



“I Am”



Talks by Ian Arnold



“I Am”

A series of talks on the "*I am*" sayings of the Lord as found in John's gospel.

by

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Introduction

We are dealing with the "*I am*" sayings as they appear in John's Gospel, seven in all. There is another in the opening chapter of the Book of Revelation (a book which, traditionally, is believed to have been written by the same John):

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" says the Lord" (verse 8).

However, it is only the seven in the Gospel that we are going to be taking in.

The Greek for "I am" is ἐγώ εἰμι (eg-o i-mee). The seven statements we are looking at involve the use of ἐγώ εἰμι with a predicate (e.g. "I am the bread of life"). In addition, however, there are several places in the Gospel where ἐγώ εἰμι is used as an absolute (John 6:20; John 8:24, 28 and 58; John 13:19, and John 18:6). In other words this is all in these instances that Jesus said: "I am". Commentators have pointed out the remarkably close parallel which exists between such usage and statements from the mouth of Jehovah which we find in Isaiah 43:10 for example:

*"You are my witnesses" says the Lord,
"And my servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe me,
And understand that I am he."*

(See, too, Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:13; 46:4; 48:12.)

Another example of parallel usage, is Exodus Chapter 3, verse 14:

And God said to Moses "I AM WHO I AM."^[c] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

It is not the place for us to pursue the linguistic connection between the Hebrew for "I am" and the Hebrew for "Jehovah". Indeed, I am not competent to do so, though the connection is there. The fascinating thing, from a New Church point of view, is that there is this record in John's Gospel of Jesus on occasion saying the same thing of Himself as God, in the Old Testament, is recorded as saying of Himself. And the thing is that two separate entities can't lay claim to the same title, or statement. "I am" carries with it all the meaning of the 'self existent, eternal One'. God is as we all agree the 'self existent, eternal One', and what Jesus was doing in using, or laying claim to that title, was declaring not just that He was one with God, or on an equal to God, but actually God Himself. If its commentators are a guide to go by, the Christian world shrinks from drawing this conclusion when yet, linguistically, it is all so plain.

The teaching of the New Church is that Jehovah "*was one with (the Lord) from the very start of conception and birth*". ('Arcana Caelestia' 2018). Indeed, it was Jehovah God Himself who descended into the world by putting on human nature through birth from Mary ('True Christian Religion' 82, etc.). The Lord on earth was able to and did speak in full awareness of who He actually was, the "I AM"; the one self existent Being of the universe.

But we need now to look at John's Gospel in which these sayings are concentrated. Why not in the others, you may ask? Why the appeal they had to John?

Of the four Gospels, John is the 'odd man out'. It is not like the other three which are grouped together and referred to as the "Synoptics". People have been intrigued by its distinguishing features. It is much more theological and philosophical in its presentation of the Christian Gospel. It is taken to be the last of the Gospels to be written and all the evidence is there that the author was not interested in doing what the other three Gospel writers had done well, which was to tell of the birth, life, ministry, arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of the Lord; but to clarify, perhaps once and for all, that Jesus Christ was God come into the world.

C. K. Barrett's comments, quoted in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, are usefully referred to at this point, where he writes:

"The first impression received by a reader who turns from the Synoptic Gospels to the Fourth is of difference: there is difference in style (easily noticeable even in translation), difference in chronology (the ministry lasts not one year but three; the crucifixion takes place before, not after the Passover meal), difference in locality (in the Synoptic Gospels Jerusalem is not visited till the last week; in John, Jerusalem is frequently mentioned from chapter 2 onwards), difference in subject matter (the Synoptic Gospels contain few long discourses, the Fourth contains no exorcisms); and to some extent difference in the presentation of Jesus Himself." (page 844)

It is this last statement we need to just dwell upon for a moment, viz., "and to some extent difference in the presentation of Jesus Himself". All the evidence is there that John's purpose in writing the Fourth Gospel was to really bring out the divinity of the Lord in a way that had not been done in the earlier three. Again quoting C. K. Barrett, this time from his one volume Commentary on John:

"In the synoptic Gospels Jesus is not defined in terms of deity, but in terms of His work, and His relation to the kingdom of God. John's thought about Jesus is on the other hand not so much functional as essential; what Jesus does arises out of what He is." (page 45)

So John was a Gospel writer with a much clearer insight into who Jesus was and with a determination to use material available to Him to highlight this. Two of the ways He did this were, firstly, to link the Lord with the Divine Being as known, understood and believed in on the basis of Old Testament references to Him. (We have already largely covered this in what was said about the use of ἐγώ εἰμι as an absolute. Secondly, John took hold of a series of titles, probably all of them earlier known and even claimed in respect of other deities, and applied them directly, and exclusively, to the Lord. It is said that, for example, there are passages in ancient literature where the goddess ISIS declares her virtues and attributes in similar terminology, viz., "I am the light of the world", etc.)

We are looking at the use of ἐγώ εἰμι in John's Gospel where it appears with a predicate the "I am" sayings, seven in all. They are:

I am the bread of life	John 6:35, 48
I am the light of the world	John 8:12 and 9:5
I am the door	John 10:7 and 9
I am the good shepherd	John 10: 11 and 14
I am the resurrection and the life	John 11:25
I am the way, the truth and the life	John 14:6
I am the true vine	John 15:1 and 5

In what follows, each of these will be discussed in some detail, both in terms of background and in respect of the spiritual meaning enfolded within.

Whilst there is nowhere in the teachings of the Church, or in The Heavenly Doctrines where that meaning, when they are linked together, is expounded and whilst I know of no attempt which has appeared in print to suggest what the sequence spiritually may be, I venture to suggest what it could be.

Bearing in mind that there are seven sayings, the teaching given very much suggests that they embody a complete series, from beginning to end. A particularly useful passage is 'Arcana Caelestia' para. 10374, dealing with Exodus 31:17, *"And on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed."* The passage reads:

"That this signifies a state of good when the Church is established, or when man is regenerated, is evident from the signification of the seventh day, as denoting a holy state, which is that of the Church when it is in good, or when it is established, or when the man of the Church is in good, that is, when 'regenerated'."

The "I am" sayings, from the first through to the seventh, take us through the stages of our regeneration, when at last the Church is established in us or we become of the Church.

There is not and cannot be anything random in the order in which they appear in the Gospel. John the author may not have known it, but he was clearly led by the Lord to quote and make use of them in the order in which he did. The question then is, what is the order unfolded here? What are these main steps of regeneration as they are being spelt out to us?

It is remarkable how many times it is insisted upon in the Heavenly Doctrines that good must be present before the seeds of truth can be sown in it and seen. (ref. 'Arcana Caelestia' 2590:2) When there is a real striving for a more holy and spiritual life then for the first time can the truths we have learned and which have been lying relatively idle in our memories, take root in our own lives and mere memory knowledge of truth becomes something alive and seen in a way as never before. ("I am" sayings 1 and 2, as below).

This in turn enables us to step forward as through a door ("I am" saying no. 3) into a more spiritual way of life and for the first time, though we have paid Him lip service previously, we really come to acknowledge the Lord as our Saviour and our Shepherd ("I am" saying no. 4). He now can raise us from spiritual death ("I am" saying no. 5) opening to us at the same time the pathway through life which leads to heaven ("I am" saying no. 6). Then, as we embark on that journey through life we increasingly come to acknowledge how great our dependence on Him is. Truly without Him we are nothing ("I am" saying no. 7). This deep and loving sense of dependence on the Lord is the final stage of regeneration.

IN SUMMARY

1. The bread of life	good must be present in our lives before
2. The light of the world	truth is seen
3. The door	after which we go through a door into a more spiritual way of life and
4. The good shepherd	for the first time, really come to see and know and acknowledge the Lord as our Saviour and Shepherd who
5. The resurrection and the life	lifts us up from spiritual death to life and sets us on
6. The way, the truth and the life	the pathway through life which leads to
7. The true vine	increasingly seeing how great our dependence is on Him.

"I am the Bread of Life"

John 6:35,48

As being one way of understanding something of what the Lord meant when He described Himself as being 'the bread of life' I would like to look at the giving of the manna in the wilderness, the description of which is given in the Book of Exodus Chapter 16. We are focusing our thought on the Lord as the Supplier of the wisdom, the guidance and the goodness that we need in our lives and to sustain us along the way. I do not know of any story in the Word which, when understood according to its spiritual meaning, so effectively highlights our dependence upon Him in this regard.

It is the seven significant features in Exodus 16 I am drawing out and dwelling upon.

The **first** thing we notice about the giving of the manna is that the people of Israel were on a journey. Under Moses' leadership they had escaped from slavery in Egypt and had begun (though they did not know it at the time) forty years of wandering in the wilderness the end of which was to be the Promised Land.

The **second** thing about the story is that although those wanderings were to end at the Promised Land which in retrospect was to make it all worthwhile, yet the Lord did not refuse them blessings along the way.

The **third** point is the people's despair. They had only been gone from Egypt a matter of weeks and they fell into a real hole. They felt deserted and wrongly advised. It would have been better for them, they complained, to have remained in Egypt.

Fourthly, the manna was given every morning for all of those forty years they were in the wilderness. It was a miracle which was repeated every day and this is not always appreciated.

The **fifth** point is that the manna was from heaven. It was the gift of God.

Sixthly, it was to be gathered every day. Only each day's needs were to be provided for. It was useless to try to take more.

And the **seventh** point: they did not know what to call it. The familiar and easy way is to talk of it as being "manna" in the wilderness. Our word "manna" is from the Hebrew meaning, "What is it?" As in Exodus 16:15, *"When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, 'What is it?'"*

In the light of its spiritual meaning, this story is all about the way in which the Lord comes to us with the goodness and guidance that we need. He is the bread of life. So let's

go back to it and see what it is saying to us about this. The people of Israel were **on a journey**, a journey which had its good and its tough times; its moments of joy and its moments of sadness; its highs and its lows. And that refers to our life, our life in this world. Life is a journey.

Now, although the end or the objective of our life in this world is heaven (the purpose of creation being a heaven from the human race) the Lord makes sure that there are **experiences of heaven along the way**. It is not unremitting grind and gloom! And that has interesting ramifications so far as our understanding of the teachings of the Church is concerned. There is evidence those Teachings have been read as promising the blessings of heaven only at the end of it all.

We have only to look at some of the hymns written one hundred or so years ago, some of which found their way into New Church hymn books. The position or perception they reflect is that this world is a pretty miserable sort of place and at the end of it all our blessings will come in heaven. And it is the same with some of the children's hymns of those times, which make me shiver the way they talk of this world as a dim and dreary valley after which all will be well in heaven. But that is not what the Word teaches. The Word teaches that whilst the Lord strives to lead us ultimately to heaven, He also provides that there be blessings and experiences of heaven along the way.

Moving to the third point, **the people despaired**. We spoke of them feeling deserted and wrongly advised.

Who of us hasn't despaired about our ability to handle a particular situation? Our ability to love somebody who is very unlovable? Our ability to forgive somebody whom we feel doesn't deserve forgiveness? Who of us hasn't felt despair? In fact we must be brought to despair about ourselves before the miracle can take place; before the Lord can truly come to us as the bread of heaven. It's not until we can acknowledge and see that of ourselves we do not possess the goodness or the enlightenment, the wisdom that is, to see our way through life, to respond to life's demands and challenges, that we are sufficiently ready for the Lord's miracle to take place. We must know despair, because it is in our states of despair that the Lord is most able to help us. When we are smug and complacent and self satisfied, the Lord does not have the opportunity that He has when we've been humbled.

Now the manna was given **every morning**. The Israelites woke every day to their surroundings covered with the bread from heaven. And this is a promise that in respect of every new state we enter upon, the Lord is prepared to rain upon us the blessings of goodness and guidance that we need.

The blessings are from heaven. The manna was **from heaven**. All goodness and all true guidance or enlightenment is from the Lord. And it is to be gathered every day, or sought out as being what is needed in every state and circumstance of our life. But none was to be gathered ahead of time or need. Some people tried to do so and the manna went putrid.

What a useful point that brings home to us. We can only turn to the Lord and seek His blessing in the particular situation we are presently in. We make the mistake of anticipating the future and worrying about the future and getting ourselves into states of anxiety about the future when in fact the Lord is present now and only deals with the now in His relationship with us. Who hasn't asked or wondered, 'What shall I do in my old age?' or 'What if something happens to one of the children'. Well, apart from making very general provision for those sorts of situations, what this is saying to us is that we need to and can only meet that situation with the Lord when it arises. Turn to Him for blessings and strengthening or guidance or whatever else is needed **at that time** and you will find that if you do turn to Him at that time and in that state He will be sufficient for your needs.

In a moving article written by one of the American ministers of the New Church the husband shares his and his wife's reaction to having a Downs Syndrome child whom they lost. One of the things he said and talked about, is how he and his wife, whenever they had thought about handicapped children in the past had felt that they would never be able to cope with a situation like that. Yet they found that in the particular situation they in time found themselves in, the Lord did give them what they needed to enable them to rise to the challenge which their handicapped daughter brought with her. We are to gather the Lord's blessings, that is look to Him for His strengthening and His guidance in each situation as it arises. We must not anxiously anticipate other states and other situations. Instead, we are to trust the Lord's presence and readiness to meet with us the demands of those states when we enter upon them. *"your strength will equal your days."* (Deuteronomy 33:25)

Finally **they did not know what it was.**

I think that is really beautiful because what it is saying to us is that when the Lord's goodness is operating in people's lives, it is very hard to put a name to it. We are often overwhelmed. We can be so overwhelmed that we even suspect the motives of another. Somebody has done something lovely and we say, 'What did they do that for?' We even begin to suspect the motives because we can't really handle the beauty of what is being done. It is such a lovely thing. How can you quantify it when you look at children and their innocence shines through? Or when their guilelessness is there for all to see? You love it. But it's hard to put a name to it. When spiritual qualities are beginning to be active within you it is very difficult to quantify them; to put a name to them or to what is happening. The

Lord's blessings, His goodness, His strength are often beyond what words can adequately convey. What words can contain and express some marvelous turn of events in your life? The people did not know what it was and so their question was, 'What is it?' What words are adequate?

The Lord, we are taught, "*is the source of everything celestial and spiritual*" ('Arcana Caelestia' 276). In plainer words still, He is the source of all good and truth, of all love and wisdom. As surely as our physical bodies will waste away when deprived of their proper nourishment, so will our souls shrivel if we do not turn to the Lord for the goodness and guidance that He alone can give. And as we are shown elsewhere, it is only when something of the Lord's goodness has been received by us that the reality within His truth and teaching begins to be seen and appreciated by us.

"I am the Light of the World"

John 8:12 and 9:5

Earlier it was commented on how different a Gospel the fourth is compared to the first three, Matthew, Mark and Luke. The author, taken to be the beloved Apostle John did not set out to again retell the story of the life of the Lord. He planned and wrote the Gospel in an altogether different way. Whilst he recounted a few of the miracles he did so for a specific purpose. They were used merely as a starting point for bringing out and developing, some deep truth about the Lord.

This is to be very much borne in mind when we come to Chapter 9 which starts with the story of the giving of sight to the man born blind. John's purpose here was to open up and lead on to the whole question of light and darkness, sight and blindness **at a mental, psychological or spiritual level**. He was inspired to see the connection or **correspondence** between physical blindness of which the Lord cured the man and the blindness of the Lord's antagonists, the Pharisees. And it is this which is so skillfully brought out as the chapter proceeds. (Even if it seems an interruption to do so, please stop at this point and quietly read the whole chapter.)

We could not have it more skillfully or tellingly brought home to us that there is blindness of two kinds, one being physical blindness and the other spiritual blindness. It is one thing not to be able to see the world of nature around us and people and things which fill its landscape. It is another thing not to be able to see or recognize realities when they are brought to our attention. We need to read the fourth Gospel as a continuous story. From earlier on in the Gospels it has been the story of resistance on the part of the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews. The debate was long and at times complex. The Lord's adversaries either **couldn't** see or **wouldn't** see, even though the Lord spoke so plainly and at least to the satisfaction of some, so convincingly (see John 7:46). There are, as the proverb has it, none so blind as those who have no wish to see.

But where the opening or the closing of people's mental or spiritual eyes are concerned, there is even more that the chapter holds for us than this. Even in respect of the man born blind whose physical sight was restored to him by the Lord, setting off waves of incredulity and disbelief as it did, the story is also told, subtly perhaps but very beautifully of the opening of **his** spiritual eyes. He was blind physically and mentally and the story is told of the way he emerges from darkness at both levels.

It was his understanding of the Lord as to who He was that we are referring to here. Can we look for a moment at the way his eyes were opened in this regard?

At first he can hardly have known who it was who gave him his sight and when questioned about the miracle spoke of "*a man called Jesus*". Clearly the Pharisees were agitated about the whole episode and they questioned him further about the identity of the person who opened his eyes. His answer this time was that "*He is a Prophet*" (verse 17). Still the questioning persisted and the previously blind man uttered his conviction that his healer could only have been "*from God*" (verse 33). Finally and in a private encounter with the Lord, he acknowledged Him as the Son of God. "*And he worshipped Him.*" (verse 38). "*A man called Jesus*" "*a prophet*" "*someone from God*" "*the Son of God*". Truly, his eyes had been opened in a beautiful way. He had been brought from darkness to light, from ignorance to understanding, as to who the Lord was.

The irony is that this outcome was the exact opposite of what the Pharisees had set out to accomplish. We can't avoid the impression that they were really worried and concerned about the miracle. As the blind man himself said to them (and they must have known it only too well), "*Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.*" (verse 32). How important then it seems to have become to the Pharisees to have the blind man confirm what they wanted everyone to believe, that Jesus was "*a sinner*" (verse 24); of poor reputation and unknown background (verse 29). But he wouldn't comply. And we admire him enormously for his honesty and his courage. "*Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!*" (verse 25). And their pressure on him and constant negative questioning of him only caused him to clarify his thinking and understanding and come to see the Lord in a light that he would not otherwise have done. How the Pharisees had been hoping the man would declare his disbelief in the Lord. Instead he ended by declaring his **belief** in Him more knowingly, more insistently, more articulately than ever.

As we can see, opposition doesn't have to be a bad thing in that it can prompt and help us clarify concepts and matters of belief we have perhaps accepted but not examined or thought through.

Eventually the Pharisees did come to see that the Lord could be getting at them as to their own blindness. Indignantly they asked Him, "*Are we blind also?*" Without entering further argument about the matter, the Lord left them to draw their own conclusions. "*If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains* "

This chapter in John's Gospel is full of symbolisms or **correspondences**. It is all to do with sight and blindness, light and darkness. And what is interesting is the way the Lord uses it to highlight the very purpose of His Coming into the world. "*For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind* " (verse 39). As

was promised of the Messiah when He came: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6,7) "As long as I am in the world" the Lord said, "I am the light of the world." In the way the situation is explained to us in the Heavenly Doctrines there is more built in that statement than ever we can perhaps fully appreciate. The Lord on earth was at the time the only light in the midst of the spiritual darkness then enveloping people's minds.

However, it is in reference to ourselves and the world which is said to be within us, that we are going to concentrate on here most of all.

We have what is called a natural or external mind and a spiritual or internal mind. In other words our minds operate on two levels. The external or natural mind is the one of which we are mostly conscious, the internal or spiritual we are mostly unconscious of.

Now, in the course of our normal development we enter into and usually function on the basis of all levels of this natural or external mind. We talk about a child's mind opening and developing and isn't it lovely to watch it happening? They first of all experience the world through their senses, then learn about it in a more structured way, start to reason about what they learn, develop opinions of their own as young adults and so on.

However it is to be noted that it is the natural or external mind being talked about here. Every normal person who is not handicapped or in some other way disadvantaged enters into the full use of that natural or external mind. We all have it and all enter into the use of it. And this enables us to function as citizens of this world. To be successful, to make money, to provide for this and that and all the rest of it.

The risk, though, is that we will stop at this level and only ever function on the basis of impulses and insights of which we are conscious here. As we have seen, there is this other higher level of the mind called the spiritual or internal mind which it is very important we try to get up amongst and **to think from**, because here is where values and divine teaching and principles have their home with us. We can refuse to do so of course, but if we do it will atrophy. It will just shrivel up and become nothing; and what happens is that the division between the two, the internal or spiritual and the external or natural, becomes hard and impenetrable. However if we make those breakthroughs from the natural world, then that division becomes almost invisible and transparent so that the two minds begin to act as one instead of acting in opposition as they often do.

Well why is it necessary to speak of this?

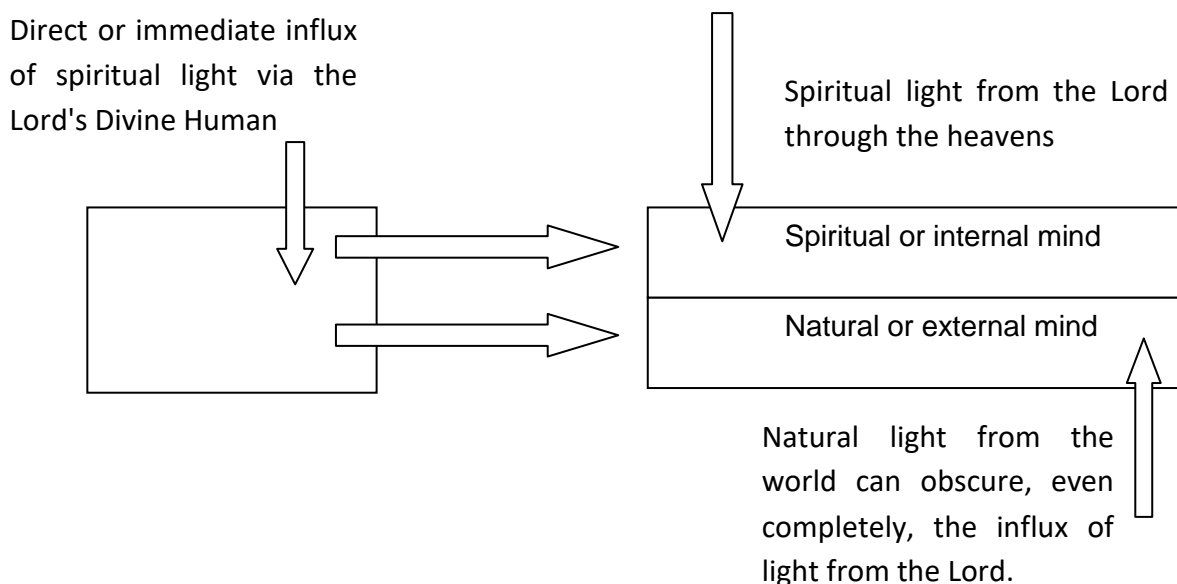
The only possible way for the Lord's light to enter into our minds is by this process of going up into spiritual or internal levels and thereby making it possible for the Lord's light to flow down through that spiritual mind into the natural or external mind. It is the familiar story of Jacob's ladder. The angels of God were seen by Jacob in his dream ascending and

descending. As we go up and create the opportunities, so the Lord with His Light, with His Wisdom and enlightenment, can come down. The Lord is the light of the world. That is spiritual light that is being talked about. If we are never open to that light then we will always function in darkness down here, at the level only of our natural minds. But so long as it is possible for these two minds, or these two levels of mind, to interact with one another and these openings or opportunities are created, so the light from Him Who is the Light of the World can descend and illuminate what is happening down here.

Two related passages from The Heavenly Doctrines, from 'Arcana Caelestia', paragraphs 9797 and 9801, bring it all together:

"So far as the internal man (mind) has been opened in the direction of heaven and thus in the direction of the Lord, so far it is in the light of heaven and therefore in the understanding of truth. The light of heaven is the Divine Truth which proceeds from the Lord; being enlightened by it means understanding the truth."

"So far, however as the internal man (mind) has been closed in the direction of heaven, and thus towards the Lord, so far it is in a state of cold and in thick darkness in respect to those things which belong to heaven; and so far as the external man in this case has been opened in the direction of the world, so far it thinks what is false and wills what is evil, so far consequently it is demented; for the light of the world in the external man (mind) extinguishes the light of heaven; and the fire of the life of the world extinguishes the fire of the life of heaven." (Emphasis mine.)



“I am the Door of the Sheep”

John 10:7 and 9

There are several points which I see to be important in order for us to come to terms with what is said in this tenth chapter of John's Gospel.

Please bear in mind that the contents of the chapter are part of a much longer and ongoing 'run in' which the Lord had with the Pharisees. This is not something you can look at in isolation from what has gone before or from what comes afterwards. In the previous chapter we read of the supposed shepherds of the flock (the Pharisees), casting out the man born blind, dismissing him from the flock and firmly closing the door on him. And now, in chapter 10, what follows is really commentary on their behaviour. In the eyes of the Pharisees all their rules and regulations were the door through which people must enter into the Church. By way of contrast Jesus speaks of Himself as being the door. And, *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."* Never mind the narrowness, the literalism, the rigid adherence to inessential laws all insisted upon as the way or the door into the sheepfold. I am the door. There is a new door which doesn't keep out people who should be allowed in.

The second thing here is that not one, but two of the "I am" sayings appear in the early verses of the chapter and we need to have our wits about us to keep the two separated. Jesus described Himself as both "the door" and "the good shepherd". He is both the door of the sheepfold and the faithful shepherd of the sheep. It can be confusing but it need not be. A shepherd could be both and often was. After calling his sheep into the sheepfold in the evening, he would himself lie across its entrance acting as the door, preventing the sheep wandering out or predators finding their way in.

The third thing is that not only had God's relationship with His people been pictured in terms of a Shepherd and sheep, the best known example of this being Psalm 23, but it was anticipated in several places in the Old Testament that the Messiah, when He came, would be as a shepherd of the people (see Ezekiel 37:24 and Micah 5:3, for example). Speaking of Himself as He did at this point, the Lord was laying claim to being the Messiah. No one can seriously doubt that He had these Old Testament prophecies in mind. Those who had eyes to see and ears to hear were able to acknowledge that it was so, that Jesus was the Messiah. But the blind Pharisees saw nothing of the kind and as it is said later in the chapter, *"picked up stones to stone him."* (verse 31).

You have no difficulty in seeing that the sheepfold stands for heaven. Now think about this for a moment and give some definitions of what you consider heaven to be? What

words, what states, what qualities, do you think of when you think of heaven? I am not talking here about heaven as a place. I'm talking about heaven in our hearts here and now. So what are the associations heaven has for you?

Well heaven surely brings to mind such words or qualities as **peacefulness, love, fulfillment, security and trust**. And can we stop over this last quality mentioned for a moment, **trust**. Heaven is a state which is based on our trust in the Lord. If you trust in the Lord you should be free from worry, free from fear, free from care. But what is another word for worry or care? Jesus said "*do not worry*" (Matthew 6:34). Heaven is a state which is free from anxiety. I put it to you; a state of trust suggests such freedom from anxiety.

What else do you associate with heaven? What other qualities or states? What are the kinds of things that make heaven?

Think about your relationship with other people. '**Being of like mind**' you say, or '**charity**'. Yes, but that's a very general term. If I'm charitable what should I be doing in respect of other people? How should I express my charity? In what way? '**Forgiving**' or '**being in forgiveness**' you say. If I am to be in a state of heaven, or to experience something of heaven, there must be forgiveness towards others. That's for sure. And what else must we be? '**Caring**', '**helpful**', '**non judgmental**', '**unselfish**', and '**tolerant**'. Yes, all of these things.

We all know that where there is forgiveness, there is heaven; where people are being tolerant, useful, understanding, compassionate and ready to overlook the shortcomings and failures of others, yet have the courage of their convictions and are each striving to help the other towards the good of life, there heaven is present.

We sense it when we come amongst it. It's where people are intolerant, unmerciful, are using others, being judgmental, are delighting in fault finding and negativity and couldn't care two hoots about the genuine happiness and fulfillment of another, there you have hell. And you can sense that when you come amongst it. You can experience it. You can be part of it. We can talk about being in heaven while we are in this world. There are also those times when we indulge in negativity, unmercifulness and such similar things which brings us into hell. Have you been in hell? Yes, you have, whenever those states have been upon you.

It is important for us once in a while to sit down and work out what is meant, or what we mean, when we talk of 'heaven' or 'the heavenly way of life'. The words can carry vague associations which we don't always think through. And though the implications, so far as heaven is concerned are wide, we in no way should feel dismayed or overwhelmed by it all.

So long as there is something of heaven's qualities within us this something can be nurtured and caused to grow and flourish in the spiritual world and heaven after we die. So long as the angels have a link with our lives through the efforts we are making now, however insignificant and halting those efforts may seem to be, they can maintain that link with us in the spiritual world and draw us closer and closer to themselves in heaven. So long as we are aspiring to these goals or objectives that's all the Lord asks of us.

In John chapter 10 **as far as the sheepfold is concerned**, this is what the Lord is referring to. And what we need to ask ourselves is this: can I identify with these qualities? Are they worth striving after? Do they represent the kind of person I would like to become? And perhaps it helps us to make up our minds, to reflect on their opposites which, when you look at them coldly and clinically, you should have no trouble making your choice. Do I want to live in a joyless, loveless, judgmental atmosphere? Do I want to constantly live with negativity, unmercifulness, and mistrust? So, what's your answer? Who of us then doesn't want to enter the sheepfold?

How then do we come into the states of heaven? What are the means by which we can come to know happiness and contentment in our lives and be at peace with one another? How can we have heaven in our relationships with one another and in our marriage most of all?

It seems ridiculous in this day and age, but there was a time when people were led to believe that they could **buy** their way into heaven. (This is one of the things which so upset the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther.) Or, you could **work** your way into heaven, or earn heaven in some meritorious way. (Today Moslems believe a person goes straightway to heaven if he or she dies in battle defending the faith?) It has also been widely believed that by merely having faith in the Lord you must be eventually received into heaven. (And this is an idea that continues to be robustly insisted upon by some Christians to this day). Non believers have the hope of a kind of heaven, of people living in peace, love and harmony with one another and they believe it is all a matter of righting the wrong in the environment and unlocking the potential for good that is within us all. There was a time after the war, when it was believed science held the key. Now, however, it is realised that it is nothing of the kind.

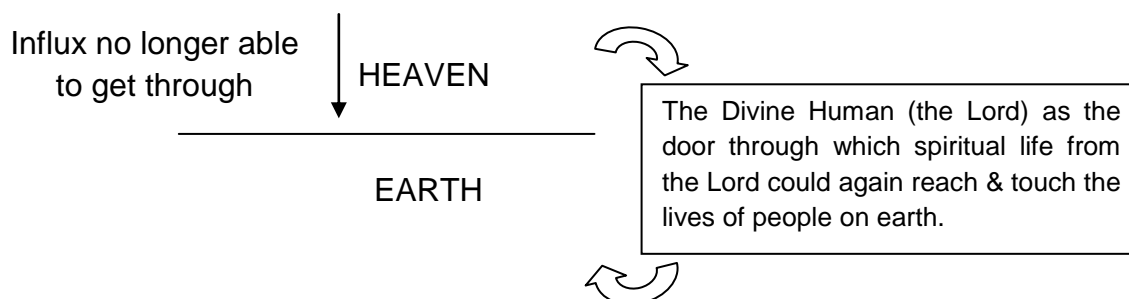
We ask again, how then do we come into the state of heaven?

Jesus said, *"I am the door"*. Not human ingenuity, or flashy cars, or bigger homes, or dependence on self, but *"I am the door"* and *"If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."*

How monumentally significant then this statement is! How central is the Lord and all that He teaches and stands for to our hopes of heaven and happiness! And how irrelevant, shallow, misleading and ludicrous do all the alternatives on offer seem when we grasp this truth. Of course there are the temptations to by pass this reality; to get around the Lord; to avoid the self examination, repentance and gradual character transformation He calls us to engage in. At times who doesn't long for an easier way, who of us isn't attracted by the suggestion that marvellously helpful as it can be, psychology alone can unravel and explain and neutralise all impulses to evil of which we become aware and many of which, of course, we act on? *"Very truly I tell you anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber."*

We affirm the truth that the Lord is the door through which, or by means of which, we enter into those states which are heaven. And He always will be. Also there is a reference here to a profoundly significant role which the Lord played while He was in the world and at a transition stage from the end of the Jewish dispensation and Church to the commencement of the Christian.

We are shown in the Heavenly Doctrine how at that time heaven and earth had become separated from one another. There had been a rupturing of the connections and inter action which should have been taking place. And people were no longer able, try as they may, to find the happiness that we and they, though dimly, associate with heaven. When our Lord came on earth He established a new connection through Himself between heaven and earth and that new connection is what we refer to as the Divine Human. NOT that we want to, or are going to, spend a lot of time over this at the moment. It is a question of seeing the significance of what the Lord said in terms of the spiritual situation which then existed. When our Lord came on earth He really was, in the most profound sense, the only way through which heaven could be in touch with the earth and earth could be in touch with heaven. This simple diagram may help.



We need to be careful of focusing too rigidly on the Lord being the door, in terms of His person. It is sometimes insisted that you really have to come to know, acknowledge and accept the Lord **in His Person** to find with Him and in Him, the door to the heavenly life.

You may have heard it insisted upon that unless people are brought to Christ in this world they will not find heaven and salvation.

The teaching of the New Church is rather on the qualities of love and wisdom, goodness and truth, integrity and courage against evil, which the Lord is in Himself which are much more the key here. A person, whilst nominally a Christian or a non Christian, can come into the heavenly way of life, or find the way into the heavenly way of life, by coming to those qualities which are what the Lord is. They may not actually come to an acknowledgement of the Person of the Lord in this world. They may not get an opportunity to do so. It may not be appropriate for them to do so. But they will find in those qualities the way to heaven and will come to acknowledge the Lord as their God and Saviour in the spiritual world.

We've already said we find it attractive in the resistant states we go through to be told, or promised, that there is another way, or that there are other ways. And if we believe what we are told and follow these up we become thieves and robbers.

It is useful to say something about the distinction which exists between a 'thief' and a 'robber'. Thieving has about it an element of deception. Robbery is more open. If I go to a bank and rob it, holding a gun at the people there, I'm out in the open. But where thieving is concerned it is more hidden. I might be a computer thief and you may not find out for 18 months because I've been able to deceive.

A spiritual thief is someone who takes away from the Lord in a deceptive kind of way. For example, if I go through all the motions of being a God fearing person, but in fact only have my own reputation or advancement in mind, I am a thief. I am using a cloak to deceive others and probably myself. But a robber is a person, spiritually, who pays very little attention to the Lord. They don't feel called upon to pay attention to the Lord. A robber is the out and out scoundrel who has on the back of their car a yellow sticker which reads, "If it feels good, do it". There's nothing deceptive about them. They are just a hedonist and believe they will find heaven by being the open scallywag. They don't try to deceive. They even advertise what their position is. They're both not going to get there; there's no doubt about that. The Lord made that quite clear. But the thief is more devious. They use a cloak to hide their intentions. *"anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber"*

So then, where are we up to?

"Bread of life"

"Light of the world"

"the Door".

Good has been present, enabling truth to be seen. Now acting on that truth and identifying with it, we find the way through to a more spiritual way of life.

"Entering the sheepfold is entering the Church, and also heaven. It entails entering heaven too, because they make one, and it is nothing but the presence of the Church in it which makes heaven." ('True Christian Religion' 380)

"Entering in means entering into heaven, thus into the good of love and of faith, for this good makes heaven; wherefore entering in and going out, means being led by the Lord as to every state of life, consequently it means thinking and willing good from freedom, that is, from the love and faith which are from the Lord, for they constitute freedom." ('Arcana Caelestia' 9927:4)

Taking time out to recheck the overall picture

Perhaps this is the time to pause and check the overall picture. I am listing the "I am" sayings in the left hand column below and alongside of them, though somewhat speculatively, a summary of the spiritual meaning of the series.

1. The bread of life	Good must be present in our lives before
2. The light of the world	truth is really seen, after which follows
3. The door	entrance into a more spiritual way of life.
4. The good shepherd	Recognition of the Lord comes next & He
5. The resurrection and the life	can raise us from spiritual death
6. The way, the truth and the life	pointing to new directions & leading
7. The true vine	and bringing us, finally to a recognition of our dependence, totally upon Himself.

As we notice there are seven "I am" sayings, seven being a complete number, a holy number. There are 7 days of creation; and that should suggest to us that what we've got here is the setting out of a complete pattern involved in our spiritual growth, or as we refer to it, our regeneration. We have very good doctrinal reasons for believing that the process of our spiritual growth is summarized in these seven different "I am" sayings. And that summary goes like this: Good must be present in our life before truth can be seen. That's very, very important. We sometimes think that truth comes first. However only the knowledge of truth is in our memory. Before the truth itself can begin to be seen by us, there must be good within.

There are many, many places where we are shown that good is the ground in which truth is sown. Good must be present. In other words we must have a desire to reach out in love and service to our fellow men and women before we begin to see what the Lord is saying to us. Before the light comes into our life, He is saying the way we should live our lives. Jesus described himself as the Bread of Life first of all. It shows us the importance of good being there from the beginning. This is the basis from which we begin to have light in our lives, that He is the Light of the World was the second thing that Jesus said about himself.

When that light dawns in our minds we see new things, new ideas, new opportunities and new doorways opening up to us. We become aware of the fact that the most mundane, everyday aspects of our life are doorways. The way we share a meal can be a doorway. The way we share public transport with other people can be a doorway to heaven if there is courtesy and warmth in our relationships with others. Because light has come into our minds, doors start opening. *"I am the door"*. In coming to terms with the fact that these

new doorways begin to be opened to us, for the very first time we begin to truly recognise who the Lord is.

He's only a name earlier on. He's only someone we learned about in Sunday School and Church in these earlier stages. It's not until we are beginning to see and understand, really knowing the truth that He teaches us, that we come to see Him for what He really is, the Good Shepherd. The One who loves us and who's monitoring and helping us in every detail and development of our lives.

So it is a relationship with the Lord which is highlighted here half way through this process that is unfolded to us. Strange and challenging as we may find it, it is not until we are well into these steps of our spiritual growth that we really begin to understand and appreciate the Lord. Having understood and recognised and appreciated Him, we then become aware of what recognition and understanding and appreciation is all about, and what He is all about.

And what is He all about? He's all about raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life. That's why we have here the statement, *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die (spiritually dead) and whoever lives by believing in me will never die"* So we come to see that the whole process of our regeneration is locked into this possibility of our being raised from death to life. We have not really been alive until this moment. As we become awake to the possibility of spiritual life, we begin to see that Christ is the way, the truth and the life. We begin to see this pattern, what He calls us to, what He asks us to renounce. Renounce the self interest or the self regard, which is the accumulating and over indulging of things of the world.

Christ is really our way, our truth and our life. From that recognition, from that acknowledgment there is a sense of humility, of humbleness. The realisation that He is the vine and that we are totally dependent upon Him for all that is truly living in us. We are the branches. All that lives in us is from God. From the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

That's the state which Jesus spoke about in other places such as Matthew 18 and also in Matthew 19, when the disciples came to Him and said, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" *He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* That is the goal, the end, the whole object of our spiritual progress, that we can in all honesty and humility confess the Lord to be the Source of everything that is truly living in our lives. In other words, to confess this relationship of dependence upon him. To realise that we are as little children, to have innocence. To be

willing to be led by him and not by ourselves. That is the essence of heaven; truly to be able to say, 'Lord you are the vine, I am but a branch of that vine'. We are told that the Lord himself makes heaven, not the angels. The angels don't make heaven, but the Lord himself makes heaven. And people are angels insofar as they have what is of the Lord in their hearts and minds.

"I am the good shepherd"

John 11 and 14

At the outset we noted the distinguishing features of John's Gospel. It being (a) much more theological and philosophical in its presentation of the Christian message and (b) how much more emphatic it is than the first three (the 'Synoptics') in its insistence on the divinity of the Lord. (I allow myself the comment that it is difficult to understand how anyone can read this fourth Gospel and not be convinced of the divinity of the Lord. People who describe themselves as Christian humanists, seeing Jesus as a 'good man', yet not being divine, would have to disregard John's Gospel in reaching that position.)

Well, how does the Gospel bring home to the reader the divinity of the Lord?

It is done in two ways.

In the first place there is a succession of statements highlighting the fact that 'the Father' and 'the Son' are one and the same. It was the disciple Philip who on one occasion said to Jesus, "*Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.*" (John 14:8). The question evoked from Jesus an unforgettable reply, "*Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?*" (see too John 10:30).

The other way the divinity of the Lord is brought home to us in this Gospel is the way in which a series of titles (the "I AM" sayings), some already known and associated with God, are spoken of as claimed by the Lord, making Him the same as God. And not just the same as God, or being on the same level as God, or having the same rank as God, but claimed and used by Jesus in such a way that, if you take Him seriously, He must be God.

The point is clearly brought out here; Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd. "*I am the good shepherd*". Please stop a moment and try to quietly take in exactly what Jesus was saying here. Can you possibly imagine yourself as one of those people who first heard Him say this? From your earliest years you have known of those places in the (Old Testament) Scriptures where God is described as the divine shepherd. But wait; here is Jesus laying claim to be exactly that. This is astonishing. It is challenging. If I am able to take Him seriously I am to believe that He is God.

I wonder if there is a better known and better loved passage in the Sacred Scriptures than this, "*The Lord is my shepherd*"? The more accurate translation of it is, "*Jehovah is my shepherd*". And now we have the Lord while on earth, saying "*I am the good shepherd*". I am that shepherd. Can you see the point? Could there have been a clearer claim uttered by

the Lord to be one and the same as Jehovah of the Old Testament? Psalm 80, verse 1 has it: "*Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock*". That's Jehovah being referred to. Now Jesus says He is the shepherd. There can't be two shepherds of the one flock. Jehovah and Jesus are one.

Whilst there can only be one shepherd, there is more than one flock. Or and perhaps more precisely, there are flocks within the one large flock. "*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.....*" (verse 16). The Christian world hasn't paid enough attention to what the Lord says at this point. There has been too much narrow, sectarian talk by people that their Church is the only Church; too much insistence upon a particular set of beliefs, or a particular brand of Christianity, as being the only one where salvation can possibly be found or the only basis on which salvation can be offered. But this is not what is being said here. What is being said here is that the Lord is concerned for all people. Though there are many flocks, He is concerned for people everywhere, of whatever religion or background, and will lead them ultimately to the fulfillment of His purposes for them. "*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.*" that is, not of the Christian fold "*They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd*".

There are several beautiful passages in the Heavenly Doctrines touching on this subject, one of which is in 'Arcana Caelestia' 3778 -

"The Lord's Church is spread throughout the whole world, existing also among gentiles who lead charitable lives The truths that are seen by gentiles as truths are in general the idea that they should worship some God from whom they seek their own good and to whom they attribute it - though they do not know so long as they live in the world that that God is the Lord; also the idea that they should adore their God under images which they hold sacred; besides many other ideas do not make it any less possible for them to be saved than for Christians, provided that they lead lives in which love to their God and love towards the neighbour are present. For by leading such lives they have the ability to receive interior truths in the next life."

Time and again you will hear it insisted, particularly by fundamentalists, that you have to know Christ in order to know salvation, or in other words, go to heaven. And we can agree with that 100 per cent. But we would not agree that this is the only place where we can come to know the Lord. (This is often the way I handle this when it is put to me.) The thing is that if people have lived a life of obedience to their God, however they conceive of their God and have sought to carry out their religious principles in life, then that will create a state of receptivity of the truth when it is presented to them in the next life. This is how the Doctrines of the New Church show it to be.

People who finally find their home in heaven will know and worship the Lord there. What the Doctrines teach us is that where people are born of backgrounds and cultures and brought up in creeds, which in no way put them in touch with Christian beliefs, thinking and values, then that cannot be taken to be a disadvantage to their prospects for salvation. So there you have it. A statement here in the Lord's words, about other sheep He has which goes far beyond denominational or Church boundaries and reaches out to all people, everywhere. After all, even amongst Christians, there's such an enormous variety of understanding and thinking and the Lord, marvelously is able to use these different belief systems of different people to achieve His purposes with them, leading them to the heavenly way of life.

Of the gentle, loving care of the shepherd the gifted American New Church Minister and writer, William Worcester (1859-1939), a one time visitor to the Holy Land, wrote:

"The shepherds spend their lives with their sheep, finding places for them to feed and places for them to drink, shelter from the storms and protection from the heat. Often in the dry season the pastures are all burned up, and the only place to find any grass or green thing is along the sides of brooks; often they must lead their sheep long distances when one green place is used up before they find another and sometimes even some of the springs give up and a new watering place must be found.

The sheep feel the heat very much and often in summer they must lie quietly through the heat of the day and only begin to eat as the sun goes down. Except in these hot times, the sheep (often several flocks) are gathered together at night in a sheltered place, sometimes in a fold and the shepherds share the watches of the night, for there are many things to fear. Living among their sheep all day, sleeping among them at night, the sheep become the shepherd's friends, each has its name and will come at once when he is called."

'Sower" Notes, Volume V1, pages 89,90.

How and in what way is the Lord our shepherd? How is He our shepherd beyond the often vague, generalized way we might take Him to be? There are three things I would like to look at, helped by the teaching in the Heavenly Doctrines.

First of all; the significance of a shepherd.

In 'Arcana Caelestia' para. 4713 we are taught that "a shepherd" or "one who feeds" signifies one who teaches and leads to the good of charity. The Divine Shepherd, the Lord, is One who teaches and leads to the good of charity. And anybody who would shepherd in His name must have that as their ideal. Every Minister's responsibility revolves around that.

The Minister's function is to teach and lead to the good of charity, knowing he can only do so from the Divine Shepherd Himself.

The **second** is that *"he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."* (verse 3)

If you are familiar with the doctrine of correspondences you may have already picked it up that "name" signifies, or corresponds to the quality of a thing. The Divine Shepherd knows the quality, that is, the state, of every person everywhere and He adapts His teaching and leading and handling of every one of us according to the particular spiritual state we are in.

This is very, very, important because 'Well, it's O.K. for me, I come from what can be considered to be a good middle class background, a middle class lifestyle, I've got access to a Church, I've been brought up in a Sunday School. But what about those who have been brought up in less affluent areas? What hope have they got? What hope has a child got whose tummy is never full and who sits with an empty bowl in front of him?'

We have these sorts of questions. And here is the answer to them. The Lord is aware. The Lord knows. The Lord is aware of the state or the situation in which every person is. He is able to adapt His processes to the different states we are all in. From there He bring us to the heavenly way of life. Nobody is outside. Nobody is beyond the Lord reaching them. He calls His sheep by name. *"To call the sheep by name is to teach and to lead everyone who is in the good of charity according to the state of his love and wisdom."* ('Divine Providence' 230)

Thirdly, it is in and through the Divine Shepherd that we find pasture.

"To find pasture" we read, *"is to be taught, enlightened and nourished in divine truths."* ('Apocalypse Revealed' 914) People everywhere, in all their different states and situations, can find inspiration and example, hope, precepts, wise sayings and whatever to feed on and to sustain them. So here is a promise that however desolate and barren our situation may be or seem, if we look to the Lord, if we trust in Him as our Divine Shepherd, we will find what is needed to feed us, to sustain us, to keep us going. Inspiration, example, hope; we might also say memories, recollections, things that the Lord will bring us into to make sure that we stay spiritually alive and come through to better things.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life"

John 11:25

As these words are so widely known and remembered, they are often called upon for the reassurance and comfort they invariably bring to a situation where a death has occurred. As a statement on the subject it is one of the most powerful and reassuring to be found anywhere in the letter of the Word. Jesus spoke boldly and authoritatively. "*I am the resurrection and the life*". So closely are these words locked into associations with physical death, or remembered in connection with it, that we can find it at first difficult to appreciate that anything additional or deeper could be meant. But there is. And much of what follows will be an endeavour to what this is.

However before we move on from the subject of bodily or physical death, there is just this one point I would like to pause over with you.

Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life*". Now let's read the statement again placing the emphasis on the "I". "*I am the resurrection and the life*". Resurrection is of the Lord alone. He alone has the power to separate the spirit from the body. As we read in the book 'Heaven and Hell' paragraph 447: "*After the separation, the spirit of man continues in the body for a short time, but only until the heart's action has wholly ceased, which happens variously in accordance with the diseased condition from which the man dies, with some the motion of the heart continuing for some time, with others not so long. As soon as this motion ceases the man is resuscitated: but this is done by the Lord alone.*" (emphasis mine). By the power of His love and against the background of His purposes for us, The Lord alone plays the key or central role in our resurrection to life in the spiritual world.

We can now go on and look at what the Lord said from what is a different and deeper view point. His words are, "*I am the resurrection and the life*". At the time He spoke them He went on immediately to say, "*He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live*".

It's interesting that in our every day conversation we talk of death in different ways and at different levels. Someone will say that something has "died" within them. Perhaps, sadly, their love for their partner, or the regard they had for another. So too, love for the Lord and for spiritual things and for a spiritual way of life, if it was ever alive, can die within us. And that death, spiritual death, can be the saddest and most awesome of all.

Much is said in the Word which gives us reason for believing that in addition to what the Lord's words might say in respect of physical death, they are also intended to be a source of great hope, comfort and reassurance in respect of spiritual death. For example, Jesus said on one occasion, " *Very truly I tell you whoever hears my word and believes him*

who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to."
(John 5:24)

A person who is yet unregenerate, is totally caught up with self or with the world and for whom these things are everything, is spiritually dead. But if that person responds to the Lord's endeavours to get them to live their life from a higher level and from a different set of motives, they can pass *"from death to life"*. *"The deprivation (or lack) of spiritual and celestial love"* we are taught, *"is called spiritual death"*. ('Arcana Caelestia' 4175)

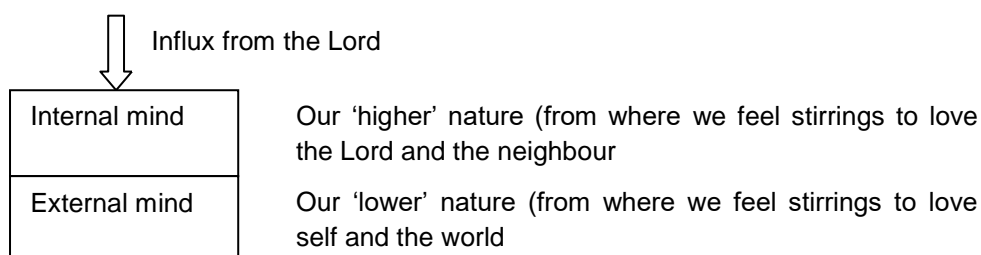
Now, can you see what is meant and promised in such places as Deuteronomy 30, verses 15 and 16? *"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction."*¹⁶ *For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws;"* Then again you have Isaiah Chapter 9, verse 2: *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has "* Finally references to unregenerate life being *"the grave"*, look at Psalm 30:3 *"You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit"* - and Psalm 49:15, *"But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself."*

In thinking back to the Jews of Old Testament times, our perception of them is usually they were the most dreadful, nit picking, literalists. And that's not totally inaccurate. There is another side to the picture. It could be said that in some respects they were not as narrow and literalistic as certain Christians have been or today, can be. More than some Christians, the Jews were able to come at their Scriptures and what is said in them, as being symbolic.

Clearly those references about *"the grave"* from the Psalms were meant to be taken symbolically and were in fact taken symbolically. There is in fact much to indicate that the Jews were entirely comfortable with symbolism. Clearly the Lord was a symbolist, spoke symbolically and meant His words to be understood symbolically. The "I AM" sayings are all about a non literal understanding of the Scriptures. The Lord wasn't a loaf of bread, but He called Himself the "bread of life". He wasn't the "light of the world" in any natural or physical sense. We know, almost intuitively, that He was talking symbolically and that He anticipated people would understand Him in this way.

We have looked at passages in the Word which should cause us to stop and at least consider the possibility that when Jesus talked about Himself as being *"the resurrection and the life"* He was, in addition to a most obvious reference to physical death, also talking about His power to lift us from a natural, self centred, worldly orientated life to a spiritual life of service to others and genuine consideration for their welfare.

A diagram will help, I hope, to further bring out the point.



The danger is that by confirming (acting on) the loves of self and of the world, we put in place and strengthen a barrier between the internal and the external, preventing influx getting through. In this way we really do become a spiritually dead person.

You might find it helpful if I just summarise the teaching of the Heavenly Doctrines on this subject.

The human mind consists of two levels, the internal and the external. (Somewhat awkwardly, I feel, the references are to the internal man and the external man.) Now the internal 'man' or mind is only in us in potential, but you are well aware of the teaching concerning 'Remains', the most real thing about the internal 'man' or internal level from which we might hope to live our lives being those 'Remains'. Whenever you think of 'Remains' or hear the doctrine of 'Remains' being spoken of, always think of the possibilities for spiritual life and for living our lives from this internal, higher level or perspective, which those 'Remains' hold for us.

Another helpful thing to remember is that 'Remains' are the raw material of our conscience. Whenever we feel our conscience being pricked we can know that something of the higher possibilities and of the higher level from which we can live our lives, is being stirred from within. At least there is still something happening there. If we deny conscience then we deny any influence which the internal level can begin to have over us. In fact if we start denying our conscience, rationalising what we want to do, silencing what our conscience tells us we should be doing then we eventually must live entirely from this external level and be a purely worldly minded or self centred person. And a purely worldly minded or self centred person is a spiritually dead person.

Let's go back then to the Lord's words, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.*" Now can we look at them in terms of what we have just been talking about?

"*I am the resurrection and the life.*" The Lord alone is the Source of all spiritual life, that is, of all unselfish reaching out to others. The Lord alone is able to lift us up so that

instead of living our lives from the external natural level (see diagram) we can hope to live our lives from this higher level. He alone can open up for us this possibility. He created us for that possibility and as well, all through our infancy and our childhood He was monitoring and preparing and carefully seeing to it that Remains and other good influences were stored with us so that this possibility could become a reality.

" *The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.*" Now can we think about these words for a moment?

Though a person dies yet there is hope for them. Would you think about this for a moment? Think about it, and try to take in just what it is the Lord is saying to us here. Even though we die, spiritually die, yet the Lord promises us we can live. It is one of the most monumentally reassuring statements which we find in the whole of the letter of the Word.

The Lord spoke of Himself as being the "*resurrection and the life*" in the context of His being called to Bethany, His friend Lazarus having sickened and before He reached the town, having died.

Any one of us might be Lazarus and probably often are. We can get ourselves into situations when we are well and truly spiritually dead. We allow ourselves to be immersed in the most grotesque and distorted and horrible thoughts and ideas. Spirituality, for whatever length of time, becomes shut out. Evil and falsity surround us. This is the picture brought home to us in the story of the sickness and death of Lazarus. To be spiritually dead is to fall into evil, self pitying, judgmental, unforgiving, revengeful or lustful states.

In such circumstances, all heavenly life and light is extinguished. We 'die' and are entombed in darkness. Even if people try to reason with us in such a spiritual state, or to appeal to us, we don't or won't admit the reality, the point or the logic, of what they are saying to us. Have you ever known such a spiritual state? You have perhaps read the Word or recalled its teachings but they mean nothing to you. You won't allow them to! You are really in darkness. The bandages which were wrapped around Lazarus signify the rationalisations and justifications that we have for being in this state, feeling this way or having this mood.

However we note from the story that Lazarus was not alone. There were his two sisters, Mary and Martha, both of whom loved him and both of whom sent to Jesus hoping for His help.

So long as we live in this world there are, mercifully so, always elements or factors within us which are a possible lifeline to the help the Lord can bring to us and through

whom we are stopped from going under. And these are what are represented to us by Mary and Martha. Both loved the Lord and knew that help would be forthcoming from Him.

But reasons for turning to the Lord at a time of spiritual crisis, or when all spirituality seems to have died, can be twofold. We can want to restore spirituality for both external and internal reasons. There can be external considerations active with us at the time and internal considerations. Martha represents those external considerations, reasons or affections, Mary the internal. An external consideration has something to do with your standing in the world; an internal consideration has to do with your standing in the sight of the Lord. Both can prompt you to turn to the Lord for help. Both can be motivating factors. Both can make you want to do something about the spiritual state you have got yourself into.

You might be going through a dreadfully introspective, self pitying state. An external consideration which causes you to do something about it; to come out of it; to turn to the Lord, even for His help, is the distress it is causing others around you. An internal consideration is your realisation that you are being self indulgent and the self pitying thoughts and feelings you are wallowing in are from hell and need to be dispersed.

In raising Lazarus back to life the Lord gave the command, "*Loose him, and let him go*" (verse 44).

What was it we said about those bandages? What they represent? They represent all the rationalisations and justifications which the hells feed into our minds when we are in spiritually dead states. The loosening of those bandages is awareness, awareness that those thoughts are only rationalisations and justifications. If only the Lord can get us to be aware of where we are at: that's the greatest hurdle. Because once we are aware of where we are at, what we are doing, what we are thinking, what we are planning, and what we've been meditating on; once we are aware, then we can see and make decisions; and the process of healing and restoration can take place.

So there you have it, one of the most reassuring of all statements in the Word. We all know dreadful states when we do feel entombed; when we allow ourselves to indulge in all sorts of rationalisations and justifications. Fortunately, the situation is not without hope. There are those elements in us which can prove to be our lifeline or link to the help the Lord can bring. And when He comes, He can raise us to spiritual life, causing the bandages to fall away, setting us free to love and serve others once again.

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"

John 14:6

Central to the Jews was the hope of the Coming of the Messiah. The Jews of old very much believed that the deliverance He would accomplish, when He came, would be very much of a worldly kind. It has been suggested that what caused the change in mood in the crowd which welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and yet screamed for His crucifixion only five days later was the fact that on Palm Sunday, instead of proceeding to the governor's palace to raise rebellion, He instead went to the Temple. And disappointment set in.

The Jews it seems recalled their past, to confirm what they wanted to believe anyway, that He would be "*a purely earthly Messiah*" ('Arcana Caelestia' 276), "*who would exalt them above all nations in the whole world.*" (Doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures 23). The least thing they wanted to know about was a "*Messiah who should provide for their eternal salvation.*" (ibid). When, the Messiah showed that this is where His chief interest and concern lay (with their eternal salvation) they rejected Him. They had long since forgotten, or chosen not to know, prophecies of His Coming which indicated that this was where His work would lie.

However we need to be careful of blanket generalisations. The Jews are known to have been divided in their beliefs about certain things and whilst salvation very much tended to be thought of and looked forward to in terms of a worldly deliverance of the people of Israel and a restoration of its ancient fortunes as they had been under King David, there are indications that with some people and in some quarters there was additionally, acceptance of the notion of salvation as involving a moral or spiritual deliverance.

It may only have been an idea or a belief taking shape with comparatively few, yet it does seem to have been there. For at least some of the Jews of the time, their salvation meant something "supernatural and extra mundane". And as far as salvation was concerned, it was taken to mean either in this life or the next, drawing closer to God. But how does a person draw closer to God? Which religion is best able to help a person do so? What are the requirements? Is there a key?

The answer is given here unequivocally. Jesus had been speaking to the disciples about His own approaching union with the Father. Now they wanted to know the way they were to follow in order to similarly come into the presence of God. "*Jesus said to him*" (that is to Thomas who had asked the question); "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

In the Introduction to this series we noted the distinguishing features of John's Gospel, the absolute centrality and uniqueness of Jesus. In no other Gospel is this so clearly spelt out. And here is a further instance of it. Jesus is the key. Jesus is the one means of access to the Father. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Whilst strictly it is not part of the particular section of this fourteenth chapter we have before us now (verses 1 to 6) yet what follows in verses 7 to 11 reinforces the closeness of the relationship which Jesus has with the Father. In a way it is a development of what has already been said. Already Jesus has insisted that it is only by Him that we can have access to the Father.

Now He goes on to teach us that He is actually in the Father and the Father in Him, and that to have seen Him (Jesus) is to have seen the Father. *"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."* (verse 11) It is one of the very high points of the Gospel. What is enshrined in these words is a beautifully simple statement about the one-ness of God. As Paul has it, *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ was God manifest, or incarnate, in the world. To see Christ was to see God. *"Jesus said to him (Philip), Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Clearly we must pause here for a moment. The whole question of Jesus' relationship to the Divine, to the Father, dwelling within Him, needs to be clarified.

No one suggests we go looking for difference for difference's sake, the New Church differs from other Christian churches with regard to what it teaches about God and Jesus and His purpose in coming into the world. We are not going into it in detail, but something needs to be said in outline. As the Doctrines state, human reason itself says there is and can only be one God in the universe. (See 'True Christian Religion' paragraph 5 and following.)

The Old Testament speaks of only one God, Yahweh, or 'Jehovah' who is promised to come into the world, to right a situation of wrong which had developed. *"And it will be said in that day"* we read in Isaiah, *"Behold this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is Jehovah!"*

Jehovah Himself became incarnate in the world as Jesus Christ. Through birth of the Virgin Mary He assumed or 'put on' infirm human nature being born here as the Babe of Bethlehem. And though outwardly He might have looked much the same as others, yet

differently from all His soul was the indwelling Divinity; Divine life itself; whereas ours is only a vessel capable of receiving that divine life flowing in and in the process, finiting it.

There were three reasons why the incarnation took place.

The **first** was to make God knowable. We read in 'True Christian Religion' that *"Jehovah God, who is called the Creator and Father, came down and took upon himself human form, in order that He could be approached and be joined."* (para. 107)

The **second** reason why He came was to deliver the whole human race from the power of the hells. There was by then chaos and disorder in the spiritual world, the result of which was people in this natural world were being swept almost unwittingly into a life of evil. People's freedom to choose either a life of evil or a life of good needed to be restored.

And the **third** reason was to glorify, or make divine, the human form that He had assumed so that from then onwards He would always have power over the hells and be able to overcome them in the lives of individuals when called upon to help do so.

In becoming incarnate as Jesus Christ, God made Himself 'knowable' in a way He had not been known or understood before. The remote and unknowable Jehovah put Himself in touch with people in a way He had not done before. In taking human form He assumed divine. God is always to be thought of in His Human form and approached by means of it. In Jesus Christ *"all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"*. (Colossians 2:9) We can only know God in His Human form, in which He revealed Himself and which He glorified. It is through that Human assumed and now glorified, that we have access to Him, just as in the same way it is only via their body that we can begin to have access to and be in touch with the soul, or indwelling 'person' of another. And so we come back to what Jesus said. *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (I highly recommend reading the first of three 'Memorable Relations' which appear in 'The Apocalypse Revealed' paragraph 484.)

We cannot approach the Divine Itself, unknowable and beyond all comprehension, other than by means of the glorified Human. Another way of putting this is to say that there is no knowing "the Father" except through and by means of "the Son". We cannot know the Divine Love (the Father) except through and by means of Divine Wisdom (the Son). It is wisdom which reveals love to us and makes it knowable.

What then does this make of the opening sentence of the Lord's Prayer which seems, or could be taken as suggesting, that we are addressing directly the unknowable Father? Are we not in this instance doing what the Doctrines of the Church say you cannot do? (see 'The Apocalypse Revealed' 566).

That would be the case if the words were simply "Our Father" or "Heavenly Father", but they are not. The words are "Our Father who art in the heavens". What this means is the One God in His divine Human. The Lord's Prayer has us addressing God in all that is heavenly; God as He is in all things of Love and Wisdom; God in truly human form.

When therefore we say "Our Father who art in the heavens" we are by no means addressing God the unknowable. Much to the contrary the Prayer begins by focusing our minds on God the knowable; on God in His Human or God who is Himself from His infinite Love and Wisdom the embodiment of all that is truly human in the universe.

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life*".

We have seen in exactly what manner He was "the way". What though of His description of Himself as "the truth"?

When He came into the world, even as a boy, the Lord loved to learn the Scriptures and totally filled His mind with them. He became the very embodiment of the Word. But His awareness of Divine Truth was attacked by the hells. By His victories in those temptation conflicts which the hells brought on, Jesus brought Divine Truth to life filling it from within. He was the Word actually made flesh. It was an incredible thing. He became the living Word. The Word was brought to life in Him. He was the way and He was also the truth.

He was also "the life". ("the life" He said He is, is not physical life so much as Spiritual life.)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Source of all spiritual life. After all He is God in human form. It is to the risen Lord Jesus Christ, to God in His Human form, that we are to turn for all spiritual life. If we wish to leave behind spiritual death and come into spiritual life we can do so by turning to the Lord Jesus Christ. "*I am*" He said, "*the way, the truth, and the life*."

To begin to have new spiritual life or to have any hope of entering upon the way to heaven, which is salvation, doesn't mean there must be a conscious acceptance of Christianity or of the Lord while in this world. Not at all. The teaching of the Doctrines of the Church is that where people live the type of life such as the Lord stood for (humility before God, self denial and genuine consideration for others) they will in fact find the way to the heavenly life while in this world and be brought to know, acknowledge and love the Lord in the spiritual world after they die. No Church is more insistent that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" than the New Church. But people can find their way to what He stands for via the religions and faith in which they have been brought up and in the spiritual world be brought to love Him as the only God and Saviour.

The Lord Jesus Christ is and shows us the way which leads us to heaven. From Him we have the truth which lights our darkness and shows us the way we should live. And when we apply that truth to life, new spiritual life comes to us; new motivation for living our lives; new gentleness; a new willingness to see the viewpoints of others; to forgive; to withhold rash judgment. A new spirit is operating within which makes all that is unregenerate oddly unattractive to us. He is "*the way, the truth and the life.*"

"I am the One True Vine"

John 15:1 and 5

We live in as an age of incredible sophistication and of human ingenuity and achievement. I recently stood on the steps of a lovely, gracious home, now used for public purposes, located beside one of the busiest of all roads in metropolitan Sydney, the Great Western Highway. I tried to recall what it must have been like 70 years ago when it was built and how different life would have been then. So much has happened since. So very, very much has been accomplished. And it is in all areas! Can you imagine what our forefathers would have thought about a suggestion that it would be possible to travel across this world to the 'old country', as they called it, in only 24 hours? Or the time would come when cures would be common place for diphtheria, whooping cough, or polio?

As wonderful as these things are there is a danger that our achievements can so easily insulate us from our sense of dependence on the Lord and need for Him. It can so easily seem to be 'our' doing; the result of untold hours of work put in by often unsung heroes in laboratories and at drawing boards around the world. And if we get into this mode we come to scoff, privately if not publicly, at something so plainly said, as it is in the fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel, "*Without me you can do nothing.*" The natural man in us isn't inclined to be humble and that's exactly what this statement is all about. On our own we can do nothing and achieve nothing.

We would like to believe it is otherwise, but it's not. Just occasionally and very beautifully, you will hear a high achiever disclaim applause and refer it all to where they believe it really belongs. What they have is from the Lord. What they have been able to achieve is only because of Him.

But can we here go further and deeper than this? Further and deeper than natural accomplishments? Can we move into the area of understanding; of interest in and affection for spiritual things; of things encouragingly said; of restraint when provoked; of strength against evil; of goodness which has resulted from something we have done? The reason for doing so is this is the area where the Lord's words apply, and to which He was directing them. "*.... for without me you can do nothing.*"

Once again the natural man in us resists all the implications here. At times we are so tempted to believe that we have (or had) the inspiration; that it was from our strength that we held back (bit our tongue and said nothing); that it was my idea to help the sick neighbour and that I am the one who should be getting thanked and applauded. But look at what the Lord's words are saying. "*Without me you can do nothing*". As the Doctrines of the

Church point out: "all of life inflows" (see 'Arcana Caelestia' 5846). All that is good, self sacrificing, worthy, noble, wholesome, integrative or positive, comes to us from the Lord through the heavens. All promptings in these directions. Yes. Oh yes.

We make a decision as to whether to respond to those promptings. That is true. But who gave us our ability to make that decision? The Lord did. Even our ability to respond is from Him. So it brings it home to us even more forcefully. "*Without me you can do nothing.*" We read: "*All uses that are in their essence uses of Charity are from the Lord and are done by Him through the instrumentality of people; and when a use is thus from the Lord, then, in the use, the Lord conjoins Himself with the person.*" ('Divine Wisdom' para. 137)

The more we look into it, the more we learn about it, the more wonderful is the way the Lord arranged things so that we are not only in freedom, but have the appearance of being our own person, making our own decisions, carving out our own place in life. That's the appearance. And it is a necessary one. But the reality is our dependence on the Lord. Just one aspect of the way the Lord arranges things is how impulses from the heavens and the hells are mediated to us by attendant spirits and angels. And in reading about this, it is incredible just how finely tuned and balanced the whole arrangement is. Truly, without the Lord we can do nothing. We would get nowhere.

It could not be more impressively driven home to us how dependent we are on the Lord that He describes Himself as "*the true vine*" and each of us as one of the branches. It is only from the Lord as the true vine, that we can draw all spiritual energy and motivation, will to good, insight, understanding and strength against all evil. It is only as we recognise and fully call upon the connection we have with Him that our lives can possibly be truly fruitful. Cut adrift from Him our lives may seem to be fruitful but will in no sense whatever be such. The fruit will be a sham. It might be attractive on the outside but it will be full of the worm of our own self interest within.

Though we might think about and speculate, there is no knowing the way the disciples really understood the Lord when they first heard Him say these things. It was on the night of the Last Supper, although they had already left the upper room (see end of chapter 14) and gone on elsewhere. We know they were confused. What is probable is that they were also apprehensive, if not fearful. They had known of the dangers of going to Jerusalem (see chapter 11, verse 8) where they now were. Here again the Lord was saying some astonishing things and Him describing Himself as "*the true vine*" was just one of them.

If they took in what He said at this point it might have struck them as sensational. In the past Israel had been thought of as the true vine (see Psalm 80, verses 8 to 15, for

example) or the focal point of spirituality throughout the world. Now the Lord was describing Himself as such. Israel had become "*a corrupt, wild vine*" (Jeremiah 2, 21).

But it was or is, His ongoing post resurrection relationship with the disciples which is His concern. They were worried about it and so He showed them how it would be. The relationship, no longer based on physical contact and presence, would be a spiritual one; and it would be a reciprocal one. They were to abide in Him and He would abide with them. "*Draw near to God*" we are urged "*and He will draw near to you.*" (James 4:8) And, on the same theme, "*God is continually endeavouring to regenerate man, and thus to save man; but this He cannot do unless man prepares himself to become a recipient, and so clears the way for God's entry by opening the door.*" ('True Christian Religion' para. 73)

If we are to successfully open the door or be conjoined with the Lord, three things must be seen to, three conditions must be met.

Firstly, there is the question of keeping the commandments. The Lord went on to say "*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love*" (verse 10)

The **second** criteria is that the keeping of the Commandments is not just an external keeping of them because in verse 13 the Lord says, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" What these words challenge us with is there must be present a real willingness to sacrifice our self centred ways and attitudes for the good of others.

Finally, the Lord proceeds to talk about the cost. We need to be prepared to pay a cost. And this is what He is referring to where from verse 18 onwards. He talks about the world hating us. "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*" And He goes on: "*If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*"

Here are the ways we are called upon to play our part in a reciprocal relationship with the Lord. By drawing near to God He is able to draw near to us.

The Authorised or King James version of the Bible says in verse 2, "*and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*" The more modern translations of the Bible, I notice, prefer the word 'prune'. Which is right?

Frustratingly, the Doctrines of the Church are somewhat unhelpful to us, at least in a direct way. What we can do is to go back to the original Greek. And the word which is used

at this point is 'kaithairo' from 'katharos' meaning 'clean', 'clear', 'pure'. 'Pruning' comes into it, but only by derivation.

There is a passage in the Heavenly Doctrines "*the trouble with evil is that it hinders influx from the Divine*". And this raises with us all that there is in us, in our 'natural man', which resists influx descending from within through the spiritual or internal 'man'. It is surely the great challenge in front of us to remove all that hinders, blocks and obstructs. Otherwise the full potential for living a deep, spiritually sensitive, self forgetful life is never realised. There is to be a real cleansing of our lives so that the spiritual can be more present in the natural. And it is this which would seem to be meant, "*and every branch that bears fruit He purifies (?), that it may bear more fruit.*"

And so we come to the final, advanced stage of regeneration. Those stages, going back briefly over them, are as follows:-

1. There must be good present before truth can be seen. (The Lord described Himself, first of all, as "*the Bread of Life*".)
2. An evil person can know about truth, but only a person who is making an effort in respect of good can really begin to see truth. ("*I am the Light of the World*".)
3. When the truth is seen, the way is opened up for movement forward into a more spiritual way of life. ("*I am the Door*".)
4. Recognition of an intimate relationship with the Lord follows. ("*I am the Good Shepherd*".)
5. And He is able to lift us up from (spiritual) death to life. ("*I am the resurrection and the life*".)
6. For the first time now we look on life from a totally new perspective and see the Lord pointing to new ways and directions in and through all things. ("*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*".)
7. Finally, in all humility, comes confession of total dependence on the Lord. ("*I am the True Vine*".)

There is an interesting little episode which Swedenborg recalls when some spirits were trying to bring him down, "You are nothing" they said to him "nothing." And Swedenborg replied, "That's what I want to be, because when I am nothing then I begin to become something." for without me you can do nothing."

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Ian Arnold was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1941 and, after converting to the New Church in 1959, left in 1961 to travel to Britain to study for the Ministry at The New Church College, London. En route he worked as a student assistant to the Superintendent of the then "New Church Mission in South Africa" (now The New Church of Southern Africa), Rev. Brian Kingslake and has retained close links with the Church there and African friends, ever since.

Ordained in 1965, and marrying shortly afterwards, Ian and his wife Margaret have served pastorates in Dalton (Yorkshire), Mauritius, Adelaide and from February, 1975, Sydney. They have a family of four sons.

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