

Spiritual Warfare

by the Rev. James P. Cooper

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.... And another sign appeared in heaven: a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads (Revelation 12:1,3).

One of the most beautiful sights seen by the disciple John, when his eyes were opened to see into the spiritual world, was a woman clothed with the sun—radiant—having a sparkling crown of stars. One of the most fearful sights John witnessed and wrote about in the book of Revelation was a great blood-red dragon which thrashed around furiously in its attempts to harm and destroy the beautiful woman.

What John saw, when he was alone on the isle of Patmos, were prophetic visions of things to come. And, like everything in the spiritual world, each one of them has a spiritual meaning. The shining woman bursting with light was a picture of the New Church which was to be established by the Lord at His Second Coming. This Church was seen as a woman because she is to become the Bride and Wife of the Lamb—the Lord.

The ugly red dragon, on the other hand, corresponds to those who hate the teachings of the New Church and who wish to harm and, if possible, destroy it. This monster is a picture of the hells who thrash around ceaselessly trying in every way to weaken and utterly wipe out this New Church. However, when the forces of evil—the dragon—attacked the woman, she was delivered by the Lord who gave her “two wings of a great eagle” by which she could fly to safety out of reach of the dragon (Revelation 12:14). These wings are the spiritual truths of the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church by which our minds can be raised above the things of this world to see in the light of heaven. For only when we see in this light, only when we see the Lord in His own eternal kingdom, in the perfection of heaven itself, can we come to truly know and love Him.

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon” (Revelation 12:7). The New Church cannot be established in our minds, or in the world, without a struggle. The battle which John witnessed is a combat between the forces of good and the forces of evil. This struggle must go on in our own minds and in the world, if the Church is ever going to live and grow. The great conflict is between two giant armies—armies which follow the Lord and armies which follow the dragon. “And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him [the Lord] on white horses” having swords and bows (Revelation 19:14). The armies which followed the dragon, on the other hand, appeared in many hideous forms: as monstrous locusts; like horses prepared for battle, some of which had the faces of men, the teeth of lions and the tails of scorpions; one beast was named “blasphemy,” he had seven heads, ten horns, ten crowns, and looked like a leopard, “and the dragon gave him his power” (Revelation 13:2).

False ideas and evil loves make us want to hate and blaspheme the Word, that is to make fun of

the holy things of religion and the Church. When people do this in the spiritual world, their evil loves take the form of monstrous creatures which combine the ugly and destructive parts of different animals. Like John, Emanuel Swedenborg had his spiritual eyes opened and saw many similar beasts. Swedenborg, though, was shown the correspondence of each one of them. He wrote, “I have seen several thousands of [those who hated the teachings of the New Church] and...from a distance they appeared like a dragon with a long tail, that seemed set with spines like thorns” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 537). These spines showed that they wanted to scratch, to tear down, to wound and destroy the new truths of the Heavenly Doctrine.

The spiritual warfare seen by John, and later witnessed by Swedenborg, represent the battles each one of us must make to “live according to the ten commandments” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 548). Because the Lord wants us to win in our fight against evil, He mercifully tells us what evil is like. He reveals in every least detail how ugly and dangerous the hells really are, so that we may know selfishness for what it really is and the terrible nature of the worldly loves that serve self alone. And, more than this, the Lord provides new weapons, new swords and new bows—the truths of the Heavenly Doctrine of His New Church—with which we may fight. He invites each one of us to join His army. He urges each one of us to learn to use the powerful wings of spiritual truth, to learn to think from the Heavenly Doctrine, and in this way to rise above the dragon’s threat. And He challenges each one of us to become skilled in wielding the new spiritual weapons He has provided, so that our minds, and the minds of all people, may one day be freed from the power of the hells.

When we heed the Lord’s Word, when we learn to fight against all the forces of evil *from Him*, then the great red dragon will be cast out—and the “devil and satan” will be driven into the “bottomless pit” of hell (Revelation 20:3). Then the woman clothed with the sun will be free forever, and the Lord’s Church will prosper and grow.