

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

WILL YOU UNDERSTAND?

by the Rev. Christopher R. J. Smith

Imagine yourselves ten years from now. You will probably be well into your twenties. Where will you be at that time and what will you be doing? Will you be happy? Will you be interested in the church? Will you be a Christian? Will you be a New Churchman?

When you reach the age of twenty, you are invited to join the organization known as the General Church of the New Jerusalem and to commit yourself to supporting its goals. So in ten years time you will either have become a member of the General Church or you will have decided that the General Church is not for you, unless you are still making up your mind.

On reaching adulthood it may well be that a person will decide that the General Church with its particular tradition and orientation is not what he wants. He could well choose to join some other organization in which to be a New Churchman. (I do not see how you can have the Church without some kind of organization.)

But what of those who seem to keep themselves uncommitted? What of the many young adults who were baptized into the New Church but who today have their names in the file headed “inactive” or “lost?”

You may say, “That’ll never be me. I’ll always be committed and active in the Church.” But I would caution you not to tempt the hells to attack your pride!

Remember the disciple Peter. On the eve of the Crucifixion, when Jesus said to the disciples that they would all fall away from Him, Peter proudly corrected Him by saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with You to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33), but by dawn the next day, Peter three times publicly denied even knowing who Jesus was.

In ten years time, it may be that you will find yourself denying the Lord in one way or another. It may be that your name will be listed as “inactive”. And what will the cause be? Those on the inactive list, when asked why they are inactive, will likely give an answer that sounds like an excuse to justify themselves.

Some may say, “The people who run the organization turned me off. When I look back, I can tell you of a lot of people who hurt me.” If everyone gave up for that reason, there would be no one left in the General Church!

Others may say, “I guess I’m just lazy.” Careful reflection can see the consequence of laziness and the grief it brings not to just oneself but also to others.

Then some in the inactive group may excuse themselves by saying, “Swedenborg was a crackpot. You can’t really believe all that stuff he wrote. Anyway, I don’t believe in God anymore. If there were a God, the world wouldn’t be in such a mess. And what’s more, I don’t believe you have to go to church to learn right from wrong, to be a good person, and to learn how to get along with people. And singing those old fashioned hymns, man, is a pain.”

Will this be you speaking in ten years from now? If it were, then it would appear that you would not have understood what you are doing and learning now.

From what you are learning now, will you come to understand what the New Church is all about? Will you understand who your real Father is? Will you understand His call to you? Will you be able to see Him? Will you be able to hear Him?

Just because your real Father is not present in flesh and blood, don’t think that’ll make any difference. Your Father, the God of the universe, once walked on this earth just like any other man. What difference did it make?

Miracle after miracle He performed. He spoke like no man had ever spoken. Yet did He not say to the men following Him, watching and learning from Him, did He not say to them, “You have eyes, why is it that you do not see? You have ears, why is it that you do not use them? You have a memory, then why is it that you do not remember? How is it that you do not understand?” (See Mark 8:18, 21).

In the immediate years before you, no doubt you are seeing much, hearing much, and learning much about the New Church. But that does not mean to say that you will have understood anything of importance. It does not mean that you will end up being able to see, to hear, and to understand the Lord.

No doubt you are learning about Swedenborg’s fantastic claim. He swears that the same Person who is spoken of as Jesus Christ in the New Testament, that same Person, came to him. The result is the 30 books that we call the Heavenly Doctrines or the Writings.

This revelation from the Lord, we are told, as well as what is written in the Old and New Testaments, can be fully understood. We have the *ability* to understand according to our *willingness* to understand. (DP 96:3; AR 224, 765, 867) Will you understand?

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord Who practice kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord’”(Jer. 9:23-24).

In ten years time, will you be happy only in your personal achievements, your worldly success, in your particular lifestyle? Or will the Church be first in your hearts?

Texts: Luke 22: 33; Jeremiah 9:23-24