

Behold! The Lamb Of God! **A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Reuben P. Bell**

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

Christmas--the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ almost 2,000 years ago, and celebrated (by no accident) at the darkest time of the year. There are many themes woven into the Christmas story. But of all the themes in the Biblical narratives, we return most often, it seems, to the theme of *light*--to the primeval archetypes of darkness and light. Is there a more basic metaphor in the human experience?

With almost gnostic precision, the Apostle John tells us of the Lord of light, who came into the world to bring us everlasting life, and to make us "children of God":

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, that was the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth [John 1:1-14].

The Lord was Divine truth incarnate, who said to us "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Our lesson from the *Apocalypse Revealed* has a lot to say about light. It tells us that when we encounter images of light in the Word, we are to think of Divine truth, streaming in from the spiritual sun of heaven. Because light and truth are linked in use--they correspond--and the Lord *comes to us* across discrete degrees of order from His abode above the heavens by means of correspondence.

And truth? We know about truth in *this* church, if nothing else. We love truth. The Writings for the New Church proclaim themselves to be the Lord's Second Advent by means of the internal sense of the Word--

Divine truths locked up for *centuries*--finally disclosed and taught in those thirty volumes of doctrine... truths to lead us to the good of life. And these truths are what make the New Church *new*. But what *is* truth?

Now this is an important question--not just an academic pursuit--because if the Lord *did* come into the world as truth incarnate, we must define this thing very closely. Why? To understand truth is to know more about the Lord. And that is always good. Let's see what the Writings can tell us about truth:

All truth is from good, for it is the form of it, and all good is the inmost being of truth. Good when it is formed, so as to appear to the mind, in speech is called truth (Apocalypse Explained 136).

Truth is the *form* of good; that is, when good is formed so that it can be intellectually perceived, then it is called truth (Arcana Coelestia 3049). In the Word the Lord is called Jehovah as to Divine good; for Divine good is the very Divine. And the Lord is called the Son of God as to Divine truth; for Divine truth proceeds from Divine good, as a son from the Father, and also is said to be born (Arcana Coelestia 7499).

Divine good can in no way be and exist without Divine truth, nor Divine truth without Divine good, but one in the other, mutually and reciprocally.... The Divine good is the Father, and the Divine truth is the Son (Arcana Coelestia 2803).

So truth, according to this series, is the very nature of Divine good itself. Since good is of the will, and thus not immediately available or even *apparent* to us fallen humans, it needs a form; a shape, a skin, an external aspect, or *something* we can see. And that is just what truth is. Who was born on Christmas day? Jesus Christ, the *form* of Divine good itself, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Someone we can see. Now if we can see Him, we can strive to imitate Him. And that is called regeneration. That's the whole idea of truth: every building project needs a set of instructions.

So we have truth... *loads* of it--in the Word itself, and in the internal sense of the Word, revealed in the Writings for the New Church. And that's wonderful. But you know, like everything else in *this* world, there can be complications.

There are some other teachings about Divine truth, that reveal the *great power* in it, and also tell us what happens when we forget that good and truth are supposed to go together. Truths serve as weapons of destruction in spiritual warfare, and they are necessary if we are to overcome the falsities that the hells use against us in the great battle for our souls (Arcana Coelestia 2686). And truth is *powerful stuff*. It has to be. In its pure form--the light that flows into heaven from the sun there that is the Lord Himself--it would burn us to ashes, if it weren't accommodated--filtered a bit--into a less potent form, that we can use (Divine Love & Wisdom 110). This filtered form is the Word, and the Writings, but BEWARE: there is great power in these as well. Like any weapon, truth must be handled very carefully, and it must be used in a proper and responsible way. And we must also remember that using truths to overcome the hells and using truths in our daily activities--in discussions and conversations and all our interactions--are two different things.

Truth, used alone, by itself--without the good that is supposed to be there with it--can *destroy* the people around us by its ability to cut to the *heart*--of their intentions, their expectations, and their motivations--sometimes before *they* know what these really are. And it leaves no room for negotiation--no room for improvement, or starting over. Truth alone does not teach, or lead--it condemns, and it leaves no survivors. The *Arcana Coelestia* tells us that "in the other life, truths separated from goods appear as arrows" (Arcana Coelestia 2686:6). I guess they would.

Now as a weapon in the war against the hells, this is great, because *this* battle is for life or death. But for daily use, around the house, in our jobs--around people who are not our enemies, but just plain old regenerators like ourselves, we must be very careful that we 1) use truths only in the presence of good, and 2) use them very cautiously even then. Pick your weapons carefully. Truth can kill.

There is a beautiful flowering plant native to Europe, with flowers like little purple thimbles. From the dried leaves of this plant, called *Digitalis purpurea* we get a powerful drug called *digitalis*, that can restore a failing heart to normal for a considerable period of time. It remains an important drug, to this day. But the dosage is interesting--and kind of scary: as little as a tenth of a *milligram* per day. And if you get too much? It will stop your heart.

Save a life, or stop one; all from the proper, careful use of a powerful agent for good. Truth is like digitalis: it must be used wisely, and with great care, with the *good* of the person always in mind. And there we have the *good* that goes with the *truth*.

So what does all this have to do with Christmas? Well, we found that the Lord came to us as "the light of the world," and we found that light signifies truth, so we made *that* connection: The Lord was Divine truth, come into the world in human form; Divine good Itself, but accommodated to our reception in the *form* of truth. (That is why He called Himself the Son.)

And we learned that *Divine good can in no way be and exist without Divine truth, nor Divine truth without Divine good, but one in the other, mutually and reciprocally...* and you don't want to try to use truth by itself, because it's just too dangerous. You've got to combine truth with good when you are using it around the house.

What does this have to do with Christmas? The Lord is Divine truth Itself--infinitely powerful; more powerful than you or I can imagine, and He decided to visit *this planet* and bring *that truth* to bear on the evil that was about to engulf its people. It was an urgent situation, that demanded such a drastic remedy. And so Divine good descended into this world in the form of all truth; *Jehovah bowed the heavens*, we read in Psalm 18, *and thick darkness was under His feet. He made darkness His hiding place, darkness of waters, clouds of the heavens. At the brightness before Him His clouds passed, with hailstones and coals of fire.* That's powerful.

So how *did* Divine truth come to us? How *did* the "light of the world" make His entry into this world of darkness? What did John the Baptist say, when he saw Him coming; walking toward him at the Jordan River?

Behold! The lamb of God! Lamb??? All this power, in the form of a man, and John calls Him a lamb? That's right. And he knew just what he was talking about. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. A baby, wrapped in a blanket. The *power of the most high*, wrapped up in the innocence of an infant. Divine truth, yes, but wrapped up in all the

good that the Lord could muster in this world. Of course! Can you *imagine* that much truth, by itself, alone, to work its work of destruction? Short work, at that. Imagine! No freedom; no second chance; no reformation or regeneration; no process; no covenant; no Savior; and worst of all, no Friend of the human race. Just judgment: *in or out* that day, and the job is done. The Lord did not choose that kind of mission on this earth 2000 years ago. He came to bring us life, not death: *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. Judgment tempered with mercy. Truth conjoined to good.* That is the way the Lord Himself operates, to leave us the room (the freedom) to bring our lives into order and to follow Him to His kingdom in heaven.

And we must do the same. We have lots of truths. The Lord has decided that we should receive them at this time in history: the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, to open up the infinite truths of the Word. But we must handle His truths gently and carefully with one another, as we use them, to correct and lead, and reform, and teach, but *never* to cut, or tear, or kill.

We must always serve up His truths with equal measures with good, to our families, to our friends, to people at work, to the people we meet, to people we don't even *like* very much. Because truth applied as a weapon *is* a weapon.. and you'll be sorry if you use it that way. But will this work? Will anyone buy the strength of your truth if it's all wrapped up in "love your neighbor as yourself?" Can you make an argument or take a stand while "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you?" Can you still be strong, using truth all wrapped up in good?

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

Of course you can! It worked on the shepherds. They came and saw the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and they helped spread the news. It worked on the "Wisemen" from the East: they believed. It will work for you. And it will transform the people around you. This is the magic of Christmas: love, come down from heaven, in the form of truth, but "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." AMEN
Lessons: Isaiah 11:1-6, Luke 2:1-20, Apocalypse Revealed n. 796