

How Should We Picture the Lord?

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How do we picture our Father in heaven, Jesus Christ? If we think of Him from His qualities of love, innocence, compassion, wisdom, and justice, then a picture will be given to us by Him, a picture of Him from the reasoning of love, the self-evidencing reason of love. We will know Him, and have a picture of Him in our hearts, and this picture will have a finite form and shape (see *Arcana Coelestia* 7211, *Apocalypse Revealed* 839, *Arcana Coelestia* 8760:2). We must have this in order to have any picture of Him at all in our minds. He will come to us in “a personal human form” (*Coronis* 48). When He glorified His Body, He became Divinely present in ultimates: able to appear to each of us visibly, adapting our finite idea of Him to show us His glorified, loving person (*Arcana Coelestia* 8760:2). “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Nor should we in the New Church do away with such an ultimate picture of Him. We need it. It makes Him human for us. We may well prefer an inner picture, drawn for us by Him in His Divine Love. Or we may wish an outward picture too—and this is not wrong. It is needed by our children, and it is needed, in some form, by us too. Carvings and paintings of the Lord, if not too explicit, may even adorn our homes and chancels. We are not to think from these portrayals, but down into them from His qualities and love. There is power in ultimates, if the inner love and sight is there. We may prefer more than one painting or drawing lest our idea become too fixed and incapable of growing (see *Heaven and Hell* 55). But to remove all human form in picturing the Lord in our churches and homes may be a serious mistake, tending to remove the Divine truth that He is a Person in form and shape and should be so worshiped. While carefully protecting what is genuine, we also need to be on guard against self-intelligence which “prefer[s] an invisible God” (*Heaven and Hell* 82). There is an absolute need for a “determinate” idea of the Lord (*Apocalypse Explained* 696:5).

“All who acknowledge and worship any other God than the Lord the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah God Himself in human form, sin against the first commandment”—if they do this knowingly (*True Christian Religion* 296). “If a wise man were to see a picture of one Divine person with rays of heavenly light about His head and with the inscription over it, ‘This is our God, at once Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator, and therefore the Savior,’ would not that wise man kiss this picture, carry it home in his bosom, and by the sight of it gladden his own mind, and the minds of his wife and his children?” (*ibid.*). Note that the inscription first gives His qualities, and then He is pictured as perhaps He appeared at His transfiguration, when “His face shone as the sun, and His raiment was white as light” (Matthew 17:2). Would not such a picture, if rightly understood, “gladden” our hearts and minds, as it does the wise man and his family spoken of in *True Christian Religion* 296?