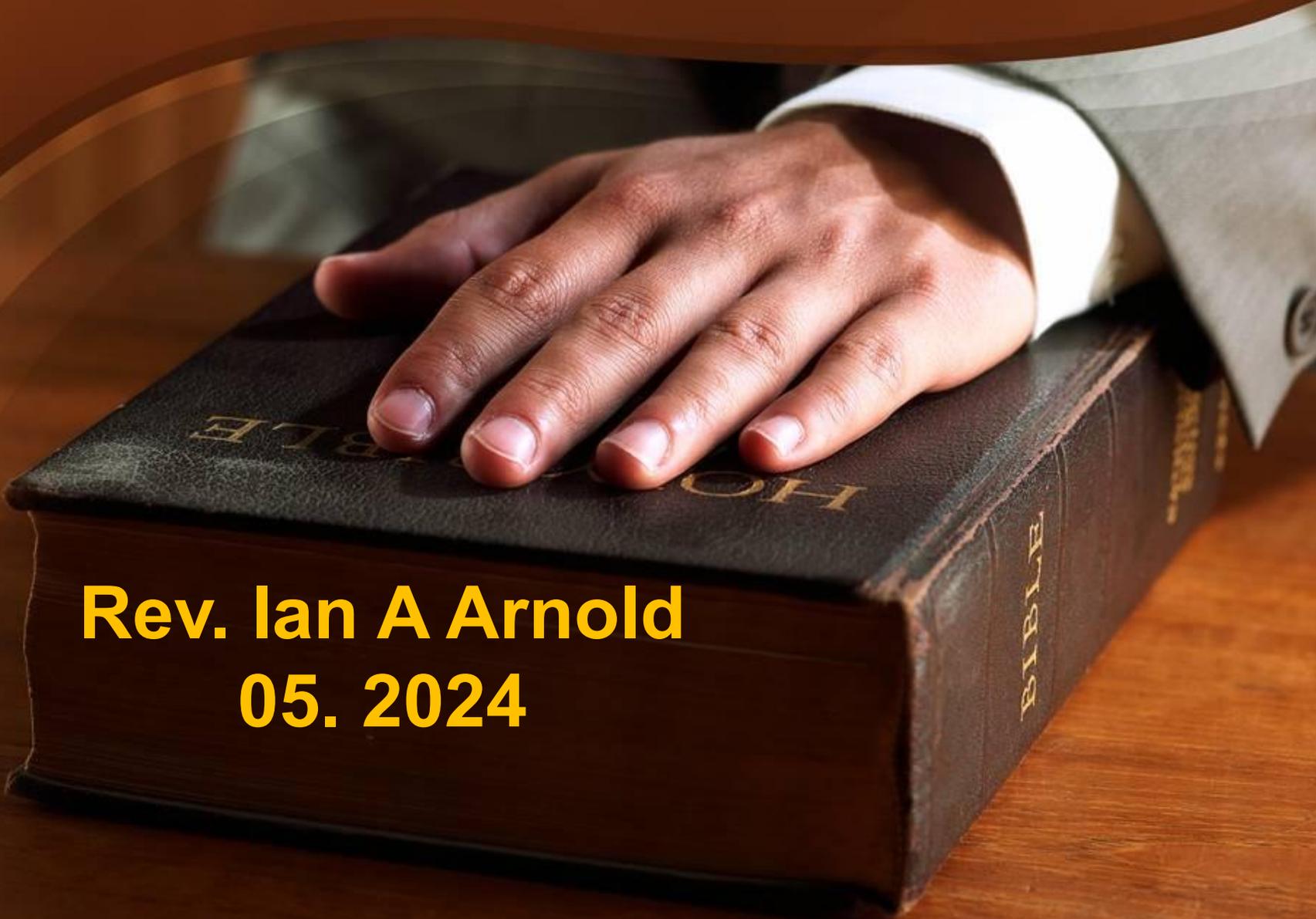
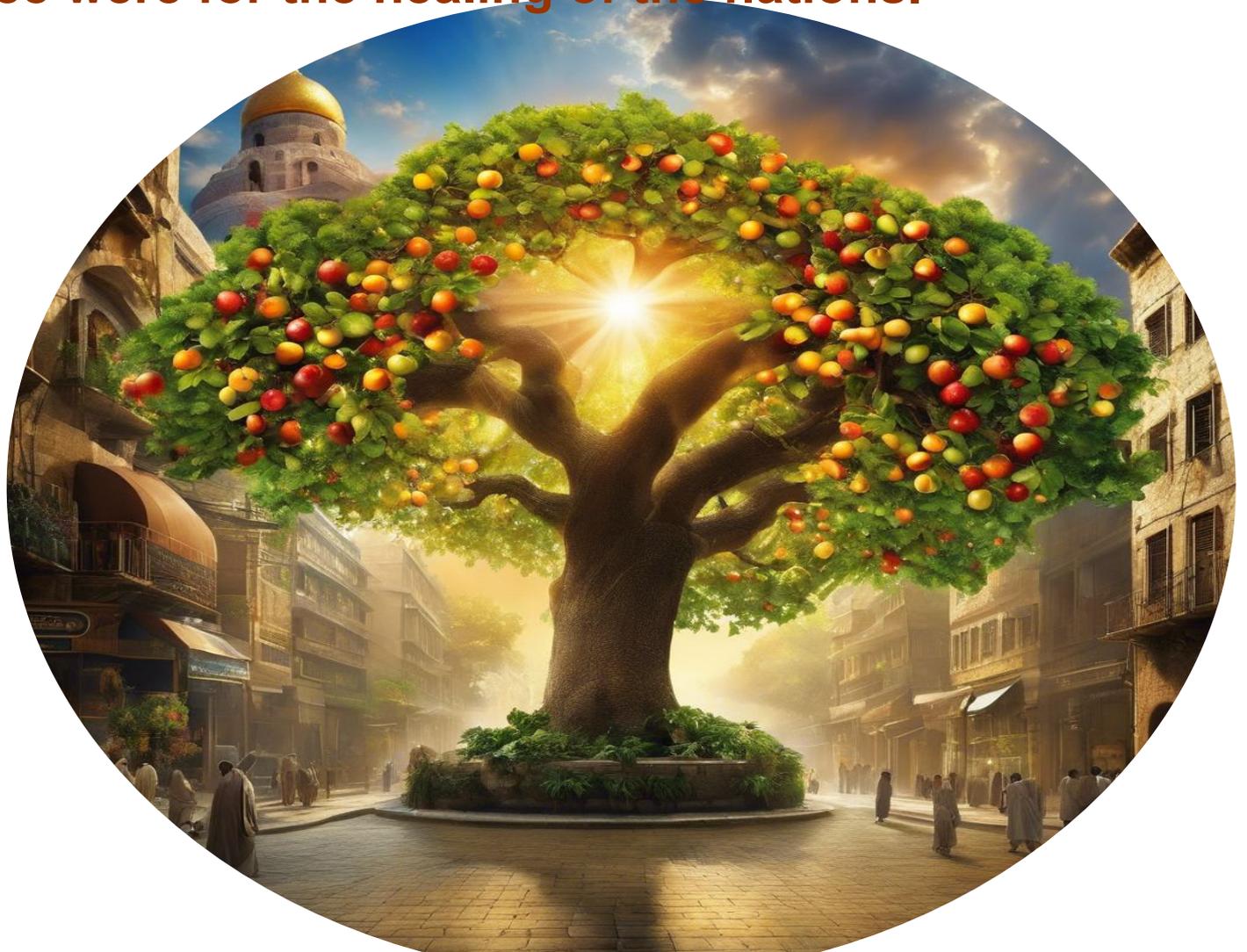


The Tree of Life

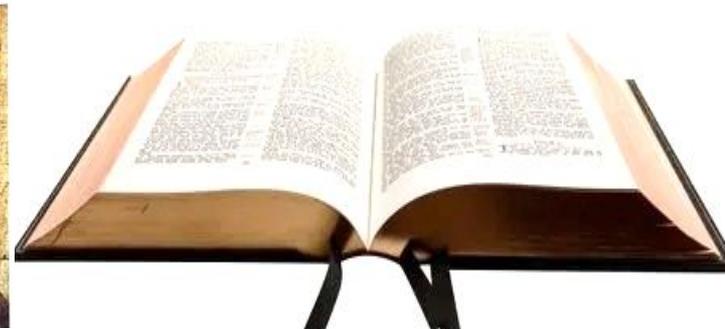
A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a white shirt cuff and a grey suit jacket, resting on a dark brown leather Bible. The Bible is lying flat on a wooden surface. The word 'BIBLE' is embossed in gold on the spine and the front cover. The background is a warm, brown gradient with a subtle circular pattern.

Rev. Ian A Arnold
05. 2024

Revelation 22:2 “In the middle of the street of it (the New Jerusalem), and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve types of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”



It is something that surprises new readers of the Writings that of the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible only thirty-four are singled out as being actual books of the Word. In the Arcana Caelestia, paragraph 10325, we read, **“The books of the Word are all those which have the internal sense. Books which do not have it are not the Word.”** In the Old Testament this means that the books of Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, are not part of the Word. And in the Old Testament it means that The acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude, also, are not part of the Word. From the Old Testament and from the New Testament it means a total of just thirty-four books of the Word.



What we need to remember here, first of all, is the definition of what qualifies as a book of the Word, **these being those that have an internal sense. And, not just an internal sense but a continuous internal sense.** Swedenborg was given to write of the book of Job and of Song of Solomon as containing many correspondences, or deeper meanings. So, too Proverbs. But the internal, or deeper, meanings in those books are not continuous. And by “continuous” what is meant is one thing linked to what follows in a long series, as we shall see.

Please don't think that the teaching in the Writings plays down the value and importance of the books of the Bible which do not have a continuous internal sense. They are accepted as books of the Bible in the same way they are accepted as books of the Bible by Christians everywhere. And Swedenborg wrote of them as being “useful books for the Church.



The fact that just thirty-four books of the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible are single out as being, specifically, the Word of God, should not really trouble us.

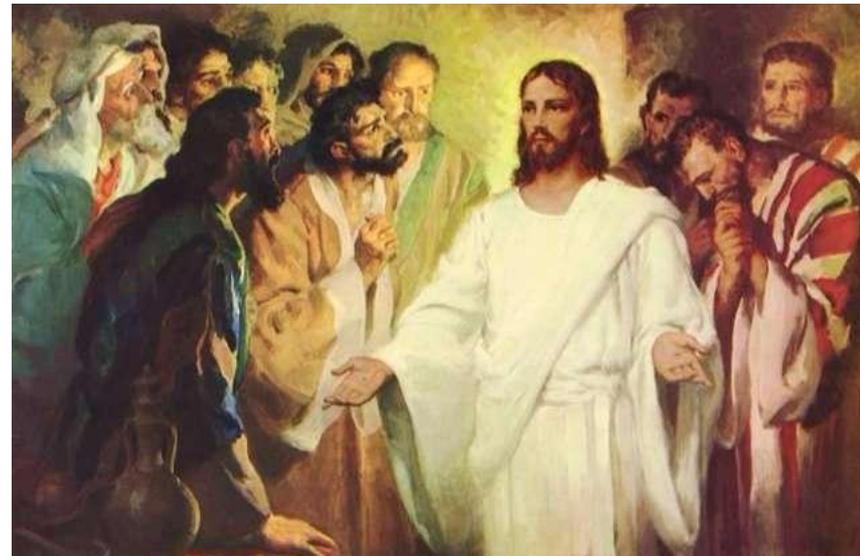
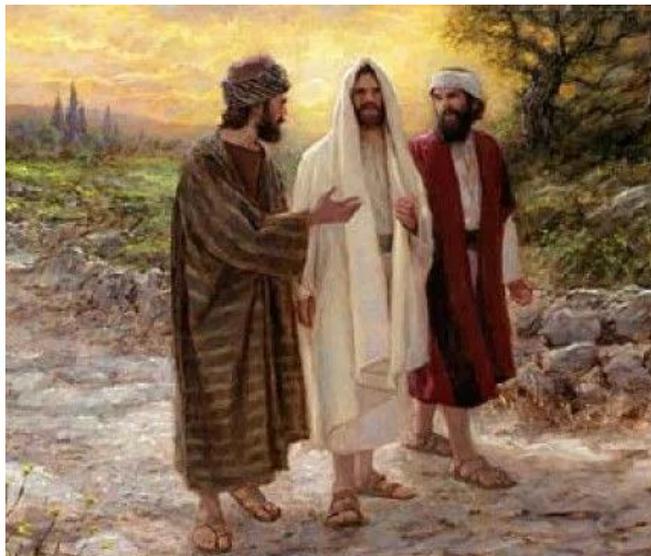
It was always the way, in Old Testament times, that “The Law and the Prophets” were singled out as having a greater significance than the other books of the Old Testament. “The Law” means the first five books of the Bible, and “The Prophets” includes the books of Samuel, Kings, and all the books spoken through the prophets, from Isaiah onwards.

And Jesus affirmed this. At the very beginning of His public ministry He reassured the people listening to Him, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.” (Matthew 5:17). On the afternoon of His resurrection and speaking with the two disciples who were returning from Jerusalem to their home in the village of Emmaus, they still not recognizing Him, “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:27). “All the Scriptures” here means the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. And only these.



Speaking to the disciples, now the evening of the day of His resurrection, Jesus said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me.” (Luke 24:44). Do you notice how “The Law”, “The Prophets” and “The Psalms” are singled out here as having special significance?

The question arises, then, how we are to regard and use the books of the Bible which are not singled out as books of the Word having a continuous internal sense?



I hope it helps to think of it this way.

The designated **thirty-four books** of the Word are – very clearly –not just the words of God that come through to us via Moses and the prophets. **They are truth in itself, as given to us by God. The other books** of the Bible both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, **are explanations of that truth given to us directly by God.** What these other books do is show us ways that truth has been applied to different situations when they were first written and how they apply to our situations, and our needs, today.

Let us pause for a moment to see this point with regard to the New Testament.

They are twenty-seven books of the New Testament, only five of which are designated as being the Word. These five are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the Book of Revelation. And why the book of Revelation? Because, again, actual messages from



In the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we have the very words of God, the truth from His mouth. What we have in the Epistles are beautiful, memorable, and sometimes hard-hitting applications of that truth to our daily lives.

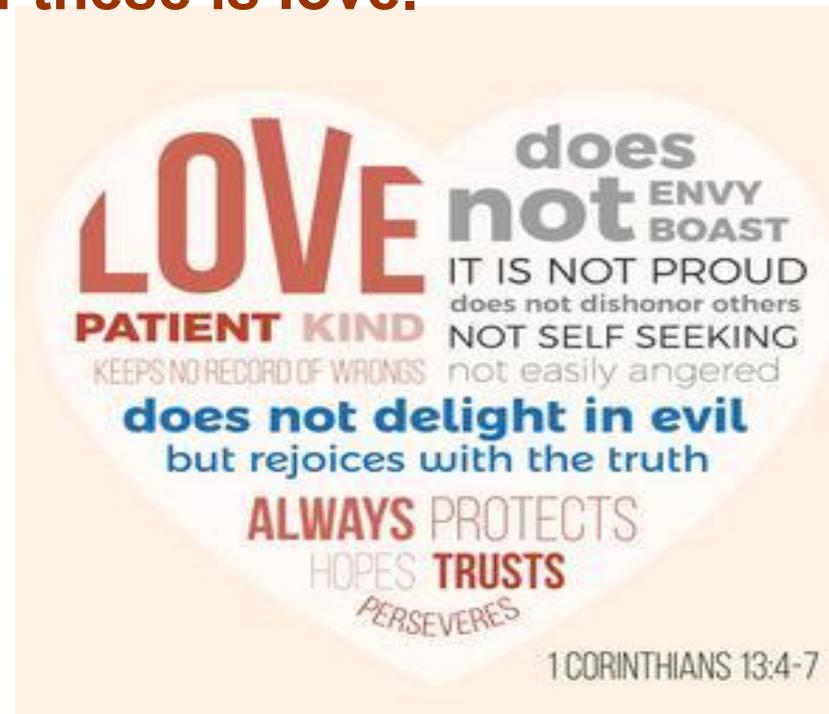
It needs to be noted that “there are indications that the apostle Paul thought his letters were not to be taken as Gospel.” (see <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com>question>). See, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:12, where he writes, “To the rest I, not the Lord., say.....”. So, the apostle is saying, in effect, ‘What I am writing at this point is from me, not from the Lord.’

Nevertheless, Paul did so much to interpret the Word of God and show early Christians, and of course Christians to this very day, **the different ways in which the Word of God applies to our lives and in the different circumstances we find ourselves in.**



Just think for a moment of what he wrote in the priority of love in 1 Corinthians 13: verses 1 to 13: “Love suffers long and is kind, love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.....And now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Surely this was the Lord in His Holy Spirit, inspiring these wonderful words.



The apostle Paul also shared with us his inner struggles which were struggles, surely, you and I can identify with. "For what I am doing I do not understand", he wrote, "for what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." (Romans 7:15, etc)

And, amongst my personal favorites things Paul wrote: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things."



So, now, to focus, specifically, on those thirty four books which are designated as being books of the Word of God, because they enfold within them a continuous internal sense.

Whilst certain books of the Bible, as we have seen, are not counted amongst these, yet we are still dealing with **a progression from Genesis right through to the Book of Revelation.**

It is fascinating that in the very beginning of the book of Genesis we read of the Garden of Eden, a place of beauty and peace and connection with God. And right at the end of the Book of Revelation is described the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It, too, the holy city, is also pictured to us as a place of great beauty, peacefulness and connection with God. The Word of God begins with a most memorable vision of closeness to God and ends with another most memorable picture of closeness to God.

Even what is described as the central feature of the Garden of Eden - the tree of life - is also the central feature



With regard to the inner meaning, or meanings, of the Word of God Swedenborg wrote of it as holding up to us the progression of the human race, through five great spiritual ages. The human race began, in most ancient times, in a beautiful closeness to God, the whole of people's lives then centred around The Tree of Life. In the spiritual sense **The tree of life means a perception that all our life is derived from God and that He is the Centre around which everything else revolves.** “And, as love and wisdom, and charity and faith, or good and truth, make the life of God in man, these are signified by “the Tree of life”. (See “Conjugal Love” 135)



People in most ancient times possessed such perception. But over many generations, perhaps even thousands of years, they came to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, meaning centering life around themselves and thinking they could decide what was true and good. And so, by their willfulness, withdrew from that state of beauty, peace and connection with God. **But, here is the promise of the Word, it will one day be restored again, and the Tree of life will, again, be at the centre of everything.**



This progression of the human race, over the ages, has its parallel in the progression of stages, such as the Lord would have each and everyone of us pass through.

Tiny children begin life in a state of exquisite beauty, peacefulness,unaware even of having an identity. But they leave this stage and enter into self-assertion and wilful choices; and, growing up into adulthood, into the ups and downs of life ,times of being on the mountains and times of being in the valleys, frequently faced with the challenges of spiritual enemies, times of progress and backsliding, the tree of life disappears from view. **And it remains out of sight until they** (once tiny children, now adults) **come into a serious and committed relationship with the Lord and seek His help to repent, reform, and become regenerate (re-born) people.**



All the while, and **if we remain committed to this spiritual journey, this will bring us to the holy city,** new Jerusalem where, once again, the tree of life will be in the midst, at the centre of everything and around which all of life will revolve. “To him who overcomes”, the Lord promised through the apostle John, “I will give to eat from the Tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7). And, “Blessed are they who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” (Revelation 22:14)



The way back to our re-discovery of the tree of life is through the Word. And as, indeed, we “do His commandments” we will see the tree of life covered in green leaves which, in the spiritual sense are “rational truths by which we who are in evils and falsities are led to think soundly, and becomingly.” (Apocalypse Revealed 936).

And it will bear “twelve types of fruit”, meaning it will bless our lives abundantly, and as is appropriate for every state, challenge and circumstance of our lives.



Such is the promise when, once again, and as the result of becoming re-born people, now children of God, **the tree of life is restored to the very centre of our love, attention, and of all that we think and say and plan and do.**

“In the middle of the street of it (the new Jerusalem), and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve types of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Amen



Readings :

Revelation Chapter 22:1 to 14

Arcana Caelestia 2187:3

“‘The Tree of life’ is the celestial itself, and in the highest sense it is the Lord Himself since He is the source of everything celestial, that is, of all love and charity. Thus ‘eating from the tree of life’ is the same as feeding on the Lord; and ‘feeding on the Lord’ is being endowed with love and charity, thus with those things that belong to heavenly life.”

Coronis 27:3

“Owing to the correspondence of a garden with the Church, it comes to pass that everywhere in the heavens gardens appear, producing leaves., flowers and fruits according to the states of the Church with the angels. And it has been told me that in some of the gardens there, trees of life are seen in the middle parts, and trees of the knowledge of good and evil in the boundaries, as a sign that they (the angels) are in free determination in spiritual things.”



THE END

