



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society September 2024

The Poison Pill of the General Church

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

What is your favorite teaching of the New Church? Let me guess. Is it the one that says there is life on other planets?! Haha, no? Or perhaps after last month's article you're all in on the ether! No? Well, I didn't think so. No, if I had to guess what your favorite New Church teaching is, I would guess that it is the teaching that good people of all religions are accepted into heaven. In my experience, that has been the most common answer.

I get it. It really is a compelling teaching. I like it because it makes religion a more rational enterprise. God knows that humans aren't all that bright,

so surely He would have known that a large percentage of them would choose the wrong religion, and therefore be destined to hell. It just doesn't seem fair... and it wouldn't be fair if only one religion led to heaven. So not only is religion more rational with this teaching, but this teaching makes God rational.

More importantly though, it makes God loving as well. He really does love each and every one of us, and it's much harder to make that case when the majority are in the wrong religion and going to hell. In my online conversations with atheists, one of the arguments they make against religion is their inability to choose the "right" one. Which God are they supposed to believe in? They say it in an arrogant and mocking way, thinking they've out-maneuvered me, unaware that I don't actually believe what they think I believe.

But, despite the fact that most General Church members love this teaching, and it is useful for debates with atheists, I find that over the last few years I've kept my distance from it. I used to think that since it was popular with the membership, it should be promoted because it probably was a good way to get new people to join in, but now I see it as, you guessed it, a poison pill for the organization.

Hopefully at this point you're wondering why I see it as a poison pill. In order to explain it, let's start with what I think is the most important teaching, or set of teachings, in the New Church. While I think the teachings about the Lord and the afterlife are super important, I think the teachings about regeneration are what, in my humble opinion, this church is really about. Knowing what we do about the afterlife is great, and it brings a lot of comfort to us when our loved ones pass away. But the doctrine of regeneration tells us how we get to a *good* afterlife!

The teachings on regeneration tell us who we really are... receivers of life, spiritual beings in natural bodies that appear to have autonomy, but actually do not! We think our thoughts are our own, so we blame ourselves for the bad ones, and take credit for the good ones. We have had good and bad inclinations passed on down to us over many generations, and if we give in to the immediate pleasure of the bad inclinations, we will work tirelessly to justify them even while they enslave us.

The teachings on regeneration warn us how to avoid slavery to evil, and more importantly, tell us how to escape the slavery that we will inevitably find ourself in. The doctrine of regeneration is so deep and practical that it touches the details of our daily life, pushing us to transform into a new, better version of ourselves.

Let's imagine for a moment, that... well, we actually did all of that "change" stuff. You know, we lived according to the teachings. If that happened, then, in my opinion, when we are testifying about our church, we would be telling others how the teachings transformed our life. "Hey, my life is so much better now! I used to work so hard to earn more money, but now I've given that up, and spend more time with my family. Funny thing is, I make less money, but I'm happier. Who knew?!" Instead of a personal testimonial about the church, many will tell their friend a "neat" or "interesting" idea about how we believe all good people can go to heaven. Yet which of those is a more compelling case for people to join our church? A changed life, or an interesting idea?

Now, with all of that in mind, how is it that the teaching that "all good people no matter their religion can go to heaven" is a poison pill? It starts like this: a New Church person says or thinks, "You don't need to join our church, because the church or your religion you're going to is going to

lead you to heaven. You're fine where you are. God is accepting of all religions." To a certain extent, this is true. But the poison is that we take that idea, and really only focus on the "God is accepting" part, which of course He is.

We then pat ourselves on the back, and put a smile on our face, feeling proud that we're so high minded and in such an inclusive religion. It feels so nice and compassionate to tell people that we think people of all religions can go to heaven... it's makes us feel like we're bathing in a tub of unicorn tears. These days it seems there's no higher virtue than to be "inclusive," so to "include" all people into heaven can make us feel like we're part of a very progressive and virtuous religion.

But there's just one teensy-weensy problem. Heaven *is* welcoming and inclusive, but it isn't actually a pleasant place for people who do not have heaven within them. The Lord tells us that anybody is welcome into heaven, but Swedenborg also records the pain, agony and torment of the people who enter heaven, but aren't of a heavenly character. They never did let their old self die, and be born again. They never admitted they're *not fine* the way they are and change to a better version of themselves. It's regeneration that allows heaven to be, well, heaven.

The problem for the church organization is that if our people think "acceptance" and "inclusiveness" are the most important things, and the most appealing teaching we have, then... in my experience they're probably not the kind of people who are interested in doing the work of regeneration.

What this means for the church is probably one of two things. One possibility is that they at some point find some way in which they think the church is not inclusive, so they leave and have nothing good to say

about all the other teachings which would still so very useful for their daily life. So that's not good for them, or the organization. The other option is they stay and say they're a believer, but it's a superficial faith. They're not the people who will inspire others to follow the teachings as well. And that my friends, are the two ways that teaching becomes poison for the organization.

The reality is that a church grows by people inviting their friends to join. In order for that to really happen, we need to be able to tell others what the Lord did for us in our life. It can feel a bit embarrassing to be vulnerable enough to admit our wayward past, to admit our former slavery... but in doing so, we offer the hope to somebody else that through the teachings of the New Church the Lord can free them of their slavery too, which, interestingly enough, will allow them to accept heaven's invitation for inclusion and actually enjoy it.

The Arrival & Upcoming Ordination of HyunJin Yang

As my time as the Hurstville Pastor winds down, we invited HyunJin to come to Sydney and start getting acclimated to life in Australia. It's a delicate situation in that he's here on a tourist visa at this point, so while we do have a work visa in process, he can't work in Australia... yet. So the goal really is for him to get to know people, get some things set up (phone, bank account, driver's license, etc.), and observe how things operate here. He is allowed to volunteer and help out to an extent, but we don't want to abuse that and endanger his work visa, so we'll be careful with what we have him do for now.

All that said, HyunJin arrived on Tuesday August 13th, and we had a lunch after church on the 18th to welcome to the Hurstville New Church family.

It was a nice event that was well attended, and there was plenty of good food provided by everybody. As impressive as the spread was, I was more impressed with how many names and faces he remembered from his visit last year! Not only that, but I observed he remembered many details about people's lives, so he's not only got a good memory, but apparently he's a good listener too... both of which are good qualities in pastor.

Looking ahead to September, we are anticipating a visit from Bishop Dave Lindrooth. The main purpose of the visit is to ordain HyunJin into the second degree of the priesthood. This is typically done a year or two after a person is initially ordained into the priesthood and is seen as suitable to be a solo pastor of a congregation. Logistics often factor into this as well, so the farther from Bryn Athyn the posting, the longer it seems to take to organize the ordination... which is why HyunJin's will have taken a few months more than two years.

This should be a good occasion! HyunJin's wife, YoungHee(she's still in Korea for now wrapping up things for them there), along with his parents are expected to fly into town for the ordination, and we expect to be throwing a bit of a party for him after the service. You, wherever you are, are invited to join in as well. It's going to be on Sunday, September 22nd, with the service starting at 10am. If you intend to attend, please RSVP to jenn@beiswenger.net by Sunday the 15th.

Spring 2024 Women's Weekend: Hornsby, Nov 15-17

Our November women's weekend is right around the corner! So far we have eight women definitely participating in-person (*one of whom is flying all the way up from Melbourne, just for this!*) with more tuning in online. **The deadline for in-person registration will be October 16th:**

\$50 will hold your spot, contact Jenn (jenn@beiswenger.net) to register and for additional details.

Why come? Why are we doing this? Basically, it's for the fellowship: the sisterhood that we share with one another – especially those who participate in the flesh – is really special. If you haven't joined us in person before, I encourage you to give it a try, because a) it's a unique experience, which is in part fun, in part spiritual, in part impactful.... it'll be whatever you make of it, and it can be really great; b) we have a compelling bunch of topics lined up: **death & dying** (*..that may sound morbid and not compelling, but hopefully you share some curiosity about death, conviction that the afterlife is A-MA-ZING, and eagerness to talk & hear more about this entirely natural part of the life cycle which is pretty hush-hush, in our western society today*); **looking beyond the words** that appear in the Bible towards the real meaning behind them; considering whether we're living up to **who we really want to be**..... PLUS we'll be assembling birthing kits – again! – for childbearing women in disadvantaged countries,.... among other reasons.

On the subject of **birth kits**: our supplies are fully funded! In less than two weeks we've raised the \$1000 needed to purchase the supplies for the birth kits that we will assemble in November. Thank you SO MUCH to all who contributed so generously!

The Perspective of Eternity by Bill Hall

editors note: long time readers will recall that Bill Hall used to regularly submit short articles for the newsletter, and my observation was that people enjoyed his simple takes on important teachings. This month as I was going through my files, I found this one he'd sent me a couple months before he passed in December of 2016. It never got published. I hope you enjoy this appropriately titled & posthumously published

article.

“For a truly rational view of life, we need the perspective of eternity that the Word of God gives us.” Rev. Doug Taylor, *The Hidden Secrets of the Mind*, p.44

A most important teaching of the New Church is that our lives continue on after the physical death of the body. This is a main reason for striving to live by the teachings of the new Church throughout our waking consciousness. So our lives are not transient that will be complete. Truly, our lives live on even now at this very moment. We are what we are now because of what we have done or experienced in the past.

What can we do at this moment to experience the perspective of eternity? Because we are convinced of the truth of eternal life, a most practical answer is to strive the best can do at this very moment. In this way, when we look back at this moment we shall be grateful that we tried to do our best, always with the intention of contributing to the common good of the community.

As Bishop Brian Keith said in an enlightening sermon, “We are never alone. We are never without Someone who loves us and takes care of us.” When this truth is implanted in our consciousness, we are certain that the Lord is truly helping us in every way to live as the Lord would have us live, to love the Lord first and foremost and the love our neighbor as ourself.

Loving the Lord who is always good to us is easier in some ways than loving our neighbor who can on a bad day, irritate and annoy us. To that end, Rev Taylor wrote, “...the Lord is not commanding us to be fond of everyone; but He is commanding us to consider the welfare of others – whether we like them or not!” This statement makes it very clear that in

all our relationships we are to be ever mindful of the health, happiness and comfort of others.

As adult members of the New Church, we have the eternal responsibility to always live by the teachings of the New Church, always remembering that the Lord is leading and guiding our lives toward a useful, productive and enjoyable life now and evermore.

Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31, 32

Assembly Videos Now Available

Let’s be honest: you probably were not able to get to the GC Assembly in June. I get it. Bryn Athyn is a long way from Australia, and not a cheap flight that time of the year either. But maybe you wished you were able to attend a session or two. Well, you’re in luck! All of the sessions are now available online here:

<https://gcassembly2024.org/videos/>

Kids Say the Darndest Things

I heard about this 6 year old boy, he was standing in a church lobby, staring at the large plaque on the wall. It was filled with names, with small Australian flags by their side. He asked the pastor, “What are all the names for?” The pastor explained that it was a memorial for all the young men and women that died in the service. The little boy stood there silently, so very concerned... he finally spoke up and asked, “Was it the 8:30 or 10 o'clock service?”

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Bryn Athyn College of the New Church Presidential Search

Bryn Athyn College is seeking applicants for the position of President. The President is the chief executive officer of the school, reporting directly to the Board of Trustees, and has responsibility for and oversight of all campus administration, faculty, and students. In addition to leading the institution in the development of a financially sustainable vision, the President of Bryn Athyn College is responsible for:

- Leading the school toward the achievement of its mission
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan
- Leading the institution's fundraising efforts
- Establishing and managing the College's annual operating budget
- Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, Academy Corporation, Chancellor, administrators, Faculty Council, students, and the Alumni Association

As stated in the institution's by-laws, the successful candidate will be a member of the General Church of the New Jerusalem. Thus the College seeks a candidate who loves both the New Church and liberal arts education. Professional experience in academia and a graduate degree are preferred, but the position is open to candidates with other backgrounds.

Applicants should submit a letter of interest and a curriculum vitae by October 1, 2024. The successful candidate is expected to assume her/his responsibilities by July of 2025.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to Owen H (6th), Carolyn H (8th), Klaire H (9th), Liam J (10th), Sylvia H (13th), Karen E (13th), Jeffrey H (15th), Phillipa H (15th), Azalea R (19th), Phillip W (29th)

What's "new" about the "New Church?"

A very common question, to be sure. Well, it all started just over 200 years ago... the main branches of the Christian church had become less correct, and one man named Emanuel Swedenborg had written volumes about how Christianity was missing the point. Some readers of Swedenborg realised he was right, and formed a new organisation that would strip away the centuries of politics and tradition and get back to what Christianity was supposed to be about: loving God and loving each other. Everything else could be seen as merely a difference of opinion if those two main principles reigned supreme through this new church.

As a result we believe in a positive Christianity, one where we look to the best in ourselves and others while still holding ourselves accountable to a higher standard and taking responsibility for our lives. Nowadays we're not so much "new" as we are "different." We still keep the name, and yet make every effort to incorporate the ideals that were instrumental in being "new" over two centuries ago.

Editor – Rev Todd Beiswenger

22-24 Dudley St., off Hillcrest Ave. in Penshurst

Tel (02) 9580-1589

Email: todd@hurstvillenewchurch.com

<http://www.hurstvillenewchurch.com/>

Call or come at any time.