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“Let’s Start At The Very Beginning, A Very Good Place To Start!”

by Revd Bruce Jarvis

Yes, you’ve got it – the opening words of one of Maria’s songs as she teaches the Von Trapp children how to sing in the musical *The Sound of Music*, once again shown on our small screens this Christmas. Starting in the right place is such an important and practical principle. Mercifully, our wise, loving and compassionate Lord leads us from



where we are to where we often do not wish to go (Jn.21:18). He is also a God of order, seeking to bring us out of our disorder and chaos into states of heavenly joy, peace and fulfilment.

Recently I had occasion to go to the Heavenly Doctrines to seek light on the passage in Exodus where the Lord told Moses about how the Holy Place was to be furnished and who was to supervise the work. That meant turning to *Arcana Coelestia*, chapter 31. *Arcana Coelestia* is Latin, the scholarly language of the age during which Emanuel Swedenborg wrote his theological works, and may be translated into the English equivalent *Secrets of Heaven* or *Heavenly Secrets*. Students of the Writings will be aware of the chapter layouts. The bulk of each chapter is the exegesis (= exposition or explanation) of a chapter in Genesis and Exodus, with the brilliant, though often complex and detailed account of the inner meanings of the Biblical text. There is also what is known as the inter-chapter material. Most but not all of the chapters begin and end with a presentation of all manner of subjects, sometimes other Biblical expositions, sometimes theological matters, such as the nature of heaven and hell, and so on. These are often thrilling eye-openers that can make the reader gasp, and think to oneself, "If only the world knew..."



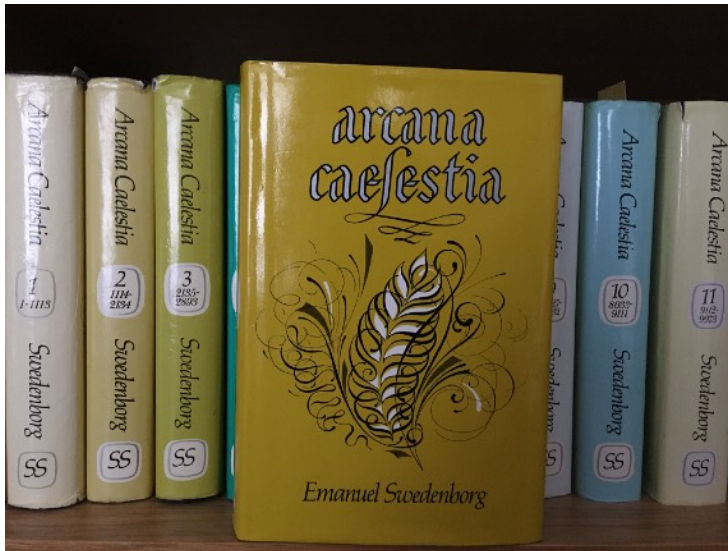
Chapter 31, dealing with the Exodus chapter I was reading, begins in such a way. It is headed, Teachings about Charity and Faith. I am going to print all 8 paragraphs below. Read them, ponder on their profound yet wonderfully simple contents. Allow the concepts to fill your mind, and reflect upon what our loving and wise Lord is revealing to you. Even if the teaching is familiar, see if you can find any new insights to inspire you at the start of another year. If the teaching is largely new to you, praise your Lord for bringing it to you at this moment, enabling you to enjoy fresh ideas of how He makes Himself known to us through His Word.

It is the start of a new year. This extract from the Heavenly Doctrines feels like a very good place to start the year!

Teachings about Charity and Faith

Arcana Coelestia 10318. Without revelation from God no one can know anything at all about eternal life, nor indeed anything about God, let alone about love to Him and faith in Him. For at birth people know nothing whatever and must subsequently learn

everything from things in the world, and in that way develop their power of understanding. At birth they also have by heredity all the evil of self-love and love of the world within them. Delights created by these loves reign all the time in them, and suggest things such as are diametrically opposed to that which is of God. This then is why people left to their own ideas know nothing at all about eternal life; of necessity therefore revelation must exist from which they may gain that knowledge.



10319. The fact that the evils of self-love and love of the world are the cause of that lack of knowledge about things that belong to eternal life is plainly evident from people within the Church. Although they know from revelation about the existence of God, about the existence of heaven and hell, about the existence of eternal life, and about the need to obtain this life through the good of love and faith, they nevertheless sink into a

denial of those ideas; both those who are learned and those who are not learned do so. This too shows how much lack of knowledge there would be if no revelation existed.

10320. Since therefore people live after death, for evermore, and a life in keeping with their love and faith awaits them, it follows that out of love towards the human race God has revealed things such as will lead it towards that life and promote its welfare. What God has revealed is the Word that we have.

10321. Since the Word is a revelation coming from God it is Divine in each individual part; for what comes from God cannot be anything other.

10322. What comes from God comes down to human beings by way of the heavens. For this reason it is suited in the heavens to the wisdom of angels in heaven, and on earth to the apprehension of people on earth. Therefore the Word contains an internal or spiritual sense for angels and an external or natural sense for people on earth; and because of this, heaven is linked to human beings by means of the Word.

10323. The true meaning of the Word cannot be grasped by any except those who receive enlightenment, and only they receive it who love the Lord and believe in Him; for their interiors are raised by the Lord right up into the light of heaven.

10324. The Word in the letter cannot be understood without the aid of the teachings which enlightened people derive from the Word; for the literal sense is suited to the apprehension even of poorly educated people. Therefore teachings derived from the Word must serve them as a lamp.

10325. The books of the Word are all those which have the internal sense; books which do not have it are not the Word. The books of the Word in the Old Testament are: The five Books of Moses; the Book of Joshua; the Book of Judges; the two Books of Samuel; the two Books of Kings; the Psalms of David; and the Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. And in the New Testament they are: The four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; and the Book of Revelation.

Arcana Coelestia by Emanuel Swedenborg was published anonymously in eight Latin volumes in London, 1749-1756. This translation was made by Revd John Elliott, and published by the Swedenborg Society, London, 1983-1999.

Note: The writer of this article has made several minor adjustments to the text of the Arcana Coelestia quotations.

Bruce Jarvis