

The Beauty of the New Church

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Lessons: Revelation 12:1-6, 21:10-27; True Christian Religion 791

Ever since the Lord rose on Easter morning, people who loved Him looked for Him to come again. For, while He was still in the world, the Lord had told his disciples that He *would* come again. Later, the Apostle John saw beautiful visions, described in the book of Revelation, that were like prophecies or promises that the Lord would come again and would then begin a New Church. One vision John saw was a beautiful woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. The Lord tells us that the New Church is to be like that beautiful woman, with the warmth of the sun shining around it.

The Lord has promised that the New Church will be most beautiful and wonderful—both a “Bride” and a “Holy City.” Weddings are very wonderful, and there is something extra special about a bride on her wedding day. She is particularly beautiful. The Lord tells us that the New Church is to be like a bride adorned or dressed up for her husband, for the New Church is the beautiful “Bride” of the Lord. He also tells us that the New Church will be a “Holy City,” with gates of pearl always open, welcoming people to enter in. It will be a wonderful city, shining with light like a most precious stone, like a jewel so big and beautiful that we can hardly imagine it. And the Lord Himself is the light in this city.

Now, how did the Lord make the New Church so beautiful? It was by giving it new and wonderful teachings or truths that are like light shining all around it. We find these new truths in the Heavenly Doctrines, which the Lord gave to the New Church through Emanuel Swedenborg. When we truly see the things that the Lord tells us there, then we find that they are the most beautiful teachings imaginable.

The most important teaching is that the Lord shows Himself to us. He sent His twelve disciples throughout the whole spiritual world to tell everyone about Him, and this was how He began the New Church. If we read the Word and the Heavenly Doctrines, we can *see* the Lord in our minds. He is like a wonderful Heavenly Father, watching over us, taking care of us, and always providing for us. The Lord knows about everything that happens to us. Sometimes we may wonder why the Lord lets things happen the way they do. But the amazing thing is that the Lord is not just working for us to be happy *right now*; He is planning how He can make us happy *forever and ever*. The Lord knows what is really best for all of us, far better than we do. Not one thing happens that the Lord does not know about. To be able to learn about the Lord and how He takes care of us, and to believe in Him, is truly a wonderful and beautiful thing.

But the Lord has explained that we cannot be in the Church simply by *knowing* these things, or by being born and raised in it. No one gets to heaven by just learning about the Church. (And many people who know nothing about the New Church will get to heaven.) No one can really understand these beautiful teachings, or really be a member of the New Church until he or she tries to *live* by what the Lord teaches. No evil people can really enter the church; just as anything that “defiles” or “makes an abomination” could not enter into the Holy City.

If the light of truth is really going to shine in the New Church, all its members must love that light. We must have something of the love for truth, or desire to learn, that is meant by the woman clothed with the sun and the bride adorned for her husband. We must have solid foundations of truth, as the Holy City did. Only the Lord God can enlighten our understanding of the doctrines of the New Church, just as He alone could inspire the writing of the Heavenly Doctrines.

The New Church is truly the Crown of all the Churches, the most beautiful of all. But this beauty comes from no person. True beauty comes from the Lord alone. The truth alone can uncover and reveal it. If we wish to know the beauty of the New Church, there is only one way—to enter that Holy City which corresponds to the doctrines of the New Church. These doctrines alone—Divinely inspired by the Lord and shining with His light—can fill our hearts with a sense of beauty from the Lord.

Now the doctrines tell us that all beauty is from good or love, in which there is innocence (*Arcana Coelestia* 3080). When love or charity rules in a person's heart, it takes on an expression from the truth, which is like a beautiful face. Beauty radiates from the face, shining from it, bathing it with warmth and light, clothing it (as it were) with the heat and light of the sun. The love to the Lord that makes the Church is clothed with the Sun, glorious in beauty almost beyond human comprehension. Wisdom and intelligence are given to those who are in that love, like a crown of twelve stars. These stars are like knowledges, which serve as guideposts to a person as he or she navigates the darkness of trials and temptation. These stars lift a person up to behold the infinity of the Heavenly Father.

Yet these states of love are not meant to remain on high, above our daily lives. While love and wisdom dwell *within* us, they must also come down to earth to express themselves, so that we may grasp their beauty and give of our spiritual possessions to others through use. Remember that the woman in John's vision is clothed with the sun, and yet the moon is under her feet. Good and truth must rest on earth. There can be no heaven without a true church on earth where it can stand. There can be no heaven within a person without its expression and foundation in his or her life.

In the beginning, the Church must undergo struggles. The woman travails in birth and brings forth a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. If the New Church is to succeed, it too must bring forth doctrine. It must labor to see the new Revelation which the Lord has given and travail to teach all nations the rational truths of the Word. It must wield the Letter of the Word until it becomes as powerful as a rod of iron. No Church can grow and succeed without doctrine. It cannot succeed unless its people understand and love its teachings. We cannot progress without a continued growth in our understanding of the truths of the Heavenly Doctrines. For we will never behold the beauty of the New Church—we will not be able to enter into the city—unless we see that male child of doctrine.

For awhile these beautiful teachings are protected, like the male child being caught up to heaven by the Lord. But there will come a time when the truths will descend—as glorious to behold as a bride adorned for her husband—a time when the balanced, foursquare city of doctrine will shine

for all people. Then a vision, marvelous beyond human measure, will come to us, and the Church will be established in our lives on earth. This begins through that wonderful innocence of the woman clothed with the sun; it continues through doctrines, as it were, caught up into heaven to be fostered tenderly and protected against attack; and finally it is brought to fullness by that Holy City of Doctrine, descending from the source of all happiness and beauty, descending from God Himself, out of heaven.

Amen.