

NEW CHURCH DAY

Revelation 22:1-14

Start in all classes by asking the pupils if they know what we mean by New Church Day. If they do not know, remind those who should remember and tell those who have not been told before. In all classes, in addition to taking up the actual assignment, do as much as you can with the doctrinal basis on which the New Church is founded, and emphasize the feeling of gratitude and obligation to the Lord which we should have because He has given us this new knowledge.

Doctrinal Points

All in our church have an obligation to read and study the Word daily in the light of the heavenly doctrines.

Notes for Parents

Swedenborg tells us that on the nineteenth day of June in the year 1770 the Lord sent His twelve apostles throughout the spiritual world to proclaim that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns,” and that a new Church based on this fact was about to be established. This is why we think of the nineteenth of June as the birthday of the New Church and call it “New Church Day.” For our New Church is based on the belief that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one only God of heaven and earth, not a mere man—even the best of men—who lived long ago, and not one of three persons in the Godhead, as most Christian churches teach. We believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of whom we read in the Bible are the three attributes of the one God, divine love, divine wisdom, and divine proceeding or activity, like will, thought, and activity in man. The Lord Himself said to Philip (John 14:9) when Philip asked Him to show them the Father: “Have I been so long time

with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Many people today still believe that those who die will lie in their graves until some future day when a last judgment will take place and they will be raised up, and then the good will be given new bodies and will go on living on a new earth which the Lord will form. In the New Church we know that when we die, we merely go to sleep in this world and wake up in the spiritual world, the real and much more beautiful world which is about us now, although we do not see it because our physical eyes focus our sight upon the material world. We also believe that the Last Judgment took place just before the New Church was begun in heaven, and that the Second Coming of the Lord took place then in the opening of the spiritual meaning of the Word, the “power and great glory” within the “cloud” of the literal sense, so that now, as we study the Word, we can learn more and more of its meaning to eternity, and if we sincerely try to live according to its teaching, we need have no fear, for we shall reach heaven and live there forever in peace and happiness.

If, as parents, we live in this belief, thinking and speaking as well as acting from it day by day, our children will grow up with an entirely different attitude toward life and toward the meaning and importance of their daily choices from that which they will encounter about them in the world, and will be greatly helped to recognize temptation and say “no” to it, and to develop into good men and women and eventually into angels.

Primary

This is a good lesson in which to tie the whole Bible together in the minds of the children as a continued story with a beginning and an end, and to show them what our life in this world is for and how important the way we behave from day to day is in determining whether or not we shall become angels. State the simple facts concerning the Second Coming and the New Church. Then go on to the lesson itself, and end with emphasis on verse 7 and its important meaning for our daily lives.

We of the New Church call the nineteenth of June “New Church Day.” This is because it is the birthday of our Church, for we are told that on the nineteenth of June in the year 1770 the Lord sent His twelve apostles who had followed Him on earth throughout all the spiritual world to tell everyone that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns,” and this is the teaching on which our Church is founded and the teaching which everyone in heaven knows and believes.

Our lesson for today is not a long one, but it is a very important one.

Do you remember the name of the first book in the Bible?

What does the word *Genesis* mean?

What is the last book in the Bible called?

What other word with the same meaning is sometimes used in speaking of it?

What do these words, *revelation* and *apocalypse*, mean?

When you were babies you did not understand the words you heard, did you?

Now, as you grow, you are able to understand more and more.

And you know that your understanding will grow steadily all your life.

Your parents can be wiser than you are, and your grandparents wiser than they.

And our growth in wisdom does not stop when we die.

Death is merely waking up in that beautiful world where we go on learning forever.

But you know also that you may choose to be foolish rather than wise.

When you disobey your parents, for example, you are choosing to be foolish.

To the end of our lives we have one Father whom we must obey. Who is He?

In what book does He teach us the way to wisdom?

At first we understand very little of the Bible.

Its meaning is like a cloud behind which we know the sun is shining.

Do you remember the lesson we had from the second chapter of Genesis, the very first book in the Bible? It was about the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived. That garden had a beautiful river and it had a fruit tree growing in the middle of the garden which was called “the tree of life.” Now here in the very last chapter of the last book of the Bible we find that that same river and tree are in heaven, the beautiful land where we shall all go to live forever when we leave this world if the books of our lives here are found to be written as they should be, according to the teachings of the Word of God.

Let us always be looking forward to that day, however long or short our lives here on earth may be. But let us not forget that we cannot ever reach that beautiful land unless from day to day we try faithfully to do what is right instead of just what we happen to want to do. We often think that having our own way will make us happy, but it won't: it will only get us into all kinds of trouble. The Bible word for "happy" is "blessed." And in the Bible the Lord has given us His Word so that we may know how we ought to live in order to be happy forever. As verse 7 of our lesson tells us: "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

The Lord has now, as He promised, come again to us "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

This coming was announced to the angels on June 19, 1770.

So we call June nineteenth the "birthday of the New Church" or "New Church Day."

Junior

With this class emphasize the spiritual history of mankind as told in the Bible and the reason why the Lord had to give successive revelations to enable men better to know and understand Him. Tell them what a "dispensation" is and how John was called to be the prophet of the final dispensation described in Revelation by the descent of the New Jerusalem. Stress what verses 7 and 14 of our chapter should mean to each of us.

What is the first book in our Bible?

What is the last book?

By what other name is this last book called?

What does *apocalypse* mean?

What two things do we find in our reading for today which were found in the story of the Garden of Eden in the second chapter of Genesis?

This fact in itself shows us that the Word of God is one book, teaching us what the Lord intended for mankind from His first creation of them, what they chose to do with all the wonderful things He gave them, how from the beginning He supported the good and tried to teach the evil the folly of their ways, and how our life to eternity after we leave this world is going to depend on

whether, while we are here, we choose to learn and obey the laws which He has given us for our happiness, or to turn our backs upon Him and do what we want to do from moment to moment, imagining that we are wise of ourselves.

Even as children growing up today you have an example of this. You know that when you decide to do something which your parents have forbidden, you either get into immediate trouble or are led into other wrongdoing such as lying or blaming others instead of yourself. What you have done does not make you happy. It was foolish, not wise. And if you do not face this obvious fact and correct your ways, you become worse and worse, more and more foolish, and get into more and more trouble.

Because of the increasing number of foolish people who imagined themselves wiser than the Lord, the world grew worse and worse and mankind more and more unhappy. The Lord did all He could, giving them new instruction from time to time, until finally He came and lived among them Himself to show to their physical sight the good way of life. The first Christian Church was founded on this example and turned the tide of evil in the world, but it was still not enough. Jesus knew that it would not be. He told His apostles (John 16:12): “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” Men had still much to learn about the things of this world, and He knew that as science and philosophy developed, it would become harder and harder for those whom the world considered “learned” to believe many of the literal statements of the Word. So He promised to come again (Matthew 24:30) “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

The church on earth is man’s response to each new revelation from the Lord. As the first Christian Church was their response to His coming in person, the New Church is the response to His Second Coming. The prophecy of this coming was made through the apostle John in the book of Revelation. He did not come again in a physical body. That, as He had said on the cross (John 19:30), was “finished.” The Lord does not have to do the same thing

twice. His Second Coming was made for us by opening the clouds which are in our minds when we read the Word in its letter, and letting the power and great glory shine through as we begin to see the spiritual meaning which is within the letter.

John describes the New Church that would be formed on the basis of this new knowledge as the holy city New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven. The new knowledge was given through the agency of a man specially prepared by the Lord to receive it, the famous scientist and philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, who would be humble and faithful in writing and publishing it. As you grow older, you will read and study more and more of what Swedenborg tells us the Lord permitted him to see and hear, and to understand as he read the Word in this new light. And if you yourselves faithfully read and study the Word in this light and try to live as it teaches, you will not only realize more and more the blessings which the Lord has given you but you will become more and more true and useful members of the Lord's New Church, the Church of the New Jerusalem.

In the *True Christian Religion*, n. 791, Swedenborg tell us: "After this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages. . . . This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770." So we call June nineteenth "New Church Day," the birthday of the New Church.

Intermediate

Take up with this class the history of the Church among mankind from the beginning, and why each declined and a new one had to be instituted through a new revelation. Then take up the reasons for the breaking up of the first Christian Church as given in their notes, the importance of the new revelation, which we are told is to be the final one, and the duty of each of them to read and study the Word daily in its light throughout their lives, as well as to direct their thought and conduct according to its teachings. Illustrate from the

chapter for today how much the new light enables us to find within the cloud of the letter.

In n. 791 of *The True Christian Religion*, one of Swedenborg's last writings, we read: "After this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages. . . . This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770." This is why we call June nineteenth "New Church Day," the birthday of the New Church, which we are told in TCR 788 "is to follow those that have existed since the beginning of the world, and that it is to endure for ages and ages."

You know that the first Christian Church, which started as a result of the travels of the apostles, has broken up into many sects, some of them having quite different beliefs even about who Jesus Christ really was. There are two reasons for this. One is that there are always people who choose to believe only what it is easy and convenient for them to believe. Such people simply refuse to believe many of the statements they find in the Bible. The second reason is that there are many who want to believe the Lord but have found puzzling statements and apparent contradictions in the literal story and, rather than give up all belief, have accepted explanations which do not agree and often do not even make sense. And as men have learned more and more about this natural world of ours, many have come to believe that it is the only world we can know anything about.

The book of Revelation was a prophecy of the state of the world as it would develop after the days of the apostles, and in its last chapters it gives the promise of a final judgment and the establishment of a New Church to which would be given an understanding of the real inner meaning of the Word of God which would explain both the past and the future history of mankind and enable us to worship and obey the Lord with understanding. We should be very thankful that we today live in this new age of the Church

and have been shown these things by the Lord through the writings of His servant Emanuel Swedenborg.

For example, we can know that the river mentioned in the first verse of our chapter for today pictures truth from the Lord, the same river described in the story of the Garden of Eden in the second chapter of Genesis. All men have a “thirst” for knowledge of some sort, and for those who want knowledge of the Lord the Word has always provided this knowledge. The tree of life in our lesson is the same tree which in the beginning was in the midst of the Garden of Eden, the understanding that all good and truth are not our own but are given us day by day by the Lord. Men’s first turning away from the Lord to self was pictured by their disobedience in eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and so putting that tree in the center of their garden in place of the tree of life. We do this ourselves whenever we think we know better than the Lord what is good for us to think and do. Genuine goodness received from the Lord is the fruit of the tree of life, and the leaves of this tree are genuine truths from the Lord which alone can “heal the nations.” We need very much to see and think of this in the present state of our world. Peace and happiness cannot come to any one of us or to the world in any other way than by obedience to the Lord. As verse 7 of our lesson tells us, “blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

Another thing which we should notice in our lesson is what the angel said when John fell at his feet to worship him. There is a verse in the Bible, Psalm 8:5, which in the King James and other translations says of man: “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.” People assumed from this that angels were a higher form of creation than man. But this is not what the Word of God really says at this place. In the original Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was dictated by the Lord, this verse says: “For thou hast made him a little lower than God”—angels are not even mentioned here. So we should note especially what the angel in our lesson told John. Angels are all men like ourselves, all originally born on our earth or some other earth in the physical

universe, who are living in heaven because they chose to obey the Lord.

This is the world in which we make our choices, and we make them from day to day. So if we want to be happy and to become angels and live in heaven, in the holy city New Jerusalem, we need to learn and keep always in mind the last verse of our lesson for today: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

Senior

State briefly the facts concerning New Church Day and concerning the spiritual history of mankind as recorded in the Word and what the Second Coming of the Lord and the descent of the New Jerusalem man. Then try to be sure that the pupils know what the basic doctrines of the New Church are, encouraging questions and discussion.

The nineteenth of June is called “New Church Day,” the birthday of the New Church.

All of you young people who read these notes, whether you were “born in the New Church” or not, have been providentially brought in contact with its teachings, for nothing ever happens which is not of the Lord’s will or of His permission. This means that in each one of you the Lord sees the potential of understanding the teachings of the New Church and living according to them. This gives each one of you a serious responsibility of thought and conduct. Some people, even some members of the New Church, imagine that if we say that the church of which we are members is the one true Church, the final Church prophesied in Revelation, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, we are setting ourselves up as better than other people. But if we do not so proclaim our Church and its teachings, what we are really doing is refusing the particular task to which the Lord in His wisdom has called us. We know that every individual is different from every other and that only the Lord knows each of us through and through.

It is only as we accept whatever of blessing and of trial is given us as a gift from the Lord and use it to the best of our ability in the service of the Lord for our own growth and for helping our neighbor that we can develop spiritually and eventually become angels. Notice how humbly John, even after all that the Lord had permitted him to see and hear in his vision, “fell down to worship at the feet of the angel.” John did not set himself up. Yet John realized that it was his particular duty given him by the Lord to proclaim to the world what had been shown him by the Lord.

There are good people in every church and in every religion. We learn from the writings of Swedenborg* that every person who believes in a God and tries sincerely to live as he believes that God would have him live is a member of the “church universal” and will ultimately get to heaven, because, even if he has not in this world had an opportunity to learn the truth about God and the right way of life, he has desired it and will welcome it when he is told it in the other world; but those who in this world have persistently refused to learn or even try to learn because they preferred to think and do as they pleased will continue in the same desire when they reach the other world and so cannot be taught there. But the Lord has always provided that there be in this world a “church specific” which shall have access to all the genuine truth which the people of that age can understand. So there have been several “dispensations” of the Church in the course of history, all leading to this final one.

The opening of the inner meaning of the Word by the Lord in His Second Coming teaches us certain basic truths upon which no other church in the world is founded. The first and most important of these is that there is one God, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that the trinity called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three separate persons but are in the Lord Jesus Christ—divine love, divine wisdom, and divine proceeding or activity—just as will, thought, and act are in each one of us. The second is that certain

*See, e.g., AC 6637, HH 328, 381, NJHD 244.

books of our Bible are the Word of God which, in their original languages, were verbally inspired by God in such a way that they express in earthly form—the forms in which God expressed Himself when He was creating the universe of nature—an internal meaning which we may study to eternity, always learning more about the Lord and what He would have us love and think and do. The third is that each of us is free to choose whether he will serve the Lord or himself, and that on our own free choice in this world will depend our state to eternity.

Adult

Be sure that all in this class know the facts concerning New Church Day and the Second Coming of the Lord. Then take up the correspondence of the Bible lesson, emphasizing verses 7 and 14 and their specific meaning for every member of the New Church.

As an adult each of us has his or her own life to live from day to day, his own background and abilities, his own tastes and temptations, his own education, his own daily work, his own friends, his own opportunities. Only the Lord knows just what each of us is and how far he is doing the best he can with his life. But wherever we go there are rules which we must observe if we wish to be accepted and liked, rules for the care and conduct of our homes, rules for our offices, jobs, schools, and laboratories, rules for our social activities, rules of the road. Rules are what make all our activities orderly and safe and enjoyable. Should we not expect to have rules for our inner spiritual life which will make our thinking and feeling as well as our actions orderly and safe and enjoyable?

The word “church” has several connotations: a building, a small group of people, a local organization, a national or world organization, religious thought in general, or a particular system of doctrine. But in every connotation the word “church” implies and assumes recognition of God, and churches differ primarily according to the concept of God to which they are dedicated, and this concept is a matter of doctrine, of specific belief. If we have no

specific belief about God, about who and what He is and what belief in Him involves we are not really members of any church.

We know from the Word and from history in general as well as from the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg which, as members of the New Church, we professedly accept as authoritative, that every dispensation of the Lord's Church on earth has declined and come to its end because its own people refused to trust and obey the Lord as He had revealed Himself to them, and chose instead to worship "the gods of the nations round about."

Our New Church is still in its beginnings. It is small and not too widely known in the world. How sincere are we? Have we studied its teachings and accepted them freely and intelligently? Do they inspire us? Are we trying daily to live better lives by their help? When we come to church on Sunday, do we come willingly and eagerly to worship the Lord the Savior Jesus Christ as God, the one only God of heaven and earth? When we have a problem to solve, do we study it in the light of the teachings of the Lord in His Second Coming? Do we accept our difficulties and trials as opportunities to learn? Do we listen sympathetically to the troubles of our friends and neighbors and try to find and bring them thoughts from our doctrines which will really apply to their specific problems and help them? Do we refrain from criticizing and condemning others because they do not agree with us or do just as we do? It is the Lord who builds the Church, the church universal, which He sees as one man, and also the church specific, which He declares to be the "heart and lungs" of that man, a specific organ with a specific function. Our Church is the church specific for the new age. We help the Lord build it only as each of us tries continually and steadily to learn and live its teachings.

The New Jerusalem is the city of doctrine in which, as our chapter tells us is the "pure river of the water of life" and the tree of life whose leaves are "for the healing of the nations." "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads." (Revelation 22:3-4)

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 944: “Behold, I come quickly; happy is he that keepeth the prophecy of this book, signifies that the Lord will certainly come, and give eternal life to those who keep and do the truths or precepts of doctrine of this book now opened by the Lord.”

Apocalypse Explained, n. 948³: “What the Divine Providence of the Lord was in revealing Divine truths can be seen from the successive establishment of churches. There have been several churches on our globe one after another. There was the Most Ancient, that was before the flood; there was the Ancient, that was after the flood; then the Hebrew; and then the Israelitish; after this the Christian; and now the New Church is beginning. Inmost Divine truths were revealed to those who were of the Most Ancient Church; more external Divine truths were revealed to those of the Ancient Church; and most external or ultimate Divine truths to the Hebrew Church, and afterwards to the Israelitish, with which church all Divine truth finally perished, for at last there was nothing in the Word that had not been adulterated. But after the end of the Israelitish Church interior Divine truths were revealed by the Lord for the Christian Church, and now still more interior truths for the church that is to come. These interior truths are such as are in the internal or spiritual sense of the Word. All this makes clear that there has been a progression of Divine truth from inmosts to ultimates, thus from wisdom to mere ignorance; and that now there is a progression of it from ultimates to interiors, thus from ignorance again to wisdom.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What special day are we celebrating? *New Church Day*
- P. Why do we celebrate it? [*see TCR 791*]
- J. What happened on the first New Church Day? *the Lord sent his apostles throughout heaven*
- J. When was that? *June 19, 1770*
- J. How did the Lord tell His disciples He would come again?
“in the clouds . . .”
- J. What did this mean? *through the letter of the Word*
- I. Why did the Lord have to make this Second Coming? *to reveal needed new truth*
- J. Why did He not come again in a physical body? *not necessary*
- P. From what book of the Bible is our lesson for today? *Revelation*
- I. What is the book of Revelation? *closing prophecy of the Word*
- P. To whom was this revelation given? *the apostle John*

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- P. At the beginning of our chapter what did John see? *river*
- P. Where else have we heard of the river and the tree of life? *Genesis 1*
- I. What does the river picture? *truth from the Lord*
- I. What does the tree of life picture? *that all good and truth are from the Lord*
- S. What did John teach us when he fell at the feet of the angel? *angels are men*
- I. Why do some believe that the angels are a separate creation? *wrong translation of Psalm 8:5*
- I. How may we know that they were all once men? *from what the angel told John*
- I. Why did the first Christian Church break up into so many sects? *lacked truth*
- S. What makes the Church on earth? *people loving and living divine truth*
- S. What important instruction do we receive in our chapter for today? *the Lord has a use for us in His New Church*
- S. What are the distinctive doctrines upon which the Church of the New Jerusalem is founded? *(1) Doctrine of the Lord, (2) Doctrine of the Word, (3) Doctrine of Freedom*