

# THE NEW CHURCH

Excerpted from a sermon by Rev. Walter Orthwein

“And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

During his exile on the isle of Patmos, the Apostle John received strange and wonderful visions of things to come. He saw cataclysmic upheavals and then a new reign of peace—a new golden age—symbolized by a beautiful city descending from God out of heaven: the New Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for her husband.

This prophetic book, the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, has never been understood in the Christian Church for no prophecy is ever really understood until its fulfillment. We can see this in regard to the Lord’s first coming. He was unrecognized because the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah had been misunderstood as meaning an *earthly* king, who would deliver the nation Israel from her enemies. But in truth the Lord came as a *spiritual* king, who would conquer the hells and redeem all humanity from spiritual slavery.

It is our belief that the prophecies contained in the Book of Revelation have been and are being fulfilled today, and that they refer, not to the end of the world, but to the end of the first Christian era, and the establishment of a new Christian age on earth—a new church.

Jerusalem, where the temple—the center of worship and instruction in the Scriptures—was, stands for the Lord’s church on earth. And the New Jerusalem, symbolically portrayed in John’s vision, stands for a new church—not a new church *organization*, primarily, but a new *dispensation of Divine truth* from heaven. When this is received, it creates a new state of spiritual love and wisdom within the hearts and minds of people on earth. This is where the church essentially exists—within people who know and love the Lord.

He that sat upon the throne and said, “Behold, I make all things new” is no other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His throne is heaven, where He is acknowledged as king, and more than king, the source of life itself. And from His kingdom of heaven the Lord is continually recreating or making new the life of religion in each person who believes in Him as the only God of heaven and earth. This is what the Lord makes new—all things of religion.

In order to come into the kingdom of heaven, the Lord said, “you must be born again,” that is, made entirely new—seeing God where you never saw Him before, aware of His presence in new ways, looking upon spiritual things with the freshness and wonder of a child, rediscovering the spiritual dimension of life—this is the newness the Lord makes. And how does the Lord bring a person into this state of life? How does He bring into existence a new church, in which He appears with new clarity and power to save? He does it by means of a new revelation of Divine truth, coming down from heaven to make all things new, to raise up a new, more perfect Christianity.

The Lord has always revealed Himself to people, as far as He possibly could, according to their state of understanding. He spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament. Then He was born

on earth Himself as the Word made flesh, or Divine truth in human form. After His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and later to John on the isle of Patmos, foretelling wondrous things to come.

But revelation did not end there. The Word (Bible) looks forward to, and specifically refers to, future revelation. For instance, when He was on earth the Lord told His disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” (John 16:12-13).

We believe that this promise of a new revelation has been fulfilled in the teachings given through Emanuel Swedenborg, who, like the prophets of old, served as a human instrument whereby the Lord could reveal new truths for all people. The solemn testimony of this well-known and respected scientist, philosopher, and statesman, was that the Lord appeared to him, opened his spiritual eyes, and revealed to him all the teachings contained in the theological writings which he then published; and furthermore, that not one word of those teachings came from himself or any other merely human source, but from the Lord alone.

These Writings, or Heavenly Doctrines, do not supplant or replace the Word (Bible), any more than the New Testament supplanted the Old; rather, they infill the Sacred Scriptures by disclosing the hidden meaning contained within them. This internal sense, or spiritual sense, is like the soul or spirit within the letter of the Word. Without it, our understanding of the Scriptures is as limited as that of Nicodemus, who, when the Lord said to him, “you must be born again,” asked: How can I, a grown man, return to my mother’s womb? (see John 3). He look the Lord’s words at their literal face value and so missed the whole meaning, which was spiritual.

It is this revelation of the internal sense of the Word which makes all things of religion new. It gives a new vision of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth. This new vision is what is meant by the second coming of the Lord. It is not a second physical coming, or a coming in person, but is a spiritual coming. The Lord said that He would come again as the Spirit of truth, or as new truth about spiritual things, new truth about Himself—the essence or soul of all truth. This is what the revelation of the spiritual sense of the Word discloses.

No one is asked to accept any of this on faith. It is a cardinal principle of the new revelation that religious truths must be freely accepted, not supported by emotional persuasion, external human authority, or “blind faith.” What people do not see for themselves to be true and freely choose to follow is not really their own. Investigate the Heavenly Doctrines for yourself, and see if they do not provide deep and satisfying answers to the important questions of life, in full agreement with the Scriptures and also with what common perception tells you must be reasonable and true. You will find—contrary to what is widely believed—that spiritual things can be understood. They can be and should be. The Lord wants us to understand His purposes in our creation and thus be able to freely cooperate with them.

The New Jerusalem is not limited to any organization, although there are New Church bodies in the world; it exists in the minds of those whose lives have been made new by the new revelation. It is not Catholic, nor Protestant, but a new dispensation—a New Church. It is eminently

Christian, for it worships the Lord Jesus Christ as God and seeks to bring the teachings of His Word into life.

The New Church is open to all. The city seen by John in his vision was foursquare, with twelve gates, three on each side. These gates are never shut, but are open to all people of whatever religious background. Each gate is a great pearl, the pearl of great price, worth acquiring above all else—the acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth.