



E-Read



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Mary's Virginal Attitude

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

(A talk given at the Christmas Gathering (a Joint Area and SOLCe event) at the New Jerusalem Church, Kearsley on Thursday 7th December)

We are in the Season of Advent which is a time to prepare for the Coming of the LORD. Swedenborg tells us the LORD comes within his presence in all of us, whenever the gospel is preached” and “every time someone thinks about something holy”.

He comes when we accept him in our “hearts through love and faith”.

Today we are going to look at Mary’s reaction to a visit by an angel in the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel, who tells her she will be made pregnant by the LORD himself:

“28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.”
38 Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Mary was a virgin. In Biblical symbolism the LORD is the bridegroom and the church or us, are the bride. We are thus the LORD’s partner or co-creator. Virgins symbolise our affections, or feelings or desires for spiritual values and principles, because they are true, valuable, awe-inspiring and eternal. ‘Virgins’ are “people who love the Lord, or in other words, heavenly people and therefore people who have a desire for goodness and a desire for truth”. We enjoy being humble, sensitive, empathetic, kind and virtuous, because we believe in these heavenly qualities. We value them.

Mary symbolises our humility, our love for being guided and directed by the LORD. It is an openness to impulses and insights from the LORD and a willingness to nurture them. We protect and value the good ideas that we receive. We’re quite happy to be nudged or reminded to do things. We want to put these hints into practice, by making them concrete, or real, or actual.

When we are in a virginal state of mind, we don’t bring our ‘baggage’ with us, or our ‘agendas’, we come open to new or better perspectives. We’re not pessimistic or fatalistic or reluctant or begrudging, we’re willing to be led. We’re malleable and flexible.

“All in heaven are called virgins, because of the innocence that lies at the heart of their goodness. The more innocence is present in their goodness, and the purer it is, the more they follow the Lamb.” (AC 3081:6e [LHC] on Revelation 14:4)

The Mary in us is humble and open to the LORD bearing spiritual offspring: loving and wise thoughts and feelings, and words and deeds.

Revd Brian Talbot

If any reader would like to know all the references to Swedenborg’s theological Writings I used, please contact me at brian.talbot@generalconference.org.uk

The Christmas Hercules

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

In the New Church we believe that there was a written revelation before our Bible, which Swedenborg calls the Ancient Word. Several of its books are mentioned in our Bible such as the historical books of The Wars of Yahweh and the prophetic books of The Utterances, as well as The Book of the Upright. Swedenborg learnt that this ancient wisdom spread westwards to Greece and Rome and was turned into myths. It is one of these myths that we turn to today. New-Church people see this story of Hercules as a baby as a prophecy of the LORD's infancy.

Most people will have heard of Hercules, one of the strongest men who ever lived. His father was the god Zeus, and his mother was a mortal, Princess Alcmena. Yes, Zeus had yet another dalliance which angered his wife, Hera the goddess, who sent two spotted snakes to kill baby Hercules. Hercules simply grabbed them with his powerful hands and squeezed them to death. I would suggest that that is how it appeared to them, when in fact the LORD simply had to be near them and show love, empathy and understanding towards them.

We know that the LORD came into temptation or spiritual conflicts "in his earliest childhood", which were basically attacks on his love for the whole human race. Swedenborg claimed to have met the worst people who ever existed on our planet, whom the Bible calls the Nephilim, which we sometimes call the Antediluvians or Before-Flood People. These "Sons of God" of Genesis 6:4 were not angels but mere, malicious mortals with domineeringly inflated egos and unimaginable sense of murderous sadism. (The "of God" could be interpreted as a superlative of magnificence or intensity or depravity.) The Nephilim that Swedenborg met, believed they were gods and their self-deception and egotism suffocated and paralysed those around them emotionally and intellectually, killing others and increasingly annihilating their own humanity. To a far lesser extent, we can be intensely dogmatic and obstinate and justify our desire to control other people, so Genesis 6 has meaning for us. Swedenborg insists that God had to become a human being to defeat the Nephilim and incarcerate them in hell. I and other New-Church ministers believe, partly because of the myth of Hercules, and partly because of comments made by Swedenborg, that this happened during the LORD's early childhood.

So next time you see baby Jesus in a manger, spare a thought for our ever-loving LORD, who was willing to suffer, even as a baby to save us.

If you have an interest in mythology, I highly recommend a New-Church book written by the Revd Carl Theophilus Odhner called The Mythology of the Greeks and Romans (1927). It is an absolutely fascinating read!

Revd Brian Talbot

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