

The Power of Spheres

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Some years ago I read an account of a survey conducted by a team of psychologists. They were examining the backgrounds and personalities of a large number of persons whose academic achievements were far above average, endeavoring to find common denominators which might throw more light on the educational process. As they compiled and analyzed the data one very puzzling fact emerged: a disproportionately large number of these persons had all attended the same school in the early years of their education! Their curiosity aroused the researchers to focus their attention on this group, and they soon found another common trait: most of the members of the group had been taught by the same teacher—a woman who was now retired, but still living.

The psychologists immediately contacted the teacher and arranged an interview, obviously expecting to find a goldmine of information about the proper educational principles and methods. But nothing of the sort happened. When the psychologists started to ask their questions, the old woman replied that she had not really done anything out of the ordinary, and she added with a smile: “I just loved them all.”

Now, it is true of course that love alone could not be responsible for producing such excellent results. Intelligence, professional competence, and hard work undoubtedly are attributes without which no teacher can be truly successful. And yet, it would be unwise to dismiss the words of the old woman as pure sentimentality.

Love—not only in its external manifestations, but also as a sphere extending into and permeating the environment—surely has a great power to open minds and arouse positive affections. That such spheres exist, and that they do affect others, is indeed very evident from the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine, where the subject is treated of in a manner so extensive and detailed that we actually possess what we might call a doctrine of spheres.

All created things—we are taught—both spiritual and material, from the most minute to the greatest, are surrounded by spheres, which are substances emanating in a constant stream from the objects or bodies. Thus it is that a person also possesses a sphere, an extension of his ruling love or general state, about which we are taught:

“The will or love of every one there (in the spiritual world) constitutes the whole person, and the sphere of life thence flows forth from him as an exhalation or vapor, and encompasses him, and makes as it were himself around him; scarcely otherwise than as the effluvium about plants in the world, which is also perceived at a distance by its odors; also about animals, of which a sagacious dog is exquisitely sensible. That such an effluvium also pours out from every person is known from much experience; but when a person lays aside his body and becomes a spirit or angel, then the effluvium or exhalation is not material as in the world, but is a spiritual effluence from his love. This then forms a sphere around him, which causes his quality to be perceived by others at a distance... “(Arcana Coelestia 10130:2).

It is true, of course, that the above passage is specifically speaking of a person's sphere in the spiritual world, clearly distinguishing from that of the material world. And one might assume that this would mean that the spiritual sphere remains imperceptible until a person puts off the material body. Indeed, if it were not so we would be able to make the spiritual judgments that the Writings so emphatically discourage.

But it must not be overlooked that there are teachings indicating that the sphere of our loves and affections does make its presence felt even in this world, albeit not in such a manner that its quality can be scrutinized by the rational. It is thus taught in the *True Christian Religion*:

"...for the affections of the will and the consequent thoughts of the understanding form a spiritual sphere round about those in the spiritual world, which is felt in various ways; while in this world this spiritual sphere is absorbed by the material body, and encloses itself within a natural sphere, which then flows forth from a person" (True Christian Religion 410:3).

And that this spiritual-natural sphere affects the minds of others is very clearly stated in the following passage:

"From every person there goes, nay rather pours forth and encompasses him, a spiritual sphere from the affections of his love, and this imparts itself to the natural sphere which is from the body, and they conjoin themselves... all sympathy and antipathy derive thence their origin, also all conjunction and disjunction..." (Conjugal Love 171).

Reflecting on these teachings we may thus conclude—for example—that the quality of a home is not merely the sum of the things that are done and the words that are spoken, or of the principles and methods that rule externally. They are undeniably of great importance, and it is vital that New Church scholars and educators continue to search the Word for true principles from which new and better methods may be developed; but it must also be evident that no method—however perfect it may be—will be really successful if the sphere of the home—especially the sphere of the parents—is a negative one.

It is necessary and part of charity, that we prevent internal states of disorder from manifesting themselves, that parents, for example, endeavor to hide the inevitable states of conflict from the children. But it is also true that if we permit such negative states to fester within, if we continue to nurture feelings of discontent, self-pity, frustration and resentment—just to mention a few—then the spheres of these will increase in strength, and dominate the sphere of the home, subtly and yet profoundly affecting the minds of the children.

Shunning evil not only externally, but also internally, which is the real beginning of the church in man, is thus also the beginning and the indispensable prerequisite for establishing that state of order and harmony in the home without which the church among people cannot grow and flourish.