

# The General Conference of the New Church

## APOCALYPSE STUDY GROUP

Presentations made at the launch ceremony  
The Apocalypse Pictures – Hayes Conference Centre  
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### GETTING INTO THE APOCALYPSE

#### Part 2 – Rev Michael Stanley

##### Introduction

- We have just heard how, when the Lord manifests himself to us as people of his church, he points out some of both our good and our bad points, ones that we should be able to immediately acknowledge.
- But then he ‘knocks on our door’ so to speak, asking to be let in into our deeper, more inner self. It is this ‘letting him in’ to our deeper selves that enables him to begin to advance us spiritually by triggering aspects of the ‘apocalyptic experience’ that is so graphically presented in the rest of the Book of Revelation.
- Only in this way are we enabled to see the negative developments that inevitably take place **unconsciously** in each of us, as in any and every aspiring member of the Church (viz. the hidden Pharisee side of our religious attitude).

## Illusory Heaven Formation (often referred to in the Writings)

### Slide 1

*“Then I saw a new heaven...  
for the **first heaven**...had passed  
away”*

Rev 21:1

Christian communities as the **Church** are ideally meant to be a form of heaven on earth. Outwardly or morally they usually are, though inwardly, that is in terms of members' motivations for the good that they do on a daily basis, this often may be far from the case. Then they (or such members) could be said to be only a **quasi or illusory** part of **heaven** on earth.

Swedenborg often witnessed such quasi heavenly communities in the intermediate World of Spirits, ones which had formed over centuries, calling them **quasi, 'as-it-were' or illusory heavens** which appeared to be set on hilltops, raised up above others. These, he said, are referred to by John near the end of Revelation as the '**first heaven**' which passed away after the tumultuous events of the preceding chapters.

In what Swedenborg often calls the genuine sense of the Word that relates to each of us personally (the 'church' in each of us), these 'first' or illusory heavens represent the way in which our human ego (proprium) **unconsciously** builds up a sense of our own goodness, wisdom and righteousness in many of our day-to-day relations with others. As a result, impure states are formed in us in whom we have a kind of false sense of our being quite heavenly, based heavily on our faith, good moral behaviour and good deeds. Half-consciously, we feel ourself to be so much better than the 'seedy and immoral' secular world around us.

## **Examples of Hidden (i.e. Unconscious) Impure or Negative States**

Without our being aware of it, our attitudes and behaviour may often be affected by hidden motives such as the following.

- Doing good for the sake of merit, reputation or reward.
- Attributing any good we do to ourselves.
- Telling others (from a position of superiority) what they must believe and do/not do [by 'Getting on our high horse' and/or taking the moral high ground].
- Developing an attitude of exclusivity and superiority towards those who differ from our beliefs and moral code.
- 'Hardness of heart' – or lack of compassion - the fault which Jesus pointed to in his very own disciples.
- In summary, unconscious Pharisaism.

## **Collapse of Illusory Heavens**

In the World of Spirits Swedenborg witnessed many of these quasi heavens collapsing, falling, and being destroyed at the Last Judgment which took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> C – catastrophic events which he says are symbolically depicted in the Book of Revelation.

So also, any part of **us** that **unconsciously** retains a false sense of being morally elevated or quite heavenly needs to be brought out into the open, i.e. revealed to us consciously, and then to collapse and be destroyed by the inflowing Spirit of the Lord. That is a key part of the Judgment process that is described in such vivid symbol form in the Book of Revelation.

## **Dynamics of the Apocalyptic Transformation**

So a major part of Revelation is concerned with the Judgment process, seen as the **Fall and Destruction** (or 'passing away') of our Quasi (False) Heavens, to make way for the descent within us of the purity of spirit represented by the Holy City, 'coming down out of heaven from God'.

## Parable of Wheat and Tares

### Slide 2

#### **APOCALYPTIC CLEANSING**

REVEALING (of 'Tares' in our Illusory Heaven)

- of hidden spiritually impure states ('Tares')

SEPARATING ('Wheat from Tares')

- of what is pure from what is impure

PASSING AWAY ('Burning the Tares in Fire')

- the revealed and rejected impurities

DESCENDING (of the Holy City)

- of pure heavenliness  
'out of heaven from God'

Swedenborg refers us to how the apocalyptic process was succinctly outlined for us by Jesus in his well-known parable of the Wheat and the Tares. This process is summarized in the slide above.

#### **Selection of more of Roland's Illustrations.**

##### **Strong Spiritual Centre** (within us)

Several of the images in Revelation are of angels in heaven rejoicing in what is happening, and praising God for it all. These images represent the spiritually strong inner part of our consciousness, close to God, that witnesses with joy the cleansing process going on within us. This is the source of inner strength that can carry us through the spiritual destruction of negative or distorted elements that are coming to light.

- **16.** Acknowledging, praising and glorifying the Lord. Angels and the 144,000 on Mount Zion.

**Revealing** of hidden (i.e. unconscious) spiritually negative developments within us.

So our inner Book of Life begins to be opened up, and hidden negativities emerge from within into our conscious awareness.

- **5. Breaking Open of the Seals of the Lamb's Book -**  
revealing what is hidden. First, we witness how spiritual states that we have initially received in a pure state from God have unconsciously declined in spirituality from having 'life' to becoming 'dead' and lifeless.
- **6. Four Horsemen** Decline from purity [Opening of Seals 1-4]

In this next illustration our imaginary heaven of 'spirituality' and righteousness is revealed, threatening our rebirth as a true 'son of God'.

**Dragon in Heaven.** Living in an Imaginary Heaven (an aspect of our Pharisee state)

**Dragon** = self-righteous stances and attitudes (e.g. biting criticism)

**Pregnant Sun-Woman** = new birth, rebirth, regeneration

### **Fall and Destruction of the First (or Imaginary) Heaven**

For this imaginary heavenly state to collapse, we have to begin to correctly distinguish between our good and bad motives, and have them clearly separated out from each other.

- **15. Harvesting the Grapes** Separating out of what is good in us from what is bad.  
**Good** (White) Grapes (144k + those in White Robes) = what is pure  
**Bad** (Red) Grapes = what is impure

Now can come the collapse and destruction of the hidden distortions of our spirituality, expressed under several powerful images.

- **18. Destroying** – 6<sup>th</sup> Seal, Scarlet Woman, Babylon, Lake of Fire.
- **8. Great Earthquake** (6<sup>th</sup> Seal) cf. Jesus' apocalyptic prophecy of the Second Coming:

**Sun** (of self-love) turned black;  
**moon** (of faith in ourselves) turned blood-red;  
**mountains** (of our supposed spiritual elevation) collapse.  
**Babylon** as the symbol of our spiritual authority to dictate to and manipulate the spiritual life of others can now be seen to collapse.

- **19. Fall of Babylon:**  
**Millstone** = weighted down by falsifying of truth  
**Unclean birds** = impure thoughts;  
**Scarlet Woman** burnt = hypocrisy seen for what it is.
- **21. Last Judgment and Lake of Fire** – symbols of the ultimate separation of the good from the bad in us. We observe what is bad being relegated to the rank of ‘pits’ that we see to be burning with the lusts that we have now turned from with horror.

### **Descent of the Holy City**

Now that the ‘tares’ have been completely separated out to burn harmlessly beneath us, a new Spirit – the Spirit of God – is able to descend from our inner heaven, and radiate out through our earthly life. The whole process of apocalyptic cleansing and rebirth reaches its glorious conclusion, enabling the glory of God to shine through.

- **22. Descending** of genuine heaven from God – the Holy City as a Bride