

THE PURPOSE OF THE PASSION OF THE CROSS

Adapted from editorials in *New Church Life* by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson

The passion of the cross was the Lord's last temptation, the final combat in which He entirely subjugated the hells and achieved complete victory over the totality of evil. And it was the means by which the Lord took to Himself the power to regenerate and save people.

As a man born of a woman, the Lord knew hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and He knew doubt even to despair in all His temptations. In the passion of the cross and the savagely brutal events that culminated in it, both these elements were present to the full. The agony in the garden was a real agony; and the passion of the cross was an agony which ran the gamut of torture from the illusion of utter abandonment by the Divine to the endurance of cruel pain by a body in which was the fear of death as in the bodies of all other people.

The Lord's purpose in coming into the world in a Human form was to make possible a conjunction of the Divine with the human race. This conjunction had been broken and the human race had been separated from the Divine, because no good will any longer existed, for nothing effects conjunction except love. There was no longer any medium of conjunction. The Lord came into the world in order that the conjunction might be restored and salvation renewed.

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church teaches that the Lord came into the world to effect redemption and glorify His Human. To glorify His Human meant that He made it Divine and fully united it with the Divine through a succession of temptations that culminated in the passion of the cross. Through this process, the Lord redeemed angels, spirits and people, and put Himself into the power of saving those who would believe in Him and keep His precepts.

While the Lord was in the world—before the Divine and the Human essences had been united in Him—He alternated between the state of humiliation (or a sense of separation from the Divine) and the state of glorification (or a sense of unification with the Divine). He was in the former when He was in the infirm human, and in that state He adored and prayed to the Father as to another, although Jehovah was in Him. He was in the latter when in the Human from the Father, and in that state He spoke of Himself as one with the Father.

We are not to think of the incarnate Lord as having a double consciousness, but as alternating between consciousness of separation from and union with the Supreme Divine. In the end, the former was to be displaced entirely by the latter, yet it was the means through which the very thing was effected. The infirm human was as a servant, and in the state of that human—the state of humiliation—the Lord was as a suffering servant; for in that state He underwent temptations, even to the passion of the cross. Yet it was in that state that the maternal heredity became quiescent, that the Lord received revelations and perception from His own Divine; and that, through victory in temptations, the infirm human was removed and He was united to Jehovah.

In the union of Himself with the Father—of the Human Essence with the Divine Essence—the Lord had in view the conjunction of Himself with the human race. This was His purpose, the Heavenly Doctrine says, and He had this at heart because it was His love. For this reason the salvation of the human race, as beheld in His union with the Father, was His inmost joy.