus when the people of the Ancient Church began to turn away from the Lord, their church gradually fell apart, and they lost all interest in trying to understand the meaning of the correspondences of their Word. At last the revelation which had once been so sacred to them was no longer understood, and eventually it was completely lost in a sea of apparently meaningless writings from their ancestors.

In the doctrines of the New Church the Lord tells us that this Ancient Word still exists somewhere in Asia, and that one day it may be found. But we may know that it never will be found unless we are able to recognize it when we see it. And that means that we must know a great deal more about correspondences than we do at present. Perhaps one of you will one day set off on an expedition in search of the Ancient Word, after you have mastered the science of correspondences! The doctrines of the New Church give you a clue as to the general area in which to search. Look for it somewhere north of the Great Wall of China (AR 11).

You have still other clues to help you recognize the Ancient Word when you have found it—it will contain two long lost books which are mentioned in the Old Testament, the book of "Jasher," and "The Wars of Jehovah." And in addition to these two books, it will contain approximately the first seven chapters of Genesis, word for word. The doctrines of the New Church tell us that Moses directly copied these chapters from the Ancient Word into the Word we have today.

However, you don't have to find the Ancient Word to experience something of the delight that the Ancients enjoyed in decoding correspondences. Our Word today is also written in correspondences, though ones that are not quite so deep as those of the Ancient Word. And today all people of the New Church may learn the basics of the science of correspondences, and use that science to discover the hidden meaning within all the stories of the Word. Perhaps you have wondered why some of the stories of the Old Testament are part of the Lord's Word, especially the ones which in their external sense present ugly battles or misdeeds. The reason they are part of the Lord's Word is that they also have a secret internal sense, which only those who know something about correspondences can see.

But I would not want to leave you with the impression that a knowledge of correspondences is all you will need to be able to see the internal meaning of the Word. There is much more to the secret of correspondences than just knowing that one thing stands for another, and from that, trying to read the internal sense of the Word much the way you might read a difficult book with the help of a dictionary. Your heart must be receptive to the internal sense of the Word as well as your mind. If you are an evil person, you will never be able to see the inner truths of the Word no matter how many correspondences you know. The Lord alone gives the spiritual sense of the Word to people, and He enlightens only those people who are good at heart.

**Text: Apocalypse Revealed 11**