

Religion is of life, and the 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 9 30 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.

Our Address is 22-24 Dudley St., off Hillcrest Ave. in Penshurst
Tel (02) 9580-1589. Fax (02) 9570-8447
Email: newchurch@optusnet.com.au

<http://www.newchurch.org.au/hurstville>

Call or come at anytime.



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society February 2005

The Only Way To Think And Live

by Rev. Garry Walsh

One man's discussion with his English teacher

Some time ago, as I was browsing through the shelves of a mainstream Christian video and book store, I found and ultimately purchased a 3-volume series of videos by an American Christian preacher by the name of R. C. Sproul. This particular collection of videos covers a series of 8 talks based upon the so-called "I am" sayings of Christ. These are all sayings which come from the Gospel of John. I found the videos fascinating. Part of the reason for this is because, to me, they captured what I understand to be the prevailing way in which the established Christian church understands the nature of God. As an example of this, consider the following condensed version of Sproul's own account of a conversation he had with an openly atheistic English teacher while he was in college.

Teacher: Do you believe that Jesus is the *only* way to God?

Sproul: Yes... ..He teaches that He is the only way.

Teacher (after accusing him of being a bigot and other similar things):

How can you believe in a God that only gives one way?

Sproul: That is the thing that amazes me, that He gives *a* way!

(Sproul then goes on to speak of the sacrifice and atonement of Christ in fairly typical fundamentalist Christian terms.)

What I find fascinating about Sproul's description of Christ being the *one* and *only* way, is the assumptions that this description necessarily makes about the nature of God. This is something we will consider further in a few moments. In the meantime, we will consider how it is that Sproul and many, many others like him, have come to the types of conclusions they have come to.

Quotes from the Word can be used to support almost any idea

Sproul, when elaborating on the conversation he had with the English teacher, also quotes the well-know passage from the 7th chapter of Matthew that says:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

In addition, he quotes the equally well-know passage from the 14th chapter of John that says:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

This latter quote completes the Lord's thought that starts with the message that, "*In My Father's house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you.*"



Ministers and wives: Jenny & Brian O'Neill, Dick & Gill Keyworth, Mandy & David Millar, Lyn & Bruce Williams, Ian & Margaret Arnold, Laurel & Garry Walsh, Pam & David Moffat, Ruth & Julian Duckworth



Young People Back Row: Sam, Alex, Julian, Sam, Jason; Middle Row: Loretta, Angela, Joel, Sophie, Lisa, Michelle, Michael, Rebekah (with Klaire); Front Row: Scott, Kristen, Naomi

Camp 2005

Glorious and refreshingly mild weather greeted the more than 120 campers who attended the very first Queensland camp held at Alexandra Headland on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane.

Most mornings were filled with a variety of age appropriate sessions based to one extent or another on the camp theme of “Covenants” involving our relationships with the Lord and with each other. In addition there were a number of optional sessions later in the afternoons or evenings that provided plenty of extra interest. There were sessions on marriage relationships with Brian O’Neill, sessions with Kevin Attwater on Chakras, Healing and Meditation and Brazilian Toe Massage, two angel services and a singing group with David Moffat.

There was also lots of time for recreation. The afternoon focal point for many was the pool. For others it was the nearby beach. There were trips to Steve Irwin’s (The Crocodile Hunter’s) Zoo and shopping expeditions into the Sunshine Coast hinterland. There were explorations around the resort city of Noosa. Evenings were filled with bush dances, trivia contests, two lively debates and a talent show that just kept going on and on (it’s amazing the talent that comes out of the woodwork).

Among it all, there was time to spend with friends old and new. And, throughout it all, there were enough different types of worship opportunities to help us never lose focus on the fact that it was the Lord who made all this possible.

It was over all too soon but many are already planning to attend again next year most likely at Phillip Island in Victoria (confirmation of this is expected soon). A huge vote of thanks to all the hard working Queenslanders who put so much effort into making the camp a success.

Birthdays

Birthday Greetings to **John Hicks** (9th), **Mike Lockhart** (11th) and **Kathryn Kennedy** (24th)

Taken together, these passages can appear to be saying that *most* people in the world are on the wide path that leads to destruction. And, by comparison, relatively few are on the narrow path that leads to life. Or, put another way, few are currently going by the *one* way that is Christ. The passages also *seem* to be saying that a place in God the Father’s house is reserved for those who, while they were in this world, had come via the way that is Jesus Christ.

Certainly this is the way that much of the orthodox or fundamentalist Christian world views the things that the Lord has taught. They look at the world and they see people who are non-Christian, and they believe, based on the doctrine of the church, that those people are doomed to destruction. They look at people in the Christian world who don’t seem to be living according to “the way” or who don’t proclaim their personal salvation in the way that they understand to be “the way”, and these people they also believe are on that wide path to hell. What this type of thinking does, of course, is to reduce to a narrow the sub-set of people those who are seen to be on the right path and who are following “the way”. And this sub-set, obviously, is made up of people who are, for the most part, just like them.

Seeing ourselves as one of the “elect”

It is incredibly easy for a person to look at passages such as Matthew 25:32, 33, which talks about the separation of the sheep and the goats, and to be certain that they are one of the sheep and that those other people over there are the goats. Or, to be certain that I will be one of the “elect” gathered up the Lord’s angels at the end of the age (Matthew 24:31), while those other people who aren’t like me will be cast into the sea of fire or killed by the sword (Revelation 19:20, 21). Something within every human being (to varying extents) likes to feel like they are one of the “Chosen People.” This of course, is a human tendency that is not limited to the Christian world. One look at the strife in the Middle East or in a country like Sudan shows that it is a challenge that spreads across the full spectrum of humanity.

Underlying assumptions about God

Here we turn again to the question posed a little earlier. What does the Christian position regarding salvation, as described by Sproul in recalling

his conversation with his English teacher, suggest about the underlying assumptions that are being made regarding the nature of God? Take a moment, if you would like, to think about this before reading on. It may well be that your thoughts about what is being said about the assumptions regarding the nature of God, are different in some ways to mine.

Here is what I see to be the assumptions, the false assumptions I might add, that are being made about the Lord. Firstly, Sproul's stated position seems to suggest that salvation, or a place in the Father's house which is essentially the same thing, is only possible when a person goes through the historical figure that is Christ. Or, put another way, salvation is only possible if a person is a "Christian."

What is being said here, if I hear Sproul correctly, is that most if not all people *before* Christ, and non-Christians in all their various forms *since* Christ, are doomed. Now in order for this to be true, it appears to me that God the Father must either a) have not cared and must continue not to care, about all those people who aren't "Christian". He seems happy, or so it seems, to let them all be condemned to an eternity of torment and torture. This is the case despite the fact (and virtually all people who have any belief in God at all seem to agree with this), that God is the Creator all those people. In other words, God is a cruel, heartless and arbitrary monster who is happy to create humans even though He knows they will ultimately suffer for all eternity. Or alternatively b) God must be so limited in His ability to save people from this eternal fate that the best He could do was open the one small way out. That "way" being, the historical figure of Christ. In which case, God is not omnipotent and therefore is not, by definition, God.

As suggested before, the Lord's Word can be used to confirm almost anything that a person wants it to confirm. In the book *Last Judgment* we find the teaching that says that unless the Lord's Word is correctly interpreted through doctrine, it tends to "cause people's minds to go astray in various directions" (LJ 14). The book *Canons* adds to this thought by describing how every heretical person can confirm their heresy by means of the literal message of the Word (Canons 45).

and their inner meanings. It is based upon a revelation about the laws of God's Divine Providence."

Among the thoughts offered by the Rev. Goran Appelgren was this simple idea"

"The New Church believes that Jesus is God and that the 10 Commandments should be obeyed."

So what do you, the reader, think the New Church is?

There are, of course, innumerable answers to this question. I am hoping that over the next several months we might be able to publish people's personal responses to this question. So, have a think about it. I look forward to hearing any thoughts that you have.

Garry



Cor and Sally Visser-Marchant acting on behalf of the New Church in Canberra have produced these sets of 4 mugs. Each of the 4 mugs displays a different quote from the Writings and are a good way of passively "breaking the ice" when it comes to introducing the church to others.

We are being told that each set costs \$20.00 including shipping and handling. Please contact Garry Walsh if you are interested in placing an order.

What do we say the New Church is?

One of the ministers in the General Church recently asked what seems like a very simple question. Finding an appropriate answer, though, has challenged New Church people from the very beginning. The question is, “What is the New Church?”

Some of the responses so far include one from Rev. Michael Gladish. He shared the mission statement that has been drawn up by the New Church group he leads in Calgary, Canada. The group’s name has come about because it is a congregation formed from the joining together of people from Convention and General Church backgrounds.

“The Calgary New Church Project exists to worship the Lord Jesus Christ by learning, living and sharing the spiritual understanding of His Word as revealed through the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.”

Mike also recalled a description of the New Church given by Rev. Kurt Nemitz. That description is,

“The New Church is not a sect of the existing Christian Church but represents a whole new form of Christianity based on the revelation of new insights about the Lord, His Word and the spiritual life.”

Rev. Don Rose offered the following thought. It is a passage that comes from *The True Christian Religion* no. 846.

“Then some of their wise men came to me asking, ‘What is the news from earth?’ I told them that the Lord has revealed secrets far exceeding in excellence any so far revealed since the church began.”

Rev. Rose also offered this thought:

“Our church is based on a revelation about the reality of life after death, the nature of heaven and the essence of heavenly happiness. It is based on revelation about the holiness of the Word of the Old and New Testaments

The heresy we are primarily focused on here is not one that we should necessarily feel inclined to accuse R. C. Sproul of. Nor, should we feel inclined to point the finger at others either. The point though is to show that if an initial premise is wrong, many of the conclusions that follow will be wrong as well. In this case, if someone holds the idea that God does not love all people equally, or that He shows favouritism in some way, then the conclusions that follow will be flawed. Of course, if someone does have these flawed ideas, we can reasonably expect that they will tend to feel as if they are one of the selective few who are on God’s favoured side. It seems highly unlikely that anyone would feel as if they are part of the group that is condemned.

Manifesting the love of self

What we are speaking about here, is a manifestation of the love of self. What this love does, as we well know, is to convince a person that their way of doing things is the best way, and to undermine, at least subconsciously, the things that are said and done by others. This problematic attitude and thinking is addressed repeated in the Writings. One example is *Arcana Coelestia* 2027.

People who attach merit to the deeds they perform in life do not have the faith that is grounded in charity,... for they do not wish to be saved by the Lord’s righteousness but by their own. That no faith grounded in charity exists with them, that is, no charity, is clear from their habit of putting themselves before other people, except insofar as the latter serve them. And those who are unwilling to serve them they either despise or hate. Thus through self-love they part company and never come together, and in this way they destroy that which is heavenly, namely mutual love, which is the mainstay of heaven (AC 2027).

It is one thing to wish that another person could see things or do things the way we as individuals see and do them, because, we care deeply for that other person and feel certain that a change in their life would be naturally and spiritually good for them. It is something entirely different to wish that

another person would change because we either don't like them, or, we are so in love with our way of doing things that we feel dismayed when others don't feel the same.

There is a strong human tendency towards selfishness. As a result, it is hard at times to feel in our hearts even the smallest echoes of the Lord's universal love towards all people. It can be a struggle to accept the God-given principle that states that the person over there who I disagree with, or who bothers me, is being led and cared for by the Lord in exactly the same measure as I am.

Because of this tendency towards selfishness, doctrines tend to grow within cultures and organizations that suggest that there is only one outward way to cooperate with God and therefore to get to whatever is seen to be the Promised Land. And, that "one way" is, for the members of that group, *their way*.

What does it really mean to go through Christ?

Having said all of this, we return to the Lord's own teachings in the New Testament and examine why it is that He taught that "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" From what has been suggested already, the way to "the Father" must be able to be found in other ways than being an avowed Christian in this world. This being the case, what then does it mean to go through Christ? And, what does the Lord mean when He says that He is "the way, the truth and the life?"

In the Writings we find that over 70 passages are given, at least in part, to answering these questions. In addition, we can say that in one form or another, the whole of the Writings addresses these issues, because, as we know, every part of the Divine revelation that the Lord has given us, ultimately tells the story of Him and of the path of our personal regeneration.

In brief, what the Writings say is that by "the way" is meant all of the true ideas that the Lord represented and taught while He was in the world. And,

subsequently, all of the teachings He gives us through His combined revelation. These are teachings that tell us who He is and how we should live (see AC 2333:4, 2531:4). "The truth", in comparison, is comprised of all those things that constitute or make up doctrine (ibid.) What this seems to be saying is that while "the way" involves individual doctrinal teachings, "the truth" paints a bigger united picture. It is like comparing the individual images of the Lord's Humanity to the overall and complete image. Or, it is like seeing the various parts of the Grand Man of heaven separately, rather than seeing them together and working in harmony. Finally, by "the life" we understand the thing that is the source of life itself, that is, the Lord's immeasurable and universal love, shaped by all those concepts that make up His "truth".

So it is, that every person who finds, accepts and lives some true concept regarding the Lord and life is, to some degree, coming to the Father via Christ. No matter what the cultural or religious situation of a person may be, if they are acting charitably for the sake of charity, they are on that right path. The bottom line is that everyone's life is measured by the rule of love. Of course, the more a person understands when it comes to how they should love, the more loving a person they can be in practice.

In this world, traditions, social pressures and simple selfishness (on the part of others as well as themselves) will prevent many people from being what we might usually call "Christians." The reality though, is that in the next life, although there are Muslim and other heavens dedicated to the various religious traditions, everyone there will ultimately be a Christian. This is because in heaven everyone will clearly see that the form of Christ is the manifestation of their God. Christ will become the object of their devotion and worship, even while they retain large parts of the traditions that have defined their culture or their religion while in this world. Stylistic preferences, to some extent, never go away. And, as people are withdrawn by the Lord from their selfishness, the feeling that others should do things our way will surely fade.

