

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

TO FOLLOW THE LORD ON A WHITE HORSE

by the Rev. Frederick L. Schnarr

What we celebrate as the birthday of the New Church on June 19th is the time when the Lord, in the spiritual world, sent forth His twelve disciples to announce the Second Coming of the Lord. In the story that we read we have a vision given us, which was first given to the disciple John while he was on the Isle of Patmos. It's one of many visions in the last book of the Word, the book of Revelation, sometimes called the Apocalypse. Some of these visions give us a picture of the New Church—the New Church that John saw so early in prophecy and yet that wasn't to come into existence until the time when the Lord had prepared Emanuel Swedenborg. The Lord chose him to write down all of the new truths that were to constitute the Lord's second coming, which in turn were to form in the minds of men a New Church, in this world and in the other world.

You know and can remember many of the Apocalypse visions. You have studied them in school; or perhaps you've studied them in Religion Lessons. You remember the opening vision of the Apocalypse with the Lord standing amidst seven golden candlesticks. You remember the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, about to deliver a man-child, and how she had to flee from the dragon into the wilderness. And then after that, the next vision is the one we just read. John was told to look up into the heavens, and there against the clouds he saw this very beautiful white horse and the Lord riding upon him. And behind the Lord, as though going forth to war, came all of the angels of heaven, all riding on white horses.

It wasn't until John had seen that vision that a great war in the spiritual world took place. That war described the final conquest over evil spirits by the angels of heaven, and then the evil spirits were put back into the hells so that they could no longer infest the heavens and cause the angels trouble, nor could they any longer take possession of men's minds on earth.

It is not until the story of the white horse and the great war is complete that there follows the final vision which you know so well – a beautiful woman is seen descending from heaven, a bride adorned for the Lord, and then at last, the holy city, New Jerusalem, is seen.

I want you to think today about that which happened right before the final vision: the story of the white horse. What did it mean? Why of all the animals, of all the living things that there are, should the Lord choose a white horse? And why was it that until they had seen the white horse there couldn't be final peace in the heavens and the final vision of the New Church?

We are taught in the Writings that the white horse means our understanding. Our understanding is the place where we learn knowledges and where we learn to think. It is the home of our thinking. It's the place where we form ideas. Now notice in this vision that the white horse—the understanding—is an understanding not invented by any person. It is an understanding to be formed immediately from the Lord. The truths that are to make that understanding, that you

young people have many of in your minds, you've learned from the Word. You have those truths in your understanding. Some of you have thought about them a little; some have thought about them much. They are as a great, beautiful white horse. If in our thoughts we look to Him who is upon that white horse—the Lord—we have the means of coming into the most deep and beautiful truths that make up the kingdom of heaven.

The white horse was an ancient symbol. Some of you who remember the stories of mythology will remember the white horse Pegasus. The Writings tell us that the people of ancient times knew that if men learned truths that were pure from the Lord, it would cause their understanding to be lifted up. It would be like a horse that has wings, that can rise up and can look down upon all the other things of your life and tell you: what your work should be, what you should do with the desires you have from your will, and how you should act to be honest, sincere, and good. It will tell you all kinds of things. It is a wonderful vision from the Lord.

In reference to the birth of the New Church in your minds, there must be an understanding born, not from your own experiences but from the Lord. That means that it must be born from truths that are learned from the Word and from no place else. The Writings are very insistent on the fact that we cannot invent truth. We can go outside and we can look at a tree and take the tree apart, and can learn for years and years about a tree. We can learn how a tree grows, what kind of a tree it is, what kind of fruit it has, and how its seeds are formed. We can learn a hundred things about the tree, and yet if after many years of studying the tree someone asks us, "What do you know about heaven from having studied that tree? What do you know about the nature of the Lord from having studied the tree?" We would have to say, "We don't know anything." These things about the tree are natural knowledges. The same thing is true of all the sciences and all the other things that we study. They are all useful; they are all good servants when they have their proper place. But there must be in the understanding, way up at the top, things that are different, things that rule from the Lord. These things are called spiritual truths and they give us an interior understanding of the Word. That means that the highest things that must be in our understanding must be formed from the Lord's Word.

This is why when John saw the white horse; the Lord was riding on him—not some angel, not anyone else, just the Lord. So all special truths—whether we call them spiritual truths or heavenly doctrines—all come from the Lord. He has given them to us. He has invited men all over this world and all over the spiritual world to come to a feast of spiritual truths. That's why at the end of this story of the white horse—what does it say? —that He called everybody to the marriage supper. He said, "Come; gather yourselves to the marriage supper of the Lamb." That meant that the Lord had opened up the books of the Word, and on every page He has given us the ability now to see what men through ancient times all the way through the ages could never see. Just think: this is what makes the New Church new.

This is what makes it exciting. There are on every page of the Word hundreds and hundreds of new things for us to see. And when we collect them together, they begin to be in our mind like a great white horse with the Lord riding upon it. And it has power—great power. What does it give us the ability to do that we could never learn from studying a tree? A tree doesn't tell us about evil spirits; a tree doesn't tell us that cheating is wrong; a tree doesn't tell us that lying is wrong. Nor does a fish nor does any animal tell us such things; nor does anything in the whole world

except the Word. So those special truths from the Lord are the truths of the New Church. They give our understanding eyes.

They give it sight, so that it can see and look into the will that each of us has—all the things that form part of our life—and see what is from the Lord and what is from man—what is useful and good, and what is bad and should be rejected. This is what comes before you can really be a part of the New Church.

Young people and children that are being raised in the things of the New Church can only be at the doorway to the New Church, because the Lord has provided that no one shall ever come to love anything – good or bad – that he doesn't understand. In your understanding lies the means of the Lord giving you freedom. That's where you have your freedom of choice, and so the Lord tells us that a man can never love anything at all, good or bad, unless he first knows what it is, understands what it is, and says to himself, "That is what I want."

When we have studied long enough, a few little things year by year, the time will come when we are ready to say, "Yes, now I see that all the things I have learned are true, not because someone has told me that I must believe them, but because the Lord has given me an understanding, and in that understanding I can see the highest truths that there are. I can even learn to think as the angels, because the Lord has opened the Word, and He has given the spiritual sense of the Word as a new gift to mankind." And He has invited us to come and partake. And when we do, we not only go, as it were, to a great feast because there are so many things to learn and do, but we have the power to as it were ride on a white horse. So it says that all the angels followed the Lord on white horses. Certainly they did, because all the angels understand spiritual truths and do them. In this there is tremendous power—power to chase away everything that is evil or false. When we learn the truths and do our best to use them, the evil spirits run away from our mind, and the loves that we may have, to lie and cheat and steal and all bad things, gradually begin to flee away and die. And in time we can receive, and maybe even someday come into, that beautiful place which is called the holy city New Jerusalem.

Text: Revelation 19:11-17