

A “Most Precious” Revelation

by the Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Then one of the seven angels...came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her radiance [light in NKJV] was like a most precious jewel [stone in NKJV], like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (Revelation 21:9-11).

Radiance. That’s the word which comes to my mind when I hear the description of the Holy City New Jerusalem. In our language we use the word “radiance” to describe two similar phenomena: the first is something sending out light or heat, and the second is the act of a person giving out or spreading happiness and love. In both cases there’s a source from which something explodes.

In chapter 21 of the book of Revelation, two images of radiance are used to describe the Holy City New Jerusalem. The first, as quoted above, is that of a most rare jewel. It is easy to see why. Many people have engagement rings or other pieces of jewelry with precious stones in them. We use them as adornment because of their beauty. One well-cut diamond can sparkle with brilliance, sending light forth in an array of colorful patterns. This is one of the reasons we value precious stones so much—because of their ability to reflect light so beautifully. It’s no surprise then, that this magnificent city, with it’s golden streets, translucent walls, gates of pearl, and foundations adorned with many precious stones, would collectively give off this sense of radiance—of light reflecting off and through all those different surfaces, giving the impression of one, enormous, perfectly cut, precious jewel.

The other image to which John likened this city was a bride adorned for her husband. Here we see the other meaning of radiance at work. True, we may think of a beautiful woman, dressed in white, who has perhaps adorned herself with a variety of jewels. But, more important, is the inner joy which so often radiates from the face of such a person—a happiness which is of a much more superior quality. How many of us have witnessed this kind of radiance, or even experienced it ourselves? I believe it is this overwhelming sense of happiness and love, radiating forth from a person, to which the Holy City New Jerusalem is likened (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 881 for comparison of the city and the bride).

With these two concepts in mind—of light radiating forth in beautiful patterns and of inner happiness shining forth—we turn our attention to what that Holy City New Jerusalem represents. In general it is a symbol for the New Church. But if we carefully consider the city’s name, more information begins to emerge. “Jerusalem” is the part of that name which specifically represents the church. This makes sense when we consider the role of Jerusalem in the history and worship of the ancient Israelites (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 880). It is “new” because the Lord has renewed this church. It is “holy” because of the close presence of the Lord Himself. But it is a “city” because of the *teachings* of that church (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 879). In other words, when we think of the city which John saw, it appeared as *a city* to symbolize the teachings we have been given in the New Church—the New Revelation made available to us by our Lord. In one passage which explains this section it says:

[The words] “he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,” mean that John was carried away into the third heaven, and there his sight was opened, [so that he could behold] the Lord’s New Church as to doctrine in the form of a city (Apocalypse Revealed 896, emphasis added).

In other words, John was shown a vision of all those truths which have been made available to us in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church. He saw an image of the way they interconnect and cohere. He saw, representatively, their beauty and goodness. And all these things were presented to him as that heavenly city.

So let us turn our attention to the new revelation which the Lord has made available to us, which is represented by that beautiful city. Our goal here is to come to appreciate four things about this revelation: its radiance, necessity, simplicity, and depth.

The Radiance of the Heavenly Doctrines

If radiance truly is a quality of this Holy City New Jerusalem, and the city itself is a symbol for the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church, then radiance is a word which equally describes this new revelation. Doesn’t it make sense that light, which is a symbol for the Lord’s truth, would radiate forth from the pages of the Heavenly Doctrines?

Here we can come back to those two ideas of radiance. The first is of light bursting forth. Consider all the images of the city which symbolize truth. The walls represent the letter of the Word—the stories of the Old and New Testaments. As they enclose and protect the city, so the literal storyline of the Bible or Word encapsulates an inner meaning which we call the internal sense. In this city, the walls are made of jasper; they’re translucent, almost see-through, symbolizing how much we are now able to understand the true meaning of those stories (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 898, 911).

The gates of the city represent teachings which introduce people to the New Church (*Apocalypse Revealed* 899). They were made of pearl, which particularly focuses us on teachings about the Lord (*Apocalypse Revealed* 918). Such core teachings—as that He is the one God of heaven and earth, that He is all-powerful and all loving at the same time—these are gateways to the New Church. They open us up to so many more teachings which the Lord wants us to know.

Then there are foundation-type teachings—principles upon which we can base our decisions (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 914). And there are streets of gold, symbolizing the many intersecting teachings which can lead us toward a good life (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 917).

All these symbols describe the teachings gathered together by the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church. Truly the Heavenly Doctrines are filled with the glory of the Lord, as was that city. He revealed them; He causes those truths to sparkle in our minds; He is able to enlighten us in so many different ways by means of those teachings.

Think also of the other kind of radiance we talked about, symbolized by the bride adorned for her husband. What’s the *purpose* of all these teachings? To help us to become happy people. This new revelation gives us the truths which will allow us to be conjoined with the Lord (see

Apocalypse Revealed 881). To the extent that we *use* those teachings to receive the Lord, we can be assured that our lives will be filled with joy—a deep inner joy which will radiate forth from us in the form of happiness and contentment.

The Necessity of the Heavenly Doctrines

In the New Church, we're asked to use our intelligence as well as our faith. The Lord has given us all the ability to think, even the desire to figure things out. A foremost use of that ability is to figure out, from His Word, how to live so that we can be blessed, or as one teaching puts it, "so that [we] can see what [we] ought to will and so to do, if [we] are to enjoy prosperity in the world for the time being and after death be blessed forever" (*True Christian Religion* 588). The point to stress here is that *the only path to heaven is through truths received in the understanding*. There is a passage in *True Christian Religion* about this fact, which states, "It is necessary, in order that a person may be regenerated, for the process to proceed through the understanding" (587). Why? Because it is only by means of these truths that we know who we should believe in, and how the Lord expects us to live our lives (see *True Christian Religion* 587; *Arcana Coelestia* 8635).

I believe this is why John saw a *city* as a symbol for the New Church, rather than something else (like a church building for example). By this vision, the Lord clearly emphasizes the fact that we need truths in order to follow Him to heaven. The more we know and understand, the more we can cooperate with Him.

What's more, this vision of a city is, in one sense, a prophecy of what the Lord promises to do for us. He provides all those teachings—through parents and teachers at first, then through reading the Word for ourselves, through sermons, books and conversations (see *True Christian Religion* 587). But once those truths are in our minds, the Lord really goes to work. He reforms our minds *based on those teachings*. He organizes them for us. He urges us to figure things out which we don't understand. He gathers harmonious facts together, so we can see them. He shows us how those teachings can make a difference in the choices we make. This is a process He calls *reformation*. It affects the understanding part of our minds. It is based on truths received from the Lord's Word, indirectly or directly. It is the Lord's work, causing us to know and care about what He has said. By means of it He leads us to the point where we can see the destructiveness of evil—both logically in our minds and through the confirmation of experiences—and also the goodness and value of doing things the Lord's way—again logically and experientially. The result is a city in our minds, a replica, albeit flawed, of that Holy City New Jerusalem, with aspects like the gates, the foundations, the walls, and the streets of gold. Is it not clear from this how important truths are in the New Church—how essential it is for us to have such a complete and rational revelation from the Lord, to allow us to cooperate more fully with Him?

Simplicity and Depth of the Heavenly Doctrines

A final area for us to look at is the *nature* of this new revelation—specifically its simplicity and depth. "Simplicity" is not a word that fits with people's usual impression of the Heavenly Doctrines. The language and philosophy can be fairly heavy-going at times. This is partly a function of translation, and partly due to the heavenly concepts now revealed. And yet, when we get right down to it, the basic formula revealed in the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church is wonderfully simple.

Consider what is said in reference to the Holy City in chapter 21 of Revelation, which contains a great summary of beliefs. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with [men in NKJV] all people, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). The Lord makes Himself available to all people. He is our God, and He wishes to dwell with us or be conjoined with us—to be a conscious part of our lives (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 882-883). “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The Lord wants to be a conscious part of our lives so that He can take away all grief, fear, and suffering from us. He also wants to steer us away from “death” or damnation (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 884).

The passage continues, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). The Lord renews or regenerates us. He helps us become better people and leads us ever onward, toward heaven (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 886, which is specifically about the Last Judgment and the renewal of the church, but by inference it applies to our lives as well). “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 21:6). These words specifically call to mind the power or government of the Lord. He wants us to know that He is in charge of His creation—He is governing our lives, down to the very details (*Apocalypse Revealed* 888). We call this His providence. “He who overcomes will inherit all things” (Revelation 21:7) promises the reward of heaven for those who follow Him (*Apocalypse Revealed* 890). “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, [etc.] have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone...” (Revelation 21:8). This warns that those who make the teachings of the Word of no account, here specifically the Ten Commandments, will cause themselves to be damned (*Apocalypse Revealed* 892-893).

The Lord makes Himself available. He shows us how He expects us to live, and He warns us of the dangers of evil. He leads us every moment away from hell and toward heaven. Those are the main streets of that Holy City—a basic outline of the whole of the Heavenly Doctrines. It’s a simple formula, which is explained in depth—from all sorts of different angles, again causing that radiance we talked about.

The Holy City New Jerusalem is a symbol for everything the Lord offers us by means of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church. By means of them He offers us guidance in every situation life brings our way. They give us a basis upon which to make wise decisions, showing us what is most important about life, how to deal charitably with the people we come in contact with, how to handle the difficult and sad things which happen to us or those we love, and how to honestly look at ourselves with the idea of getting rid of some of our imperfections. All the Lord asks of us is that we thirst for those teachings—that we see their value and know that the Lord Himself speaks to us within them. For then He can wipe away every tear from our eyes, He can be with us and be our God, and He can fill our lives with radiance—with the light of the Lord’s truth—and with the joy and happiness which inevitably result.

Amen.

Lessons: Revelation 21 (portions); *True Christian Religion* 587; *Apocalypse Revealed* 897