

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

WHY A “NEW CHURCH”?

Adapted from an article by the Rev. Erik Sandstrom, Sr.

The birth of the “New Church” is celebrated on June 19th. On that day, in 1770, Emanuel Swedenborg finished his initial work on the book *True Christian Religion*, which he wrote and later published by command of the Lord. The religious books that Swedenborg wrote at the direction of the Lord are collectively called “the Writings” or sometimes “the Writings for the New Church”.

Do I belong to the “New Church”? I can certainly say that I belong to the earthly organization called the General Church of the New Jerusalem—and I am very proud and very grateful to be able to say that. But can I also say that I belong to the New Church? There I will have to say, I don't know. I can hope that I do belong to it, and I can pray that I may, but the Lord alone can tell for sure. The reason is that the New Church itself is inside of us, and we do not know for sure how much of what is truly good and really true is inside of us. The *General Church* wants and seeks to be a servant or a tool of the Lord's own New Church. But the New Church itself is within individual men and women!

The Lord spoke of this when the disciples asked Him about His kingdom. He had taught them that His kingdom was “not of this World”, and that He had come to set up a new kingdom among people, where everyone who truly did what is good for others would belong. “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples”, He said, “if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). So when the disciples wanted to know when His kingdom would come, the Lord's answer was, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, see here! or, see there! For, indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21). The kingdom that is within a person is the Lord's own New Church. The Lord calls all men and all women in the whole world to come to the New Church.

In the Book of Revelation (or the Apocalypse) we read, “I John saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (Rev. 21:2). That is how the Lord's New Church itself gets to be within a person: It comes down into him from God out of heaven! We can only hope that this internal church may be within us, and that we may belong to it. But what, then, is the “Old Church”. The “Old Church” too, is within us. It consists of false ideas that we have, and also evil affections (or states) and bad habits. We must get rid of these things, so that the Lord's New Church can come in.

So why a “New Church”? Because we all need to become new within ourselves! And that will be true for all future generations of people as well. In that sense the Lord's New Church will always be new, as it comes down from heaven into the hearts of those who come to the Lord's calling.

Texts: John 13:35; Luke 17:20, 21; Revelation 21:2