

# **All Things New**

by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson

*“Behold, I make all things new”* (Revelation 21:5).

## **THE NEW CHURCH**

Every year in June people meet to celebrate the birthday of the New Church. But in what way is the New Church “new”?

First, let us examine what is it that makes a church. From what is a church derived, and in what does it consist? According to the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, a church exists from the Word, and it is such as its understanding of the Word is. Thus a church is derived from doctrine. It consists in a life according to doctrine, that is, in love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor, which is religion. And it is made by the presence of the Lord in doctrine, and conjunction with Him in the good life that doctrine teaches. Therefore the name, the “New Church,” can refer only to the acceptance of a doctrine, the establishment from it of a religion, and a resulting presence of, and conjunction with, the Lord that never existed before. It is these new things that make this a new church.

This conclusion is the meaning of the words: “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that this is a prophecy of the New Church, foretelling that in it there will be essential and genuine truths, and thus new things of doctrine and of life, which were not in any of the former churches.

## **NEW TRUTHS**

What are the new teachings that make the church a new church?

In the first place, there is an entirely new idea of God. The Divine truth given in the Heavenly Doctrine teaches that God is one in essence and in person, and the Lord Jesus Christ is that God. It teaches that the Lord in His Divine Human is the one God of heaven and earth, the Father being in Him and the Holy Spirit from Him. The first advent was the incarnation of Jehovah Himself. Its purpose was the redemption of angels and people, the glorification of the Lord’s Human, and the extension from it of salvation. We are taught that the Lord has now made His promised second coming in the Heavenly Doctrine revealed through His servant, Emanuel Swedenborg. This doctrine teaches us to think of the Lord as a Divine Man, whose essence is love and wisdom, and from whom alone is all life, good, and truth.

The second new thing of doctrine in the New Church is an entirely new conception of the Word of God. This is that the Word is Divine, holy, and fully inspired, because its words are the words of the Lord’s own mouth through the prophets and evangelists, and because it contains and supports a threefold series of more and more interior senses which treat only of the Lord and His kingdom. In other words, the Sacred Scripture is a parable from beginning to end. Its characters are not holy in themselves, but they represent Divine and spiritual things. The Word has no holiness apart from the spiritual sense that dwells within it. And because the Word contains the

spirit and life of God, it is the fountain of all wisdom, the one source of spiritual life, and the only way to heaven.

In addition to these things there is a new idea of faith as being, not mere intellectual belief in the promises of the Word and blind acceptance of that which transcends understanding, but the love of truth for its own sake and the spiritual sight of truth which is given to those who live according to it.

With this goes a new conception of charity as consisting in doing well to others from an unselfish desire for their spiritual welfare. Furthermore, there is an entirely new idea of human responsibility: while a person cannot do any good from himself, he must remove and shun evils as if of himself, while acknowledging that the inclination and power are from the Lord.

And, finally, there is a new conception of eternal life: that a person lives as a person, with all that this implies, immediately after death. He is then established forever in the life of good or evil he had freely chosen while on earth. And he then lives a human life with like-minded companions in surroundings which correspond to his internal state.

These are, fundamentally, the new things of doctrine from which the New Church exists.

### ***NEW LOVES***

A life lived according to these new doctrines produces an entirely new kind of life, a new religion, in which the New Church consists.

As love is the life of a person, so this new life is a new love, and it is, primarily, a new love to the Lord. The teachings of the Christian Church, with its conception of a tri-personal God and the doctrine of vicarious atonement, produced a personal love for the Lord, akin to that which might be felt for an elder brother or friend who had made some great sacrifice to secure benefits for his younger and weaker brethren. But acceptance of the Heavenly Doctrine results in a more interior and spiritual love, which consists in loving the good and truth that proceed from the Lord, and especially in loving His wisdom as it is revealed to the church.

To love good and truth sincerely is to use them for the purpose for which they are given by the Lord—for the spiritual welfare of humankind. Thus, hand in hand with a new love to the Lord, goes a new love toward the neighbor. The teaching of the Christian Church also produced a personal love of the neighbor which demanded that even external judgments be left to God and that all people be regarded and treated equally as brethren. To benefit others in this indiscriminating way was said to be Christian charity itself.

But the teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine that *good* is the neighbor produces an entirely new kind of love. This love consists in loving heaven more than any end of self or the world; in loving what is true, sincere, and just; in seeking the eternal welfare of others by loving only what is good in them and trying to amend what is evil; and in acting only from the Word which alone teaches what good is; and all this because the Lord commands it.

## *A NEW LIFE*

From these new loves, which come only from the Lord through the Heavenly Doctrine, there arises an entirely new kind of life, a new religion. Now this life is no different in externals from that of any person who obeys the civil and moral laws of society, but it is entirely new in its motives and quality. It is this life in which the New Church consists.

Yet while this life constitutes the church, it does not make it. What makes the New Church is the presence of the Lord within the Heavenly Doctrine in the minds of those who receive it. This presence is immediate because the Heavenly Doctrine is an immediate revelation of Divine truth—and the Lord is conjoined with those who receive Him in the life they live from that doctrine. In this sense the Church is “new,” because such a presence and conjunction of the Lord is now given for the first time.

So we may say that the New Church is new, and a church, because it consists, from new doctrine, in an entirely new kind of spiritual life, in which the Lord can be present in a new way to effect salvation. This is what is meant by the prophecy, “Behold, I make all things new.”

Now we must not fail to recognize the real significance of this claim. A new ecclesiastical body, a new priesthood, new rituals, new forms of worship and instruction, new customs and social practices, new modes of thinking and speaking, and observance of new conventions, do not in themselves make the New Church, though they are all necessary for its ultimate existence.

The church exists among people, and in their congregations, only to the extent that it has been established within their hearts and minds. And the New Church will be founded on earth as the new gospel finds glad acceptance in human hearts and minds, as the Heavenly Doctrine is received and lived by individuals, and as the Lord takes up His abode with them in the tabernacle of the Heavenly Doctrine which they love, understand, and live.

For these reasons this church is, and ever will be, “new,” although it is to endure to eternity. Since the church is made by the immediate presence of the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrine there will always be born in it new things of love and faith; new and ever more interior perceptions of the inner meaning of the Heavenly Doctrine and of uses and how they may be performed; and an increasingly more perfect life of charity, resulting from an ever clearer vision of the Lord and of His kingdom. In this way the church that is new will ever remain so, leading people ever more effectively to the worship and love of God.

Amen.

Lesson: Isaiah 65; Revelation 21; *Doctrine of the Lord* 65