

GOD IS NOT ONLY A CHRISTIAN

new
church

connection

www.newchurch.org

Is There Such Thing as the "Right" Religion? pg. 8

Belonging to a Religion is Important pg. 10

**NO ONE
BEYOND REACH**
pg.14

Readings From Sacred Texts pg.12

2012 | Issue 1



New Church Connection explores the connection between religion and life. Every issue features content that highlights the personal nature of spirituality, providing applicable ideas to support your journey with insights from the New Church (Swedenborgian) faith.

in this issue: **God is not only Christian**

new church connection

WELCOME

Connecting you with a New Christian spirituality for everyday life

PRODUCTION TEAM

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
David Lindrooth

MANAGING EDITOR AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Bronwen Henry

CREATIVE DESIGN
Caroline Kline

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Michelle Chapin

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Chelsea Odhner

COPY EDITORS
Rachel Glenn
Bruce Henderson

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER
Anita Halterman

General Church Outreach
A department of the General Church of the New Jerusalem

1100 Cathedral Road
PO Box 743
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

1-877-411-HOPE (4673)
www.newchurch.org
questions@newchurch.org

For general information call 267-502-4911.

To contribute an article or personal story, or to request this magazine for yourself or a friend, please contact the production team at outreach@newchurch.org for more information.

cover concept and images by: MICHELLE CHAPIN
cover design by: CAROLINE KLINE

I remember in high school first contemplating salvation and different religions. I was part of a nondenominational youth group which promoted the idea that salvation is only accessible to those who 'know Jesus' while on earth. I did not feel at peace with this idea. It was in these late teen years that I first explored New Church theology for myself, and was drawn to its merciful message regarding different religions. This beautiful aspect of New Church theology is summarized succinctly in *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 246: "The Lord's Church is with all in the whole world who live in good according to their religious system. All who live in good—wherever they are—and acknowledge one God, are accepted by the Lord and come into heaven."

The works of Emanuel Swedenborg point to a path that Jesus led, a path of kindness, acceptance, and love. In this issue we examine this concept of the Lord God Jesus Christ and His influence beyond the limits of any one religion. When Jesus walked on earth He changed the earth. When Swedenborg wrote about how Jesus changed the earth, he removed barriers in the way of fully accepting the potency and magnitude of Jesus' impact.

In this issue we begin to examine this important topic. We explore who is saved, why God said certain things in the Bible, reasons to participate in organized religion, and more. Do any of these ideas resonate with you? Surprise you? We'd like to hear your thoughts. Join the conversation online at www.facebook.com/NewChurchConnection.

With gratitude,

Bronwen Henry

Bronwen Henry



The Lord provides that everyone who acknowledges God and refrains from doing evil should have a place in heaven.
-Divine Providence 326

What's Next?
Forgiveness, Prayer, and more.
Submit your topic ideas online.

Changing Lives

Brother Miller found truth that deeply resonated with him from the New Church, and began preaching it in his Baptist community.

4

Seeking Answers

Why do so many different religions exist in the world? Rev. Barry Halterman explains.

8

Real Challenges

Rev. Derrick Lumsden discusses three spiritual benefits of organized religion that encourage and enhance our relationship with God.

10

God. Love. Kindness. And World Religions.

Engage in readings from sacred texts about the beauty of the world created by the Divine.

12

No One Beyond Reach

We are told the Lord is merciful, but also that only those who know Christ are granted eternal life. Rev. David Lindrooth explores the New Church teachings that harmonize these two points of view.

14

Going Deeper

The story of Abraham being ordered to kill his son Isaac is a confusing one. It seems unlike a loving God. Rev. John Odhner explores the inner meaning of this story.

18

Small Group Study of World Religions

Gather a group together for this 5 week study about how different world religions view elements of our spirituality.

20

After turning his life around,

Brother Miller came from a background in Baptist Culture to embrace the wonderful truths found in the New Church. He believes it's more than just a good idea, it's the only idea, and constantly encourages people to embody the spirit of God, and embrace His Divine Love.

up quickly as people arrive to hear Brother Miller speaking about the revolutionary concepts from a man named Emanuel Swedenborg. These teachings contradict the surrounding Christian churches where many of Brother Miller's listeners come from, yet those at his services say, "I've never heard any teaching like this, but there is something true here." Many of those who return week after week say, "I can understand the Bible now, and I know what to do. This is a precious revelation!"

... Interview by Sasha Silverman

It's

one of the worst sections of downtown Louisville, Kentucky. Gang members shout profanities across the littered streets and the smell of dope permeates the air. In the churches, the predominant doctrine is faith alone. On one lawn, though, open chairs invite any passerby to come and hear words of inspiration and personal responsibility. Seats fill

It all started back in 1979, when a young inner-city musician named Ed Miller felt the Lord's presence in a powerful way. He'd been singing in a band, and living with a woman who was separated from her husband, but he was tired of his lifestyle. He knew he wanted things to be different, but he didn't know how to change. One night, while studying the Bible, the light in his room became brighter than any light he'd seen, and he felt an amazingly peaceful presence saying, "You have to leave. I have work for you to do." He now believes this was the beginning of a preparation for finding the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, but at the time, he just knew he wanted to do the Lord's work.

Ed went on to become a well-respected Baptist preacher, delivering passionate sermons on the old Christian ideas of faith alone, literal translation of Genesis, three gods, and the remission of sins. Underneath his confident exterior, though, Ed felt something wasn't right. The creation story, for example, didn't make any sense in the literal translation.

How could the sun be created on the fourth day, after God had already created light and darkness? When asking the older ministers for help in

understanding, though, the response he'd get was, "Just have faith." Looking back on that now, Miller says, "But you can't have faith unless you have the truth!"

Around 1995, Brother Miller, as he was now called, heard of Swedenborg, and decided to order some books. Astounded by what he read, he thought to himself, "This is too wonderful for me." He would start reading after dinner and keep reading until the next morning. Through applying what he read, it became clear to him that "truth is not just to know, but to live!"

Over the next few years, Brother Miller kept ordering more and more books from the Swedenborg Foundation, and the teachings began to permeate his sermons. He continued preaching in Baptist and other non-denominational churches, but now he refuted the doctrine of faith alone—a teaching he felt was damaging his community. He wanted to teach everyone the importance of the commandments, and of repentance and regeneration. "These teachings don't come from Swedenborg," he told people, "they are from the Lord. They are Scripture. They are the opening of the Word. Swedenborg truly was a servant."

"The Lord is giving us the power to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth."

"It became clear that truth is not just to know, but to live!"

One of Brother Miller's most receptive listeners was a woman named Virginia (who, years later, on June 19th, 2009, would become his wife!) She and her son, Marcus, helped establish Bible/Swedenborg study sessions in a library, where they studied how the Bible and Swedenborg's teachings make one. Not everyone felt comfortable with Brother Miller's new approach, however. One of the Baptist church pastors, in particular, felt extremely angry, and kicked Miller out of the church. Unwilling to give up, Brother Miller continued to hold sessions at a library, and began to attract a sincerely interested group of seekers.

"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."
 -John 3:21

This committed group has established a church, with Brother Miller as pastor, and they have recently purchased a church building to host their worship services. The Church of Truth, as they now call themselves, hopes to grow and share the good news, and eventually build not only a church, but a school as well. Miller says, "It's so much warfare, because our area is heavily concentrated in faith alone. But now there is the Church of Truth which the Lord is using to give people a chance to choose Divine Truth. So it's a blessing." He adds, "We're unique. We have our own identity, but we're part of one body." In addition to pastoring the Church of

Truth, Brother Miller has a Saturday evening radio broadcast. He goes to the studio along with his wife, and many of the core church members. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose and Rev. David Lindrooth participate via telephone. In these services, the whole team talks about the inner meaning of the Bible, the importance of the Ten Commandments, and the falsity of faith alone. They discuss the stages of regeneration, and announce that God is one, not three. They say that Jesus will not come again in the flesh, but through a new understanding of the Word. They proclaim that the Lord is establishing a new Christian church in the world, and that all people will have access to the truth. Brother Miller says with full assurance, "This is going to be the mainstream teaching. This is the plan for the human race and how to achieve it. The Lord is giving us the power to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth." It's taken some time, but the message is catching on. When ministers from other churches say, "Very good argument," Miller replies, "Not a good argument, but the truth!" He's even noticed that they're starting to incorporate some New Church ideas into their sermons. For example, he's heard them begin to talk about, the "process" of being born again, instead of treating it like a one-time event.

Brother Miller sends encouragement, "We see what faith alone has done to our neighborhoods. It's hurt our communities. Swedenborg's revelation tells us that the commandments haven't been done away with. These teachings are making an impact on our lives, and bringing us out of terrible situations—they are really doing wonders. "The Lord has blessed you to be a guardian of these very precious teachings. We want to encourage you. There's a world of people who need them." ●

"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary."
 -Revelation 2:3

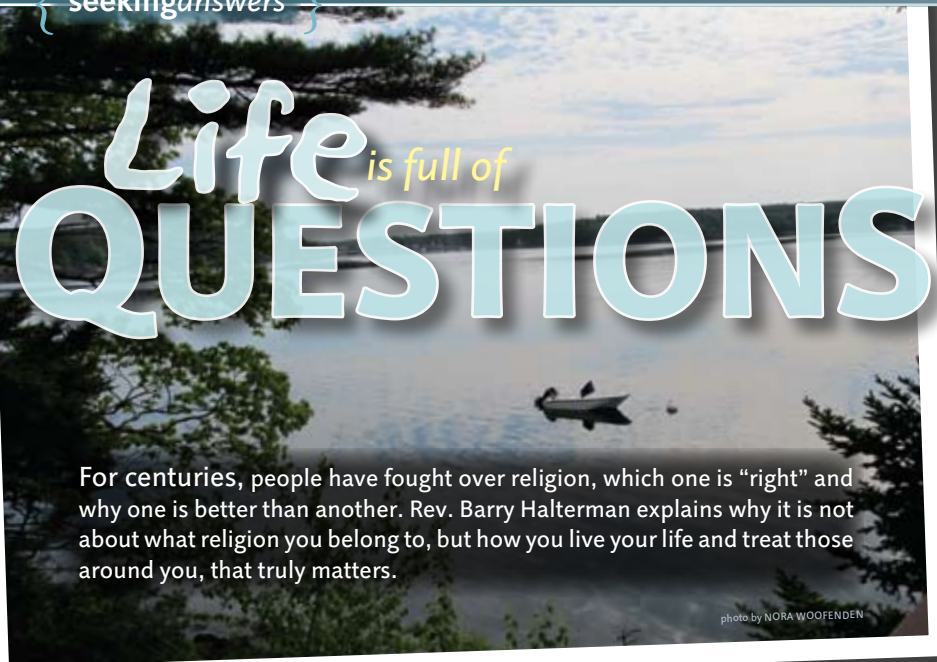
You can listen to Brother Miller's radio program every second Saturday 6:30 PM-9PM ET. Visit them online at www.truechurchof-truth.com, or myspace.com/truechurchoftruth.

What Is Your Story?
 How has your life been impacted by living New Christian spirituality? Send us your story.
[@newchurch.org](http://newchurchconnection)



Join an Online Small Group!

Small group discussion provides a great way to work on your spiritual life and get support from others in the process. There is an easy way to participate by video if you are not nearby or unable to attend a group in person. For more information, to sign up to join a group, or volunteer to lead one, visit www.newchurch.org/activities/online-small-groups.



Life is full of QUESTIONS

For centuries, people have fought over religion, which one is “right” and why one is better than another. Rev. Barry Halterman explains why it is not about what religion you belong to, but how you live your life and treat those around you, that truly matters.

photo by NORA WOOFENDEN



photo by BRENT SCHARR

The clearer our picture of how to serve the neighbor is, the closer to God we can become.

Q IS THERE ONE “RIGHT” RELIGION?

a Yes, but it doesn’t exist simply with one group or one church. The right religion is simply this: to love our Creator and all the people He created. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40). In other words the whole point of religion is to learn to love and serve God and the neighbor. At their core, all

religions come back to the same thing: love and serve God and the neighbor. That doesn’t mean all religions are equally true or good. Some religions seem to have a clearer understanding of how to love and serve God and the neighbor while some lead away from this principle. The clearer our picture of how to serve the Lord and neighbor are closer to God we can become.

Q CAN PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIONS GO TO HEAVEN?

a Getting to heaven isn’t simply a matter of having the right beliefs, or doing the right rituals, or calling Divine by a specific name. You can’t get to heaven without doing what God wills. A person who professes belief in Jesus as Lord but breaks His commandments really isn’t a follower of Christ at all. Is a Muslim who refrains from murder and theft because they are sins against God any different from a Christian who refrains from murder and theft because they sins against God? One says “Allah” instead of “Lord,” but aren’t they both following the will of God, the Heavenly Father of all of us? Anyone who refrains from evil because it is against God and does good because it is from God is following the will of God and has the Kingdom of God within him.

SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE.
Email questions@newchurch.org.
Mention “New Church Connection”.

Q WHY DO MANY RELIGIONS EXIST? IS IT ON PURPOSE OR AN ACCIDENT?

a The different religions are based on the different responses people have to God over time. Even in these different responses, certain universal truths are common among them. Truth, by definition, comes from God. Jesus said, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). New Church theology teaches: “When a religion has been implanted in a nation, the Lord leads that nation according to the precepts and dogmas of its own religion. He has provided that there shall be in every religion precepts like those in the Ten Commandments.... The nation that regards these precepts as Divine and lives according to them from a religious motive is saved” (*Divine Providence* 254). Mixed in with those true teachings may be many false teachings. The point is that the Lord is present and leads all people through the true teachings of their religions.



Rev. Barry Halterman is the Religion Department Chair at the Academy of the New Church High School in Bryn Athyn, PA (www.ancss.org). He is also Assistant Pastor at New Church LIVE (www.newchurchlive.tv).

realchallenge

Much of sacred text speaks of an individual's path. If there is beauty and truth in so many religions, than why choose one? And, in particular, why join in with others in an organized manner on the path?

realsupport by Derrick Lumsden

Here is an excerpt from an article by Derrick Lumsden originally published on www.newchurchperspectives.com.

I have often heard people say: "I am spiritual, but not religious."

My understanding of why people say this is because they see the value of spirituality, but also the reality of the faults of the religious organizations with which they have contact.

To offer full disclosure, I am a priest. It is my job to be both spiritual *and* religious, but I chose this profession in part because I believe in organized religion.

Here are a couple of benefits I see to organized religion: organized religion offers guidance in spirituality, and en-

gaging with it provides an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Organized religion offers guidance in spirituality.

Religious organizations exist to help people with spirituality. One way to view religion is as a spiritual path. To progress in spirituality, you must choose a path. Without an organization, a person must wander in the woods and see if he can find the path and manage to stay on it without any guidance. Organized religions offer the value of being able to pass along awareness of the dangers and also the great views that come when one walks the path.

An organization offers the guidance and wisdom of many people. This shared

Without an organization, a person must wander in the woods and see if he can find the path and manage to stay on it without any guidance.

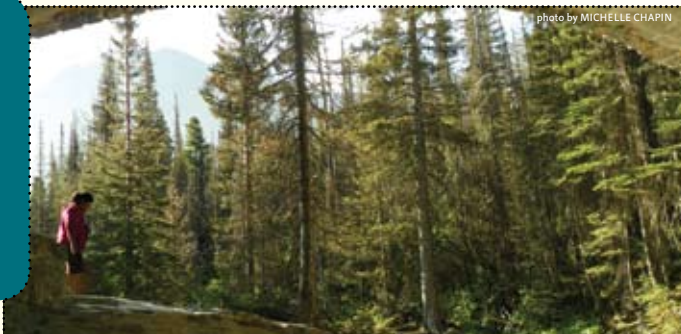


photo by MICHELLE CHAPIN



photo by MARIAN VANGENNE

Your view can benefit from being challenged and improved by many minds

Organized religions offer the value of being able to pass along awareness of the dangers and also the great views that come when one walks the path.

wisdom is of greater value than any one individual mentor could ever offer. Your view can benefit from being challenged and improved by many minds.

Engaging with organized religion provides an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Social tension is often an uncomfortable thing, and yet without tension you lose an opportunity to grow. To try to gain strength without some form of resistance is impossible. To try to play a musical instrument without the vibration of some tension is impossible. The tension caused by trying to work with others creates the opportunity for spiritual growth, which in turn creates the opportunity for harmony that would otherwise be impossible.

To take your opinion away from an organization leaves it at the mercy of those who disagree with you. To stay engaged with an organization forces you to come to terms with the tension between individual desires and the good of the whole community.

I invite you to engage with an organized religion because I firmly believe you and the organization will benefit.

So why choose one religion over another?

Why would you use Windows 98 when you could use Windows 7? Why use a commodore when you could use an iPad? I am admittedly biased, but generations of religion ought to improve, they ought to add more to what was before and deal with some of the serious drawbacks of what came before. The claim for the New Church is that we have a new generations of the religious organizations—a new revelation that offers more and helps us deal with some of the drawbacks of the previous approaches. Not that the previous religions are good for nothing or that there isn't much to be learned by exploring them or that those who use them don't get tremendous benefit, but if God has more to say, isn't it worth going with the latest? ●



Rev. Derrick Lumsden is pastor of Westville New Church. Learn more at newchurchwestville.co.za.

God. Love. Kindness, And World Religions.

Christianity has not cornered the market on love. God's love permeates all religions. When Jesus came on earth He embodied love in a way that can transform anyone who follows the Way He taught.

Here are a selection of quotations that remind us of the love that is central to Jesus' teaching and also show that this theme is found in other world religions.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

-1 John 4: 7-8

"Of how great importance it is to have a just (or proper) idea of God may appear from the consideration that the idea of God forms the inmost of thought with all who have any religion."

-*Divine Love and Wisdom* 13

"Love is the mystery of divine revelations! Love is the effulgent manifestation! Love is the spiritual fulfillment! Love is the light of the Kingdom! Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit inspired into the human spirit! Love is the cause of the manifestation of the Truth (God) in the phenomenal world! Love is the necessary tie proceeding from the realities of things through divine creation!"

- `Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá v3[1]

"[Allah] is the Forgiving and Loving."

-(Qur'an 85:14)

"Jehovah God is Love itself and Wisdom itself, or Good itself and Truth itself."

-*True Christian Religion* 3

"Be fearless and pure; never waver in your determination or your dedication to the spiritual life. Give freely. Be self-controlled, sincere, truthful, loving, and full of the desire to serve.... Learn to be detached and to take joy in renunciation. Do not get angry or harm any living creature, but be compassionate and gentle; show good will to all. Cultivate vigor, patience, will, purity; avoid malice and pride. Then, you will achieve your destiny."

-Bhagavad Gita

"O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever."

-Psalm 139:3

"Where love is, there God is also."

-Mohandas Gandhi

"All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness. The important thing is they should be part of our daily lives."

-Dalai Lama

Compiled by Bronwen Henry

No One Beyond Reach

Rev. David Lindrooth explores a core topic “Do you have to believe in Christ to be saved?” in the context of questions about life after death and children in heaven. Through these complex questions we hear both hope and inspiration in a vision of God that is not limited.

by Rev. David Lindrooth

Late one evening in a trash filled alley in the remote city of Latur, India, a young orphan who had been subsisting on the scraps of food he could retrieve from the local dump, passed away from the effects of a burst appendix. The event went largely unnoticed in the neighborhood. He was one of a seemingly endless number of orphans who inhabited the city. His body would be found the next morning by the sweepers and dis-

posed of—not even meriting a death notice in the local paper.

While variations of this sad tale are repeated far too many times in our modern world, this boy’s life is only beginning. According to the book *Heaven and Hell* by Emanuel Swedenborg, the child, upon awakening in the next life, is given to angel parents and raised and instructed in heaven in an atmosphere of love that defies the imagination.

Strangely, there are many Christian theologians who claim that such a child is condemned to hell because he was not exposed to Christianity. It is almost as if they are saying that the boy was beyond the reach of Christ and somehow hidden from His love because he never declared that Christ died for his sins and was baptized.

New Church teachings present a different view, one in which Jesus Christ’s saving power is not limited. In the New Testament, Jesus says directly that “without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5) and that “all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew

28:18). Encompassed in these statements is the idea that He is the origin of all life, both in heaven and on earth. This is true whether one ‘knows’ Him or not. The transformational events of Jesus’ birth, life, and death continue to impact all individuals regardless of their awareness of those events. By extension, it is not hard to imagine that anyone who lives in heaven comes in contact with Jesus Christ and experiences the all encompassing power of His love.

Considering this in regard to children in heaven, I’m uplifted by New Church

teachings on this topic. In the book *Heaven and Hell* it goes on to describe how a child who is raised in heaven has a unique opportunity to witness the Lord’s love and mercy in operation. With other angels as mentors, the child is able to see the Lord’s operation with a level of clarity not possible on earth. Like all human beings, that child (though in heaven) still is given the opportunity to choose between a life of good or evil, a life aligned

with heaven or with hell. But having had a clear vision of how Divine life works presented to him in the wisest of ways, it is hard to imagine that such a child would

ever choose evil over good.

One purpose of the church on earth is to attempt to create a supportive environment that mirrors the educational environment in heaven and make it as easy as possible to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30). When we show the accepting love of Jesus, for all people, we are doing just that.

Divine Love itself, in the human form of Jesus Christ, has the power to affect people’s lives any time they act in harmony with His principles—regardless of religious affiliation. Jesus said simply “give and it will be given to you”

When our actions are in harmony with divine life, we receive that life.



(Luke 6:38), meaning when our actions are in harmony with divine life, we receive that life. It is that simple. But there are more or less powerful ways of making this connection, depending on one's understanding of who God is and how He operates with people.

Religion, to the degree that it shows how to harmonize with the Lord, is a useful tool in helping people discover heaven and understand how God reaches and touches human beings, even in circumstances that seem beyond hope. Religion that leads people away from that contact can actually be detrimental to one's ability to receive spiritual life. So it is important to find a religion that sensibly connects people to the life of heaven. The New Church shows how the isolated orphan who dies knowing nothing of Christianity will be raised in heaven and still will be given the opportunity to choose a life that aligns with heaven.

Although in our world the orphaned state continues to be a reality with

which we must cope, on a spiritual level we are never orphaned. No matter our outward circumstances, the Lord is always present within us, ready to lead us when we turn our lives to Him and begin to walk in His ways. As He said: "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you" (John 14:18). ●

No matter our outward circumstances, the Lord is present within us, ready to lead us when we turn our lives to Him and begin to walk in His ways.



David Lindrooth is director of General Church Outreach, supporting the international growth of the New Church. Learn more at www.newchurch.org.

New Church Teachings on World Religions

"He who is not against us is on our side" (Luke 9:50).

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

"People who are not Christian but accept one God and live by some type of kindness toward other people according to their religion share a common bond with Christians. No one who believes in God and lives a good life is condemned. So you can see that the Lord's religion is everywhere in the whole world" (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 244).

"It is of the Lord's Divine Providence that every nation has some form of religion; and the primary essential of every religion is the acknowledgment that there is a God, otherwise it is not called a religion; and every nation that lives according to its religion, that is, which refrains from doing evil because it is contrary to its God, receives something spiritual in its natural" (*Divine Providence* 322.4).

"When a religion has been implanted in a nation, the Lord leads that nation according to the precepts and dogmas of its own religion. He has provided that there shall be in every religion precepts like those in the Decalogue.... The nation that regards these precepts as Divine and lives according to them from a religious motive is saved.... Moreover, most nations remote from the Christian world regard these not as civil but as Divine laws and hold them sacred" (*Divine Providence* 254).

"To acknowledge God and to refrain from doing evil because it is against God are the two things that make a religion to be a religion. If either of these is lacking it cannot be called a religion...The Lord provides that there shall be some religion nearly everywhere, and there shall be these two things in every religion. The Lord also provides that everyone who acknowledges God and refrains from doing evil because it is against God should have a place in heaven" (*Divine Providence* 326).

God Said

What?!

As we explore the question of 'Who is God?' and how he shows up across religions, we turn to sacred text. When we read stories in the Bible, God is often misinterpreted as angry or wanting others to suffer for His name's sake. Reading the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, we are confused and left wondering why the Lord would ask this of Abraham? How can this be a story of His mercy?

→ by Rev. John Odhner

I think that God is loving, so some stories in the Bible make me do a double-take—"God said what?!"

The book of Genesis tells a story like that. God said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering." Abraham complies, takes Isaac and binds him on the altar, but at the last second the angel of the Lord intervenes and stops Abraham from killing his son (Genesis 22).

I imagine you might react like me—"Wait... What?!... No way! God would never ask for that—would He?" To be fair, part of the point of the story is that Abraham trusted God enough to do something that seemed like it would destroy everything for which he had worked, hoped and prayed. If God had asked for something less extreme, it wouldn't have been a test of his faith. At least we can say that God never really intended that Isaac should actually be sacrificed. Still, that leaves us wondering whether God was lying to Abraham, and whether we should have such complete faith in a God who asks us to make such extreme sacrifices.

The Bible says that "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). *True Christianity* tells that, in reality, God cannot turn away from us or even look at us with a frown" (56). Still, we see people—even the innocent—suffering. Since earliest times people have assumed that God punishes us for displeasing Him, but the teachings of the New Church invite us to look more deeply at the Bible.

From earliest times people knew from prophecy that Divine Love would take on a human manifestation in the world, and that this Human would take on our challenges and give everything, even His life, to help us overcome evil. Eventually, though, this belief was twisted into the horrible idea that God could somehow be pleased with sacrificial murder of His Son, or with human sacrifice in general. That terrible belief was widespread in Abraham's time, and Abraham could not grasp sacrifice in any other terms.

On a literal level, the Bible shows Abraham believing that God really wanted him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Yet else-

where the Bible states that God did not desire nor command that kind of sacrifice. "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire...burnt offering and sin offering You have not required" (Psalm 40:6).

On a deeper level this story is telling us symbolically what love is like. Genuine love is sacrificial. We should never sacrifice our children though we may sacrifice for our children and help them learn to sacrifice compassionately for others. A mother may go hungry herself to give food to her starving child. A soldier may give his life to protect his country and a fireman may give his life to rescue people from a burning building. A person in love may overlook and forgive a thousand little injuries and failings, because love is compassionate and is willing to suffer in order to protect and provide for loved ones. "Greater love has no one than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). ●

In reality, God cannot turn away from us or even look at us with a frown.

—*True Christianity* 56

Part of the point of the story is that Abraham trusted God enough to do something that seemed like it would destroy everything for which he had worked, hoped and prayed.



The Rev. John Odhner is an Assistant to the Pastor at the Bryn Athyn Church. For more information, visit www.brynathynchurch.org.

Please go online to download the full version!

We've developed a 5 week small group study for you to consider world religions including the New Church. With a friend, small group, or as an individual, check out these themes present in all religions and explore how they show up in your life.

Small Group Study of World Religions

WEEK ONE Self Awareness

"First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

–Christianity

"He who knows others is discerning; he who knows himself is wise."

–Taoism

Discussion Questions

- What resonated with you from these quotations?
- What challenged you?
- How have you seen this topic's significance in your life?
- Do these different perspectives on this one truth help you see it in a more holistic way?
- How can you bring this into your life this week?
- How do these different perspectives expand your idea of this concept/truth?

WEEK TWO Actions Speak Louder Than Words

"God will not ask a man of what race he is. He will ask what he has done."

–Sikhism

"But I say unto you: deeds of love are worth as much as all the commandments of the law."

–Judaism

WEEK THREE Deeper Meaning in Scriptures

"The letter kills, but the spirit gives life."

–Christianity

"The Koran was sent down in seven dialects, and in every one of its sentences there is an outer and an inner meaning."

–Islam

...the truth is that everywhere in that Word there are internal things which never appear at all in the external things.

–*Secrets of Heaven 1*
Emanuel Swedenborg

WEEK FOUR Heaven is Within

"The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

–Christianity

"Do not search in distant skies for God. In man's own heart is He found."

–Shintoism

The people who have heaven in them come into it after death.
–*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 236*, Emanuel Swedenborg

WEEK FIVE There is One God

"There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

–Christianity

"He is the one God hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the Self within all beings, watching over all worlds, dwelling in all beings, the witness, the perceiver."

–Hinduism



Congregations around the world

The New Church is a new Christianity that provides a clear path to eternal happiness and addresses many questions about God, love, and life after death. The teachings are immediately practical and deeply spiritual. The New Church is based on the teachings of the Bible as illuminated in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem) has congregations around the world. All people are welcome to join in worship and participate in the life and community of the church.



FOCUS ON THE NEW CHURCH IN Westville, South Africa

As a church community, New Church Westville strives to support marriage and family relationships. We want to grow and strengthen these sacred relationships within our community and look for ways to support marriages and families across South Africa.

One significant way we support families is through the education of children. We run both a Pre-Primary school and Primary school (through grade 7).

Find more at <http://www.newchurchwestville.co.za/>

Find a New Church Near You...



Please look online or call for more information

www.newchurch.org/contact/locations
tel.1(877)411-HOPE or (267)502-4911

...and Get Connected!

About Swedenborg and Works Cited

Emanuel Swedenborg was an 18th-century scientist and philosopher who continually studied the Word. Late in Swedenborg's life, the Lord called him to receive revelation for a new church. The New Church teaches that these Writings are divinely inspired revelation for the modern age—heavenly doctrines touching on many aspects of religion with a rational and merciful approach.

In this issue the following works of Swedenborg are referenced: *Divine Providence, True Christianity, New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, and *Heaven and Hell*.

New Church TEACHINGS

The perspectives in this magazine are based on the teachings of the New Church found in the Old and New Testaments and the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Core teachings of the New Church:

- There is one loving, personal God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. His providence is powerful and unending. God guides each person's spiritual path, from the smallest things up to the biggest things, and His angels are with us every moment.
- The Old and New Testaments have a deeper meaning, revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, which help people lead happy and useful lives to eternity.
- Spiritual growth is a process. Through recognizing our sins, praying, shunning evils, and living a new life, we are transformed and united more closely with God.
- All religions have goodness in them. People of every faith are saved if they live sincerely according to their religion.
- Each of us continues life as a complete person immediately after the death of the body.
- While people are free to choose to live in hell, God wants everyone to live with Him in heaven to eternity.
- Marriage can last forever, for God blesses people with a special love in marriage that goes on after death, even to eternity.

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. - POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 182
Southampton, PA

new church **connection**
A Publication of General Church Outreach
PO BOX 743
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 USA
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your joyful responses and generous donations to support the uses of this magazine. Your continued input and support make this publication possible. We hope that your 2012 is abundantly blessed and filled with the Lord's peace.

With gratitude,

Brown Henry

