

# Thinking for Yourself

by Rev. Geoffrey S. Childs

We were told in our family since we were children that New Church education leads you to think for yourself. This was also one of the expressed goals when I attended the Boys School and was encouraged to think independently.

It is easy to recall Bishop de Charms stressing this need, especially in relation to the discovery of one's own faith. Often in his summation speeches at banquets he would stress how important it is for each generation, and each person, to discover the Writings for themselves. He unfolded the need for the genuine vision of faith to be one's own, that the discovery that came to the man born blind can come to each of us: "...one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

This call for faith that is one's own is stressed in a famous passage in the Writings: "The doctrinals of the church are not true because the leaders of the church have said so, and their followers confirm it. The Word must be searched, and there it must be seen whether the doctrinal things are true. When this is done from the affection of truth, then the person is enlightened by the Lord so as to perceive, without knowing whence, what is true" (*Arcana Coelestia* 6047:2).

One of the great themes of the New Church is the call to think and perceive for oneself. This is seen in the famous "Nunc Licet" passage: "Now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith" (*True Christian Religion* 508).

In an analogical way, this thinking for oneself can start very early. It commences with encouraging the innate creativity within each child. It comes in the stirring of wonder and imagination given to each of us by the Lord. Within our soul is the genius for a specific future use in the Grand Man of heaven (cf *Divine Providence* 67). And this talent is supported by celestial and spiritual remains from infancy. For the celestial is not passive: it is active, creative. And it is present waiting for the tender instructor; waiting to be stirred into life.

At every age there is an openness to creative exploration and learning in each child, each student. And what wonders of creation, nature, literature, science and art await that child's curiosity, its enquiring and open mind. The theme that each individual should learn to wonder, imagine and think for himself or herself should start prior even to kindergarten. Studies have shown that creativity may be fed as early as the tenth month of life (*The Golden Thread*, p. 108).

One should learn to think for oneself! But *which self* should do the thinking: the hereditary self? The mediate good self? The "remains" self? This is beautifully answered in *Arcana Coelestia* 2568. Wondering, imagining and thinking should start from the affirmative principle. The negative principle, reasoning from the hereditary self and the senses only, should be shunned as an evil against the Lord. This is the path to innocence, and to the genuine wonders of creation.

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Before adult age we lead students by affection and gentle direction of affirmative thinking, trying to arouse the good affections present in each child from remains. Then, at adult age, we invite them to the great discoveries promised by the Lord: to the discovery of a living faith that is one's own. The young adult who shuns evil and looks to the Lord will be enlightened "so as to perceive... what is true." "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And then discovery after discovery await, as revelation and knowledge combine to lead towards that "morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2 Samuel 23:4).