

The Earth is the Lord's

by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose

*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.
For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.*

(Psalm 24:1-2)

What is the church? As little children many of us may have thought of the church as being primarily a building, a place in which we worshiped the Lord. As our minds grew older, we came to believe that the church was the people who belonged to it, a group who had joined together in a common belief and worship. Only in adulthood can we come to see that this idea is also limited. The church is more than the people who belong to it. It is the Lord alone who makes the church.

The Lord's presence and conjunction with people is the church, not the people themselves. It is vital to realize that the church does not belong to us; it is the Lord's. If a person feels that he has part ownership in the church, or if his relationship with the church is primarily so that it can serve him, he makes a tragic mistake. He appropriates to himself what is the Lord's alone.

From the language of correspondences we know that where the earth is mentioned in the Word, it means the church. And, at the beginning of Psalm 24, the truth that the earth—the church—is the Lord's, is clearly taught: "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." Yet we can come into full acknowledgment of this truth only with strong effort. It is so easy to forget that the church really is the Lord's alone, yet, if the people of the church do not make the effort to recognize that it is the Lord's, then the church with them will die.

The church transcends its people. This does not mean that they are to be uninvolved. Though it might at first seem contradictory, the Lord's church (which belongs to no person) has its specific existence only in the individual mind. A member of the church must himself *be* a church, or there would be no church in general (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4292:1). This is the very nature of the Lord's church, or His kingdom. The Lord alone builds His kingdom, but He builds it within human minds. The church, or the Lord's kingdom, is His presence, and though no person makes the Lord's presence, it is specifically in the human mind alone. Those people who would be of the church must therefore be deeply involved. Not only must they dedicate time and energy to the Lord's work, but they must also offer their very minds as dwelling-places in which the Lord can be present. They must make it possible for the Lord to establish His kingdom within their thoughts and affections.

The founding of the earth or the world, that is, the founding of the church as to truth and good (see *Apocalypse Explained* 741:8), is described within the words of our text: "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers." Although the earth or the world, in a natural sense, is certainly not founded upon the seas and rivers, the dwelling-place of the Lord is indeed so founded. It is founded upon the seas and rivers of our minds.

The correspondence of water to truth is well-known in the church. Whether the Word is talking about waters, rivers, streams or wells, we know that, in the internal sense, water stands for truth. Now, just as the waters of the earth, when collected together in great abundance, are called seas, so, too, collections of many truths in our minds form spiritual seas (see *Arcana Coelestia* 28, 9755:3). Certainly, when we consider the multitude of facts we have learned from childhood, we realize that we could never list all that we know. Even a relatively ignorant person has a veritable ocean of facts

at his disposal. Indeed, facts about the performance of everyday chores, about the area in which we live, facts about our jobs, our friends, our country, and many other things are like seas of knowledge within us. Such factual knowledge is essential for life in this world. And yet worldly knowledges by themselves do us a disservice. We can become so wrapped up in the matters of this world that we scarcely glance upward to reflect on a higher reality. The church could never be founded within our minds if there were not, amidst this sea of worldly facts, knowledges from the Lord's Word.

There must be, amongst the agitated muddy waters of worldly knowledge, clear, calm knowledges from the Word, for these reflect a higher reality and turn our minds upward to think about the realm of the spirit. Without these knowledges, we would be so immersed in worldly affairs that the church would never be able to find room within our minds. The Lord's kingdom, which can exist only in human minds, would perish. From this it becomes clear beyond a doubt that the church depends upon the religious instruction of the young for its continued existence and growth. It is in childhood that a vast sea of knowledges of the literal sense of the Word can most easily be formed. We must teach religion to our children, and seek to instill these knowledges, which alone can later direct the thoughts of the adult upward toward spiritual truth.

The seas of the mind, gathered first in childhood, and then also throughout life, greatly affect the adult rivers of thought. Whereas seas—collections of water—signify collections of truth in the form of knowledges, rivers—flowing water—signify truth as it exists in the flow of thoughts within the adult mind (see *Apocalypse Explained* 518:3). All of us are aware of these rivers within our minds. Our thoughts flow unceasingly from one subject to another, as one thing reminds us of something else. These rivers or currents of thought would be clouded with worldly matters if they did not also contain the clear water of truth from the Word. If our thoughts are not to be taken up solely with problems of this world, we must have truth from the Word to direct the flow of our thoughts upward on a regular basis.

In this, knowledge from the Word, learned in childhood, is a great help. Indeed, it is a necessary basis. Yet in adult life we need more than memorized truth. We must take the time to think about and reflect upon the Word, so that truth can exist within our understanding. Then, and only then, can truth not only be something we think about, but also be an actual part of the river of our thought. Only then can truth not only be collected together in our memory, but also flow within our understanding. Without the adult reflection which makes this possible, the religious education of youth comes to naught. Knowledge in the memory forms the basis for the future formation of the Lord's church; "He has *founded* it upon the seas." Yet only truth in the understanding can allow the church within the individual to become a reality; He has "*established* it upon the rivers."

Once these rivers and seas, formed from the Word, are present, then His kingdom or church can be founded and established by the Lord in our minds. We then have both knowledge and understanding of truth which can direct our lives to what is good, that is, to what is truly good. Ignorance leads us to call whatever we enjoy "good". Without truth we are bound to slavishly follow our own preconceived ideas and inclinations. Yet once the Lord's truth becomes a part of our minds, we have another alternative. Truth teaches what the Lord wills, that is, what is truly good. We can do and come to love this good. In this good, the Lord is present. It is this spiritual good which forms His dwelling-place, His church.

It is indeed a long upward path from knowing and understanding truth to being willing to do the Lord's will alone. Rising above our own interests and selfish loves to true charity is by no means an instantaneous process. Our lives must gradually be purified by the waters of truth. Only then can we come into that love of doing the Lord's will represented in Psalm 24 by "the mountain of the Lord."

“Who may ascend into the mountain of the Lord? or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.” Our loves, our intentions, and our deeds, must be purified, so that good may enter—that good which alone is the Lord’s habitation.

It is then that the Lord enters our minds. As we come into good, the gate of our heart is opened to receive Him. We are taught that there are two gates into the rational mind of every person. One is the gate of hell; the other is the gate through which the Lord enters. As a person’s mind becomes a fit dwelling-place for the King of heaven, the gate to hell is gradually closed, and the Lord’s gate is opened to receive Him (*cf. Arcana Coelestia* 2851:3). “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him...” (Revelation 3:20).

Psalm 24 continues, “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.” It is most significant that the Lord is called a King, for He comes as our Ruler. When His truth reigns supreme within our minds, we have within us the Lord’s church or kingdom—that is, His government.

This may seem like a far and almost unreachable goal. It perhaps strikes us as too idealistic for the people of the New Church, with all our weaknesses and failings. Yet, to regard the Lord’s entrance into our minds as an almost impossible dream of the distant future is to ignore the reality that this can begin to happen now. Even now, we can make room for the Lord in our minds and lives. Every day we can read the Word, so that our knowledge of the Lord may increase and the flow of our thoughts may regularly be turned toward spiritual things. And every day we can strive, little by little, to rid ourselves of impure thoughts and evil actions. As we do this, we are performing a use, a use for the Lord’s church.

We need to provide a spiritual dwelling-place for the Lord, a dwelling-place within our own minds. This requires dedication and effort. But it is by no means an impossible sacrifice. We lose nothing by rejecting the things of self and inviting the Lord into our minds. On the contrary, we receive countless, unimaginable heavenly blessings. And the task of regeneration, for that is what this is, is not as difficult as we might imagine. For, the Lord fights for us in our temptations. “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.”

The church is the Lord’s. He governs it, and, if He does not, then it is not truly the church. And if the Lord is to govern the church, then each individual must allow the Lord to govern him. Without this, the church, or the Lord’s presence with humanity, will begin to fail. The church is indeed great, and it truly transcends individual men and women. It is not our church, but the Lord’s. Yet, for its existence, the church depends upon those who will rise above ourselves to welcome the King of heaven into our minds. It depends upon those of us who will say to the Lord, from the depths of our hearts, “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth.” Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 24; Revelation 3:20-22; *Apocalypse Explained* 518:23

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