



New Church Canadian

A Bi-Monthly Newsletter of General Church in Canada

Issue 211

12 STEPS to the PALACE OF WISDOM

By Rev. Michael Cowley

"Imagine wisdom as a magnificent and finely decorated palace.

One climbs up to enter this palace by twelve steps.

One can arrive at the first step only by means of the Lord's power.

*As a person climbs these steps he perceives that
no one is wise from himself but from the Lord.*

*The twelve steps into the Palace of Wisdom mean
love in union with faith."* (Divine Providence #36)

So many people find help using a "Twelve Step" program. Because these fellowships are not professionally led by a therapist or doctor they are often referred to as "self help" groups. This is such a poor description of what takes place among those who enter into "the rooms" of one of these groups.

Like entering the "Palace of Wisdom" mentioned above the "first step" is arrived at "by means of the Lord's power" and only in a state of humility.

However, inside the rooms people will laugh at the idea of "self help."

There is a phrase: "my best thinking got me into my problems." People come for the help they can only receive from others, not themselves.



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So, another essential ingredient in taking both the steps to the Palace of Wisdom and the steps into spiritual development and recovery offered in the Twelve Steps is humility. Many find the Twelve Steps difficult because one must "surrender" their own power and their own prudence in favour of what the program suggests. For some this is just "too much" for their ego, or as we'd say in the New Church, their "proprium." This is why people have to "hit bottom" or come to a state where they can see that doing it "my way" just isn't going to work. There are so many parallel threads between entering the Palace of Wisdom and the spiritual developments offered by the Twelve Step programs.

Most people have heard of these "Twelve-Step Programs" used in AA - Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, Over Eaters Anonymous, and a variety of other "Anonymous" recovery and self-help groups, but not many know of the relationship between the principles behind these twelve steps and the Writings of Swedenborg used in the New Church. Yet the Writings of Swedenborg and the faith of the New Church were major influences in the formation of the Twelve-Step Program.

Bill Wilson was one of the co-founders of AA, and the author of the twelve steps as they originally appeared in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. He was a man of fierce ambition, keen insight, and an undying spiritual thirst for close personal contact with the Lord.

Bill first came in contact with Swedenborg's Writings during the summer of 1915 while falling in love with Lois Burnham, the oldest daughter in a strong New Church family. The spirituality of their Swedenborgian faith and the sphere of their home fascinated and delighted him. He found out that Lois was the granddaughter of Rev. N. C. Burnham, a Swedenborgian scholar and one of the founders of the Academy of the New Church. The family was very active in the Brooklyn (New York) Swedenborgian church, and Lois was quite involved in the church's "Young People's League."

In her autobiography, *Lois Remembers*, she recounts fond memories of her New Church home life, including her delight in Sunday dinner discus-

sions with the visiting pastor and her other friends from the church. She tells of the strength and guidance she received from Swedenborg's teachings, especially as a young woman dealing with the difficult pressures of dating and courtship. In January of 1918 Bill and Lois were married in the Swedenborgian church in Brooklyn, New York.



As with most, the story of Bill's alcoholism is a sad one. A brilliant man when it came to the stock market, he nonetheless deteriorated to the point of being committed several times to hospitals as a result of his disease. He continuously received strong support and love from his wife and her family, but fifteen years after marrying Lois, his life was in ruins and his faith was gone. No one really understood his disease. No one could really help him. He hit rock bottom.

In his helplessness and desperation Bill cried out, "I'll do anything, anything at all!" He reached a point of total, utter deflation, a state of complete, absolute surrender. With neither faith nor hope he cried, "If there be a God, let Him show Himself!"

That state of surrender was the opportunity his God had been waiting for. What followed was a spiritual experience akin to those reported by people with near-death experiences. "Suddenly my room blazed with an indescribably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale by comparison. Seen in the mind's eye there was a mountain. I stood upon its summit, where a great wind blew - a wind not of air but of spirit. In great, clean strength it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought, 'You are a free man.' A great peace stole over me, and this was accompanied by a sensation difficult to describe. I became acutely conscious of a presence which seemed like a veritable sea of living spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world.

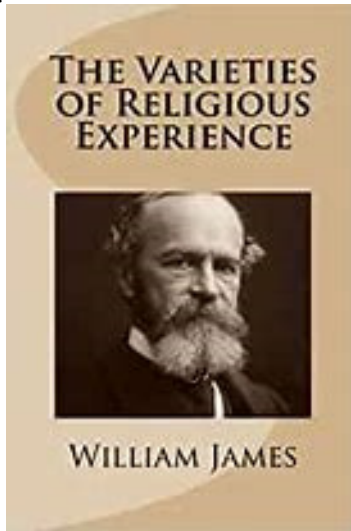
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'This,' I thought, 'must be the great reality, the God of the preachers.'"

Bill, the alcoholic, as anyone might guess, began to wonder and to doubt the reality of his spiritual experience, his "hot flash" as he often called it later. Was it an hallucination? Was he going insane?

Here we see the hand of Providence at work, and again the influence of Swedenborg's Writings in Bill Wilson's life. Bill was assured by his doctor that he was quite sane, and this was confirmed through the pages of William James's book, The Varieties of Religious Experience. From James he learned that his religious experience, his spiritual conversion, had validity and value.



William James, similar to Lois Burnham, was from a Swedenborgian family. His father, Henry James, was a famous Swedenborgian theologian, and the author of several books and articles on Swedenborg. His work on Swedenborg and Swedenborgian teachings influenced many of the great literary minds of the time, both in and out of the New Church.

Though Bill did not find Swedenborg directly quoted in his reading of The Varieties of Religious Experience, what he did clearly observe were the principles of religious conversion and spiritual growth so well explained in Swedenborg's Writings. He found the same spiritual principles so well accepted in his wife's family now clearly presented by this son of a Swedenborgian scholar. Here they were explained in terms directly related to his own spiritual experience and disease.

Bill Wilson began his recovery from alcoholism as a result of his religious experience. He would later say that William James had been a founder of Alcoholics Anonymous-the insights in James's book were that vital in Bill's thinking about the spiritual, emotional and physical disease of alcoholism. James, through his research and Swedenborgian

background, helped Bill Wilson clearly see the alcoholic's need for the kind of spiritual help delivered in the twelve steps.

When we look at Bill Wilson's twelve steps and Swedenborg's teachings on spiritual development and growth, we see complete harmony. There is no suggestion that Bill sat down with Swedenborg's Writings and rose up with the twelve steps. What we do clearly see are the Swedenborgian principles and the Swedenborgian spiritual lifestyle (being major influences in Bill's intellectual and emotional life) reflected in every one of the twelve steps.

With such strong Swedenborgian influences as his wife, Lois Burnham, and his spiritual mentor, William James, it is clear why there is such unity between Swedenborgian spirituality and Bill Wilson's twelve steps. The Higher Power revealing Himself in Swedenborg's Writings and showing us the steps to rational spiritual life is the same Power operating in Bill's twelve steps to save a "12 Step-er" from his disorder and disease.

Divine Providence 36 says: ***"I have sometimes conversed with angels about wisdom." It then goes on to say, "They said that they picture to themselves wisdom as a palace, magnificent and highly adorned, the ascent to which is by twelve steps, and that no one reaches the first step unless from the Lord through conjunction with Him. Further they said that everyone ascends according to the measure of the conjunction; and as he ascends he perceives that no one is wise from himself but only from the Lord, and that the things in which he is wise, compared with those in which he is not wise, are as a few drops of water to a great lake. By the twelve steps leading to the palace of wisdom are signified principles of good conjoined to those of truth, and principles of truth conjoined to those of good."***

There is so much more to tell about the connection between some of the greatest therapeutic and mental health modalities of the last century and the Writings of the New Church. In a future article for New Church Canadian I will explore some of the historical roots of the New Church in Canada and the unique respect the New Church doctrines provide as a foundation for spiritual freedoms and the attraction these teachings had on early New Church converts.

From the GCIC EYP/Regional Pastor

by Rev. James Cooper

Canadian Scholarships

This is a reminder that the General Church in Canada provides financial assistance to students who are *bona fide* Canadian residents and wish to attend the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools, or the Bryn Athyn College of the New Church for all or part of the 2022-2023 school year.

Please contact me at rev.james.cooper@gmail.com, or Reinhold Kauk at reinholdkauk@hotmail.com for further information.

Travel:

If it isn't one thing it's another! Just as the Covid restriction are being lifted, the Canadian airlines have been caught flat-footed and there's chaos at Pearson and lots of cancelled flights. You may have noticed that Canada is a really big country and we really need the air travel sector to be working to be able to effectively serve all our members.

We're also in transition with Michael Cowley's retirement from Olivet and moving to part-time travel work for the GCIC. His preference is to do a block of visits in a row, and then take some time off so he will be doing most of the visits to Dawson Creek and Grande Prairie between now and Christmas. We are also working with a committee of members to develop regular services in a cross-border effort between Vancouver and Seattle, currently called the "Cascadia" group. That will affect our visits to Vancouver, but what that impact will be we don't know yet.

In summary, people are taking much needed vacations, the airlines are in chaos, available clergy time in Canada has been reduced, and demands on our time are increasing! We'll figure something out, and let you all know what's happening through the usual channels of email, Facebook posts, and New Church Canadian.



New School House in Berlin (Kitchener), Ontario (1892)

"[On October 30th], parents and friends gathered at 10 o'clock, and took their places in the rear of the hall on the first floor. In front were the chairs for the children, but these were as yet unoccupied. The teachers and children assembled in the old school-house, not far away, and marched to the new building together. After laying aside their hats and wraps in the side rooms they formed in line to enter the hall. Before entering they sang the first two verses of the "Color Song" (see Life [1892], p. 124). With the third and fourth verses they marched into the hall to their seats, placing their offerings in the basket as they passed the door".

(New Church Life 1893, 10)

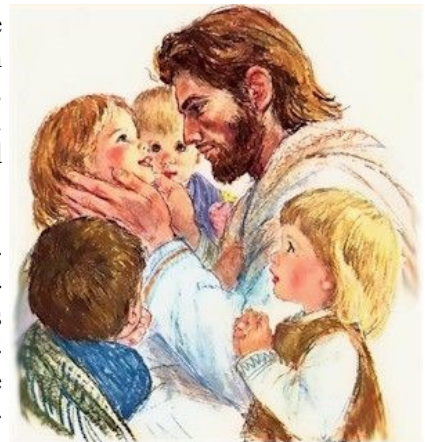
WHAT IS NEW CHURCH EDUCATION?

by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

Simply put it is spiritual education guided by New Church principles. A next-level definition describes some of the key goals: To open the eyes of children to spiritual reality, helping them to become loving, wise, and useful human beings, and they make progress on their journey toward heaven. The fact is, Divine revelation has a tremendous amount to say about this subject. Here are eight ways of describing New Church education:

1. “Bringing the Lord to Children and Children to the Lord.”

There is a famous episode from the Lord’s life recorded in three of the Gospels, where parents brought children to Him “that He might touch them.” The disciples, as you may recall, rebuked those parents, thinking, apparently, that the Lord was too important to be bothered with children. But the Lord said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:13-14).



This quote, perhaps more than any others in the Word, has become a focal-point for the use of New Church education. It’s about bringing children to the Lord. It’s an intentional commitment on the part of parents that that the Lord influence their children’s lives. So they take their children to church, or seek resources to teach them about the Lord. The church can respond by “bringing the Lord to children” in every children’s talk, Sunday school lesson, video, or school classroom.

2. “An Extension of the Home.”

Another key quote from the Word that speaks to this use appears in the book of Deuteronomy. After calling the Israelites to pay attention to the Lord’s commandments, particularly the first and great commandment to love the Lord their God, the instruction continues, “You shall teach them diligently to your children...” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). So much of the imagery of that text focuses on the home and what happens in it. Many a parent has correctly heard the call to teach their children the contents of the Word—the stories as well as the do’s and don’ts from the Lord’s perspective. As children get older, it might look like conversations focused on the spiritual principles that lead to wise decisions. Again, parents will often turn to their church for assistance, so that their children can launch into life with a strong sense of what the Lord teaches.

3. “Success in This World and the Next.”

Success is a word that has many connotations, some of which lend themselves to getting ahead in this world and making lots of money. It can also capture a much more noble pursuit. Nowhere is that better evident than in the commission of Joshua. He was to meditate in the Book of the Law and do according to all that is written in it. “For then,” the Lord said, “you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

The phrase “good success” brings into the equation the Lord’s definition of achievement. It means being a good person or successfully living according to the teachings of the Word. It includes successfully raising a family, or serving in a job that intentionally makes the world a better place, or developing skills of truly wise friendship. It is for these reasons that some people have used the phrase, “success in this world and the next” to capture the spirit of religious education in a New Church context.

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4. "Opening the Eyes to Spiritual Reality."



In the Psalms we read, "The eyes of all look expectantly to You..." (Psalm 145:15). In the Gospel of Luke we learn of two disciples on a journey to the town of Emmaus shortly after the sad story of the crucifixion. The Lord joined them, but they did not know Him until He dined with them and broke bread. Then it says, "Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him" (Luke 24:31). So it is with the spiritual dimension of raising children. The goal is to open their spiritual eyes so that they may come to know the Lord and see the things He wants to show them.

This begs the question, "What would you most want your children to see as they grow?" Wouldn't we want them to see people worshiping on a regular basis, praying, or opening copies of the Word and learning from them? And wouldn't we want them to see examples of honesty or kindness or usefulness?

5. "Helping People Become Loving, Wise, and Useful Human Beings."

There is a phrase that captures the goal of some of our New Church schools, namely to "feed the mind, touch the heart, and prepare for life." This three-part purpose was chosen because it describes who we are as human beings (see *True Christianity* 744). We have minds that can think and learn, we have hearts that can care and love, and we have bodies that are incredibly capable of useful action. And a growing desire to become a loving, wise, and useful person is what makes us "truly human" (*Conjugal Love* 269).

The beauty of this way of thinking of education is that it accords with the coaching and guidance that most parents and teachers do on a daily basis. "Was that kind?" "What a thoughtful thing to do." "What would be a wiser way of handling the situation?" "Can you help me?" "Hey you're really good at..." And so on.

6. "Developing Spiritual Habits."

We know that we learn through repeated trial and error, or through practice (see *Arcana Caelestia* 1050). It is not unreasonable, then, to see the whole process of development as a series of habit-forming activities. The amazing thing, though, is it's not just about developing certain skills. It actually gets to the heart of character formation, and in spiritual terms, the development of a heavenly disposition. A teaching along these lines reminds us that what becomes habitual and ingrained in our character "flows spontaneously into action" (see *Arcana Caelestia* 3843).

So we might ask, "What do we most want to become habitual with children as they grow?" or "What do we want to flow spontaneously into action?" The list includes such things as apologizing and taking responsibility for their actions, considering the usefulness of what they are about to do before they do it, responding with kindness, speaking truthfully, treating others with respect, being generous with their time and energy, persevering, and many other things.

7. "The Formation of Conscience."

A seventh way of viewing this use of spiritual education focuses on the internal motivation of each child. We know that parents, teachers and others provide useful boundaries for children as they grow. "No, you are not allowed to walk home after dark by yourself." "You need to say sorry for what you just said." "It would be really

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great if you took better care of your things.” But isn’t the goal to not have to say these kinds of things as often? We rejoice when children choose to do the right things without being asked or corrected.

The word that the Word uses for this process is conscience. Conscience is that “still small voice” in our minds where the Lord speaks to us, letting us know what is good and what is bad (see 1 Kings 19:12). It is formed “from things revealed in the Word” (*Arcana Caelestia* 371). We know that conscience is strengthened by the use of it, and weakened by the ignoring of it. We learn that people who act in accordance with conscience experience “the quiet of peace and internal blessedness,” whereas those who act against conscience “experience disturbance and pain” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 133). A wise parent or teacher might say to a child, “If you feel bad about it, it’s probably a good thing,” or “The best way to avoid a guilty conscience is to be honest,” or “Notice how good it feels to do something that really helps someone else.”

8. “Fostering Innocence.”

A final way we could define this use is as an effort to foster innocence. Once the Lord was asked, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” In answer, He set a young child in the midst of them and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1,3).

It isn’t hard to see the Lord urging those people toward internal purity, the kind of purity we see in little children. We know that children generally have an openness to learning and being taught. Of course they can be stubborn and self-centered, but more often than not they know they’re not the ones in charge, and submit to the authority of the adults in their lives. This willingness to follow those in charge, or openness to guidance, is captured in a far-reaching definition of innocence given in the teachings of the New Church, namely “a willingness to be led by the Lord and not by ourselves” (*Heaven and Hell* 280).

The goal in terms of education then, whether in the home or in a church or school setting, is to support that openness and willingness to be led—to guide young people to that “nothing to hide” state more often in their lives, and to bring the Lord into the equation as often as possible.



New Church Education in North America newchurchvinyard.org

As New Church ideas spread to North America, many congregations in the United States and in Canada started day schools as well as Sunday Schools. But as the quality of public education improved and it became more accessible, most congregations decided to focus on their Sunday School programs as a way to teach children about the Lord and His Word. There were others who felt strongly about the importance of New Church education in the home, in school, and on Sundays. They felt that one of the most effective ways

to help the church was to give children their academic education in the light of New Church teachings. They wanted children to hear or read stories from the Lord’s Word each day and have a supportive environment to help them apply these teachings in their lives. Those believing that New Church education plays an essential role in the life of the church rallied around the Academy of the New Church when it was established in 1876. Many congregations opened elementary schools in support of Academy ideals. These schools are affiliated with the General Church of the New Jerusalem, which works closely with the Academy.



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Kitchener, ON



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In Person
and
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Dawson Creek New Church
Dawson Creek, BC



Olivet New Church
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We always welcome your comments, letters and articles!

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