

New Births of Innocence

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Jesus...said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God." And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:14, 16)

What is the most essential quality that makes a person human, in the best sense? The Writings say, "Innocence is the human itself" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4797). In the Writings' usage, innocence is not ignorance or naivete, as we commonly speak of it. Innocence is the willingness to be led by the Lord. Every good affection, every happy and peaceful state, every true insight—in short, every truly human state—comes from the Lord. So innocence, the willingness to follow the Lord, is at the center of every good state. Through innocence, the Lord is able to be with us and lead us to heaven. So Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:15). Since innocence is the essential of human life, the Lord provides that we receive this quality as the very first state of all, and He provides for new births of innocence all through our lives.

Innocence is the first state of all human beings. Spirits associated with the highest heaven, the heaven of innocence, surround infants both in the womb and when newborn. They fill children with their sphere (*Heaven and Hell* 295). The little ones are completely open to receive the influence of angels who are themselves forms of innocence. They do not yet have any sense of themselves, nor do not act from a will and judgment of their own (*Arcana Coelestia* 295). New babies have such soft skin, such flexible bodies, and such clear eyes, because they are formed so much from innocence. The innocence of infants touches their parents and joins together with their adult innocence from the Lord. This conjunction of innocence is the heart of parental love (*Conjugal Love* 395-397).

Baptism strengthens little children's associations with heaven. In this way, infants, who cannot yet *choose* their associate spirits, are connected with the New Heaven, which John saw in the last chapters of Revelation. Angels from this heaven are appointed by the Lord to protect and guide children as they grow up, keeping them in a state in which they can receive faith in the Lord (*True Christian Religion* 699).

Children need baptism because the innocence of infancy and childhood is only external. True innocence dwells in wisdom. By intelligence, people *see* for themselves what the Lord wants them to do; in wisdom, they freely *follow* the Lord in their lives. To become angels, children must grow up to receive innocence from the Lord in freedom according to reason. This takes place first by education in the truths of the Word and then by regeneration, through victories in temptation.

Innocence is what enables the Lord to order the flood of new sensations and experiences rushing into a new little mind. Think what a miracle it is that from complete ignorance, children can learn to think, to see the order and purpose in the Lord's kingdom in this world and in heaven!

Clearly this is something only the Lord can do, and He can only do it as far as a person is willing to be led.

So the Lord forms a mind, little by little, and inspires children with curiosity—the affection for knowing things. Children need to be instructed in all kinds of knowledge as a basis for intelligence and wisdom, and for true innocence. Internal innocence, we are taught, is the goal of all the instruction of little children in heaven (*Conjugal Love* 413). So, also, the inmost goal of all the instruction we give in New Church homes and schools should be the innocence of wisdom, freely chosen, giving consent to the Heavenly Father.

Because of their innocence, children eagerly learn from their parents about the Lord, and are delighted with the stories of the Word. Their fathers and mothers teach them the Lord's prayer and the Ten Commandments. They learn the importance of obeying their parents, even when they don't want to. Obedience is innocence in actual life. Learning to obey father and mother as children, in spite of their own wishes, establishes a very important basis for obeying the Lord in adult life, contrary to the inclinations of proprium. Orderly habits developed in childhood, especially the habit of self-discipline, make adult choices easier.

One important habit that parents can encourage is the habit of reading the Word and talking about what it means. The Word is the way the Lord leads us. The willingness to read and meditate on the Word each day is a real expression of innocence. The example parents in this area set will carry lasting influence with their children.

As children reach adulthood, they become able to know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, and to follow Him, as if from themselves, instead of from their parents. This constitutes a new birth of innocence with them, the beginning of internal, freely chosen innocence. It is not the pure, sweet state of newborn babies, but instead it is conjoined with the beginnings of genuine intelligence.

The Writings say that from this time on, if people are being regenerated, the Lord begins to recall the innocent states of childhood and to offer people a chance to make them their own. They do this by learning the truth, so they can judge what is truly good. Then they make this good their own by applying the standard of truth to their lives.

Throughout the course of life, in each new state from the Lord, there is a new birth of innocence. We see it when a person chooses to belong to the Lord's church. We see innocence in the tender states of consent, betrothal and marriage. The Lord brings new innocence into a couple's home through the wonderful gift of babies, and their innocent states growing up. The parents confirm their own innocence in the very willingness to have and to care for the children the Lord gives them. This is the highest way people on earth can cooperate with the Lord's purpose of forming a heaven from the human race. Parents are bringing young children to the Lord, that He may touch them.

By these new states of innocence, throughout our lives, the Lord gradually makes all things new with us. Eventually, in the other life, all the evil tendencies, the old bad habits and confused reasoning, that stand in the way and rebuke the little children—the selfishness and worldliness

and wrong values that prevent us from coming close to the Lord—can be put aside. Then the Lord can lift us up with the strength of His arms into heaven. He can communicate the healing power of His love and wisdom by the touch of His Divine hands, and bless us forever as His children.