

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION

God created this world and the spiritual world, and He created man to be inhabitants of them. Most importantly, we know that His purpose in creation was so that there might be a heaven where men and women could live with Him in a state of joy and happiness. We know also that the Lord places us in *this* world first, so that we may make our own choice about where we wish to live to eternity. Do we want to live in hell, where we love ourselves and pleasure more than any thing or anybody else? Or, do we want to live in heaven, where we look to the neighbor and the Lord before thinking of what we want for ourselves? Life on earth is a life of preparation, a life of choice, a life where we develop our character—good or evil.

If God had a purpose in creating us, and if we have a choice between fitting in with His purpose or denying it, then it must follow that God tells us of this purpose, lets us know why we are on this earth, and tells us how we can prepare for heaven. We cannot imagine that the Lord would place us here, hoping that we would do certain things even if He did not tell us what those things were! The Lord knows that we need Him to tell us the difference between right and wrong.

For this reason, from the very beginning of the human race, the Lord has *revealed Himself*, so that people could know Him and know what His will for us is. He has revealed Himself in different ways over the years, but He has always made sure that we can know what our lives are all about and what our choices are.

Now, we may ask ourselves, how does the Lord reveal Himself or make Himself known to us today? Most of you will already know the answer. He does this in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in the *Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church*. The Old Testament was written many hundreds of years ago, before the Lord came into the world, and was given to the Israelitish Church. It was written especially for their needs; it did not try to explain things that people were not yet ready to understand, but it did show things they could learn and obey. We might wonder why a revelation, given so long ago and for very different people, should still be important to us today. The reason is that we are still often in the state in which those people were, especially when we are young. So there are times when the teachings of the Old Testament are exactly what we need. Also, with the help of the *Heavenly Doctrines*, we can see the spiritual sense within the Old Testament, and learn still more from that.

The New Testament was given to the Christian Church, written just after the Lord came into the world, and most of it tells us about His life in the world. When the New Testament was given, people were able to understand some more interior things. The Lord did not change what was taught in the Old Testament, but He added to and enriched it. Do you remember how often the Lord said, “It was said to you of old time...but I say unto you...” The Lord would take a teaching of the Old Testament and then show how there was more to it than at first appeared. This is the kind of teaching which you will find a real use for throughout your lives, and, again, it contains an internal sense which we can see with the help of the *Heavenly Doctrines*.

The *Heavenly Doctrines* were given for the New Church, and they are indeed the Lord's Second Coming, for just as the disciples saw Him in a body of flesh and blood, so we can see Him in a body of truth given to us in this revelation through Emanuel Swedenborg. The *Heavenly Doctrines* take us the last step, meeting the needs of the fully adult mind in today's world. Today, we ask many questions which were not asked by the Israelites or the Christians, and which they could not have understood. Now people are not content to be told that a thing *is* so or *must be* so; we want to know *why* it is so, and *how* it is so. These are the kinds of questions that the *Heavenly Doctrines* answer. We sometimes say that the *Heavenly Doctrines* are the Word for the New Church, but this does not mean that we are excluding the Old and New Testaments. It means that the *Heavenly Doctrines* especially meet the needs of adults in our age. We are told that the Lord has now told us everything about Himself, about the other world, and about what we need to do, that it is possible for people on earth to understand. We will learn much more in the next world, but the revelation for people here on earth is now complete.

It is important to understand that it is only through the Word that we can learn about spiritual things. By using our five bodily senses we can learn a great deal about this world. Scientists are learning more and more about it every day. But they will never be able to discover what is spiritual; they can only see what is natural. For example, a doctor will never be able to dissect a body and find the soul within it. The soul is something quite distinct and different that can never be seen with earthly eyes. Spiritual things can only be taught to us by the Lord in His Word—in His revelation.

You can see then how important the Word is to us. But it is not important or of value as long as it remains on the bookshelf. It must be taken down and read and studied and thought about. But even this is not enough! It is not enough to have all these knowledges in our minds and to understand what the Lord is like, what life after death will be like, and how we should prepare for that life, if we do not *do* it. So the Word must be taken down from the shelf and studied, but then we must also try to live it in our lives. This is the whole purpose of revelation; if we do not put it into action, we might as well not even have owned a copy. Think then of the Word as the Lord talking to us, the Lord telling us of Himself and of heaven, and of how we should live. If we feel that the Lord really is talking to us, we will want to listen to what He has to say and will want to do what He tells us in our daily lives.