

THE MEANING OF THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

The Rev. James P. Cooper

In the internal sense, the book of Revelation tells of the establishment of the Crown of all Churches, the New Jerusalem. This church is to worship the Lord in His glorified Human, as seen in the revealed internal sense of the Word. Visions of the New Church are recorded by John in Revelation.

Of all the books of the Word, the book of Revelation is perhaps the least understood. Its visions are incomprehensible without the internal sense. Scholars and theologians simply say that Revelation must be symbolic in some way, but they do not have the key to unlock the symbolism. Thus, the book of Revelation is revered because it is in the Bible, but it remains mysterious to those without the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. The Heavenly Doctrine provides the key to unlock Revelation, showing it to be a clear prophecy of the time and manner of the establishment of a New Church. The vision of the woman clothed with the sun is from the twelfth chapter. Using the science of correspondences to unlock its meaning, we see that it teaches how the New Church was first established in the heavens at the time of the Last Judgment. It was a manifestation of the Lord's Divine Love through the new doctrine, which had the power to cleanse and thus regenerate humankind.

The image of the woman clothed with the sun is a familiar one. It is often used in illustrations of church literature. But the usual illustration of a beautiful, radiant young woman, while delightful, is not complete. The woman that John saw was great with child, in the final stages of labor. Her face may have expressed both pain and joy: the pain that comes from the ending of one state, and the joy that comes with the beginning of another.

This woman, seen by John in the spiritual world, represents the New Church. The church was represented by a woman, because the church is the Bride and Wife of the Lord. As a bride is in the affection of truth or wisdom of her husband, and loves him because of that wisdom, so the church looks to conjunction with the Lord, for it desires to be one with the Divine Truth, or Wisdom, that is from the Lord. This is a powerful vision of the Lord's relationship with His church.

The Word teaches that the Lord appears in the spiritual world as the Sun of heaven, to represent the power and life-giving nature of His Divine love and Divine wisdom. The woman standing forth as the church is seen with that power and life from the Lord radiating to humanity through her, as if from a sun. "The reason why she was seen 'clothed with the sun' is because the church is in love to the Lord, for it acknowledges Him and does His commandments, and this is love to Him" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 533). The woman is clothed with the sun for two reasons: because the Lord's life flows into us through the church in the heavens; and, also, when people in the church know the truths from the Word and live according to them, they are in love to the Lord. This love is signified by the light and heat of the sun.

Thus the radiant power of the woman comes from reciprocal conjunction with the Lord. We receive good and truth from the Lord through the church, and then, as if of ourselves, we choose to make it our own—thus returning that love to the Lord. This reciprocal conjunction is the life of heaven from which all delights and blessings flow. It was the Lord's purpose to conjoin the New Church in the heavens with the church on earth. The revelation of the internal sense of the Word in the Heavenly Doctrine was the means to that end. The reason for celebrating the 19th of June, as "New Church Day," is that the Lord has revealed the internal sense of the Word, and through that internal sense the church in the heavens has been conjoined with the church on earth. It was on the 19th of June, 1770, that this work was essentially completed.

However, this was not the end, but a beginning. The Lord has, through His Second Coming, given us the tools to establish the church on earth if we sincerely desire it and work for it. Establishing the Church on earth will not be easy. "She cried out in labor and in pain to give birth" (Revelation 12:2). The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that this means the church on earth will not be easily received at first, especially by those who are in faith alone (*Apocalypse Revealed* 531).

The spiritual reason for working for the growth of the church is the fact that the church in the heavens and the church on earth are related, like the spirit and body of a person are related. Just as no one can come into the spiritual world without first living in the natural world, the church in heaven cannot exist without the church in the world as its foundation. This means that the growth of the church on earth, both in number of members and in the quality of the spiritual life, has a profound effect on the growth and eventual development of the church in the heavens. The heavenly church cannot be built beyond the foundations laid for it upon the earth. The church on earth and the church in the heavens are more intimately related than we can imagine, for they correspond to each other. Both are founded upon the reception of the Word by people and angels. Thus, it is absolutely necessary that there be a church somewhere in the world where the Word is, and where the Lord is known by it (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 533).

The end of all creation is that there shall be a heaven from the human race. The Lord has provided all the things needed to achieve that goal: the Word, the church in the heavens, the church on earth, freedom of choice in spiritual things, and spiritual equilibrium. All that remains is for us to exercise freedom of choice, and to allow the Lord's Providence to lead us by means of the church on earth to the church in the heavens.

We are truly free. This means that falsity and evil have a pull on our hearts and minds equal to that of good and truth. We must make hard choices. To turn away from the pull of our evil hereditary nature takes real power. The power to turn away from falsity does not come from ourselves, although that is the appearance. It comes from the Lord through the church. This power is represented by the "male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (Revelation 12:5). This child represents the doctrine of the church—not the words and ideas presented in the Word, but the ideas *after* they have been received in our minds and confirmed by a life lived according to them.

The Lord waged a battle against the hells in order to complete the final judgment on them and restore order to the spiritual world, thus establishing the New Church. Its establishment was

witnessed by Emanuel Swedenborg in 1770 at the conclusion of the Last Judgment in the spiritual world and is described in the Heavenly Doctrine. We might think about how far the church has come in the years since and reflect on how far it has yet to go. We hope and pray for its future growth, wondering how we can best serve the Lord's ends in furthering the church on earth.

We must remember that the church must be in the mind and heart of each individual member before it can really be said to be established. Each of us is a little world, either a heaven or a hell. There must be a judgment in each of our minds, so that our own spiritual world can be reordered. Each of us may become a church, a true church, knowing the Lord as He is revealed in His Word, and living according to His commandments. When each individual strives to become a true church, then the church on earth will surely grow in both numbers and quality, and the church in the heavens may then have a sure and excellent foundation to eternity.