



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society April 2018

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Why No Crosses?

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

Have you ever noticed that New Church churches just don't have crosses on them? You really don't find them inside either. Some of you might note that the Bryn Athyn Cathedral is in the shape of a cross, but aside from that our buildings are generally devoid of them. Contrast that to just about any other Christian church and you'll see a very marked difference. They are the main symbol for them, but we rarely use them.

Okay, so why not? Why don't we have any crosses? It really all comes from how the Writings tell us we should visualize the Lord. Here's an example: "As the Lord actually presents Himself to us, we must actually receive Him, not, however, as He hung upon the cross, but as He is in His glorified Human, in which He is present, the body of which is the Divine good and the blood of which is the Divine truth" (TCR 728).

We get something similar in Apocalypse Explained:

"It is by means of Divine truth, when it is received, that a person is reformed and regenerated by the Lord and saved, and not by the shedding of blood on the cross. This can be seen from this also, that the garments of angels appear glistening from what is white and bright, not from faith in and thought about the blood of the Lord on the cross, but from Divine truth with them from the Lord; for, as was said above, their garments are all in accord with the truths with them. Nor is any angel permitted to think of the Lord's passion, but only of His glorification, and of the reception by Him of the Divine". (AE 476)

What New Church scholars have taken from these passages, and others that teach similarly, is that we really aren't to focus on the cross when we think of the Lord, but rather we should think of the risen Lord. It's been said, "Focus on the empty tomb, not the bloody cross." And just to be clear, "bloody" in this context is the blood of Christ, not a derogatory adjective.

It is definitely a different perspective than mainstream Christianity. They are very much focused on Jesus' blood and the cross. It creates many issues for us in terms of evangelization because for an old church Christian to come to us, they have to completely reorient their thinking. It also makes it difficult for us to use mainstream Christian music in our worship services because so many of them are about the blood on the cross. I really can't begin to tell you how many songs we've not used because the lyrics are just not compatible with our beliefs.

You could make a case that we have perhaps gone too far the other way by not mentioning the cross more. After all, it is a Christian symbol. When a child is baptized, the minister makes a cross on the child's forehead and breast with the water. True Christian Religion 682 states, "For at Baptism an infant receives the sign of the cross on his forehead and breast, which is a token of his inauguration into the acknowledgment and worship of the Lord."

The New Church does see the cross as a Christian sign as well, but because of what the Lord teaches us in the Writings we come to a different understanding of what that sign means. The cross for the New Church is about temptations, and how Jesus was able to accomplish His mission of restoring balance to the world by being tempted and resisting them. It wasn't just the final sacrifice of being tempted on the cross, but rather He went through them His whole life.

Since we too have to go through temptations, the cross can be used as a useful reminder to us about the sacrifices we too must make in order to accomplish our own goal of regeneration. It isn't easy, and it can feel like we're dying in the process... and that's because we are. A part of us IS dying.

Yet what mainstream Christianity has done is taught that because Jesus died on the cross we are saved. Because He died, we live. So they put the cross front and centre as a constant reminder of the price that was paid for our life. There is some truth in it, but what saves us here and now is not Jesus' death, but rather our own willingness to receive His Divine Truth and Goodness into our lives. It's true that if He hadn't suffered on the cross that we wouldn't have the freedom to receive Him, but at this point our salvation depends on our actions today not the actions of Jesus from 2000 years ago. While there's no doubt that the passion of the cross is a big deal, it also carries with it the weight of hundreds of years of false teachings about it.

What I take from the Writings is that when we focus on the empty tomb, the resurrected Lord, we are reminded of the complete story of Jesus and His life. We are to think of the Divine Truth represented by His blood, but we are also to think of His birth, His fulfilment of Scripture, His teachings, His miracles, His healings and the transformation of His human to a Divine Human. These are all present in the resurrected Lord.

There's far more to the Lord's life on Earth than the passion of the cross, and He wants us to think of all of those things, not just His suffering. And that's why you won't find crosses in New Church churches.

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Practising Forgiveness

During February and March we ran a five-week spiritual growth program around the topic of practising forgiveness. I had some reservations about it before we started, mostly on the lines of, "We know this already," but as it turns out spending several weeks actually *practising* it was quite good for us. Some found that it brought up some things that had happened long ago that clearly we hadn't actually offered forgiveness for. Others found that it made them feel the need to seek forgiveness for some things that they had done. Everybody agreed that it was useful to essentially shine a light on the topic of forgiveness and bring it to the forefront of our consciousness.

One of the things that I've come away with from the program is how forgiveness is really very much tied to the past. There was a great quote by Lily Tomlin in our workbook that said, "Forgiveness is giving up all hope on a better past." That really resonated for me, because when I look at myself most of my forgiveness issues revolve around wishing some events in the past had unfolded differently... wishing for a better past. Since Doc Brown and his time machine are still part of science fiction and not science fact at this point, wishing for a different past is a rather futile endeavour.

But how real is the past anyway? Consider this: the Writings teach that maintenance is constant creation, which means that each moment of your life is being created *right now*. This is in contrast to how some think of how God operates. They will see God as the watchmaker in the sky... He set the universe in motion, and just let it go. But that's not what the Writings teach. Rather think of a film strip, and God is creating each frame, one by one. Except, that's He's only creating the one frame that has light on it. Once the moment has past, it is no longer being created. That moment ceases to exist. He's only creating the moment you are living in.

This is consistent with teachings about the spiritual world. In that world, there is nothing that is not useful. Look around your house, and how much stuff do you have that you do not need? In the spiritual world, that stuff would disappear. There's no trash, tips or landfills for waste. It just ceases to exist. When you do need something, it can be brought back into existence..

I think the same is supposed to be the case with our past. It is supposed to cease to exist, to disappear, when it is not useful. If we don't need it, let it go. If we do need it, we can bring it back into existence. If the past can be brought in and out of existence, is it really real? I think that in a way, that no, the past isn't actually real. It was real, but isn't right now. We make it real when we conjure up the memories of it. One aspect of forgiveness is not conjuring up those memories. It's leaving them in the past where they belong, because the Lord is not creating that reality right now. He's created a new reality for you, and that's *right now*, which is the only reality that actually exists.

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Interested in a Weekend Retreat?

In the February newsletter I put forward the idea of having a weekend retreat at Camp Wanawong, much like we did two years ago, and was asking anybody who was interested to please let me know. There are minimum number requirements, so I need to know if it is do-able before booking. I've not received much of a response. At this point the camp would be a no-go, so if you are interested, please let me know, otherwise it won't happen.

Here's a recap of what it would look like: a self catered event, keeping the costs down (\$84 for adults, \$64 for kids last time), either the weekend of June 15-17 or June 22-24. We'd run a similar format as last time, where we'd have a mix of things, including a campfire, campfire stories, games, and of course a theme that we'd base our learning on.

If this sounds like a good time to you, and you'd like to participate, let me know ASAP.

Pastor on Holiday

Just a quick note that the Beiswengers will be taking a holiday April 12-23, heading out to Alice Springs and Uluru for some fun. We're very much looking forward to seeing the big red centre! At this time we're expecting to hold lay services here in Hurstville for the two Sundays that we're away.

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A Baby!



We are delighted to announce that a baby girl has been born on March 19th to **Jon and Angela (Heldon) Caldwell**. Angela posted this on Facebook: “Our little daughter **Everlyn Grace Caldwell** was welcomed into the world yesterday at 4:50pm, 8 pounds 4 oz, 20 inches long. She is a most precious being to us!”

Apparently it was a text-book birth, with the exception that one of her arms came out wrapped around her neck... but it all worked out fine. Mother and daughter are both doing well.

Some of you may know that **Margaret Heldon** had gone to the US to be with Angela for the birth, and sure enough it worked out perfectly.

It wasn't all that long ago that Owen & Margaret Heldon had no grandchildren, but things have changed as they've now got 4 granddaughters and a grandson. Happy times for the family!

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Society Meeting

We've got a society meeting scheduled for **April 8th**, after church. This is the time where we look at what we've done over the last few months, make suggestions for ideas going forward, and take a look at our current finances. We're always looking for good ideas to implement, so if you've got one, please bring it to this meeting. If you can't be physically present, feel free to email it to me in advance of the meeting.

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New Christian Bible Study Update

1.75 million visits per year... that's the current pace for the New Christian Bible Study site. How about that? This effort seems to be working. Thank you for your ongoing interest in the success of this project!

This growth is exciting, and it brings us to a new - and wonderful - challenge: how do we best serve this big stream of visitors? People arrive wanting to read the Bible, and understand its inner meaning. As they navigate the site, they come face to face with a LOT of content.

How do we help them find what they need first? And second? It's a little like being in a new city. People need maps, walking tours, spiritual roads to travel on, and, at some point, good friends to travel with.

In 2018, we are going to focus on providing those things. Here are a few examples of things we want to do...

- build easy-to-follow pathways through the content, like reading plans and topical studies.
- offer placeholders, suggestions, reminders, and links to new content.
- help visitors connect with groups – online, or in person.

Please support us as we tackle this next phase of work, to help the New Christian Bible Study keep growing, and be more useful to everyone.

This very impressive web site can be found at:

<https://newchristianbiblestudy.org>

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You Can't Outsmart God

Smith climbs to the top of Mt. Sinai to get close enough to talk to God. Looking up, he asks the Lord,

"God, what does a million years mean to you?" The Lord replies, "A minute."

Smith asks, "And what does a million dollars mean to you?" The Lord replies, "A penny."

Smith asks, "Can I have a penny?" The Lord replies, "In a minute."

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Todd Beiswenger** (3rd), **Donna Heldon** (5th) **Dylan Johnson** (7th), **Gaye Heldon** (15th), **Merv Kennedy** (17th), **Huiling Sun** (20th), **Kerry Horner** (22nd), **David Horner** (25th)

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