

THE WORD OF THE LORD

by Rev. B. David Holm

The teachings of the New Church about the Word are very precious. We know that the Word is Holy. We know that it is Divine, for it is the Lord speaking to us. We know that in its essence it is the Lord Himself—the Lord with humankind. It is no wonder that the New Church has made the open Word the very center of its worship. But *how* are these teachings true? *How* can we understand them intelligently and so be conjoined with the Lord by going to Him in His Word?

On the surface the Old Testament might appear to be merely a collection of ancient stories about an obscure nation in the Middle East. The New Testament might appear to be little more than the biography of an idealistic Jewish reformer. There are numerous people who regard the Old and New Testaments in this way. And the Heavenly Doctrines, or the Writings, are often regarded as merely the theological views of a not very well known Swedish philosopher and mystic, and they are dismissed as unimportant.

Now the New Church completely rejects such views about the threefold Word. But why do we reject them? On what grounds? First, we know that the Word, unlike any other writing, is Divinely Ordered from beginning to end, for it is written according to *correspondences*. The Lord, in His infinite love, has accommodated His love and wisdom in such a way that it can be received by people in the Word. When we go to the Word, we are in the presence of Divine love and wisdom—Divine good and truth. In its *form* the Word is Divine wisdom or truth. In its *essence* the Word is the Divine love or good. Thus the Word is the Lord's good clothed with His truth—and this on every level.

For there are levels or degrees in the Word—levels all the way from the Lord Himself to the literal stories within the printed Word. The Word is not merely a printed book; it is a living thing, and, in the highest sense, it is the only living thing—for it is the Lord.

The Word as we know it, descends from the Lord in degrees. Each lower degree *corresponds* to the one above it. There are two degrees of the Word which are above the comprehension of even the highest angels. There is a celestial sense or degree of the Word accommodated to the highest angels. There is a spiritual sense or degree accommodated to the spiritual angels, and there is a spiritual-natural sense accommodated to the natural angels. And then there is the natural or literal sense for people on earth. Thus there are six degrees of the Word—and the Lord Himself makes the seventh degree. This is the Word in its fullness. (For more about these degrees see *Arcana Coelestia* 8443.)

This means that when we sincerely read the story of Noah, or one of the Lord's miracles, or a passage in the *Heavenly Doctrines*, we are affected interiorly. Every degree of our mind is nourished, our spirit is in communication with heaven, and the Lord Himself is present with us. When we earnestly read the literal sense there is a wonderful *ascent* up through the six degrees of truth to the Lord Himself. And there is also a *descent* of influx from the Lord Himself, through the six degrees, to each person who goes to the Word with humility and with a desire to live what

it teaches. The Lord can then conjoin Himself to us and reform and regenerate us through the presence of His love and wisdom, His good and truth, in the Word. Such is the immense power of the Word!

Yet our natural heredity holds us back from going to the Word regularly and with humility. For the natural nature within each of us has a great distaste for the Word, and even a dread for the presence of the Lord in it. Why? Because the Word calls for the complete subordination of the hereditary nature in each of us. Our hereditary nature can think of a thousand excuses for not going to the Word, but each stems from the fact that this part of us does not *want* to go to the Word.

Yet we are challenged and able to overcome our natural, hereditary tendencies. We are called by the Lord to come meet Him in His Holy Word, to reach for higher truths to guide our lives. We must penetrate external ideas about the Word and, in so doing, we will find Him there in ever-growing fullness. For in reading the Word, we have the greatest privilege of communing with the Lord Himself.