

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

THE SECOND COMING BY MEANS OF A MAN

by the Rev. Michael D. Gladish

The Word of the Old and New Testaments clearly teaches that the Lord will come again. Thus, although He would (and did) come into the world in His own human form once, it is promised that He will come again. The appearance is that He will come again in exactly the same form as He did before. So it is written in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (which is a history of the early Christian Church) that when Jesus ascended into the sky and went to heaven 40 days after Easter two angels stood nearby and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 11).

Largely because of this teaching the whole Christian world generally has held that when the Lord comes again He will be seen in a physical human body coming down out of the sky!

Now this certainly sounds dramatic and simple enough, but in reality it's not quite that easy. For when the Lord taught He also warned about *false Christs* (Matt. 24: 24, Mark 13: 22) who might confuse people and lead them to misunderstand His Second Coming. Is it possible that others might also come down out of heaven like the Lord? NO! Then how could people be confused? The answer is that people have misunderstood what the angels meant by coming down from heaven.

Anyway, if He did come again just exactly as He came before, it would be well to remember that most people didn't know who He was even then! How will they be so sure next time?

The Writings for the New Church, of course, explain the second coming so that we can be sure about the Lord. However, in doing so they clearly show that it could not take place literally, exactly as it did before. What would be the use of such a thing, anyway? What the Lord did once in His Human body He did most perfectly, and so it would not need to be done again. Besides, there is something very interesting about that statement, “This same Jesus...shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go...”

Do you know how the disciples had seen the Lord after Easter, after His resurrection? Do you remember how He walked through closed doors to meet them, and suddenly appeared or disappeared at different times? The answer to this whole mystery is that the disciples had not then seen the Lord with their natural eyes at all, but with their spiritual eyes. For although He appeared to them in His own body, this was no longer a physical body but a heavenly body, since He had put off that physical body at the crucifixion.¹ Notice also that no one ever saw the Lord after Easter except His disciples. They were the ones who believed in Him, and no one can have his spiritual eyes opened if he does not believe in something.

Therefore, to see the Lord coming again as the disciples had seen Him go, is to see Him with our spiritual eyes. And how is this done?

Let's take an example from the Word. In Luke, chapter 24, we read about how two disciples met the Lord while walking on the road to Emmaus. At first they did not know Him and talked with Him as if he were a stranger in that country. But then the Lord taught them "in all the scriptures, the things concerning Himself" (v. 27). And, when they sat down to eat together, it is written, "their eyes were opened," and they suddenly knew who He was. So the Word teaches that although they *saw* the Lord at first with their natural eyes, still they did not really *see* Him until their spiritual eyes were opened. This was done by their learning the truth about Him and understanding it.

So it is with the Lord's second coming. He came to us the first time by being present with people to their natural eyes, and also by making sure that the story of His life was written down for all future men and women to read with their natural eyes. But He comes to us the second time by giving us a true understanding of all that He did.

When the angels in the book of Acts said that the Lord would return "in like manner" as they had seen Him go, they meant *with understanding*, for it was with joyful, thankful understanding that they saw Him go on that day. And it is with love and wisdom that we will see Him again.

Now just to be sure that this point is very clear, let us take one more illustration. Use your imagination. Suppose that the Lord did come again in a physical body exactly as He did before; suppose He were to come in to this city—or even this room—right now, and tell you that He was the Lord. If someone did that, would you believe it? Well, it sounds so amazing that you would almost certainly be doubtful. You would have to be convinced that He was the Lord, wouldn't you? And you would not be convinced just because He said so, or because He looked like the Lord. You would only be convinced if all the things that He said seemed true to you, and you understood them. Now if it is the truth itself that convinces you, and not just the appearance of a man, you can easily see why the Lord's second coming could only take place by means of the teaching of truth!

And this is exactly what has already taken place. The Lord has come again in the teaching of the truths of the internal or spiritual sense of the Word, in short, the teaching of the Writings for the New Church. By means of these teachings, which are so clear and logical, so beautiful, so deep and so helpful, we are enabled to understand many wonderful things about the Lord's life (and about our own lives, too, even unto eternity in heaven or hell); and so, our spiritual eyes are opened.

Many new things are also revealed in the Writings, things that until now had only been known to angels in heaven. So we often call our teachings the *Heavenly Doctrines*. But now one thing remains to be said: how or where did we get the Writings? If the Lord has no need to come into the world again in His own physical body, how can He bring His truth to us?

The answer again is quite simple: in the way that He has always done it, by means of a man! Throughout the history of the world the Lord has always used natural, finite men to teach and

lead in His truth. Each has been taught by the Lord in a different way, and so each has also taught in a different way: Moses, David, Isaiah, Malachi, Matthew, Luke; even the Lord Himself was only able to teach and lead men after He put on a human body from His mother, Mary. And so now, as He comes again, He comes through the faithful work of another man who himself was able to understand, and write clearly, and publish by means of the press, all those wonderful things that were revealed for the benefit of all men who would be willing to read (or hear), and be convinced. He comes in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.²

Of course you are not expected to believe in the Writings of Swedenborg just because they appear before you, or because someone says you should. But as with anything as serious and important as the Writings claim to be, you are expected to learn about them and think carefully of them. And so we are convinced that one day you, too, will have your spiritual eyes opened to see, really see, the second coming of the Lord there, in the love and heavenly wisdom that is taught in those books. Remember, the Lord said, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Nevertheless, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16: 12-13). What better time is there than now, when the world needs it so much? And what better way could the Lord possibly come than as He has done, in the clear, pure truths of the Writings?

NOTES

1 The statement in Luke 24:39 that the Lord had flesh and bones, unlike any *spirit*, would be better understood...unlike any ghost, for the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost! In reality they were seeing the most perfect spiritual Man of all, in His own spiritual body.

2 It is interesting that we call these books, “the Writings,” because this is a word that means the same as *the Scriptures*, another word that the disciples used when referring to the Lord’s law and teaching. So all these works are now parts of the one great Word.

Texts: John 16:12-13; Acts 1: 11