

SEEING THE LORD

The Rev. Geoffrey S. Childs

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

The essence of religion is to see the risen Lord and to love Him. Yet to see the Lord is at times most difficult. For we may feel like Moses, who said to Jehovah:

“Please show me Your glory.” Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you....” But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live.” And the Lord said, “Here is a place by Me and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock.... [I] will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:18-23).

The request of Moses to see the Lord has its counterpart in our own lives. For the first love in a truly human life is a love of the Lord. The Heavenly Doctrine speaks of this as being celestial in quality, the inmost of loves. And this is confirmed by Scripture: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Yet it is sometimes disturbing to us that we are told to love a Lord we cannot see. We have not seen Him as a physical Person; we do not know Him directly, with our own eyes. It seems at times difficult to love God when we cannot visualize His appearance. This lack of sight of the Lord may even make religion seem ephemeral—somewhat meaningless in this material world. Sometimes, even when our minds are in a state of perception, study of the Word does not lead us to a direct seeing of the Lord. Rather, we are like Moses, in a small cleft of the rock of truth, and when we would see the full glory of the Lord, He instead covers our eyes with His hand, and we see only His back.

This difficulty of spiritual sight was spoken of by a very early Christian writer, Paul: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part.... For now we see in a mirror, dimly...” (I Corinthians 13:9, 12). Even when the Lord was incarnate on earth, He was truly seen by a very few. That is, during His lifetime on earth, those who knew that His Soul was Divine—that this was the Lord Himself on earth—were only a few. This occurred in the Lord’s infancy. It was the wise men who knew, and thus, when they saw His star, “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” (Matthew 2:10). It was with complete depth of reverence that they “fell down and worshiped” the Divine Child and “presented gifts to Him” (Matthew 2:11). For the wise men were remnants of the silver age, and from the science of correspondences they knew that the Lord Himself was to be born on earth, and that the sign of His birth was the star. And Simeon and Anna may have known, but not even Mary and Joseph understood the full truth. Nor did the doctors in the temple when the Lord was twelve years old. Nor even did the Lord’s own disciples during all the time He taught them, even up to the crucifixion. They knew the Lord had a mark of greatness, that He had a holiness equal or beyond that of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha. They thought of Him as the promised Messiah—the human king, divinely inspired—who would free Israel from the

Romans. But to see that He was the Lord Himself was beyond their comprehension. The nearest perhaps to understanding the truth was Mary, who saw many signs and wonders “and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

It was not until Easter, when the Lord had risen from the tomb, that the amazing truth began to dawn. He appeared then before His disciples in His risen Human, the glorified Divine Human. The greatest of perceptions came to them—the realization that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation! This truth came even to Thomas, the doubter, who had said, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). Knowing Thomas’s doubts, the Lord appeared before Him and said, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:27-28).

This is a key to seeing and loving the Lord in His Human, His Divine Person. He appeared before the eyes of His disciples; they saw and knew Him to be the God of creation. The Christian Church was built upon this vision. Moses could not see the Lord face to face in His glory, for no one can see the Divine in itself—the Infinite Father or Jehovah. But He put on a human and glorified it so that He could be seen—seen and known by even the natural mind. His disciples saw Him, and this completely convincingly, so that even Thomas the doubter believed.

Yet this sight of the Lord, in His risen and glorified Human, was given almost two thousand years ago. It was given only to a privileged few—His closest followers, whose inspired scribes wrote about it in the New Testament. This sight was more than sufficient for its day; it sustained the faith of Christians for hundreds of years. Yet generation after generation arose who had not seen the risen Lord with their own sight. And the most important of all truths began to be obscured, until finally the truth that Jesus Christ, risen from the tomb, is the Lord of all began to be entirely lost.

Yet in the New Church this should not be the case. We should see Him as fully and as convincingly as Thomas did. If our vision is dim, it is because it is obscured by a false approach, by false ideas. So what is the truth that can lead us to the true sight of the Lord our Father and our Maker?

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church reveals that “Love of the Lord does not mean loving Him in respect to His person, but it means loving the good that is from Him” (*Heaven and Hell* 15; see also 16-17). That is, we are to love the good of the Lord, His qualities, and not His Person alone. We are told to think “from essence, and from this of person” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 611).

This is a familiar truth, well known in the church. Yet to know a truth is not the same as seeing it. In the case of this most vital principle, the truth is there. But we tend to think in terms of persons and of what our physical senses see. The teaching that we should think of the Lord from His qualities first and not from His Person may therefore seem abstract—too theological and remote. Yet this teaching is the most real thing in creation. It is the foundational truth of spiritual perception. Spiritual thinking moves from causes to effects, from spiritual things to ultimates.

This is the affirmative principle (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2568). In the case of friendship on earth, if we really love someone, we think of his or her character or qualities first. The appearance is second and wisdom that reveal Him.

But this does not mean that He is not a Man or a Person. That He is a Person can be seen from His birth on this earth in Bethlehem. And, as a Divine Person, He rose from the sepulcher. And now He is revealed to us fully in His Divine Human. In the New Church the Lord in His Divine Human is not a book, not even Divine Truth itself. John saw Him as He is: “His eyes [were] like a flame of fire...and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength” (Revelation 1:14,16). He is a Person! The Lord is Divine Love! His sun shines in His eyes. And He is a Man—Divine Man—the most loving Person in all creation. Angels see the Lord in Human form and “human shape” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7211). A wise man, thinking from quality, loves a picture of the Lord because He is a Person: Jesus Christ (see *True Christian Religion* 296). The New Church is the “crown of all churches, because it will worship the visible God, in whom is the invisible” (*True Christian Religion* 787).

But the Lord is more than Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament. He is Jesus now *fully* revealed, in His glory. He is “the Spirit of truth,” disclosed in the Heavenly Doctrine, that guides to “all truth” (see John 16:13). This inner quality, now revealed in our one Lord, is so beautifully called the “Comforter” by John the apostle:

But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:26-27).

When we see and love this Lord in His newly revealed qualities, we will know from this what He looks like. Our heart will reveal this to us! The Lord will take our finite picture of Him and reveal Himself Divinely in a clear picture (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8760:2).

We desperately need the Lord’s compassion, mercy and wisdom in the deepest human issues of life. How do we find inner happiness in marriage? Why does the Lord permit sickness and terrible tragedies? How has He ordered creation? What is He truly like in His inmost loves and thoughts? What are His promises to us in earthly life, state by state, ladder step by ladder step? It is these things that the Comforter reveals to us in His New Word, in such works as *Conjugal Love*, *Divine Providence*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, the *Arcana Coelestia*, and other books of the Heavenly Doctrine. Here in tender, gentle, and rational terms, the Lord reveals “all truth,” speaking right to our hearts if only we will listen. These truths of the New Word are the “spirit of truth,” of which the Lord said, “He will glorify Me” (John 16:14). The Heavenly Doctrine glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament.

To have a true idea of the Lord is first something of the head; to be conjoined with Him is then something of the heart. Alienation, loneliness and the inability to find and love God are things of the heart. What blocks us off from Him? There is a teaching that indicates the worst barriers to finding and seeing the Lord: “To think of God as in a human form is implanted in every person

who receives influx from heaven.... Those that have rejected influx by self-intelligence prefer an invisible God, while those that have extinguished it by a life of evil prefer no God” (*Heaven and Hell* 82). Conceit in us prefers an invisible God; evil prefers no God. As we shun these fundamental destroyers, He will open the door.

It is our limited states of heavenly love that block us off from full conjunction with the Lord. We come near to Him through the steps of rebirth. As little children we know and love Him as our Heavenly Father, feeling His love and protection through our parents. In early adult life He can come to us in the beauty of truth; we are aware of Him primarily as the light of the Word. Later, in mid-adult life, He may come to us more closely in our love of the neighbor when He is felt essentially as warmth in our love for others. Finally, He may come right to us, welcoming us at last to His arms, in our discovery of love of the Lord.

He would always welcome us sooner, but we are usually not ready, except in states of despair, in temptation, or when we pray to Him out of spiritual need. His personal presence breaks through when needed to give peace and hope. When He does come most intimately, He will come in His Person, His Divine Human.

If we really need the Lord, He will be there. He appeared to Mary Magdalene first when He rose on Easter morning because she needed His presence. Then He appeared to Peter, who felt unworthy and devastated because he had three times denied the Lord he loved. And secretly the Lord is with us in every genuine use we do. He is present in this world right now, even as He was after Easter! He is Divinely, substantially present (see *Doctrine of the Lord* 35:9-10) on each plane of the human heart. Of this Lord Jesus, now glorified in the Heavenly Doctrine by the Spirit of Truth, we pray, “O come, our Blessed Lord, O come, Incarnate Word; Hallelujah!

Amen.

Lessons: Exodus 33:12-3; John 21:1-14; Matthew 28:16-20; *Arcana Coelestia* 6135:3, 7211