

Old Testament Reading:

Proverbs 11:19

He who is steadfast in righteousness will attain to life, And he who pursues evil will bring about his own death.

New Testament Reading:

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (English Standard Version)

What I Know That I Know

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Through the relatively new License Pastor Program, I've been afforded the opportunity to pursue theological studies with some of the greatest minds of our time. One of these professors who can easily be regarded as a "National Living Treasure" is the Reverend Dr. George Dole. Dr. Dole's translations from Latin to English of the visionary writer Emanuel Swedenborg provided much of the content and context of our discussions. In some cases, the translation itself became a point of discussion.

There are two latin words that appear in Swedenborg's writings that refer to knowledge albeit different kinds of knowledge. The words are "scientia" and "cognitio."

The late Rev. Dr. William Woofenden explains that "scientia" was translated as "knowledge" as in knowledge of known facts "with the option of suppressing 'known' in appropriate contexts" while "cognition" was used to indicate "cognition and knowledge." (see Swedenborg Researcher's Manual p239)

This concept is one that resonates within me. Swedenborg's use of the latin terms "scientia" and "cognitio" help to explain the difference between knowing what I understand to be true and experiencing what I know to be true. It is, in essence, what my own father referred to as "What I know that I know."

It has been said that Bible scholars often miss the kingdom of heaven by 14 inches, which is the distance from the brain to the heart. The idea of giving mental ascent to an abstract concept rather than experiencing the realization of a truth can be difference between those who know of Jesus and those who know Jesus and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

In our first theological studies meeting we introduced ourselves and gave a brief background of our interest in the course. While I was raised as a Methodist during my Father's brief tenure as a minister, I did not consider myself a "Christian," until I dedicated my life to Jesus at the ripe age of 16 while still in high school. It is interesting to me now, looking back, that the fundamentalist, spirit-filled church I attended seemed to me then like a "new church!" It was not the staid, conservative, quiet and orderly liturgical service I remembered from my childhood. Rather, there was a band playing, which I later took part in, and people singing in a contemporary musical style with hands raised while swaying to the beat. Ministers were often visitors from other countries and a regular weekly sermon was provided from a "youth" minister that specifically addressed issues facing teens and young adults.

It was an exciting time during the early 70's with a counter-culture Jesus movement sweeping the country. The emphasis on most messages was that God not only loves you but wants a personal relationship with you. The Bible was presented as a compilation of historical notes from different authors and personal letters of apostles relating God's desire to be with us and draw us to Him. Not far from this idea was the concept of "knowing" versus "knowing of." If you wanted to "know" Him, you needed to simply "ask" Him into your heart. At the time I was less concerned with "getting into heaven" and more focused on seeing things from a new perspective. As Proverbs says, "He who is steadfast in righteousness attains to life..." which to me means, he who consistently pursues "doing" the right thing will see life from a new point of view.

The church I had become part of seemed like a colony of the “saved” (those who knew Jesus personally) amidst a country of the “lost” (those who only knew of Jesus). Still I wondered how the “good news” of God’s love could break down barriers of countries, cultures, races, and religions. Are we to “make disciples of all nations” by converting everyone to the literal interpretation of “accepting Jesus” or by simply choosing to live as He lived, by healing and caring for others and choosing love over hate or revenge. I could hear Jesus telling Phillip, “Have I been with you so long Phillip and you still don’t know me?” Soon I began to disassociate myself from the subtle condemnation of writers, thinkers, and artists, who fall outside the boundaries of literal biblical interpretations. There is no way, I felt, that Mahatma Gandhi or the Dalai Lama, or peaceful activists of other faiths could be condemned to hell or considered “lost!”

What attracted me to our church (Church of the Open Word / Garden Chapel) and to the opportunity to pursue theological studies was a desire to more fully understand the internal sense of the Word while learning to be instrumental in serving the faith community I’ve come to love. How would I gain such knowledge except to follow the natural process of moving from a “scientia” state to a “cognitio” state as simple truths are applied in my life?

In one of our early meetings, we discussed the concepts of good and truth as presented in “New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine” (#s 11-19). Two points were especially significant to me. 1. “There is nothing more necessary for man to know (“cognitio”) what good and truth are; how the one has respect to the other; and how one is conjoined to the other,” and 2. a realization that what we know (“scientia”) is next to nothing compared to what we do not know (see *Secrets of Heaven* 1557). This opens up into a process of discovery as we apply what little we know to our daily choices of caring conversations of acts of charity. Dr. George Dole commented, “I believe the church begins to die when it shifts from discovery mode to preservation mode.” This was especially meaningful to me as I have observed churches struggling to maintain liturgical traditions while signs indicate diminishing returns in attendance and support.

If we define “scientia” as intellectual knowledge versus experiential knowledge, we can see the effects of preserving what we, as a church, give credence to and how we feel things should be. Even when we have “experiential knowledge” we can lose that sense of “discovery” when our focus changes to preservation and, especially, when in our efforts to preserve what we have; charity, kindness, and compassion, which should define who we are, become less important or worse, scarce. I sense this happening all over the country and in many denominations and faith traditions. Years ago I read with interest that the leader of a certain denomination was fired for praying with members of other faith groups. When we, as a church, cease to practice charity or put what we have learned into practice, the truth we have ceases to be heavenly.

To be in discovery mode one must be present. We, as a specific denomination, must look at where we are “welcoming” and especially where we are not. We lose the sense of discovery when our thoughts turn to preserving what little we have instead of morphing into what we need to become. If we are “present” to the Lord’s spirit and to the needs of each other, we can become more receptive to change. The minimum standard to which we hold fast is described as where the Lord is adored and the Word is read. “For the Lord reforms man, and the Word teaches how man must live that he may be reformed by the Lord; therefore if these two truths are not acknowledged and received, the church itself perishes” (AE 1069). We must change the idea that maintaining an “intellectual” identity will somehow be enough to attract and keep new members.

It was mentioned in our continuing studies that the church is the only institution (perhaps besides our family doctor) designed to be with us from cradle to the grave. Perhaps this is all the more reason we must endeavor to keep ourselves in “discovery mode.” As was mentioned in our class discussion, “every new discovery opens the door to more questions.” We need to be willing to ask questions without fear of shaking some theological tree. Is this tradition still relevant or useful? Am I showing up to give and receive with an active interest in discovering

how I can offer comfort, healing, and care? This relates to imparting gifts to one another in the form of active listening and active acknowledgment of God moving within our lives. This cannot happen if we fail to either attend usual gatherings or allow differences to prevent the “touch” or transfer of our attention, love, and care.

Almost 30 years ago I joined a local karate club for the purpose of physical fitness as well as self-defense. Over the decades I have learned much about internalizing fundamental concepts in order to apply them correctly without much hesitation or thought. The style of karate I study is called “Shotokan” and is a traditional Japanese method formalized in the mid 1900s. One of the terms used frequently in the school or “dojo” is the word “Osu” (pronounced Ooh-soo) which is a form of acknowledgment but carries with it an inferred message that says, “I accept what you are saying and I think I understand, but more importantly I will (intend) to understand. Thank you for teaching me.” It does not assume complete understanding, only the will to understand.

This is an important facet of the natural process for internalizing truths understood so that they become truths learned. They are learned when put into practice. This describes the process of my accepting and receiving the truths you teach (the state of “scientia”) but must be put into consistent practice before I can say “I truly understand” (cognitio).

It was not uncommon for me to approach the Sensei (teacher) during the regiments of training and ask about a struggle with a particular technique in which the Sensei would answer in a single word, “Practice.” This was understood that over time, with much practice, I would overcome this minor technical struggle. In a practical spiritual sense, if we put into practice what little we know, our understanding will increase. Someone in our class discussion said, “If we lose the capability to have delight in other people, then we’re missing something!” We can help to move from our “scientia” or intellectual state to a state of knowing experientially, “cognitio,” when we accept and welcome charitable goodness as simply part of who we are and what we do, not some special program or specific instance of charity. “The things that we hear

from the Word and hold in our memory are no more than seeds sown there. Roots, however, do not develop until we receive and welcome charitable goodness” (Secrets of Heaven 880:1). We welcome charitable goodness when we “will” to do good for the sake of doing good.

There is a divine process described regarding the internalization of the Word and how it is received into our minds. It becomes internalized (the Word) when it has first been naturally apprehended and loved. This, interestingly, does not require complete understanding but mostly an acceptance regarding its divine origin as well as a desire to understand. Once internalized, which is a practice as much as a process, it yields a more “spiritual” quality or identify. This, I believe, is what William Bruce infers when he says “when truth has once been raised into the spiritual mind, and descends again into the natural, it is heavenly” (Commentary on the Gospel of John-p86). It descends into the natural when it becomes part of our “doing.”

I often observe joggers out exercising in the mornings on my way to work. I always give a nod as a form of approval as I like to see people on the course of self-improvement. However, I will never be able to realize the actual benefit, until I start jogging myself. My understanding, perspective, and natural life will change as I put into practice what I have observed and accepted. It was said that Swedenborg consistently distinguished acknowledgment from mere “knowing” and, instead, associated it with living what we know (experience). When combined with the acknowledgment of divine truth and wisdom, a sense of profound truth can be realized as an epiphany of sorts.

It was mentioned in our discussion that the most ancient church was a mindset not an institution. We are masters of the art of creating an institution but we have lost the mindset of “discovery” when we fight the need to change. To become a living church again, we need to adopt the mindset of discovery and be willing to see institutional changes.

Pastor Linda Browning Callendar added a nice touch to our talk when she said, “There is no limit to the amount of good that can be accomplished if no one cares who gets the credit.”

What a beautiful way to visualize the concept of discovery as having for its goal the ideal of working for the Lord and for the neighbor and not for individual praise or reward. Even if that reward is a bigger church or a better salary. This allows the pathway for true understanding (cognitio) and opens the gate for increased knowledge as a marriage of truth and the good of faith. It is well said by William Bruce in his commentary on John, “For every good that men do, they are enriched with knowledge in return,” and “(the) union of truth with good is effected by doing the truth or living according to the laws of divine order” (Commentary on John, pg.s 95, 99). We appropriate the good and the truth to ourselves when we commit to “will” or to our “intention” to apply all that we know so far. It should be noted by Bruce’s comment that this is the way to increased understanding (“cognition”) and not simply increasing what we know as “scientia.” In fact, it is prudence to remember we can “will” or “intend to do” that which we understand while acknowledging there is a great deal more that we do not understand. According to Swedenborg, intellectual pursuits are far less important than how we live (SH 1557:3).

A consistent theme throughout the course focused on how the issues we discussed actually look in our own experiences. In our first assignment, for example, we were asked to be aware that the person we are talking to is “in process” and to listen for hints of motion. At the very least the exercise required me to be attentive and present with the person with whom I was talking. The very transition of moving our focus from our own intellect or mental process to an actual experience of “doing” by active listening reinforces the need to move from a cerebral state of data exchange (“scientia”) to an actual state of understanding through experience (“cognitio”). Add to this the image of saying “I care about you” through the act of listening without any agenda except to be attentive.

Each of our exercises required us to be actively aware of our bodies (sense of touch), our emotions, as well as how we react. This is indicative of a living, breathing, conscious effort to honor and respect those around me at the expense of any thought on my part of controlling the outcome. It is reflective of mutual love, the opposite of self-love. It could be said that this is the process of “knowing” what good and truth are and how one is conjoined to the other.

This process is what is described as the “divine design” in TC 105 where emptying out is a form of relinquishing self-love so that we can receive God and “prepare ourselves as a vessel and a dwelling place where God can enter and live as if we were his own temple.” Swedenborg adds that we have to acknowledge that this preparation comes from God though we must prepare, as if, of ourselves. This divine design leads to a second state, which is described as “partnership with God.” “In the second state, we do basically the same things, but now we do them with God.”

There is no deeper form of “cognitio” than to experience the knowledge of God inside everything we do and say.

I mentioned in one of our final discussions a song by Peter Mayer of Minnesota called “Holy Now.” In the lyrics we find a state of mind similar to the partnership that Swedenborg describes:

“When I was a boy each week, Sunday we would go to church,
pay attention to the priest, he would read the Holy Word.

And consecrate the Holy Bread, everyone would kneel and bow,
today the only difference is, everything is holy now.

Everything, ...everything is holy now.

When I was in Sunday School, we would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two, Jesus made the water wine.

And I remember feeling sad that miracles don’t happen still.
But now I can’t keep track, ‘cause everything’s a miracle.

Everything, ...everything’s a miracle.

Wine from water is not so small, but an even better magic trick

Is that anything is here at all.

So, the challenging thing becomes, not to look for miracles,
But finding where there isn't one.

When holy water was rare at best, it barely wet my fingertips
But now I have to hold my breath, like I'm swimming in a sea of it.

It used to be a world half there, heaven's second rate hand-me-down
But I walk it with a reverent air, 'cause everything is holy now.

Everything, ...everything is holy now.

Read a questioning child's face, and say it's not a testament.
That'd be very hard to say.

See another new morning come, and say it's not a sacrament.
I tell you that it can't be done.

This morning, outside I stood and saw a little red-winged bird,
Shining like a burning bush, singing like a Scripture verse.

It made me want to bow my head. I remember when church let out.
How things have changed since then. Everything is holy now.

It used to be a world half there, heaven's second rate hand-me-down
But I walk it with a reverent air, 'cause everything is holy now.

Everything, ...everything is holy now."

What a beautiful partnership when we see the divine within the ordinary around us. I can still acknowledge the Lord's presence in the ordinary even if I cannot grasp the total meaning of everything I see. In the same way I can say "Osu" if I hear you teaching and still not fully grasp what you are saying but "will" to understand it and intend to apply what little I do understand now in how I live day to day. Another hopeful aspect of the term "Osu" is reflected in a

beautiful quote by William Bruce, "I know that my present state of obscurity and uncertainty will pass away and be followed by light and certainty" (from Bruce's commentary on John p104). I dedicate myself to trying to understand you by listening attentively when we speak. Sooner or later I will see the light and I will be certain that I know what I know.

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to truly know you. Forgive me for the many times I listened but did not hear. Forgive me for my selfish ambition to get my ideas across at the expense of hearing others with an open mind. Help me to apply what little I know to my "doing" so that I might walk closer to the light of love and be closer to you. Help me sense your spirit when the immediacy of action is required. Help me, I pray, to be a reflection of your love. Thank you for your unending love to me.