

THE PURPOSE OF THE HURSTVILLE NEW CHURCH IS TO BRING YOU CLOSE TO THE LORD, HIS WORD, AND EACH OTHER.

We extend a warm welcome to everyone, and invite you to take what you like and return it willingly. We use the Bible and the Heavenly Doctrines 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 journey.

Pastor Rev Garry Walsh became our new pastor in September when he returned to Australia after graduating from theological college in 2001 and spending 12 months as assistant pastor in the Oak Arbor Society near Detroit in USA. Garry is Australian and has a wife **Laurel** and 3 daughters.

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

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 on Friday evenings.

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

Call or come at anytime.



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2004

The Word, Its Meanings, And Eternal Life

by Rev. Garry Walsh

The Question

Throughout our world a great many people find themselves compelled to search for answers regarding the reality of life after death. And just like the rich young ruler who approached Jesus, we might be tempted to ask, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19: 16).

The answer to this question may seem obvious to those who are familiar with the Lord's Word. For it is in the Word that we find not only the question, but on multiple planes also find the answer.

The Word Holds Secrets

The *Arcana Coelestia (AC)* was the first fully-theological book published by Emanuel Swedenborg. It begins in dramatic fashion, saying, "The Word of the Old Testament contains heavenly arcana (secrets), with every single detail

focussing on the Lord, His heaven, the Church, faith, and what belongs to faith” (AC 1).

This statement flew in the face of the prevailing Christian dogma that often insists that the holiness and infallibility of the Bible lay entirely in its literal message. This notion of biblical infallibility does not come without its own questions. Many within the broader Christian community have tried to describe how this infallibility could have come to be, especially considering the inherent fallibility of the human authors. We read one possible explanation below:

Can the Bible be infallible if it is written by fallible humans? And if not . . . how can we accept it as literal truth?

There is no logical reason why this could not be true. After all, even fallible humans can get things right some of the time, *especially* if they are supervised by Someone who is infallible.

Christians do not claim that the humans who penned the books of the Bible were *always* accurate in everything they said or did. We simply believe that the Bible is right when it claims that God guided these men in their task of writing Scripture, in such a way that the result is an infallible book. The apostle Peter undoubtedly said some foolish things during his lifetime, but God did not allow him to clutter up the Bible with any of those blunders. 2 Timothy 3:16 contains the classic claim that the Bible was produced by God, not just men:

All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

One standard explanation of the concept of "inspiration" is given by Ryrie:

God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. (Charles Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972, p. 38)

We do not know exactly how God accomplished His purpose of providing a totally accurate Bible. But 2 Peter 1:21 gives some insight:

lessons. Deanna and Ashley are doing special course material that is already prepared. They will be very happy to show you their work and you may need to give them a hand occasionally. You will also get to keep an eye on Heather who will be amusing herself with toys nearby. If you can help please see Laurel.

News Notes

This year the **Harvest Festival** is scheduled for a family service on 14th March. As in previous years you are asked to bring fruit and/or vegetables which will be donated to the Exodus Foundation afterwards.

Trevor Favell has recently moved to Mary Andrews Village. He has comfortably settled in and is doing well. His new address is:

Mary Andrews Village
857 King Georges Rd,
South Hurstville, 2221

The office phone is: (02) 9547-2054. Trevor's direct number is (02) 9546 2007 and he would be happy to have a call from you. However it is best to avoid phoning during meal times which are 7.00 to 8.30 a.m, 12.00 to 1.30 p.m. and 4.30 to 5.30 p.m..

Patricia and Brian Walsh braved the rain last week to take **Shirley and Tom Taylor** and **Dot Heldon** to the Art Gallery of NSW to see **Michelle Heldon's** body of work in the current Artexpress Exhibition. They all thoroughly enjoyed it.

Our thoughts are with **Rhonda Hall** and her husband **John** who recently had a major operation. We are pleased to say that after some initial drama John is now home and progressing well on the road to recovery.

Deanna and Ashley Walsh have been doing well at Little Athletics at the Bankstown Sports Club. Deanna recently recorded a personal best in the high jump and Ashley won a gold medal in the 500 metres and a bronze in the 100 metres.

Rev Garry Walsh who is overseas until 3rd March attending Council of the Clergy meetings has also managed to spend a few days in Florida with Laurel's parents **Barry and Lynn Smith**. While in Bryn Athyn he has met with **Syd and Lib Heldon** and is staying with **Brian and Claudia Horner**.

(Birthdays are on the back of the calendar.)

Summer Camp 2005 – *Your attention* **NOW**

The next Australian New Church Summer Camp is booked at **the Uniting Church Conference Centre, Alexandra Headlands** on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland from January 10th to 16th. This will be the first camp held in Queensland. The location is magnificent, set amongst rainforest adjacent to one of the finest beaches in Australia. Summer camps are for everyone. They bring New Church people together from all over Australia as well as from overseas. If you haven't been before now is your chance to find out how special they are!

Recently some of our readers will have received a letter from the organisers for this camp, Julie Barnes, Anna Duff and Rev Ian Arnold, inquiring about your intention to attend. For those and others who are interested in coming the Brisbane Society of the New Church needs to know your intentions **NOW** due to minimum booking requirements. The standard of accommodation is excellent (yes, there are en suites!) and don't be put off by the prospect of Queensland in summer as the location is right on the coast and there are two swimming pools.

Please ensure you reply to the letter no later than 5th March. If you did not get a letter contact Owen or Margaret Heldon (02) 9545 3823 and we will supply you with more information and a form. Unless there is a positive feedback the camp will not be able to proceed so let's all support the Brisbane Society in their effort to make this a success.

Visit of Bishop Peter and Lisa Buss

We are looking forward to a short visit from Bishop Peter and Lisa Buss during March. They arrive on 18th and leave on 22nd. The bishop will give a **doctrinal class on Friday 19th** and because of this **we are moving the monthly Friday dinner to this day**. It would be helpful if you could notify Kerry Lockhart (02) 9570 4629 ahead of time for catering purposes if you are coming on that night.

Bishop Buss will also preach on Sunday 21st. We understand there is also a possibility that he will also visit for a week during November.

Occasional Help with Sunday School

We are looking for volunteers (anyone from teenagers to our older folk) to help occasionally with Sunday School. Please note that you DO NOT have to prepare

No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The word "moved" in this verse is also used in Acts 27:15 to describe the way a great storm blew the apostle Paul's ship off course across the Mediterranean. The people on board could spend the time as they chose (either bailing or wailing!), but the storm determined their destination of Malta. Similarly, God guided the writers of Scripture to produce exactly the message He wanted.¹

So what was the nature of the literal message that God wanted us to have? Was the message to be taken entirely at face value, or should we believe instead that the spirit of the message is more important than the actual words used in that message. We go again to a Christian website to see how others have dealt with this issue.

The Idea of Inerrancy

Some Christians believe that since the Bible is God's Word, everything in it must be absolutely, literally, scientifically and historically true. Anything less would be unworthy of God. According to this view, the Bible, in all its detail, is inerrant on matters of history and science, as well as of doctrine. Any apparent conflict between the Bible and another source (science, history, etc.) should be resolved in favour of the Bible because of its divine origin.

The Idea of Hermeneutics

By the mid-twentieth century, many Christians had taken a different view of the Bible. Although still believed to be inspired by God, it was not considered an infallible authority on matters of science and history. The Bible was now seen primarily as a book of spiritual and moral guidance. God had inspired its human authors to deliver His message to the world, but had left it up to them to express that message in terms of their own cultures.

In this view, many of the Bible's stories are historically accurate, but some spiritual truths are revealed through the common literary mechanisms of allegory, parable, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and irony that were never intended to be taken literally. Such mechanisms serve to "paint a mental picture" of ideas not easily expressed directly in words. The Bible reveals timeless spiritual truths about God, love, salvation, faith, morals and ethics that

¹As found at, www.Christiananswers.net

transcend the realms of science and history. We can appreciate the beauty of a sunrise whether or not the sun literally "rises" above the earth. In the same way, we can understand and appreciate the lessons of the Bible whether or not all its stories are true in a literal sense. Trying to force the Bible's stories into a scientific or historical framework debases them and obscures their true meaning and intent.

Conclusion

Just how much of the Bible should be taken as literally true is one of the hottest debates within Christianity today. Opinions range all the way from "everything" to "not much." However, the important thing is that we understand what God is telling us through the Bible and that we don't let arguments about the literal truth of the Bible distract us from that goal. Perhaps, with a bit of humility, we can admit that only God has all the right answers.²

The New Church Perspective

The teachings of the New Church provide an alternate answer to these two. An answer, that perhaps surprisingly, seems to agree with aspects of both of these alternatives.

When discussing the concept of spiritual and natural meanings within the Lord's Word in the little work called *de Verbo*, or *Word Of The Lord*, Swedenborg recounts this type of experience:

I have spoken many times with spirits who did not want to know anything about the spiritual meaning of the Word, saying that the natural meaning is the Word's only meaning and that it is holy simply because it is from God. They said that if a spiritual meaning were to be accepted, the Word in its letter would become worthless.

Many of them kept insisting on this point, but they received a reply from heaven that without a spiritual meaning in it, the Word would not be Divine. It is because it has a spiritual meaning as its soul that the Word is Divine, and, in fact, living, for without that meaning the letter would be as though dead. The very holiness of the Word consists in its

² As found at, www.twopaths.com

Director of Evangelisation, and followed through with his plan, of planting churches. He's done wonderful work on the Internet and on broad advertising, but focussing on the growth of congregations. So his dream of church plantings was something he introduced to the church. That's why we have Boulder, Seattle, and the Philadelphia New Church, we put resources into his plan.

We've had three times as many adult baptisms in the 1990's compared to the 1970's. That's real people coming to the church. I wish it were twenty times as many. We need to work on it. What do we need? For growth in a congregation we need the complete package. We need people who do a lot of things that we haven't really paid attention to. We need a good financial plan for every place we work at. We need to improve our marketing. We're babes in the woods in our marketing. We need local plans for societies, and we need both enthusiasm and work.

But what do I feel good about when I look at this church? Well, there are people, we know there are people who love the doctrines. We've retained our essentials in all respects, but we've loosened up in many other ways that were perhaps barriers to growth. Everywhere people are beginning to talk about growth and our young ministers and theologs are wanting us to do it better than we have.

So let's be grateful for where we've come from, confident the Lord will lead us into the future, and never mind the future. Tom Kline's going to be the leader and I can sit back and say, "Get to it, guy".

Greetings from Rev Doug and Christine Taylor

From our snow-bound home in Huntingdon Valley, PA (next to Bryn Athyn), the Taylors send greetings and thanks to the sunny Hurstville Society!

You all did so much to make our stay so very enjoyable – in telephone chats, visits to your homes, church events and outings. We have returned brimming with precious memories and photos. Our family members have all loved hearing about you all and about the great times we had with you.

Love from Doug and Christine. 5th February 2004

but he was bringing so many people into the church in the Chicago area they felt they had to get him into Theological School. And they did. And he went out west. There was almost nothing west of the Mississippi until Harold went out there. And he built several congregations through the incredible energy he put into it.

In the 1970's things began to pick up in evangelisation. Doug Taylor was keen on this work, he ran a radio broadcast in Australia for years and people came into the church because of it. So Bishop King, who was very supportive of this work, brought him back to the States to become Director of the Office of Evangelisation. Bishop King went on a fundraising effort to raise money for education and evangelisation. These endowments continue to make a difference for what we are doing today.

In 1977, Frank Rose, Tom Kline, Dave Simons, Harold and I visited the great Crystal Cathedral out in Orange County, California, where Schuler built a congregation of 28 into something in the thousands today. Schuler is an amazingly dynamic speaker. To me listening to him was an amazing experience because here was an evangelical minister, with whose doctrine I would quite strongly disagree, preaching very good moral sermons, and talking about all the excuses we had for not doing evangelisation. And he would dispose of all of the excuses that we had – such as about how we have this doctrine that's difficult to learn.

The Lord is not difficult to understand. He really doesn't make Himself difficult to understand. Schuller made a point that it takes huge work and a real commitment [to evangelise]. He said, "I guarantee you, if you knock on 6,000 doors, your church will grow. Because you'll find out what people need." He had this saying, "find a need and fill it, find a hurt and heal it". Well that's really good doctrine if you stop and think about it. The point is that when you ask people about what they need, we don't have to test the wind and give them anything they ask for. What you do find out is what they need and then see how the Lord can speak to that need through the Writings. Make your message meaningful. This made sense to me and totally changed my outlook.

And then along came Grant Schnarr. I could say so many things about Grant and what he did planting a church in Chicago, and discovering people's love for the New Church. Out of that Grant developed a plan. He became the

having a spiritual meaning . . .

But because the spirits who kept insisting on the literal meaning alone refused to be convinced by these arguments, the angels therefore presented many, many passages taken according to the natural meaning that could not possibly be understood apart from a spiritual meaning . . .

By these arguments the spirits were convinced that there is a spiritual meaning in the natural meaning of the Word, and that the real holiness of the Word still resides in its literal meaning, because all the inner meanings of the Word are there in their fullness. Moreover, they were led to see that the literal meaning clearly presents as well everything that teaches the way to salvation, thus everything that teaches how one is to live and believe... (de Verbo 5)

The External as Clothing for the Internal

We return to the Arcana and find there the teaching that the essence of the Bible's Old and New Testament Scriptures, lies in its internal or spiritual meaning, with the external or literal meaning acting like natural clothing, adapted to suit the developing states of mankind. "It is by virtue of the internal sense" we are told, "That the Word of the Lord is living. That sense is like the soul, whose body, so to speak is the external sense" (AC 1143).

The Arcana Coelestia, along with Swedenborg's other theological books, go further, suggesting that there might even be times when it is appropriate to ignore aspects of the literal stories completely, focussing entirely instead on the spiritual truths that lie within. There is a teaching that says, "The internal sense is such that every single thing has to be understood apart from the letter, abstractly – as though the letter did not exist" (AC 1404). If we can begin to do this, we start seeing a new world of wonders emerging from the pages of the Lord's Word. The literal sense is the vehicle through which discoveries on the spiritual level can be given to us. We can be introduced progressively into things previously unknown. We can begin "seeing a heavenly paradise by means of an earthly one" (AC 1772).

It can be seen, that we agree with aspects of both the "inerrancy" and "hermeneutical" approaches to the Lord's Word. The Word is seen as "unerring" because its message, although penned by people who in themselves

were fallible, is still such as will provide the necessary moral messages that lead to salvation.

The Literal Stories to Be Preserved

In Matthew 5, verses 17 and 18 we read,

“Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled.”

The “jots” and “tittles” are the smallest features in written Hebrew. The Lord while He was in the world, wanted to restate the value of even the most minute details of His Old Testament Word. Yes this Word was provided in a way that was (and continues to be) adapted to human needs and comprehension. But, that fact did not undermine the importance of the details within that adaptation.

In a similar way to the Old Testament, the New Testament Word is adapted to the states of human comprehension. And, just like the Old Testament, its inerrant literal messages pave the way to learning about and living the life of heaven.

Speaking To The Inner Message

In addition to strongly supporting the concept of the inerrancy of the Lord’s Word, the doctrine of the New Church also speaks of its inner meaning. In fact, the discussion of this inner meaning consumes the greatest part of Swedenborg’s theological works. And so, the hermeneutical approach to the Word, as previously described, can be seen as an equally valid approach within the New Church. For the New Church, no choice is needed between these two approaches. Each is valid within its own purposes and each lends itself to the understanding of the other.

Our Initial Question

We return now to the human question, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” The answer, to a certain degree, has been given already. What is first required is to acquire a progressively growing sense of the literal messages found in the Lord’s Word. As the de Verbo passage stated, the literal stories of the Word teach “everything that teaches the way to salvation, thus

everything that teaches how one is to live and believe.”

As a further response, we are taught that:

To enter heaven and experience its joy, that is, eternal life, souls have no need for anything except that which is the Lord’s and derives from Him. It is for the sake of these things that the Word exists, and these are the things it contains interiorly (Arcana Coelestia 1886).

Historical Experiences Of Growth

Excerpts of Bishop Peter Buss’s Keynote:
Evangelisation Seminar, Boulder, Colorado, October 2003

Our purpose is to spread the knowledge and encourage the faith of the New Church in the minds of people, to encourage it in their hearts so that they will have the will to do what it says in their lives and find heaven. That’s what we long for. That’s what’s so important in the work we’re doing.

Now, where have we come in the last twenty years? What happened that our church didn’t focus on evangelisation right from the beginning? Well, in some ways you know it did. Back in the early 1900’s, every single minister had to write a report to the Bishop on what he did in outreach. But people discovered that outreach isn’t easy. It’s lots of work. It takes very careful cooperation with the Lord.

Over 40-50 years relatively little was done in our church in outreach. There were some special people like Otho Heilman. He would take a book of *Heaven and Hell* in each pocket and off he’d go, and he’d talk to anybody. They once counted up that something like 80 people joined the church through the efforts of Otho Heilman. Great missionary! “Otho, how’d you do it,” they said? He said, “Simple. Every 100 people I speak to, one of them joins the church.” Now that’s a lot of work. He had to speak to 8,000 people!

Another marvellous man was Harold Cranch. Harold believed in outreach, and he worked on it. They told him he was too old to go the Theological School,