Maine Association Sermon
October 14, 1962

"For there shall be no night there."
- Revelation xxvi,25

Isaiah lxii
Revelation xxvi,1-3, 10-12, 22-27

Psalm 122
New Book of Worship, Psalm 122, p.83

There is a state of unrest in the religious world today. It is not a state of conflict, in which the lines are definitely and distinctly formed, but rather it is a state of dissatisfaction with old views, a relaxing of old denominational ties, a lack of interest in religious dogmas, and increased interest in what are called practical good works. People of different religions never regarded each other with so charitable a spirit as they do today.

This is somewhat as it was when the Lord came on earth. At that time the Roman empire was dominant. It was supreme in government and in influence in Europe and in a considerable part of western Asia. It, too, was tolerant of opinion, provided the opinion did not interfere with the essentials of government. The Jews were tolerated, and enjoyed freedom of worship. The temple at Jerusalem was even rebuilt for them under a Roman governor. But the central government would not allow any authority to be set up that might be opposed to the governing body, and the Christians were persecuted because it was thought that in the worship of Christ they were setting up a kind of monarchy within the state.

A new era, however, had dawned upon the world, and Rome was unable to turn it back. Truth has the power to overcome difficulties and to prevail over error. The Apostles went forth to proclaim the truth by voice and by pen. Neither principalities nor powers could stop the advance of the new revelation, and in 325 A.D. the Roman emperor himself, Constantine, presided over the celebrated assembly of Christians at Nicea. The work of the early Christians was to make the Word of the Old and New Testaments the common possession of men.

In the New Testament it was predicted that the First Advent would be followed by the Second Advent, that the whole Word would be perverted as the Hebrew Scriptures at the Lord's time had been made of none effect by the traditions of men.

This Second Advent has taken place and a new era has dawned upon the world. This new era was introduced through the revelation given by the Lord through Emanuel Swedenborg, in which a rational understanding of the Lord God is given, a new understanding of the Word, and a wonderful setting forth of the nature of the spiritual world and of how men find their places there.

A few men at once recognized the unique character of the knowledge of the new era, and in the Lord's providence felt impelled to proclaim it. Just a few, convinced of the greatness of the new knowledge, met together to talk over the wonderful happenings, and they felt urged to tell others of the great blessing they had found.
The world at that time was vastly different from what it is now. Popular education was unknown. The perverted religious doctrines were taught, and mental darkness on all the vital things of life everywhere prevailed. But a new era had dawned, and people began to look at life from a different point of view. The value and importance of knowledge began to be recognized, and scientific investigation opened up the secrets of nature. Also the desire for the betterment of the states and lives of people and nations began to develop.

The source of the enlightenment of today is the Second Advent, wherein the true nature of the Bible and the relation of this life to the immortal life are made known, together with the responsibilities involved. Hitherto religion has been looked upon as more or less a matter of faith, and not directly associated with life. Now it is seen to be a matter of life.

No human ingenuity or schemes can bring peace to a distracted and divided world. To bring about this peace the teachings of the Second Advent were given to the world. Their message is necessary to the well-being of the individual and of the world. The world, we believe, is moving on to a period of love and brotherhood, but it can do so only as it responds to the new spiritual forces inflowing from above.

But such a state cannot be attained without truth - or doctrine - truths which instruct and convince. There is much foolish shunning of doctrine, but doctrine is merely knowledge put into practical form. Doctrine is teaching, and what, for example, is a sermon if there is no teaching in it. It gets nowhere. If we are to advance, it can be only by means of ideas, of truths, that satisfy the reason.

We are living in an age of discoveries on the plane of nature, because of discoveries in the plane of the spirit. How much is still unknown about the world! How much we have yet to learn about it! The fact is that mankind is just beginning to learn in all the fields of human knowledge. The day in which we live is but the dawn of a day which will forever increase in brightness. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, 0 city of God."

The Holy City of John's vision, descending from God out of heaven to the earth, is generally recognized as representing the Lord's Church, for it is written, "And the Lamb is the light thereof." John's vision was of a city because in the Word a city is the symbol of the Church as to its doctrine or teaching. It pictures the Church as to its ability to receive and to impart the truths of religion received from the Lord who is its central light, the origin of all truth. We all know that even in a worldly sense a city means more than the assembling together of buildings and streets. That is only the outside. The real city is the intelligence, the desires, and the spiritual aspirations of those who live therein. And we know that cities have their character from the people who dwell in them. Sodom and Gomorrah are called cities of iniquity, but Jerusalem a city of truth.
We can not have a city of truth, a life freed from falsity and evil, unless He who is the truth makes known His will to us. Of ourselves we cannot climb to it. It has to be revealed. The Holy City revealed to John in vision is a picture of the truth that will, if learned and put into practice, make all things new, enabling man to live in peace in this world, and qualifying him for eternal happiness in the life hereafter.

The central fact about this city is that the Lord is the light of it. If there is no darkness in it, no sorrow and sin, it is all due to the presence of the Lord, for all blessings flow from Him as their Cause.

A doctrine of faith and life that will enable us to live and work, a doctrine that disturbs nothing but darkness and floods the mind with light and healing, which banishes mystery and lifts our thoughts from things purely material to the eternal values, showing us how to live that the Lord may be present with us and bless us is indeed the Holy City.

And it is solely for our good that these truths have been revealed. We read in AC 8413, "The man who is being regenerated is not deprived of the delight of the pleasures of the body and lower mind, for he fully enjoys this delight after regeneration and more fully than before." We have only to live within the City to find out and to proclaim with gladness its truth.

If the external organization of the New Church in the past generation has declined, it is only because its members have forgotten that they must dwell continually within the city of revealed truth, because that is where the Lord dwells and without the Lord we can do nothing. There are those who only see the apparent decline of the organization without seeing its cause, and imagine that the New Church is dying or being absorbed into the former church. Let us not make this mistake. The New Church is just in its beginning. It is passing through the inevitable temptations which always beset a new spiritual beginning in the world or in any one of us as an individual. The New Church is really the new system of truth revealed by the Lord in His Word to meet the needs of the new age. It is the Holy City New Jerusalem coming down to earth from God out of heaven, of which He is the Light and the King. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end," Of this Jerusalem He said, "I will defend this city for mine own sake."

Amen