

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NUMBERS

by Rev. Richard H. Teed

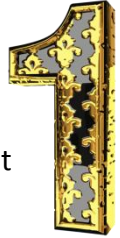
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ONE



All numbers used in the Divine Word have a spiritual significance. We propose to consider certain outstanding numbers. Of course we commence with **One**. **One** is the basis of all numbers, and is as it were repeated in all subsequent enumeration.

One is fundamental and even sacred. Its significance points to the **One** God, Who is the Lord. The Lord our God is said to be "jealous", to express the idea of His being the only Life - All in all. We today are not tempted as were our forbears to indulge in forms of idolatry or the worship of many gods. But we are, just as prone to adore certain false principles and evils, and to cling to them instead of relying on the **One** Whom we are taught to worship.

Another aspect of our theme is the imperative need to recognise that the Lord our Creator is **one** and the same as the Lord our Saviour and Redeemer. This teaching is the foundation of New-Church thought; and it is this truth which at present is not generally perceived in the Christian world. Christians are prepared to accept the fact of our Divine Saviour - God. But still it is evident that in their thought God, the Father, is Another **One** above and beyond the Lord. Hence in every church we note that prayer is addressed to our Eternal Father - and in the mind of those who pray this is not Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin, is "Immanuel", God with us. It is asked, "How should we think of God?" To the New Church the answer is simple and clear - He is the Lord Jesus Christ, God Manifest, the Known God in Whom is the Unknown. "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father" - the Mighty God...The Prince of Peace. "I and My Father are **ONE**."

There is **One** only Life, which flows from the **One** Source. The life you and I use is life from God - adapted to our capacity of reception. We

have no life of our own. Life flows in to us every second, with every heart-beat and every breath we draw. It is well to stress this thought that the life we use does not belong to us. It is permitted to flow into us so that we may have being. We shall need to render an account for how we have used this life - which is not our own. If we have grossly abused the powers we have, it is surely tragic to reflect that it is something of the **One** Life that we have utilised for some profane and evil purpose - the contrary of what it is intended to accomplish.

God is **One**, and He wants us by living from Him to become as it were **one** with Him. Without Him we can do nothing. He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

Is it nothing to you to reflect on His agonising temptations endured and won that we may be free from hell's dominion? Unless He had come and conquered hell, we today could have no being.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the **One** Saviour, and only in His strength may we hope of deliverance. "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

TWO

The Divine Word presents us with the picture of the Lord ever seeking union with His people. This is the fundamental thought involved in the number "**Two**". **Two** means conjunction. All life is impregnated with that yearning for the link with another. God could not be alone: of necessity He must be Creator, Because He is LOVE; and Love seeks another to whom it may give of itself.



So then God, our Father, loves us with an everlasting love, and ever seeks to draw us to Himself. **Two** perfectly united make the ideal One. This thought is again pictured in the intended relation between the sexes. Sex does not exist only for the purposes of propagation. In male and female resides the possibility of God's most precious gift to us, which is the marriage of one man and one woman: a union not only for life here but for eternity. It is not good that man should be alone, neither is it good for woman. They are made for each other; and it is implanted in the heart of youth that they shall seek a mate. True marriage is a union of minds. Contrary to common conception, real chastity resides in the state of marriage. Celibacy is to be avoided if it be possible.

Instances of the spiritual significance of **Two** spring to mind. Love must have Wisdom; it cannot act alone. Good works through Truth. Will must have understanding as its mate. Charity and Faith are the ideal pair in religion; and each alone lacks proper life. Charity alone is inclined to become merely natural, concentrating wholly upon external and worldly needs: and Faith alone is dead.

The Lord presents Himself as the Bridegroom or Husband and the Church as His bride or wife; and the sacred record is full of appeal that the Church shall be faithful to that holy bond. We sometimes say it takes **two** to make a quarrel. Likewise it takes **two** to satisfy love: and

love is our very life. A mother yearns for her children: she would give her life for her children. All protection has in it the idea of **two**. All true citizenship and comradeship have in them the idea of **two**. The Ego alone inclines towards death. We are built that we shall turn away from the life of the hermit. People are gregarious. If they shun the company of their fellow-beings, they are acting contrary to the nature with which they are gifted.

"I" should become "We" in our outlook, because you and I are intended to have a common life. To share is one of the loveliest thoughts. 'Tis true that we have to love ourself so that we shall be in no respect a burden on others; but the Divine injunction is that we shall love our neighbour as ourself. The orderly love we have for ourself teaches us how to regard our fellow-beings. This indeed is the Golden Rule, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. That is the spiritual significance of "**Two**".

THREE

Three makes completeness. Two alone cannot stand upright: it is the "**three**" that supplies support.

The most obvious illustration of the significance of "**three**" is supplied in the human frame: head, body and limbs. The **three** are wholly distinct from each other, yet they together constitute a perfect unity. The head is control and government; the body is executive, maintaining order and health; the limbs are the means of activity and function.



In the realm of thought Love and Wisdom need the adjunct Use in order to accomplish reality. This is illustrated again as Good, Truth and Power. The two former are just abstract without the third. So in the life of religion there needs to be Charity (to the neighbour); Faith; and Works must make the complete trinity.

The supreme conception of the significance of "**Three**" is in the Divine Trinity. The perfect One is **threefold**. These we may endeavour to express as Life, Form and Operation. These constitute the definition of Unity. In Scripture this Trinity is named as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Christian Church has been grossly deceived in thinking of this Trinity as separate Persons. It has been forgotten that "the first of all Commandments is: the Lord our God in One Lord". Yet every true unit is **threefold**: it is the **three** that constitutes the one. Trinity defines unity.

Thus the **threefold** Trinity of the Christian religion is of Essentials constituting One. The innermost Divine, called the Father, is Life Itself. The Form of the Divine, called the Son, is the Human, which we may know and recognise as our God. The Operation of the Divine to give being and health and salvation, called the Holy Spirit, is the Presence of God with all His creatures. By the Holy Spirit are people uplifted and inspired to know and worship their God. The Holy Spirit

of our Lord is the third and vital essential bringing the Love and Power of God to people, that in God they may come to live, move and have being. By the Incarnation, Love came down to reach fallen mankind, and lift them up through a Glorified Human, which would make the gift of the Holy Spirit of Jesus possible.

Every person is a trinity of soul, body and operation or activity. Soul cannot act except through body (both in this world and the next), and the purpose of human life is to do and accomplish. It is on this third essential that our trinity rests and has reality. We may illustrate this again as Desire, Thought and Action. Desire is the first essential: nothing can be done without it. Then Thought shows the way that what is desired may be attained. The third essential is to do it: to make, to speak, to build. It is this third essential which makes reality: a "castle in the air" comes to rest.

Thus we see that "**three**" means stability, support, completeness.

SIX



This number belongs to the idea of work. We recall the most familiar use of the word in the third of the Ten Commandments: "**Six** days you shall labour and do all your work". Considered spiritually the work involved belongs to the experience of the regeneration. Our daily work should of course be related all the time to the internal interpretation of life. But the life of regeneration is not wrought by withdrawal from the world: it is by living in the activities of the world that regeneration can be carried forward.

We are pointed also to the **six** days of creation as recorded in the first chapter of Genesis. These of course are not literal days of time, neither in the spiritual sense does the sacred record tell of the creation of the external world. The Word of the Lord is concerned with us and our formation into the image and likeness of God. At first the person is found to be "without form and void, and darkness" dominates the scene. It is in **six** great steps or stages that the change is wrought which effects the rebirth. Finally on the **sixth** day there comes the Divine cry, "Let us make mankind". This is the appeal to us to co-operate with our Divine Maker and Saviour to make a human of each one of us. As we are endowed with freedom our consent is essential; and we are not truly human until there is built in us the form that lives from the Divine Human.

This great change which must take place in us means "work" and "labour". We cannot drift into heaven without effort. The change from "darkness" to "light", which is the gift of Him Who is "the Light of the world" can come only with effort. We shall need to face temptation bravely, and learn to say NO. Evil needs to be cast out so that genuine good can come in.

All this means effort and self-discipline. We are warned not to expect too easy a course. "**Six** days you shall labour, and do all your work".

We might consider the relation of the number **six** to the numbers we have already considered. **Six** is composed of two and three. Two speaks of conjunction with the Lord and our neighbour; and three tells of the fullness of truth revealed for our guidance. These two, held previously as ideals, are to be put to the test, to be put into practice; and this means spiritual effort - "work".

There is a very suggestive text in the Gospel, which speaks of our theme. It reads, "After six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them". You and I would indeed wish to behold the glory of our Lord; this can only be given up in "a high mountain apart"; and before this can be experienced "**six** days" need to pass.

Are you willing if need be to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death", fearing no evil, knowing He is with you with the comfort of His rod and His staff? For behold, in the presence of our enemies, He prepares a table before us.

The **six** days will have an end; and they who endure to the end shall be saved.

SEVEN

Seven is generally recognised as a holy number - or *the* holy number. Its significance therefore relates to holiness. Holiness is not something acquired by human endeavour. Genuine holiness is a Divine gift, imparted to those who are in a state to be able to receive it. Actually, the Lord Alone is "Holy".



We recall the year of Jubilee in the appointed calendar of the Israelites; and this Jubilee arose from **seven** times **seven**. After forty-nine years the new year of Jubilee began. It signified surely a complete state, yielding to the commencement of a new beginning. Somewhat the same idea lies in the Lord's injunction that our forgiveness of one another should extend to **seventy** times **seven**. Such is what is requisite for a state of holiness.

Our usage of **seven** days in the week is of course suggestive and significative. This reckoning is based upon that Commandment which lays such stress upon the **seventh** day, to be called the Sabbath. Has it occurred to you to wonder why this Commandment holds such an important place in the series? Looked at literally is the setting aside of one day to be a day of holiness of such great importance? How can it matter so very much in the order of human life? We know there have been those dubbed "Sabbatarians", who have observed quite literally what they deem to be the requirements of this law. Yet they do not seem to have really found the secret of the spiritual life.

It is only as we penetrate to the deeper more interior meaning of the Commandment that we grasp its real significance. The word "Sabbath" means "Rest"; and this is heaven. There is no rest to the wicked; and our hearts can find no rest until they rest in Him.

Can we not see then the importance of the place this Commandment holds in the series! First the Lord presents Himself to us - as a jealous

God, unwilling to share our loyalty and devotion with any other object of worship. So He exhorts us not to take His Name in vain. Then thirdly, He sets before us His purpose in relation to us. What this is is summed up in the word "Sabbath", which means heaven. It is for this He has created us, and to this end His Providence ever leads us. The **seventh** day is the Sabbath.

Our thought turns back to the spiritual meaning of the six days of creation as recorded in the early chapters of Genesis. In the spiritual sense the creation is our reformation and regeneration. At first we are seen to be "without form and void". In six great steps we are changed, so that at the last the wondrous cry can ring out "Let us make mankind". He appeals to us for our co-operation, without which the work cannot be done. Shape cannot in itself produce the human. We are to be built in the image and likeness of the Divine Human. The thrilling pronouncement in the Gospel - "Behold the Man*" - directs us to the only perfect Human like Whom we need to be reformed.

*Pilate's utterance in John 19:5 Ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ! ("Idou ho anthrōpos") means "behold the human" since in Greek *ánthrōpos* is the generic term for "*mankind*," the human race, people, including *women* and men. There are two words in Greek which mean 'man,' *anēr*, which refers to a *male individual* of the human race, and *anthrōpos*, which is the group, racial, and *generic* term, and which has the general idea of '*mankind*'.

It is only when this is accomplished that it can be said that God can "rest". In making "humans" of us - as only He can do - He works without ceasing. He draws us to Himself and inclines us to become like Him; and it is only as the utmost that we are willing to yield ourselves to Him is attained, that our Maker will relinquish His "work". "The **seventh** day is the Sabbath", and God "rested on the **seventh** day".

TEN

When Abraham pleaded for Sodom, he was assured that "the city shall be saved for **ten**'s sake"; and that was the final promise: Sodom was destroyed.



Ten, like all numbers used in the Divine Word, has a deeper meaning than mere enumeration. Spiritual significance always relates to state. The absence of what **ten** signifies inevitably means condemnation.

This significance is very definitely indicated in the **Ten** Commandments. Has it ever struck you that it is difficult to make division of the Commandments into **ten**? There could be eleven, and there could be nine. Some Churches divide what is called the first Commandment in our order into two; and what we in our Liturgy have set as the last two Commandments could easily be reckoned as one. Yet they are the "**Ten** Commandments". Why? Because they are so designated in the Word by the Lord.

Clearly, therefore, there is a deeper meaning in the number **ten** than at first appears. The **Ten** Commandments are the Law of life. They are not, and never will be, out of date. Would some say, forsooth, that we have outgrown them? It is, and will ever remain, contrary to Order that men should kill one another. Excuses cannot alter this. And in spite of "the pill", sexual irregularities are adulterous and therefore destructive of the soul. Theft in any form destroys orderly human life: to get something for nothing and at the disadvantage of someone else is most harmful to heavenly life. And all liars shut themselves outside the Holy City.

These **Ten** Commandments indicate the fullness of life. They show what evils are the sins we must shun; and so they open up before us

the way to heaven. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments."

But **Ten** has even a further significance than what is full or complete. It relates further to what of this fullness is stored up in every soul from earliest childhood and also throughout our life. This precious store preserved in the human mind is what in New-Church phraseology is called "Remains". It is only by a measure of goodness and truth that our salvation is possible. When we are children we do not know of this need; and as we grow older we are careless of it. But He Who slumbers not watches the need of every soul. There are angels especially with the children that store something of their own heavenly states in the minds of children. These states cannot be used at that stage, but they "remain" and are ready to be drawn upon in later life. If we had not these "Remains" our life would be bereft of heavenly influences, and we would sink ever more deeply into the bottomless pit. But "Remains" call to us out of the sweetness and innocence of childhood, and they constitute the voice of conscience. There is none so debased that they cannot hear this call, urging that sin be not committed; and if the call is heeded (no matter how we may have fallen) "the city shall be saved for **ten**'s sake".

Remembrances of childhood with all of us are sweet because then especially we lived with angels, and what they gave us "remains" throughout our life. We were innocent then, though ignorant; and the innocence we had was of the angels who were our unseen companions. What is required is that we shall become innocent again, but the innocence of wisdom. "Unless you change and become as little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven".

FORTY

It cannot fail to be noted in a careful reading of the Divine Word that the number **forty** is mentioned in connection with special circumstances. We are told that the Flood was on the earth **forty** days and **forty** nights.



At once one's mind goes to the New Testament, where we read again of "**forty** days and **forty** nights". It was in the wilderness then that our Lord suffered temptation of the devil. Actually, our Lord's temptations were not limited to a certain time and place. He suffered temptations throughout the whole of His life. It is recorded that He said to His disciples, "You are those who have remained with Me in My temptations". It was by His continual conflict with evil and His victory then that He wrought our Redemption and glorified His Human.

We see then in the account of His three temptations in the wilderness a picture of the temptations which assailed Him throughout His life. That stones be made bread belongs to the natural plane; the pinnacle of the temple belongs to the spiritual plane; and the high mountain belongs to the plane of the celestial.

It is not difficult to see that the spiritual significance of the number **forty** is temptation. The fact that the wandering of the Children of Israel in the wilderness was **forty** years is a further confirmation of this. Temptation is a necessary part of our experience of the regenerating life. Without temptation there can be no decision made. Temptation presents two possible courses, and it is by our decision to take the right course that our Lord can effect our regeneration. There were two trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We must assert our freedom and make choices, otherwise we are not human at all: but an automaton.

At the time of temptation we are asked what kind of life we really want: and we have to decide. Each occasion of temptation either resisted or yielded to, confirms a way of life. Is it heaven you want? Then the way is open, walk in it. Is it hell you prefer? Then that way you must go.

Forty years of indecision, of victory and defeat, of hope and despair must be endured before the Land of Promise is reached. Our Saviour has passed that way too; and He did it so that we may faithfully overcome. He loves us with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving kindness He draws us to Himself.