

Sermon on Changing Seasons -- Changing States

Lessons: Genesis 1:9-19; Daniel 2:20-23
Psalm 1:1-3; Matt. 24:32-33
AC 37; AE 602; AR 936

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“And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.” (Genesis 1:14-15)

As we transition from summer into fall, we are delighted by the colors of this season. At the same time, with the end of daylight savings time, and with the weather turning chillier, we are reminded that winter and the end of the year is not far away. After that, the cycle starts over with the start of a new year. The changes of season, along with the changes of time, in this world may serve to remind us that changes take place in the spiritual realm as well. In explaining the text in Genesis chapter 1, verses 14 and 15, Arcana Coelestia 37, speaks of these changes as being necessary for our spiritual development.

It is said that the lights shall be "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years." ... There are alternations of things spiritual and celestial, both in general and in particular, which are compared to the changes of days and of years. The changes of days are from morning to midday, thence to evening, and through night to morning; and the changes of years are similar, being from spring to summer, thence to autumn, and through winter to spring. Hence come the alternations of heat and light, and also of the productions of the earth. To these changes are compared the alternations of things spiritual and celestial. Life without such alternations and varieties would be uniform, consequently no life at all; nor would good and truth be discerned or distinguished, much less perceived. (AC 37)

To this we would add what is said in Apocalypse Explained 602:

... by these things pertaining to time states of the church are described in the Word, "seedtime" describing and signifying the establishment of the church; "harvest" its fruit bearing; "morning" its first time, and "noon to evening" its progression. These natural states (or conditions) also correspond to spiritual states, which are states of heaven and the church. As concerns the

church, the church in general passes through these states, and so does each man of the church in particular. (AE 602:2)

However, Apocalypse Explained 602 goes on to say:

Moreover, each man of the church from his earliest age is also inaugurated into these states, but when the church is at its end he can no more be inaugurated, for he does not receive Divine truth, but either rejects or perverts it, therefore he has neither seedtime nor harvest, that is, no establishment and no fruit bearing, nor has he morning or evening, that is, neither beginning nor progression. These states are meant and signified by "times" in the Word; and as in the end of the church these states cease with men of the church, therefore it is here said that "time shall be no more;" and this signifies that there shall be no further understanding of Divine truth or the Word, consequently not any state of the church.

As by "time" things pertaining to time are meant, such as spring, summer, autumn, and winter, these (signify) the states of one who is to be regenerated, or is regenerated, also the things pertaining to these times, such as seedtime and harvest, (signify) the state of the church in respect to the implantation of truth and the fructification of good... (AE 602:2, 6)

In a sense it would appear that there is a contradiction in these passages. They speak of the church, and the church within us, as going from states of morning, or spring, through the states of daytime and evening, or summer and fall, and ending up in a state of night or winter, when the church is at its end and there is no further understanding of Divine Truth and in fact no longer any state of the church. And yet it also says that these are the states that one who is to be regenerated or is regenerated passes through.

We can put this in perspective if we think of the cycles of the year. When the cycle is ended, that is when the nighttime is longest, then it starts over again. The daytime starts getting longer again, and after some time the temperature start warming up also. In terms of correspondence, the increase in light or truth precedes an increase in heat, or love and charity. Within each of us, we all go through similar spiritual seasons.

These alternations or cycles take place in every church and in every person in the church. The changes of state that the church goes through are seen in this description from the Coronis:

There have been four successive states, or periods, of each Church, which in the Word are meant by 'morning,' 'day,' 'evening' and 'night.'

In each Church the four changes of state have been consecutive; the first of which has been the appearing of the Lord Jehovih and redemption; and then was its morning, or rise: the second has been its instruction; and then was its day, or progression: the third has been its decline; and then was its evening, or vastation: the fourth has been its end; and then was its night or consummation.

...the man of the church advances from morning to day, to the end that he may be reformed and regenerated by means of the light of reason, which is effected only by a life according to the precepts of the Lord in the Word. If this does not take place, his light becomes darkness, and the darkness, thick darkness; that is, the truths of light with him are turned into falsities, and the falsities into unseen evils. It is otherwise with the man who allows himself to be regenerated: night does not overtake him, for he walks in God, and hence is continually in the day; into which, also, he fully enters after death, when he is associated with angels in heaven." (Coronis 2, 5, 6)

Consider a person, perhaps ourselves, in the beginning of a state of the Church, that is, in a morning state. We may perceive the presence spiritual truths in the Word and feel deeply and delightfully affected by those truths. We may then try to live a life according to them. By temptations, reformation, and regeneration, we may then come into the noontime or height of that state of the Church. But then what happens? The Churches go into an apparent decline which culminates in their spiritual end. Likewise, we also may reach the height of a state of the Church within us only to apparently decline. But this decline may be only in appearance. It may be an appearance because what causes it is not so much our returning to evils we had earlier shunned, (this would be profanation), but from new evils, unseen evils, which before lay hidden, now coming out or showing themselves. Such evils and their falsities attack the goods and truths which are now present in our mind, and the attacks of these evils and falsities deprive us of the delight which we felt in an earlier state of the Church. They may even take from us the affection for the truths we felt in the the Word. Some of us may have felt these states several times in our lives. This does not mean that our spiritual state is hopeless. It may be a sign of spiritual progress.

However, when evils and falsities which are more interior attack the truths of faith and goods of love, then the state of peace and of delight is lost.

Look at it this way: As each one of us is an individual church, those states of the Church described in the Word correspond and refer to the states of the Church within us. In particular, in each state of the Church within us, we will pass through those four states: first, of the Lord's appearing to us, then states of instruction, followed by states of decline, and finally states of consummation. In the descriptions of the states that the church passes through, the Word is teaching us about the states of the Church within us, and preparing us for what we must go through.

During our spiritual journey, there are times when it appears that we are making no progress at all, perhaps even going backwards. Seems like, after passing through a balmy summer-like states, and then enjoying warm and colorful fall-like states, we go right back to the cold winter states that we were in last year, and the year before that, and the year before that, and the year before that. And we may wonder if we are making any progress in our regeneration at all. Have we ever thought that and felt like that?

And if we have thought that and felt like that, it may be a good sign, not only that we are thinking about it, but that we are concerned about whether we are making any progress spiritually. With respect to those spiritual cycles or seasons, it is useful to compare regeneration or spiritual progress to a spiral. As we go around the circle of a spiral we are not in the same place and yet we come to places which are similar to, or correspond to, states that we have been in before. For example, the winter of 2013 is not the same winter as that in 2012 although they are both states of winter. This spiral spiritual progression is referred to in the Word as the circle of life.

And so, let us enjoy the remaining days of this very colorful autumn season. And as we prepare for the winter season which is going to follow, we can also be preparing ourselves for those spiritual winter states which will come upon us. Let us keep in mind that after a spiritual winter, a spiritual spring time follows.

Amen.