

WINGS FOR THE NEW CHURCH
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“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent”(Revelation 12:14).

The woman was to make use of the wings in order to raise herself into the air and receive protection from the serpent. It seems to be an obvious statement, since such is the function of wings. But let us look into the internal sense and we will see that the subject is how the Church is to receive intelligence by means of the truths of faith, which are represented by wings. Then we can conclude that sometimes we tend to ignore this use of wings. Sometimes we forget that truths are to be applied to a use if we want them to provide our elevation to a heavenly degree of life.

Throughout all the Word, the Church of the Lord is represented by a woman. She is mentioned in different ways according to her state, but especially as a bride and a wife. In this part of the book of Revelation, the woman represents the Church that is to exist henceforth. She is specifically called the New Church, that spiritual institution which was seen by John, also in form of a city called the New Jerusalem. It is the true Christian religion that the Lord is establishing in the hearts of those who “keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:18).

The woman was seen clothed with the Sun because she abides in the love to her Master and Lord, the Sun of the heavens. Loving the Lord is to acknowledge Him and keep His precepts (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 533). The moon under the woman’s feet signifies the faith of this Church being applied to the natural

facts and experiences of life. The stars above her head are the intelligence and wisdom that proceed from the Word and that will exist in the Church (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 534). She was pregnant and “cried out in travail, and was in torment to bring forth”. This represents the difficulty we have receiving these spiritual teachings in our daily lives, since we have to give up our own bad motives and wrong concepts.

Besides the pain and suffering felt by the woman, the most obvious negative factor present in John’s vision was the serpent or dragon standing just in front of her, ready to devour the child after He was born. Such a dragon signifies the falsities of those who err about a God in three persons, and about a faith separated from charity. These concepts are against the truths of the New Church and are constantly attacking them (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 537). Therefore, owing to such a danger, the woman received two wings of a great eagle so that she could fly to the desert and be safe from the dragon’s attack. It is more than obvious that if she were to remain at that place, the dragon would succeed in devouring the child immediately.

John’s vision was a prophecy, as we are taught, about the persecution which comes to all those who embrace the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church. Many of us have already experienced open attacks on these chief points of our belief: 1) The Lord Jesus Christ is the only God; 2) Salvation is a matter of conjoining our belief with a life of shunning evils; 3) Heaven is inhabited by angels who began as men and women on this earth; 4) Spirits are people who have just died, and are present with man; 5) Marriage is between one husband and one wife, and is to endure forever if they are regenerated together. Sometimes these attacks are by means of contempt and mockery, sometimes by means of hatred and offensive aggression. Often we are called heretics, and such an accusation causes real pain in our hearts. However, what else are we to expect from a serpent

of hatred? Still, the Lord is our defense against such dangers and attacks, and He promptly provides the means of protecting His beloved Church.

Sometimes He defends us by providing a sword for us to fight, or sometimes by providing a relief, an escape, as in the case of our text. Two wings of a great eagle were the means of escape for the woman, for the combat against the dragon would be waged and won by one of the Lord's societies of angels, called Michael.

Wings are mentioned in many passages in the letter of the Word. They represent the truths of faith (*Arcana Coelestia* 8764) and the power that the truths have to elevate the understanding, just as wings elevate birds to the sky. Wings are like arms for birds; therefore, they represent power, just as arms do. It is due to the power of the truths that the angels were seen as having wings, and in the Word they are called cherubim and seraphim (although angels are men and women and actually do not have any wings).

Like powerful and wide wings of a great eagle, the truths of faith elevate the understanding of a faithful person of the Church into higher dimensions of spiritual life. Whenever we learn truths, our understanding is being furnished with wings, as it were, making us able to mount up and reach the heavenly light in which the angels are. In its due progression, the truths will cause the understanding to see things from a higher perspective, viewing the cause behind the effects, and the ends of things. The ability of seeing things from a higher point of view in a clear light, is called perception, which is represented by an eagle in the letter of Word.

Wings by themselves cannot give a bird the ability to fly, as even a child knows, since many birds have wings and cannot fly. It is the same as stating the simple fact that having the truths of faith in the understanding does not assure salvation. The truths

of faith must be employed with effort and zeal on the natural level of our lives in order to provide spiritual elevation; otherwise, they cannot protect us from the evils and falsities represented by the dragon. The woman was given a pair of wings, but it was up to her to spread them for flight with sufficient vigor and disposition in order to elevate herself to the skies and be liberated. Only taking flight could endow her with freedom and security. *“They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary...”* (Isa. 40:31). “To mount up” or “to fly” in the Word represents the elevation of the understanding and perception, that is, a clear vision which is provided by truths (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 561, *Apocalypse Explained* 281, 282).

Flying is an interesting phenomenon that appears to be simple, but in reality is quite complex. In order to fly, a combination of various elements is necessary: the right weight of the body, the span of the wings, the action of flapping, and so on. Scientists discovered long ago that four forces act on a flying body. Some say that these four forces must be in balance so that the body may climb and stay in the air, but it really seems that two of these forces must be stronger than the other two.

The first acting force, called gravity, causes a body that has mass to have weight and consequently to be attracted to the ground. In the spiritual world, this force exists powerfully as well; it is the tendency of every human being to sink into worldly things, into selfish feelings and attitudes, consequently into the hells that are below. Evils and sins are really powerful forces that drag our souls downward to the hells. In the spiritual world, hereditary evils, as well as the evils that are added by our own acts and intentions, are the measure of our weight. As a result, this weight determines the intensity of the spiritual gravity upon us. We read in the *Writings*:

Both falsity and evil are heavy, consequently both sink down; but still it is evil which makes heaviness in the spiritual sense, and thus sinks down just as from a weight; but not falsity by itself except from the evil which is in it; for from itself falsity has no weight; but from evil it has its tendency to sink (*Arcana Coelestia* 8298).

In another place:

The interiors of man together with his sensuous things are lifted upward by the Lord when the man is in the good of faith and of charity; but if he is in evil and falsity, then his interiors together with his sensuous things look downward, thus only to the things that are in the world, whereby he puts off the human nature, and puts on the bestial; for wild beasts look downward, or only to those things which are on the earth. He who looks downward, wills what is evil and thinks what is false, but he who is lifted upward by the Lord, wills what is good and thinks what is true; the uplifting by the Lord takes place actually, and from this a removal from evils and falsities (*Arcana Coelestia* 6592)

That is gravity. Now in order for flight to succeed, a second force is necessary that must overcome that of gravity. It is usually called lift, and it is provided mainly by the wings. Due to their shape and the action on the air flowing over their surface, wings generate a sustained lift of the body, thus overcoming gravity and making flight possible. The *Writings* explain also this second force:

The evil which is in man continually reacts against the good which is from the Lord. Evil from what is hereditary and from what is actual,

adheres to man in each of his thoughts, nay, in the least things of his thoughts. This drags him downward while the Lord, by means of the good, which he instills withholds him, and uplifts him, so that the man is held suspended between evil and good. The consequence of this downward tendency is that if even for the least moment the man were not withheld from evils, he would of himself rush downward (*Arcana Coelestia* 2410).

The third force that operates on a flying body is called drag, a kind of resistance to advance. It drags you backwards, owing to the body's weight. This resistance is due to inertia, and everybody needs to overcome inertia in order to move forward from his place. Such a resistance or inertia also exists in the spiritual world. It is a kind of sphere of lethargy, which carries away everyone's belief, leaving them with illusions about God, regeneration and the means of salvation (see *True Christian Religion* 619:1-3). Such is the influence that comes from the dogma of the Christian Church. We feel this lethargy acting on our disposition every time we decide to move a step forward in our regeneration. That is the reason why it is easier to be useless than useful, to be lazy than engaged in work, to remain still than to move forward in the path of regeneration.

In order to overcome this third force, or drag, we must employ the fourth force, which is impulsion or traction. With the birds, such a force is provided by their flapping their wings, making a movement in the air like rowing. This action impels the body forward enough to compensate and overcome inertia. In an aircraft, this force is provided by the propeller or jet thrust.

Without propulsion or traction, a bird would not go anywhere, but would fall down, because no traction means no lift, either. Without a significant effort to progress in our regeneration, lethargy or idleness will cause us to sink down in selfish and

worldly things. When a bird is not flapping its wings in the air, it is not really flying, but just gliding, that is, it is constantly descending. Gliding is not like flying but is just a way of surrendering slowly to gravity. Eventually, the ground will be your destiny! For the same reason, when we stop using the power of truths in order to fight against evils, thus to elevate ourselves above the love of self and love of the world, we cannot remain on the same level of spiritual life. We start to sink down instead.

In order for us to be elevated to a higher level of intelligence, we need to employ truths with courage and effort, obeying what they say, which, in short, is shunning evils as sins. Every progress and elevation on a spiritual level requires effort, constancy and vigor. Otherwise, one is subdued by those two contrary forces, from hell and from oneself.

In order for us to succumb to the forces of hell dragging us down, all we have to do is—nothing! It is enough just to stop fighting against the evils of our old will. By contrast, in order for us to gain lift and sustain it, a real effort, a determined reaction against lethargy and selfish attractions, is absolutely necessary. The life of heaven is a life of effort and activity:

The delight from good and the pleasantness from truth which cause blessedness in heaven, do not consist in idleness, but in activity; for in idleness delight and pleasantness become undelight and unpleasantness; but in activity delight and pleasantness are permanent and constantly uplift, and cause blessedness (*Arcana Coelestia* 6410).

Eternal rest is not idleness, for from idleness come languor, torpidity, stupor and drowsiness of the mind and so of the whole body. These are death not life, still less the eternal life in which are the angels of heaven. Eternal rest, therefore, is a rest which dispels them, and makes a man

live. Such rest can be nothing else than something which elevates the mind, and therefore some study and work whereby the mind is aroused, vivified and delighted, being thus affected according to the use from which, in which, and for which the work is done. (*Conjugal Love* 207).

The birds were created with wings, but the effort of using them to fly is what birds have to do as of self, on their own. The Lord, by means of the Scriptures and the Doctrines, gives the truths, but the effort to use the power of these truths in order to resist evil is the effort that we must make as of ourselves.

From our innate nature, we are heavy and dull. We are prone to live more on the dust of the ground than in the heights of skies. It is just natural. We love to live bound to the things of the senses. However, the Lord has created us to reach for the sky. The rational ability He gave us is our spiritual ability to fly. It is important that we learn to use the power of truths of the Church to modify our lives, by desisting from evils because they are sins. We cannot neglect learning truths; even less can we neglect to follow and obey the truths we already know, and to follow them with due care and diligence. For this is the only way we have to reach the real purpose of our creation. We are to maintain our level of spiritual life, not just be gliding down from a higher point to where we have been in the past. We were created to be flying high and far towards our destination, above the motives of a selfish and worldly life. The continuous exercise of truths to resist evils will make us fly high and far afield towards the purpose of the Lord's love.

The woman received a pair of wings to fly to a place where she would be preserved, out of the reach of the dragon, until the certain time mentioned in our lesson. Both time, times and half a time, and twelve hundred and sixty days mean that the New

Church will at first be among few. During this time, the Church will be as in a desert, isolated, protected, until the falsities and evils of the former Christian Church are judged. Then the New Church will spread to “its appointed state” and will be with a large number of people (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 547). The falsities of the former Christian belief must be removed before the New Church grows up.

Those who have heard the Lord’s invitation and have already come to embrace the New Church truths ought to make use of its teachings in order to elevate themselves above their former lives. But this elevation depends on their will, their effort, on their own or as of themselves. As they learn to fly, they will gain courage and confidence in the Lord, until the time comes when there will be no more danger of an attack from the serpent below. For “...*they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint*” (Isaiah 40:31). Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 40; Revelation 12; *Divine Providence* 20

The Rev. Cristóvão R. Nobre was inaugurated into the priesthood at Bryn Athyn Cathedral together with several other young men, in June 1984 and ordained into the second degree in Brazil in August 1985. Cristóvão found the New Church through a



book by van Dusen, and eventually contacted the Rev. Andy Heilman then resident Pastor to the Society in Rio, Brazil. He heard the first New Church sermon by the Rev. Figueredo, and was baptized after more reading and study. He began serving first as Minister of the Rio de Janeiro Society in Brazil in 1984, then as its Pastor in 1985. He and his family travelled to Church services first in Rio and then Campo Grande every Sunday, visiting the isolated, and working on translation from the Latin into Portuguese. After a well loved service of 20 years, he retired in 2004,

continuing as a part-time Translator of the General Church. Cristóvão lives with his wife Cleia (de Souza) in Alcobaça Brazil, but they are also seen in Bryn Athyn or Colchester.



Professor Charles S. Cole was so very active in the field of New Church Education, as a Teacher at the Academy of the New Church schools, and as Dean of the College. He was also President and Chairman of the Swedenborg Scientific Association which publishes the New Philosophy. His support for students attending the British Academy Summer Schools is legendary. He and his wife Karen have been welcome in numerous places round the world at Church occasions. Charles S. Cole passed away on May 18th 2008, aged 92.