

E-READ

The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

About Us

To find out more about The General Conference of the New Church, including the locations of our Churches, visit our web site at: gcnc.org.uk

Contributions

If you would like to contribute a letter or article to future issues of e-Read, please send it via email to : gemma.mclean@gcnc.org.uk

Please note that publication is at the discretion of our Spiritual Leadership.

Share E-Read

Feel free to print and share this publication.

Sign up

Sign up for E-News and E-Read email notifications at: gcnc.org.uk/signup

Home Worship

To download the latest Home Worship material please visit: gcnc.org.uk/resources/home-worship

To subscribe via email, please sign up at: gcnc.org.uk/hwsignup

Donations

E-News and E-Read are provided completely free of charge.

If you would like to donate to support this ongoing resource, please do so here:

<https://www.generalconference.org.uk/resources/donations>

DECEMBER BUMPER EDITION

Welcome to this bumper edition of E-Read, featuring 3 different articles:

1. **The Apple of Strife** by Revd Bruce Jarvis (*page 2*)
2. **Good King Wenceslas** by David Friend (*page 5*)
3. **Joseph, Carpenter of Nazareth and Husband of Mary** by Geoffrey Bentley (*page 6*)



The Apple of Strife

by Revd Bruce Jarvis

A Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church Signified by the New Jerusalem in The Revelation by Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swede Summaria Expositio Doctrinae Novae Ecclesiae, Amsterdam 1769

Some months ago, I took down from my shelves a little volume entitled *A Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church* (BE). Written, of course, by Emanuel Swedenborg, it was published just a couple of years before his magnum opus, *True Christian Religion*. Its title implies a summary statement of the core doctrines of the New Church. Readers quickly discover that its content deals mostly with



what the translator, Revd Rupert Stanley, describes as “a searching exposure” of the principal falsities enshrined in the *Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1545-63) and the *Formula Concordiae* (1577), upon which the doctrines of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches were founded. In a brief foreword, Swedenborg explained that he intended *Brief Exposition* to be a “sketch of the Doctrine of the New Church in its fulness”, a forerunner to what we know as *True Christian Religion*. He writes:

It is offered to the world for its information ... its contents will be fully proved in the major work itself.

He went on to make the point that it would be necessary for him to set down the main doctrinal tenets **of the Christian Church of his day**. Only then could there be a clear appreciation of what the New Church doctrines teach. What follows is a detailed scrutiny of these tenets, showing how they disagreed with the Doctrines of the New Church, which are drawn from the Word and confirmed by it. Its intended successor, *True Christian Religion* (1771), was able to focus on a magisterial presentation of Christian theology and teaching because the necessary preliminaries had been dealt with in *Brief Exposition*.

My curiosity was aroused by a comment in the translator’s Preface which quotes from a posthumous document of Swedenborg’s entitled *Sketch of an Ecclesiastical History*

of the New Church. He describes what happened in the spiritual world when BE was published.

When the Brief Exposition was published, the angelic heaven, from east to west and from south to north, appeared of a deep crimson colour, and with most beautiful flowers. ... On the books was written, "The Advent of the Lord"; on all in the spiritual world. I also wrote the same by command, on two copies in Holland.

Clearly, more investigation was required, and a small pile of books grew on my study floor. A search of R.L.Tafel's *Documents concerning Swedenborg* revealed that in a letter written in November 1769 to his friend Count von Höpken, a former Prime Minister of Sweden, he had referred to *Brief Exposition*, and related the above incident, adding that *this was a sign of the assent and the joy of the New Heaven*. (Document 244)

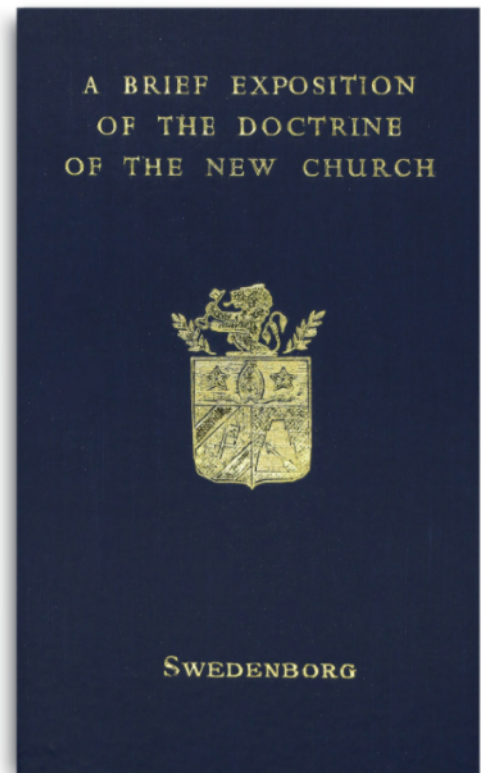
Another Document (301), headed *Sketch of an Ecclesiastical History of the New Church*, makes a similar reference to the reception of *Brief Exposition* in the spiritual world. It also tells us that Swedenborg said he had been commanded to write: *This book is the Lord's Advent, written by command*, which he did on two copies of the book in Holland. He added four references, all to *Arcana Caelestia*, nos. 2513, 4535, 6895, 8427. Later, the owner of one of those volumes added *Apocalypse Revealed* 626 to that list. In his Preface Rupert Stanley provides a snippet of information to the effect that one of the two copies is held in the Library of the British Museum, where it can be inspected.

It is worth mentioning here that the above documents are included in *Small Theological Works and Letters*, edited by the Revd John E.Elliott, and published in 1975 by the Swedenborg Society. No.244 appears at p.265, and 301 at p.191. The latter document records that the early Christian Church had been different before the Council of Nicaea (AD325). Until that event, the Apostles' Creed had been the principal article of faith. Swedenborg writes: *It was even more different after the Athanasian Creed was composed. The cardinal doctrine of the Church concerning the Triune God and the Lord was changed; especially concerning three persons from eternity*. [Note: The Athanasian Creed was adopted some time during the 5th century A.D.]

True Christian Religion, published two years later in 1771, includes one mention of *Brief Exposition*. Interspersed among the doctrinal contents of TCR are Swedenborg's descriptions of his experiences in the spiritual world. In the chapter on the Lord the Redeemer, he records an occasion when he heard a group of people talking animatedly about the strife caused among leaders of the church by "the apple of Strife". In particular, they were concerned that "many laymen have run after it, picked it up and

held it before our eyes.” Swedenborg explains that by the apple they meant *my little book entitled: A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE NEW CHURCH*. The group said they’d like to speak to *the original thinker who has thrown the apple of Strife among the leaders of the church*. Some asserted that the book was divisive and heretical; others, however, made a strong defence of its teaching, saying that it contained many sayings from the Word, which laypeople paid attention to and supported.

Swedenborg engaged with the group, and the interchange is recorded in TCR 112. Essentially, the discussion concerned what was at that time the current tri-personal doctrine of the Lord, compared with what was now being revealed in Swedenborg’s Writings. If you have a copy of *True Christian Religion*, number 112 is worth reading, as is the rest of the chapter.



I realise that I have said very little about the contents of *Brief Exposition*. Let me mention one feature which may be new to some readers. **Members of the New Church are used to reciting the Faith of the New Church**, that wonderful and remarkably pithy summary of the teachings about our Lord and what constitutes the life of heaven. It comes at the end of the introduction to *True Christian Religion*. But it is probably not so well-known that Swedenborg included this summary in *Brief Exposition*, not once but twice at nos.44 and 117. I include it here as it appears in Rupert Stanley’s 1952 translation:

1. There is one God, in whom is the Divine Trinity, and He is the Lord God the Saviour, Jesus Christ.
2. A saving faith is to believe on Him.
3. Evil actions ought to be shunned because they are of the devil and from the devil.
4. Good actions ought to be done because they are of God and from God.
5. And these should be done by man as of himself, yet it ought to be believed that they are from the Lord, with him and through him.

Has **your** curiosity been aroused, I wonder! At a time of the year when we are preparing once again to celebrate the Lord’s advent into our world, perhaps it is an appropriate moment to think again about His great and marvellous work of redemption.

Brief Exposition is a slender volume, and can be obtained from the Swedenborg Society for £4.40 plus p&p. A little Christmas present for yourself!

Good King Wenceslas

by David Friend

“Good King Wenceslas” is sung at Christmas time, but its only reference to Christmas is related to the first line of the carol. “Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen” - a saint’s day which falls on 26th December, the second day of Christmas. The words we sing have, however, no direct reference at all to the Christmas story as related in the Gospels. Whereas the other carols we sing with great gusto and enjoyment during December tell of the birth of our Lord into the world - very often confusing the various elements of the gospel stories with each other - the tale of Wenceslas’s good deed has a moral imperative hidden within it which appeals to most people at this time of the year. So what?

There seem to me to be a number of points in the song which can be usefully used to illustrate the state of personal temptation, and what has to be done to deal with its ravages. The song has two characters, King Wenceslas and his page, whose words are often sung by different voices in performance, and might be aligned with the Lord and a mortal man. The page is a servant of the King and owes him allegiance, much as we, as humans, endeavour to serve our Lord during our life on earth. The Lord is always on the lookout for humanity and, on a cold and frosty morning, spies a poor man struggling with his situation. He brings this to the attention of his page, who is able to recognise the stranger and advise the King all about the man. Can we see the parallel with our own situation, where our Lord, through the activity of our conscience, brings to our attention something amiss in the world of our living. When we think about what has been brought to our attention, we are able to recognise all about the individual involved. Our Lord makes provision - food, wine and pine logs, - for dealing with the situation, but there is a need for action on our behalf to address the problem which has been shown to us. The Lord leads the way for us, but, in following, we tend to get into trouble and need his assistance. Once again the Lord is there to point out that, if we follow his guidance and step in his footsteps, we shall make the progress needed to satisfy the situation. The song ends with a plea, appealing to our better nature:

**“Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
You who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.”**

My best wishes to all E READERS at this joyful, but clinically uncertain, time.

Joseph, Carpenter of Nazareth and Husband of Mary

a personal view by Geoffrey Bentley

In many classical paintings of the Holy Family, Joseph is often depicted as an old man. This seems very unlikely to me. It is 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the length of Wales, and 430 miles from Bethlehem to Egypt. He would need to be fit and in good health to conduct a pregnant lady on the first journey and to lead her and a young child on the second journey.

Joseph's name means 'Jehovah adds to'. Did Joseph add much to the life of our Lord? I suggest that he did although much of it is not obvious in the gospel accounts.

That he was older than Mary there can be little doubt. It took about 6 years of apprenticeship before he could establish himself in a business of his own. Until he did that he could not afford to get married. So I guess that he would be in his mid to late 20's when he became betrothed to Mary who was probably in her 'teens'.

The carpenters of Canaan were renowned for their workmanship. After all, Joseph's forbears has designed and made the furniture for the tabernacle and for Solomon's Temple. Everyday furniture, agricultural implements and even weapons had a foundation of wood. Spiritually, wood represents natural goodness which can be diverted to good uses in the production of furniture or evil ones in the production of idols.

Did Joseph take a bag of tools with them on the journey to Bethlehem? It surprises me if he didn't. The birth of our Lord has all the hallmarks of surprise in its timing. Many babies are born days away from the expected date. I have seen a premature baby placed in a shoe box before the ambulance arrived and another baby placed into the hurriedly emptied drawer from a chest of drawers. To place Jesus in a manger, to me, conveys expediency. I can't imagine that he was there for longer than two days before Joseph could construct a cradle.

Joseph needed a lot of reassurance about Mary's pregnancy. Zacharias, Mary herself, the shepherds and the Wise Men all had one angelic visitation. Joseph had 4! He was told not to have physical union with his wife **until** after Jesus was born.

In the gospels 4 brothers and some unnumbered sisters are mentioned. In some branches of Christianity, it is postulated that these were Joseph's children from a 1st wife. How could a jobbing carpenter afford this? This idea is to preserve the teaching that Mary was a virgin all her life. Personally, I can't accept this. The Almighty had interfered with the marriage as it was, I cannot believe that Divine Love would take it a stage further.

Joseph was a carpenter and would not be wealthy. But he could earn enough in Roman money to afford a dwelling and food. This refutes the idea that our Lord was born into abject poverty. By the time that the Wise Men arrived to worship Jesus he was a young child living in a house. By the way, it was Joseph who gave the baby the name Joshua (Jesus in Greek) which means 'Jehovah brings salvation'. This is exactly what our Lord brought to everyone on earth and in the heavens.

How could the family have maintained itself if Joseph hadn't continued to work on the way to Egypt, in Egypt and on the return journey? The gold, frankincense and myrrh from the Wise Men could not have covered 2 years.

The last mention of Joseph is when our Lord was 12 and delayed returning home to Nazareth because he wanted to discuss the scriptures with the learned men in the Temple in Jerusalem.

How did Jesus learn enough to be able to do this? He must have attended the synagogue either in Nazareth or another nearby town. If payment for lessons was involved, Joseph must have contributed this. I wonder at what age did our Lord realise that the 5 books of Moses were all about himself?

Joseph is not mentioned again in the Word. Mary had the dreadful experience of witnessing the crucifixion. I assume that Joseph died before our Lord began his ministry. Jesus himself was a carpenter. He must have learned this from Joseph.

One final conjecture, did our Lord have to continue the family business until another son of Mary had completed his apprenticeship and could take over? Only then could our Lord commence the ministry for which he entered this world.

So did Joseph add anything to the life of our Lord? He most certainly did!