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New Church Day - What Are We Celebrating? *by Revd Bruce Jarvis*

One key aspect of worship I am really missing is singing much-loved hymns. The gap in my life has been there for several years since we needed to reduce our regular services here at Seaburn Dene to two per month, so I've been very glad to sing along with my wife Tonia during the Conference Zoom Services these past few weeks. But, we're sitting in armchairs, and, in any case, we don't like to sing too volubly and inflict ourselves on our neighbours! In any case, much of the delight of singing hymns is to feel part of a group, and hear the worshippers around us also lifting their voices in praise of the Lord.

Over the years hymns proclaiming the good news of the Lord's second coming to His people have meant a great deal to me. In my younger days, Revd Brian Kingslake's hymn, *Lord Jesus, who from Galilee sent forth the apostle band*, made a great impact on me, summarising in poetic form the glorious teaching we have in the Heavenly Doctrines. My mind can still be transported back to my late teenage and early adult

years at Purley Chase, and to a room full of young people there for the Summer School week singing that hymn to the inspiring *Castle Rising* tune, led by the Revd Eric Jarmin's fabulously rich baritone voice. I quote an extract from verse 2:

*We, who have seen this truth aglow,
and marvelled at the sight,
must needs make known the things we know –
we dare not hide the light!*

Years later in 1986, when the Conference published its successor to the 1946 hymn book, *Songs for Worship*, it included another New Church Day hymn by the same author, this time sung to his own composition, *The New Kingdom* (383) What a rousing and inspiring sing! Verse 1:



*The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns!
This is the hour
He comes with power
to loose our captive chains.
Hell's legions reel before him,
the victor's crown he gains.
Hallelujah!*

When on earth, and as He approached the final part of His ministry, our Lord explained to His disciples not only that He would have to endure the death of His earthly body but that He would come to His people again. This would happen literally and immediately in the sense of His Spirit being intimately with them. Never again would the hells be able to block off His love and wisdom from an individual. Never again could they prevent men and women coming directly to Him to receive His divine protection and guidance.

Christ Manifesting Rev. 1:1-20

But He also made it clear that He would need to reveal Himself again to His people. *I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.* (John 16:12) For many years, His disciples and their successors in the infant Christian Church believed that the risen Lord would again descend in a physical, earthly manifestation, until in time it was accepted that His return would be at some later date, though still a material coming.

In the New Church we believe that it was through the revelation to His servant Emanuel Swedenborg that the Lord fulfilled that promise to come once again to His people on

earth. What we also learn is that the Lord first needed to restore order in the spiritual world, making what is known as a final or last judgment. This took place in 1757 (see *Apocalypse Revealed* Preface 2 and 796.3), and involved the process of separating what was essentially good and true from what was evil and false. The gradual build-up of obscurity there over a long period of time was causing problems for men and women here. It was rather like a thickening layer of dark clouds preventing the sun's light from reaching earth.

This obstruction had to be dealt with for the sake of both those in the spiritual dimension and for the Church here on earth. Only then could the human race on earth begin to be illuminated and raised into the light of heaven. Only then could the everlasting truths about the nature of God and the purpose of life be seen clearly and understood anew here on earth.

And so it was after the Lord had brought order into the spiritual world that He was able to share the good news with all people of good will living in that realm; and then for that gospel of new light to begin to spread into the thinking of human minds here on earth. In the opening chapter of his final monumental theological summary, *True Christian Religion* (published 1771), Swedenborg wrote:

It is a notable fact that several months ago the Lord called together his twelve disciples who are now angels, and sent them out throughout the spiritual world with orders to preach the Gospel there anew, since the Church established through their ministry is today so close to its end that hardly any remains survive. This has come about because the Divine Trinity has been divided into three persons, each of whom is God and Lord. (para.4)

Later in the same book, we read:

It is the leading theme of this book that the Divine Trinity is united in the Lord. At this point I will add a piece of news. A few months ago the twelve apostles were called together by the Lord and sent out into the whole spiritual world, as they were once into the natural world, with instructions to preach this gospel. Each apostle had his own zone assigned to him. They are now following out their instructions with all eagerness and dedication. (para.108)



Christ Knocking Rev.3:20

The final chapter in *True Christian Religion* is headed, *The Ending of the Age*, and Swedenborg brings that to a close in para.791. These words may be familiar to many readers.

After the completion of this book, the Lord called together His twelve disciples, who had followed Him in the world; and a day later He sent them all forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel, that the Lord God Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever, as foretold by Daniel (7:13, 14) and in Revelation (11:15):

Blessed are they who come to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Rev.19:9.

This happened on the nineteenth day of June in the year 1770. This was meant by the Lord's saying:

He will send His angels, and they will gather together His chosen people from the bounds of the heavens on one side as far as the bounds of heaven on the other. Matt.24:31.

It has been common practice within the various New Church organisations across the world to remember this wondrous act of the Lord's Divine Providence with special services either on the 19th June itself or on the nearest Sunday. Wherever you are, and however you mark the occasion, it is my prayer that you will find it possible to praise Him in your heart, and in daily lives of loving service that are the hallmark of angelic life. Hallelujah!

Oh, and remember that the Lord's coming is not just a one-off historical event. He comes to us anew whenever we open our hearts, our minds and our arms to welcome Him in. Just as we can think of the Lord's birth in us as a daily event, so every day can be New Church Day for you and me! In which case, talking of hymns and singing –

*New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.* John Keble
1792-1866



Holy City as a Bride Rev.21:2

Notes: *True Christian Religion* quotations are from the translation by Dr John Chadwick, published 1988 by the Swedenborg Society, London.

The three pictures are from the Apocalypse-of-John Exhibition. The artist is G.Roland Smith. The full collection can be found at www.apocalypse-of-john.org.uk

What's Swedenborg Got To Do With It?

by Lee Differ (ordinand, General Conference of the New Church)

On a warm Saturday afternoon last September, a small crowd of the good and the true assembled at Purley Chase for the Annual General Meeting of the Swedenborg Society. Near the close of proceedings those gathered were treated to a bombshell question from one Dr. Geoffrey Bentley. Speaking of a scientist - and atheist - acquaintance of his who invites him to regularly 'spar' on religious topics in a local discussion group, Geoffrey posed the query to us all, 'Where do I start?'

Bang! Struck by the variety of possible response to the question, I fumbled, not knowing myself quite where to begin, the subtle task of laying out one's position in the hope of convincing another - broadly referred to as the art of 'apologetics' - constituting such a vast field of endeavour.

Alongside a knowledge of history, philosophy, theology, culture, politics, moral philosophy, and scripture, the apologist cultivates too the skill of relating their message to the human experience of the 'opponent' (for, as Swedenborg reminds us, we are all prone to thinking just as much with our hearts as we are with our heads).

So, does Swedenborg relate in any meaningful way to anything we see and experience, in general, today? That's to say, might there be any 'external' ground (in broad response to Geoffrey's question) upon which to possibly build a Swedenborgian apologetic, permitting us to exchange and engage from a mutually meaningful starting point? It's all very well, after all, speaking of angels, devils, and the structure of heaven, but, apologetically at least, to begin with, that might all sound somewhat fantastical.

Swedenborg himself, usefully, makes substantial claims for a particular way of understanding earthly, human history. Do events closer to his own time, and ours, confirm that reading, such that we could employ them as an apologetic starting point, or have things turned out completely contrary to Swedenborg's predictions? As we approach the 250th New Church Day, might we ask "Does Swedenborg have *anything* to do with what we see 'at this day?'"

In response to a kind request from the Chair of Council, Judith Wilson, I have, pondering this question in light of the theological studies that Council have kindly permitted me to recently undertake with their generous support, produced three short films with the aim of outlining, by way of introduction, some of the most salient developments - theologically, culturally, historically - of recent centuries, with specific reference to the historical claims made in Swedenborg's works.

Perhaps something therein *might* afford ground for the future development of a broader 'Swedenborgian apologetic.' Such speculations aside, however, the films' contents, will, I hope, provide occasion for some rejoicing in the Swedenborgian churches on this significant anniversary. They should, too, bring to light - woven amongst the glad tidings - positive challenges that might be further explored for the benefit of the church and its mission.

My thanks go to Rev. Alison Southcombe whose visual sensibility prevented me from contravening artistic good taste more than I doubtlessly otherwise would in the production of these 'documents.' Any remaining audio-visual blunders, are, it goes without saying, entirely my own.

Links to the films:

'A Faith Lost and Found' (Part 1) - <https://youtu.be/WNUrnEeuxR8>

'A Faith Lost and Found' (Part 2) - <https://youtu.be/3AhPFJoVmTk>

'A Faith Lost and Found' (Part 3) - <https://youtu.be/PwIOVhz4MfU>

(The films are intended, in their current version, for a New Church 'readership' by invitation via E-News and E-Read. Viewers are therefore kindly asked to refrain from any copying or wider distribution.)