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A Hymn for Good Friday *by Revd John Elliott*

- 1 HARK, the voice of love and mercy
Sounds aloud from Calvary;
See, it rends the rocks asunder,
Shakes the earth, and veils the sky:
‘It is finished!’
Hear the dying Saviour cry.
- 2 It is finished! O what pleasure
Do those gracious words afford;
Heavenly blessings without number
Flow to us from Christ the Lord:
‘It is finished!’
Saints, the blessed words record.
- 3 Finished all the types and shadows
Of the ceremonial law;
Finished all that God had promised;
Death and hell no more shall awe.
‘It is finished!’
Saints, from hence your comfort draw.

4 Tune your harps anew, ye seraphs,
Join to sing the glorious theme;
All on earth, and all in heaven,
Join to praise Immanuel's name.
Hallelujah!
Endless glory to the Lamb.

JONATHAN EVANS, 1749-1809

This hymn does not appear in *Songs for Worship*, which was published by the General Conference in 1986, so I've reproduced the version included in the previous Conference hymnbook entitled *Hymns for the Use of the New Church*, which congregations had been using since 1946. As a young teenager I sang the hymn during the Good Friday services I attended with my parents at Kensington New Church, though before 1946 we had copies of a much older Conference hymnbook published way back in 1880.

To judge from what I've read on the internet about Jonathan Evans, not much is known beyond his being a Coventry man who was the author of a few Christian hymns and who was a Non-Conformist pastor. His hymn for Good Friday focuses on 'It is finished', words uttered by our Lord – according to John 19:30 – immediately before 'he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.' Some English versions of the New Testament prefer 'It is accomplished', which seems to me to make it quite clear what the Lord meant – that what He had come on earth to do had been fully achieved, rather than that the unimaginable pain and suffering He had to bear on a green hill far away had come to an end.

In the second verse the hymn speaks of our Lord's utterance from the cross as 'gracious words', and in the third it declares that 'death and hell no more shall awe'. The unusual verb *to awe* seems to mean something like to take control over people or to overwhelm them. The Teachings of the New Church go along with this, for there are many places which explain that our Lord came on earth to conquer the hells or powers of evil who were taking control of human beings. Let me quote one of those places –

The Lord came into the world to save the human race, which would otherwise have perished in everlasting death. He achieved this salvation by subduing the hells, which were attacking every single person coming into and leaving the world. He did this at the same time by glorifying His humanity, for He could thus keep the hells subdued for ever. The subjugation of the hells, and at the same time the glorification of His humanity, were achieved by the temptations which were permitted to assail

the humanity He inherited from His mother, and by constantly winning victories over them. His passion on the cross was the last temptation and His complete victory.

*(Paragraph 293 of The New Jerusalem and Heaven's Teaching for it.
Translator John Chadwick. Published 1990 by the Swedenborg Society)*

Although only the fourth Gospel tells us that the Lord's final words were 'It is finished' the other three record other utterances made by Him while on the cross. Matthew and Mark both tell us that at the sixth hour – that is, at three o'clock in the afternoon – He cried out with a loud voice 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Indeed they both give the actual Aramaic words He used.) According to both those evangelists, after the crucified Lord had emitted that loud cry He cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. They both go on to say that at this point the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, then Matthew alone adds a little more, beginning with 'and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.' And it was with this detail found only in the first Gospel that Jonathan Evans began his hymn that came to be included in some New-Church hymn-books.

Clearly Evans was conflating or fusing together one account of the crucifixion with another, but I'm not going to dwell on that. Rather, let me refer briefly to Matthew's description that when the Lord cried out with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit, the earth shook, and rocks were split, for the first verse of Evans' hymn is a poetic reproduction of this description. Some people take it literally; for them there was an actual earthquake, when the solid rock forming the earth's crust developed fissures; but others see it as a description to be understood 'mystically'. Let me also refer to the statement found in Mark's Gospel as well as Matthew's, that the veil or curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. In his hymn Evans does not explicitly reproduce this detail, yet the first four lines of his third verse show that he had a mystical understanding of the event. That mystical understanding almost certainly came from an acquaintance with *The Letter to the Hebrews* in the New Testament, especially the ninth and tenth chapters.

To be brief as I can, the mystical understanding is this: Before the Christian Era (BCE), God was invisible, hidden from people's eyes, like the Holy of Holies in the temple which was veiled from sight by a curtain. Hence the opening words of John 1:18 : 'No one has seen God at any time.' So people's approach towards and worship of God consisted in rituals prescribed by 'the ceremonial law', chiefly the whole sacrificial system. But these rituals were 'types and shadows' of what was to come, they were a foreshadowing of what God had promised. The word *type* is being used in its primary meaning, namely 'that by which something is symbolised or figured' (SOED). So once the Lord had come upon earth, and had finished or accomplished the work He had come to do, the types and shadows came to an end, because the hitherto invisible God was now visible. To quote the whole of John

1:19: 'No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.' And as the Apostle Paul put it: 'He is the image of the invisible God.' (Colossians 1:15, where the Greek word for *image* is *eikon* or *icon*.)

In a couple or more places in the Teachings of the New Church Swedenborg refers to a mystical sense within the literal sense, but of course he usually speaks in terms of an inward or spiritual level of meaning within the literal. But in addition to the inward or spiritual sense there is an inmost level of meaning within the Word, occasionally called the celestial sense. On this level 'It is finished', our Lord's final utterance, and the tearing in two of the veil hiding the holiest place in the temple, have to do with what was happening within the Lord Himself. That is to say, the subject in the inmost sense of the Word is the glorification of the Lord's Humanity, which was accomplished at the same time as His final victory over hell. The Humanity was made fully Divine, God who had hitherto been an invisible God, was now visible within the Lord's Divine Humanity. His work on earth was finished, it had been accomplished.

The final line of verse 3 of Jonathan Evans' hymn reads: 'Saints, from hence your comforts draw.' Being a Non-Conformist, he was not at all employing the expression *saints* to mean people who have been canonised. Rather, his meaning was all people endeavouring to lead a good and holy life, (the equivalent of saint in Latin, Greek, French, and other languages, is the ordinary word for one who is holy.) Thus in the next verse everyone on earth as well as all in heaven is invited to praise Immanuel's name. For Christians Good Friday may be a quiet occasion, yet let not the quietness hold them back from the song of praise: 'Hallelujah! Endless glory to the Lamb.'

Which Teaching?

by Revd Bruce Jarvis

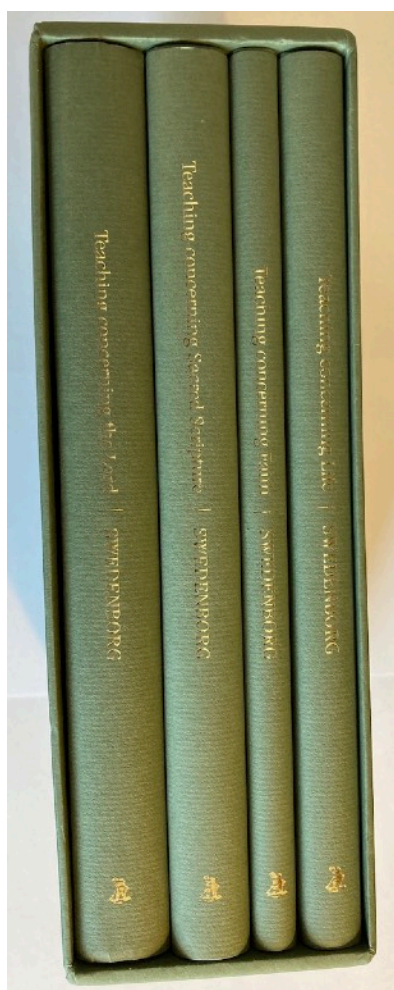
I wonder how often readers sit and reflect upon which of our New Church Teachings is most important to you, and perhaps occupies centre stage in your thinking? Just what is it about this wonderful gift of revealed truth that regularly occupies your mind? What is it that makes you sit up and rejoice? Is it all the fabulous information we now have about what awaits us in the next stage of our eternal life? Could it be the principle that the Word of God – the Sacred Scriptures – are fully and divinely inspired, containing truths for our use here and later in the spiritual world, a mirror in which we can all look for help on our journey to salvation and freedom? And what about the beautiful teachings on marriage love between a woman and a man, and how this is God's most precious gift to the human race? Maybe it's the teachings on living a charitable life, so that what we

believe must be expressed in our practical relationships with people. Any one of those subjects might be what really inspires you, and there are plenty of other possibilities. I just picked out what immediately came to my mind.

So what about me? What is it that's constantly coming to the forefront of my mind, making me ponder and reflect on what a wonderful Maker and Saviour we have? Throughout the Heavenly Doctrines, from the *Arcana Caelestia* (or Secrets of Heaven) right through to *True Christian Religion*, the nature of our God returns and returns, again and again. Why should this be?

A correct idea of God is ... like the sanctuary and altar in a church, or like a crown on the head and a sceptre in the hand of a king, as he sits upon his throne. From this (idea) hangs the whole body of theology, like a chain from its anchor-point. If you are prepared to believe me, (writes Swedenborg) the idea everyone has of God determines their place in the heavens.

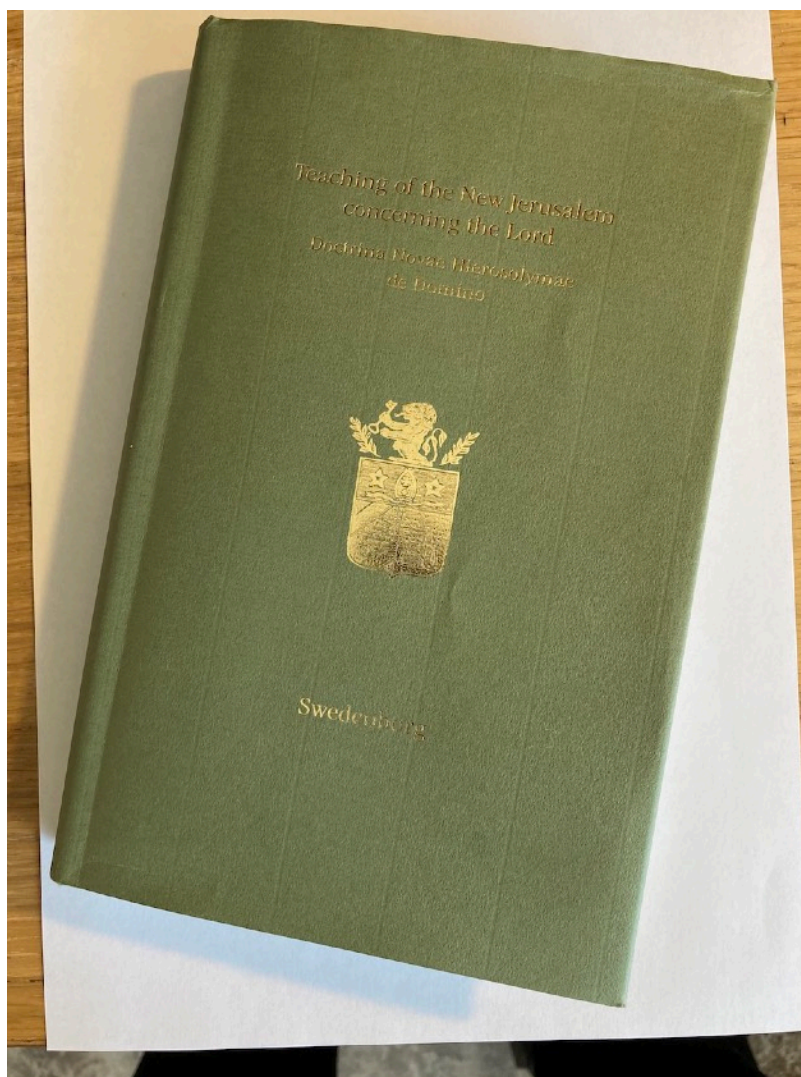
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Wow! That's a show stopper! The idea that you and I have of our God will determine our place in the heavens - how could that possibly be? Well, think about it. Whatever I think about the nature of the Divine, that conclusion affects the way I think and behave. For example, if I see God as an absentee father who is inclined to punish and reject anyone who gets things wrong, that's going to affect the way I see other people and want to deal with them. Ultimately, in the spiritual world, we shall be drawn to a community of people who have similar outlooks and values, and who share our own aims and desires. Our view of who and what God is determines how we see life, and how we understand what His qualities of love and wisdom mean in practice. It deeply affects how we relate to Him, and whether or not we can accept that He is constantly providing for our welfare and happiness, here and to eternity. If you have a copy of *True Christian Religion*, turn to the chapter on the Holy Spirit, and read that paragraph for yourself.

I recently acquired a new edition of what are commonly known as the Four Leading Doctrines by Emanuel Swedenborg. Amongst the volumes of the Writings on my shelves has sat the 1967 reprint of the Swedenborg Society's *Four Leading Doctrines*, translated by Wm C Dick and published in 1954. Now I have the latest translation by

Revd John Elliott, published in 2019 by the Swedenborg Society, London, this time produced as four separate volumes in a boxed set entitled: *Teachings of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord, the Sacred Scriptures, Faith and Life*. There is another difference. This edition includes Elliott's fourth edition of the original Latin text of 1763, published by Swedenborg in Amsterdam. The English and Latin texts sit on facing pages, so that those who wish can see the language in which it was written.



I have been re-reading the first of those four volumes in the new translation: *Teaching of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord*. What

has always struck me so much about this presentation is the large and comprehensive number of Biblical quotations used by Swedenborg to explain the essential Oneness of the Lord, who is Creator, Redeemer and Saviour – God with us. That is not surprising when you consider the opening statement: **The whole of Sacred Scripture has to do with the Lord, and the Lord is the Word**. Swedenborg opens the explanation by quoting those wonderful words from the opening of John's Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*. He employs John 3:19 and 12:36 and 46 as further evidence that the Lord is God, from eternity, and that God Himself is the Lord who was born in the world.

At the end of the book, citing the words in the Book of Revelation ch.22 about a *new heaven and a new earth ... Behold, I am making all things new*, Swedenborg testifies that:

... in the church to be established now by the Lord there will be a new teaching, which did not exist in the previous church ... because if it had it would not have been accepted, for the Last Judgment had not been accomplished yet...

The contents of this wonderful little volume are summarised in general terms in the final paragraph:

- i God is one in Person and Essence, and the Lord is that God.
- ii The whole of Sacred Scripture has to do with Him alone.
- iii He came into the world to subdue the hells and to glorify His Human;
He accomplished both of these things by means of the temptations He underwent, and completely so by means of the final one, which was His passion on the cross;
and by accomplishing all this He became the Redeemer and Saviour, to whom alone merit and righteousness belong.
- iv By His fulfilling all things of the Law is meant His fulfilling all things of the Word.
- v By His passion on the cross He did not take away sins but as *the* Prophet carried them, that is, He suffered on it in order that in Him the way in which the church mistreated the Word might be represented.
- vi Nothing else is meant by the imputation of His merit than the forgiveness of sins following repentance.

These things are covered in this small work. Still more new things will be seen in those that follow, which will deal with Sacred Scripture, Life, Faith, and Divine Love and Wisdom.

I have a picture in my mind of those earliest readers eagerly awaiting the opportunity to have those succeeding volumes in their hands, and revelling in such wonderful new light from heaven. I hope that readers of E-Read may themselves feel called to investigate once again what the Lord has revealed about Himself. It is not only our understanding of Him and His ways that is vital. If we discover something new about His mercy and forgiveness, that new knowledge has surely to be carried into our own relationships and behaviour with others. If we come to realise something new about His kindness and generosity, that must surely be translated into our actions and attitudes. If we appreciate anew His unending patience and readiness to go the second mile with us, that must surely carry over into our approach to people who irritate and frustrate us.

We shall not be wasting our time. Indeed, our place in heaven depends upon it!

Behold, I am making all things new.