

Religion is of life, and life of religion is to do what is good

(Doctrine of Life 8)

The New Church is an international organization of people striving to improve their conscious relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, the one God who rules heaven and earth.

We extend a warm welcome to everyone, and invite you to take what you like and return it freely. We use the Bible and the Heavenly Doctrine revealed by the Lord and published by Emanuel Swedenborg to guide us in our lives, especially in our relationships. We freely share our love and understanding with each other, and try to give one another support in our spiritual journeys.

Our pastor is **Rev. Garry Walsh**. Garry grew up in the Hurstville congregation and is pleased that together with his wife and children, he is able to serve this group as their pastor. He is available on call to help people work through any of the life issues that affect their relationship with themselves, their neighbours and their Lord.

Worship Services are held each Sunday at 10:00 AM. **Sunday School** for children ages 0-14 runs concurrently with the Sunday Worship service. In summer there is child minding during the services.

Young People's Group is held every second week.

Doctrinal Classes are held on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of each month (summer excepted) beginning at 7 30 pm. Tea and social precede the class on the first Friday each month at 7.00 pm..

Discussion classes on fundamental New Church teachings are held on Wednesdays at 10.00 am.

The Swedenborg Bookroom, at 22 Dudley Street, Penshurst, contains books by and about Emanuel Swedenborg for sale or loan. It is open by appointment.

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Call or come at anytime.



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society April 2004

Is There Such A Thing As A Personal Devil?

A study by Rev. Garry B. Walsh

The idea of the personal devil

The idea of a personal devil has been a strong feature of Christian theology. This is not surprising since the Bible seems to describe such an individual. A striking example of this is the forty days that Jesus spent being tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Luke 4: 1-13). It seems from this story, among others, that there exists a single individual with the power to manipulate human lives, and on occasion, to tempt even the Lord Himself.

Despite fairly frequent references to “the devil” or “Satan”, the Bible tells us relatively little about “him”. The pronoun “him” has been placed in inverted commas, because, as will be seen later, there are good reasons to question whether such personalized language is warranted. “He”, for lack

of a better pronoun, first appears in the book of Genesis in the form of the serpent that deceived Eve. This was the deception that turned mankind against the will of God and so saw the eviction of Adam and Eve from their Garden of Eden. “He” also appears at the very end of the Bible, as the “great, fiery red dragon” of the Book of Revelation that sought to devour the child born of the woman clothed with the sun.

The devil as a fallen angel

In between the Genesis and Revelation accounts, the devil, or Satan, is generally viewed, not as a serpent or dragon, but as someone in human form. This is not to say that the devil is seen as being human the way you or I are human. Instead, the devil is seen as being something or someone who has existed from before there were humans. Where, you might ask, might this idea have come from?

Much of the modern Christian world’s thinking regarding the existence and nature of the devil seems to have been moulded at least as much by John Milton’s famous book *Paradise Lost*, and by Dante’s *Divine Comedy* than by the Bible itself. However, we find that *Paradise Lost* in particular uses the Bible as its inspiration, basing its images of the devil on a few verses appearing in the 14th chapter of the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. There we don’t find the devil under that name, but, under the name “Lucifer”. We read:

- 12 “How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
13 For you have said in your heart:
‘I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.’
15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,

(including the Ayers family – can we come too Carolyn?) before heading to the British Isles to begin a working holiday of unknown duration.

While we are losing Carolyn and Naomi for a while we will be happy to welcome **Brian** and **Claudia Horner** for a couple of weeks in May who are coming back to visit family and friends.

Coming Up In May

In early Autumn last year we held a **BBQ Social** following church that was so successful that we thought we would plan another one this year. The date we are aiming for is the first Sunday in May which is the **2nd May**. Please keep your calendars open for that date and stand by for more information.

Also, sometime in May we need to hold a **Work Day** to catch up on normal maintenance on the property. The **Property Trust** will decide a date during its meeting on **Tuesday the 6th of April**. Note that this is a midweek meeting rather than after church.

Society Meeting April 18th

Please mark your calendars with the above date. This is one of two Society meetings we have each year (apart from the AGM) so try to make it if you possibly can. The agenda will include planning for **June 19th**, more details about the Hurstville Society’s major outreach activity based on the **Rise Above It** workshops on the Ten Commandments and developments in the church on music.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Dot Heldon** (2nd), **Ted Simmons** (6th), **Brandon Hinds** (10th), **Naomi Heldon** (20th), **Brian Walsh** (31st)

Graham Horner has also recently spent time in Sydney. Graham required an operation on his shoulder that was brought on by years of heavy lifting. We understand that the operation went well and that he is recuperating at home in Tamworth.

What's more, the Horner family is excited by the arrival of a new baby. **Ken and Kerry Horner** who live in Singleton have announced the arrival of a baby boy, their second child. Both mother and baby are said to be doing well. We don't have a name for the baby as yet.

Congratulations to **Sam Johnson** who has recently completed a two year course giving him a Diploma of Computer Graphics and Animation. Maybe the world can now look forward to some even more exciting computer games coming on the market in the future.

On a more sombre note but with what seems like a happy ending, **Rhonda Hall's** husband **John** has recently undergone surgery for a thyroid condition. The difficult operation is believed to have gone well, but unexpected and severe complications while John was in recovery almost cost him his life. Swift action by Rhonda together with hospital staff managed to bring the problem under control. John is now recuperating at home and should make a full recovery.

Dave Buck was also in hospital recently. He experienced breathing difficulties during the night and was taken to hospital as a precaution. He seems to be doing well.

March has also seen **Tom Taylor** spend some time at a respite facility. This short break allows **Shirley** to catch her breath before she continues to provide all those little things that Tom now needs help with since he lost his leg.

Looking ahead to May two of our young people are setting off on more adventures. **Naomi Heldon** will be visiting a number of countries around the world and meeting up with her many friends. **Carolyn Heldon** is planning to visit the USA and Canada also catching up with lots of friends

To the lowest depths of the Pit.

Picturing hell

Lucifer, we have just read, is defined as being someone who has fallen from heaven. Because heaven is not clearly described in the Scriptures, scholars throughout the years have tended to create their own interpretations of what it is like. Often it is seen as a place that was created independently to the earth and whose residents, the angels, are distinct from human beings. This thinking comes in part from places like Psalm 8 where we hear the well known words:

- 4 What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
- 5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And you have crowned him with glory and honor.

This passage can make it sound as if mankind is a distinct step below angels. As we ponder that idea, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew word rendered "the angels" here, is actually the word "Elohim". This is a word that seems to have originally meant "God", singular, or more precisely, someone with the attributes of God. In Jewish tradition however, the word can also be used to describe a collective of supernatural god-like beings rather than a single individual. If we take the word "Elohim" in the traditional Jewish sense to mean a group of people rather than an individual, it can be argued that if Lucifer were once in heaven, he must be one of these supernatural and god-like beings himself.

New Church ideas of angels

New Church teachings present a very different picture of angels. The Writings teach that the purpose of the Lord's creation is a heaven from the human race. Angels therefore, rather than being a distinctly different branch of creation to human beings, are in fact human beings themselves. They are people who had once lived in this natural world and who had subsequently been led by the Lord into the heavenly realm for which they were created. Not all people allow themselves to be led by the Lord however, and therefore not all people who have lived in this world become angels. This,

though, starts to get into the subject of human freedom and regeneration and is best left to another study.

This New Church understanding of angels as being former earth-dwelling humans calls for a complete re-evaluation of the nature of the devil. Part of this re-evaluation can involve a study of the literal sense of the Word itself. We begin to do this by examining the previous passage from Isaiah chapter 14 where the one and only biblical reference to Lucifer exists.

Putting Lucifer's fall in context

Verses 12 through 15 of this chapter are frequently quoted by themselves. This means that they are often taken out of context. If we put these verses back into the context of the chapter they came out of, a different picture may begin to emerge.

This chapter of the book of Isaiah makes up a portion of a series of prophecies, (you may even call them promises), that Isaiah was instructed to record. In the introduction to the prophecy found in chapter 14, we find the words:

³It shall come to pass in the day the LORD gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, ⁴that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say:...

Prophecies against the king of Babylon

Following this we hear a series of prophecies against the king of Babylon. It is worth reading the whole chapter if you have a chance, especially the beginning through to verse 22. The words, "How you have fallen, O Lucifer" form part of this pronouncement to, or rather against, the king of Babylon. Since the kings of Babylon were very real people living in this world, we can see that verse 12 is not referring to some supernatural, god-like person. It is referring instead to a very ordinary human one(s).

News Notes



March has been a month of highs and lows for the Hurstville congregation. On the positive side, it was wonderful to be visited by **Bishop Peter and Lisa Buss**. Bishop Buss led the doctrinal class on Friday the 19th and also led the worship service on Sunday the 21st. As is usual for a Bishop's visit, the attendance at both Friday's tea (supper) and class and Sunday's worship were very pleasing.

We will have to insist that we get as many Bishop visits as possible in the future, with their wives if they can, to keep up the spirit of enthusiasm and community.

Also joining us for the weekend of the Bishop's visit were **Philip and Eleanor Richards** from Canberra. Philip and Eleanor have become fairly regular additions to our congregation. Their presence here is always more than welcomed.

March also saw a visit from **Tracey Hinds** and her children. They spent the weekend in Sydney to visit Tracey's mother **Kaye MacFarlane** and their grandmother **Dot Heldon**.

It is especially nice to have an extended visit from **Grace Horner** who has travelled down from Ogunbil near Tamworth and is staying with daughter **Margaret Heldon**, husband **Owen** and family. She is very much a part of this congregation and is missed while she is away. Grace should be in Sydney until after Easter.

Vera Glenn of Bryn Athyn, former teacher and now keen gardener, in her book, "Heaven in a Wildflower" writes:

A truly beautiful garden, the external and the internal, is the Lord's doing; nothing would grow without His heat and light, His love and wisdom. I realise that I only serve as an undergardener. So, humbly, I tend my spiritual garden, pulling out that nasty thought, nurturing and feeding that tender affection for truth, trimming away the tangled growth of woody self-intelligence and all the time thanking God for the beauty of His creation, and the daily strength He gives me to bring fulfilment to my life.

Planned Giving Position

Applications are being accepted for the position of **Planned Giving Coordinator** by the Joint Planned Giving Committee of the Academy and the General Church. This is a temporary, part-time, contract position, beginning in June, 2004, for a one-year trial.

This is a professional position, reporting to the Development Officer. Responsibilities will include: educating people about the benefits of planned giving; contacting those interested in making planned gifts to the Academy, General Church and/or their local church society; providing liaison with legal, tax, financial planning, insurance, real estate and other professional advisors, as needed; and requisite computer skills.

Some travel is expected. Appropriate college degree, certification, applicable experience, desired compensation, and proven track record of success should be provided. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity or national origin.

A letter of application, with resume, references and supporting information should be sent to: Bruce Henderson, Development Officer, Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009. For further information, please call 215-938-2526.

The Writings make several references to this prophecy. In many of those references, the Writings, rather than saying, "king of Babylon", say instead "king of Babel". The reason for this is that in the Hebrew the same word can be rendered either way. The Writings describe them as being interchangeable in meaning. The word "babel" refers back to the story in Genesis chapter 11 where the people tried to build a tower with its top in heaven in order that they might climb up to there. It was then that the Lord confused their language with the result that the people could no longer understand each other and were subsequently scattered over the face of the earth. The word "babel" literally means, "confusion". It is interesting that this name, meaning confusion, carried over to become the name of the great Babylonian empire.

Babylon means "confusion"

We can see by extension that the prophecy against the king of Babylon is literally a prophecy against the king of confusion. Or put another way, the prophecy is against the one who reigns over confusion. The Writings tell us that "kings" and "rulers" in the Word represent the truths of that nation. All nations have ideas that they hold in common. These are their "truths" so to speak, even if some of these ideas may not be completely true in and of themselves.

Ideas that are really true, that is, ideas that accurately reflect something about the Lord and His kingdom, will by themselves, never confuse anyone but will bring clarity into people's lives. Confusion only begins to occur when there is a mixing of what is really true with what is false. Babylon therefore, because it means "confusion", represents a state of life where this mixing of truth and falsity has occurred.

It is possible to see the effects of a mixing of truth and falsity if we look to examples in the Word itself. In order to do this we turn to the place in the Old Testament where the word "Satan" first occurs. Here we find a story where King David's thinking became confused and he subsequently commanded a course of action that went against the clear instructions of the Lord.

King David's poor decision

¹Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. ²So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it."

³And Joab answered, "May the LORD make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?"

⁴Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore Joab departed and went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem. ⁵Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to David. All Israel had one million one hundred thousand men who drew the sword, and Judah had four hundred and seventy thousand men who drew the sword. ⁶But he did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

⁷And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel. ⁸So David said to God, "I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly." (1 Chronicles 21)

This passage mirrors a passage that had appeared in the 2nd book of Samuel. What is interesting is that in Samuel we read that, "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel" (underline added), and it was He who "moved" David to commission the count of the people (see chapter 24 verse 1). How might we account for these two different descriptions of why David did what he did? Was it Satan or was it the LORD who confused David's mind and moved him to this decision?

The Lord is never angry

The answer starts to become clearer when we consider the teachings that state that, despite what the 2 Samuel account might literally say, the Lord is never angry. Anger is beneath the Lord and is contrary to His very nature.

Spiritual Gardening

by Norman Heldon

Since there is so much high-rise living, fewer people have gardens to cultivate. Also many young people have other activities that interest them more. They wouldn't even recognise a Dilatatum if they tripped over one! Dilatatum? Paspalum weed of course! An English poet and nature lover wrote:

Where would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wilderness, let them be left,
O let them be left,
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

A fine poet, but Gerard Manly Hopkins evidently didn't have a garden. "Long live the weeds." Not so, Gerard.

However, we are all gardeners of one kind; we tend the spiritual gardens in our minds. We either cultivate the good thoughts and affections of truth, to which the beautiful and useful plants correspond, or we cultivate the weeds that correspond to their opposites.

It all started with the people of the Most Ancient Church, represented by Adam and Eve. From having enjoyed a beautiful celestial state, being taught directly from heaven and likewise children trusting in the Lord, they thought they could decide for themselves what was good and true. Their Garden of Eden state, formed from the love and wisdom received from the Lord, was destroyed. "Thorns and thistles," evil thoughts and affections began to infect their minds. We could picture their surroundings changing too, the earth at first being a lovely and fruitful place, weed free in fact, but after their fall being infested with troublesome, even poisonous, plants.

Our minds too are certainly not weed free, but if we are good spiritual gardeners we can recognise these troublesome and poisonous plants, dig them out, pull them up.

to the Lord will always try to manipulate people. They will always try to inspire thoughts and feelings that they hope will move a person away from the Lord and towards them. It is not that they are trying to simply increase their hellish communities. Instead, they are trying to reel in new people who they can manipulate and even torture.

Isaiah 14 describes Lucifer's fall. His name literally means "light-bearer", or "morning light". Every one of us begins life with so much promise. Yet, some people choose to oppose the Lord and take a life path that heads away from Him. It can seem as if their morning light goes out. We may see a little of this tendency in ourselves at times. However, even at times when we sense we are off course, hope is not lost. The Lord's Word brings the promise of His continual work to steer us in the direction He would have us go. For this reason we find the words in the book of Revelation,

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power...and I will give him the *morning star*"

(Rev. 2: 26, 27, emphasis added).

In addition, the Lord also says in Revelation,

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches, I am the Root and Offspring of David, the bright and *Morning Star*"

(Rev. 22: 16, emphasis added).

The Lord is the Morning Star. He is the new beginning. No fall from the ideals of the Lord's way is irreversible. There is no overwhelming force like the devil to overcome. Instead there are only depraved and desperate souls from hell who really have no power over us unless we give it to them. The real power rests with the Lord alone. And "Behold", the Lord says, "I make all things new" (Rev. 21: 5).

Therefore, it can only ever appear as if the Lord is angry. This appearance of anger can come about when disease, destruction and misfortune are attributed to Lord when they should be attributed to human evil. Because people tend to see a direct connection between some event and its evil cause, they often resort to blaming the Lord. People tend to either blame Him for directly causing the bad thing, or He is blamed for His lack of willingness to stop it. The result is that the Lord can be seen as callous or even arbitrary in His dealings with people.

There are other interesting differences between the 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel accounts, not all of which are necessary to consider here. One difference that is worth thinking about is the issue of why it was that David ended up feeling remorseful for his actions. 1 Chronicles says that "God was displeased" with the count and struck Israel in response. This also sounds like a very un-God-like action. This reaction from God is seen as being the catalyst that made David reflect and admit, "I have sinned." In the 2 Samuel account we read that "David's heart condemned him", prompting him to once again admit to the Lord that, "I have sinned" (verse 10). In neither case does David seem to have any knowledge of the forces that prompted his call for the count. The result is that neither Satan nor the Lord were directly blamed, even though the stories suggest that one the them should have been.

Identifying why we might experience hell

Just like David's situation, most of us will struggle to try to identify why we might think and feel certain things and why we might speak or act in certain ways. We know that the Lord is never angry and would never inspire us to do unkind or immoral things. Could there, however, be a personal devil or Satan at work in our lives? Would this account for the hellish motivations that sometimes infiltrate our lives?

The Lord, in the New Testament may seem to support the idea that Satan is working within people. In the 16th chapter of Matthew, we hear the Lord telling His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and be killed

before He could rise again. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him, suggesting that such things could never happen to Him. How did Jesus respond? He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me Satan!” (verse 22).

Could a personal devil or Satan have been manipulating Peter that day? If the devil was manipulating Peter, was he also manipulating the Jews who Jesus addressed in the 8th chapter of John? There Jesus says,

“⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer at the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

How many people can the devil manipulate?

If both Peter in one story and the Jews in another were being manipulated by the devil, is it possible that no one is free from his grasp? When we think about the evil intentions and indeed actions of the men of Sodom before that city was destroyed, we may wonder whether there is any limit to the number of people who can be controlled by the devil at once (see Genesis chapter 19).

We can picture someone potentially being able to manipulate a single individual or perhaps even a small number of people at the same time. It is much more difficult to imagine someone manipulating hundreds, even thousands or millions. Yet, that is exactly what people tend to assume sometimes. There is a tendency for people to look at their own thoughts, feelings and actions and to attribute anything evil to the devil. There may be an even greater temptation to think we see the work of the devil in others. We all know that there are things within us that rightly belong in hell. Therefore, if the devil were to be controlling everything hellish, he must be powerful enough to influence almost everyone.

No individual could do all this

It doesn't take long to realize that the notion of a single person called the devil influencing everyone's life is impossible. It would require the devil to be everywhere (except heaven perhaps) at once. This would make the devil omnipresent. And, we know, that omnipresence, along with omnipotence and omniscience (ie. in all places, with all power, and with all knowledge), are attributes that can only be ascribed to the Lord. For the devil to be omnipresent he would need to be more than just god-like, he would need to be God!

Clearly the devil, if he (or she) were even to exist, could not be everywhere at once. Indeed, the Writings make it clear that the devil isn't even present in hell. By this we mean that there is no individual called the devil who either lives in hell or actually runs hell. In the book *Heaven and Hell* we find this teaching:

People in the world still believe that there is a devil who rules the hells and that he was created as an angel of light but was cast into hell with his gang after he led a rebellion. The reason for this belief is that the Word talks about the devil and Satan, and about Lucifer as well; and in these cases the Word is understood literally. However, in these passages the devil and Satan mean hell... We can also see that there is no devil to whom the hells are subject from the fact that all people who are in the hells, like all the people in the heavens, are from the human race, that there are millions from the beginning of creation to the present day, and that everyone there is the kind of devil he or she became by opposition to the Diety while in the world.

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There is no personal devil, but there is a Lord who can make all things new

So, there is no personal devil. However, having said that, we are still all subject to hellish influences to one degree or another. Those in opposition