

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.

Temporarily the Hurstville Society is without a **Pastor**. During this period the Society will be served by lay leaders and visiting preachers.

Worship Services are held each Sunday at 10:00 AM. **Sunday School** is held concurrently with the worship service.

Young People's Group is held once a month in conjunction with the Young People's Group at the New Church at 2 Shirley St, Roseville.

A tea and social in conjunction with **discussion** meets on the 1st Friday of each month (January excepted) beginning at 7 00 pm. This will be conducted by visiting ministers when available or lay led as appropriate.

Bible Study and Discussion Classes previously held midweek have been suspended until further notice.

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 September 2009

Freedom

by Brian Smith

“Freedom” – perhaps one of the more overused words. I must admit that often when I hear 'freedom' mentioned in a speech or written in an article I just switch off and stop listening. It might be a particular favourite rhetorical device of American politicians but I assume Australian speech makers like it almost as much. Sure, 'freedom' *is* a very politically valuable concept. The problem is, if you use any word too much it will get tired and lose its impact; even a good word like 'freedom'.

Sometimes it takes a new context to be able to hear the word in a fresh way. For example, Mel Gibson screaming: “FREEDOM” just before he is executed in the movie *Braveheart*. Another way to get back to the meaning of 'freedom' is to look more closely at what it means, and possibly see it in a

new light. Probably the most powerful way to remember the meaning of freedom is to have a freedom taken away or given back to you.

Do we ever think about our freedom to breathe? Someone with advanced emphysema might be able to explain to us the importance of a freedom to breath. Or consider Bill Gates; at this point in his life it's doubtful that he gives much thought to the freedom he has to drive any car he wants. I might not have the freedom to drive a \$221,000 Lamborghini Gallardo but I do enjoy the freedom to drive some car and eat three (or more) meals each day. I rarely think about the availability of food as a freedom, but it is certainly not something that everyone can count on. These are just natural types of freedoms.

Really, all lower freedoms – political, economic, intellectual, physical – flow from the essential freedom of our spirit. The Lord teaches that mankind is given freedom which is never taken away (Heaven and Hell 597; Divine Providence 73). He doesn't want us to be a bunch of dead “brutes” or “stocks” (Apocalypse Explained 1138⁴). In fact, the Lord wants us to be alive, and able to pursue and enjoy the delights and pleasures which can only come from the feeling that we have our own life. Humanity is defined by our freedom (Divine Providence 176). This type of freedom is more internal and much more valuable than any political freedom we might consider.

Think of a beloved pet cat. In his house he has freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom from oppression, freedom to eat as much as he likes. The cat enjoys plenty of external or natural types of freedom. But none of them are anywhere close to the gift of human freedom. As humans we can consider. We can choose. We can express love, not just as an automatic biological response but as a reasoned choice and commitment. We get to choose between heaven and hell.

But even this type of freedom to choose how we live is not the highest level of spiritual freedom. It is only the potential of true freedom.

Consider – I have the choice to accept and follow God or reject and ignore

Worth noting was the very successful joint service held at Roseville on Sunday 16th August where **Brian Smith** and **Rev Julian Duckworth** combined to present a discourse on the subject of doubt which also happens to be Brian's theme for his dissertation he is working on. The Hurstville Society and others around Australia are glad you spent your summer vacation down under working for us. And when you return home your families will find that Kai has begun to talk a lot (budding minister?). Can he keep an Australian accent?

Congratulations to **Shane** and **Lina Heldon** who have another son, born on the 4th July. His name is **Jayden** and is brother to **Saxon** and **Kyan**. He was premature and had to stay in hospital for 2 1/2 weeks until he learnt to suckle properly.

Margaret Ward returned home recently after an overseas trip to England and France. She had a wonderful time including a stay with **Rev Alain** and **Jeanne Nicolier** at their country residence in the south of France. She recounts the wonderful experience of picking food for the meals straight from the garden. The Nicoliers grow most of their own food.

Carolyn Heldon is soon to return after a much longer overseas trip to the USA, Sweden, Denmark and France where she ALSO has been staying with **Rev Alain** and **Jeanne Nicolier** for a few days. She will have just enough time to say hello to her sister **Michelle** who is heading off overseas for a month to England, France and Austria.

Talking about overseas travellers, several members of the Taylor family will be visiting in August/September. Just arrived are **Rev Doug** and **Christine Taylor** followed next month by **Roslyn Taylor**. It is always good to see the Taylors who have been such an integral part of the Hurstville Society for so many years.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Owen Heldon** (6th), **Carolyn Heldon** (8th), **Klaire Horner** (9th), **Sylvia Hicks** (13th), **Karen Lockhart** (13th), **Jeffrey Heldon** (15th), **Phillip Horner** (15th), **Emily Hicks** (26th), **Phillip Walsh** (29th)

Lord will be manifested in our hearts as we all come together to praise Him. My greetings to all of you. May you stay blessed till we all meet.

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Togo



The church in Togo is rapidly being established under the care of the Reverend Segno Kodjo Ayi and the newly ordained Eric Souka.

Reverend Ayi is building a group in Lome, the nation's capital, while Erik Souka is developing a congregation in Vogan, a community to the North East.

There is tremendous enthusiasm for the New Church in these areas and the groups are making surprising progress.

Source: <http://www.newchurch.org/activities/outreach/church-growth.html>

News Notes

For the last two months the Hurstville Society has been blessed with the addition of the Smith family, **Brian, Janine and Kai**. They have become wonderful friends with a special gift for making people feel at home in their company, something that will no doubt continue to be a boon in their ministry.

him. This is a certain type of fundamental freedom which makes a base. And yet, it is not the fullest possible expression or enjoyment of the quality of freedom. We're told about two types of freedom:

There is infernal freedom and there is heavenly freedom. It is from infernal freedom to think and to will evil, and so far as civil and moral laws do not hinder, to speak and to do it. On the other hand, it is from heavenly freedom to think and to will good, and so far as opportunity is granted, to speak and to do it. (Divine Providence 43).

So we have infernal freedom to do evil and heavenly freedom to do good and the passage goes on to explain that whichever a person does from their own choice feels to them like freedom. It sort of sounds like whatever direction we choose to go is the greatest expression of freedom. But in reality, following evil is a type of slavery while following the Lord is real freedom at its finest (Divine Providence 43).

We might be able to understand this with an example. Picture a man named Bill who likes to eat chocolate. When he gets to eat chocolate he thinks he is enjoying the height of freedom. Nobody stops him, but he finds that as he continues to eat his body deteriorates: his waist gets larger, he has headaches and unstable blood-sugar, and worst of all, his enjoyment in eating the chocolate decreases.

Billy is in perfect freedom to eat all the chocolate he wants but his freedom to enjoy it is limited by the nature of the love itself.

Chocolate itself isn't bad, but making a god out of physical pleasure is. This is just the reality of the universe – loves which oppose God have a very limited delight, one that leads towards the slavery of addiction not actual freedom. So Bill has the “freedom” to eat as much chocolate as he wants but if he wants the real freedom to enjoy something he has to develop expansive loves which involve serving other people and loving his Creator.

How can he get to that true, heavenly freedom of good loves? God won't make him get there – that would take away Bill's base level freedom to

make the choice between good and evil himself. But God does *empower* him to develop heavenly loves. Bill *can* learn to love being free from the addiction to chocolate – but it involves a spiritual paradox.

Bill has to actively compel himself to oppose his own idolization of physical pleasure. It seems (and certainly feels) like self-compulsion goes against our freedom. But in fact, Bill is the only person who can force Bill to do something and have it be an expression of freedom rather than oppression. As Bill makes choices from principle, he grows in his sense of empowerment and freedom (Arcana Coelestia 1937⁶). Rather than continuing to feel pushed around by his own cravings he has a taste of heavenly freedom, which is the ability to act on good loves (Arcana Coelestia 9586 and Arcana Coelestia 2885).

We can believe the Lord when He says that the fullest sense of freedom comes from obeying Him or we can question it. He gives us that choice. But this teaching is one of the most practical and testable. It is easy to look at some of the more self centred patterns in our life where we are going after what “we want.” Do these experiences make us feel free and happy? What about those times (maybe rare) when we instead actively reject one of our negative desires on principle? It is our choice to make but I think Jesus is telling it like it is: “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8.34-36).

References

Self compulsion builds freedom.

For Billy, it seems like the worst kind of oppression if anyone were to deny him his chocolate, and so on. (Heavenly Secrets 1937:6)

Infernal freedom vs heavenly freedom.

Freedom to do good and freedom to do evil. Opposite feels like slavery. Doing good actual freedom, doing evil actually slavery. (Divine Providence 43; Heavenly Secrets 9586)

A Message From Rev Ayi Segno Kodjo

(Negotiations are underway to obtain a visa so that Ayi can visit Australia during September and October and provide pastoral services.)

Dear friends,

I am more than delighted to send you a short article. It is going to be short simply because I have a very limited access to the internet in Togo. I am writing (or send all my emails) in a crowded Internet Cafe where one is charged per minute spent on the computer. All the same this cannot forbid me from writing a short article to your newsletter before I set foot in Australia.

Below is my short article. Please feel free to edit and correct any grammatical mistakes.

The Lord sees the entire human race as one single person, which the Writings call the Grand Man. That is why there is a joy in heaven when people, originating from various places, come together to worship the Lord. This kind of joy is what I foresee since from the time my request to visit the Australia New Church was accepted. I give glory to the Lord for guiding and leading me through His path far back in 1996 when I first came across the New Church in Ghana. Soon after discovering the Heavenly Doctrine, I decided to take it to my native country Togo. That is how it all began, first as reading group, then later into a church. I was the first person to start a New Church congregation in Togo.

I attended the Bryn Athyn Theological School from 1998 and was ordained in 2001. Soon after the ordination I went back to my country to start a very vibrant group. I met my wife Katy when I was in school, and we got married in 2002. We have been blessed with two kids, Silas (7) and Selom (6).

The Lord has endowed me with a special gift, and it is my outmost joy to share my experience with the people of Australia. I am also coming to Australia to learn more from you, and I strongly believe that the love of the

communication has begun – and you Australians have been my first major teachers.

We were blessed with 35-40 new relationships, many of which already seem to be growing friendships. It is sort of obvious that coming to a new country we will meet new people, but our interactions with people has really been the heart of our trip. I've heard the Heavenly Doctrines summarized as being essentially about relationship. I find this true – religion really is all about learning to love the Lord and our neighbours. We got to practice this. Meeting new people can be quite tiring and stressful, but knowing more people is the best thing in the world. I feel particularly wistful about how very short our visits were to Canberra and Perth. But despite the brevity of these visits it was delightful to find an almost immediate sense of connection due to shared truths we each strive to live.

Janine, Kai and I thank you all from our hearts for the support, and love you have offered us. I share some of your concerns and questions over some of the challenges facing these small, New Church groups. We're at interesting times for the world and for the General Church and I sincerely pray that the Church flourishes and has a beautiful and profound impact on the world around it.

But when it comes down to it, these issues facing the Church and those facing us as individuals are in the Lord's expert hands. We all do what we do and then we trust the Lord to build the house and keep watch over the city.

Brian, Janine and Kai (Smith)

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Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
Psalm 127:1

Definitions of heavenly freedom.

a) Whatever a person does from love. (Heavenly Secrets 1937:6)

b) To think and to will good, and so far as opportunity is granted, to speak and to do it. (Divine Providence 43)

Freedom from Evil

by Bill Hall

“Man cannot control the experiences that come to him: but he can receive or reject. He can react affirmatively or negatively. Heaven consists in every one regarding himself as nothing. The celestials know this. They know that to attribute anything to themselves, except reception, is of evil Evil has no power over one who in sincerity of faith believes himself to be nothing!”
(Dr. Hugo Lj. Odhner, *Spirits and Men*, p. 14).

As we move forward in our day, we never know what demands may be brought upon us. If we are driving, we may have an unexpected trouble with our car. At work, we may be called upon to make a difficult decision. In the sphere of human relations, we may encounter an unexpected problem, perhaps even an accusation of which we are innocent, or an incident in which our involvement was completely sincere but which nevertheless caused harm to another.

One of the most basic teachings of the New Church is that people are receptacles of life and that life does not originate in them. Life flows into people from two sources: heaven or hell. As children and youths we are not directly responsible for our responses to the influx of life. At those stages we have not sufficient understanding to perceive the nature of the influx of life. At that time our response is from what we have inherited and what we have received from our parents and associates from the time of birth. The rational consciousness does not exist in us fully at those times.

It is a different experience in adulthood, for then we become responsible for our responses to the incoming influx of life. As adults we cannot turn away

from the responsibility of responding as the Lord would have us respond. As adults we have to accept the responsibility of living according to heaven or according to hell. As adults we come to see that we must accept responsibility for our responses to all situations.

The level of education differs from person to person. Some people are excellent scientists who have a mastery of science and thus know a vast extent that the non-scientific person does not know. And it is the same with literature, the arts and religion.

So we come to see that what Dr. Odhner is saying is that when we regard ourselves as receptacles of life, this truth enables us to reject all negative states. This truth enables us to see that we do not have to respond to evil thoughts that flow into our minds from evil spirits from hell. The instant that we perceive an ugly, lustful, filthy or selfish thought, this truth enables us to turn aside from that evil thought and instead to accept what flows in from heaven. And in accepting the truth that all good and all truth inflows into us from heaven, we are free to accept the truth that what we are now receiving is from the Lord through angels of heaven.

So our minds expand beyond the immediate and pressing states of the moment. We are fortunate to experience a wider view, and a longer view. We come to see that our response to the moment has consequences beyond the moment. We all know that a careless word or gesture, whether done by ourselves or others, can cause distress to the recipient. But when we live the truths of Dr. Odhner's remark, we experience a freedom to turn away from hellish thoughts and instead to receive the blessings of heaven. Our lives are born anew and we experience strength and understanding from the Lord to live all the days and moments of our lives as the Lord would have us live.

We feel free to step forth from the barriers of the past so that the errors or transgressions of the past no longer haunt us as they once did. As Arcana Coelestia 3854 explains, “. . . every moment of both his understanding and of his will is a new beginning.” When we accept and live this truth we experience freedom from the Lord to rejoice and be glad all the days and moments of our lives forevermore. Let us seize all our moments as

blessings from the Lord and evermore rejoice in the ceaseless opportunities the Lord provides to be of service to our community. May our cup runneth over from the love and understanding we continually receive from the Lord.

“What is freedom of choice but the power to will and do, and to think and speak to all appearance as if of oneself?” TCR 489

Goodbye For Now Australia

It is nice to know that with eternity involved, goodbyes are always temporary. Still, with 15989 km involved goodbye now probably needs to cover several years, if not decades. It is difficult to leave knowing that it is unlikely that the Lord will bring us back here anytime soon. It makes me start to make lists of missed opportunities. But I'd rather offer a short list of opportunities taken.

Hurstville Society, along with the rest of the General Church in Australia, took the opportunity to invite our small family around the world to serve as temporary pastor. There's quite a cost that goes along with this type of an invite and I really appreciate the effort, time, money and commitment shown by Hurstville, Perth and Canberra. The effort to host, entertain and support us demonstrates a real commitment to the cause of building and sustaining a community focused on knowing and following the Lord.

Janine, Kai and I took the opportunity to accept this trip to Australia. We put a fair amount of thought into this decision, realizing we didn't want to pass it up. It matches our love for adventure and travel and also my desire to get free of the classroom to start practicing ministry.

I had the opportunity and privilege to offer classes and sermons in three different, beautiful Australian cities. I will not say all I could about my affection for Australia, but I really feel drawn to the relaxed, yet somehow elegant culture of this country. It was a HUGE benefit to my training and development as a minister to be able to work here for two months. Learning how to turn the jumble of ideas in my head into understandable and useful