

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society October 2004

Missionaries: A Personal Reflection

By Rev. Garry Walsh

1877 saw the first recorded landing of Christian missionaries in India. Many have subsequently followed, seeking to work among the Indian people and hoping to achieve a variety of social and religious objectives. One of these people was an independent Baptist missionary from Australia named Graham Staines.

Graham Staines arrived in India in 1965. His aim was to help the poor. He ultimately spent many years working with the Leprosy Mission. And, as to be expected, he proclaimed the Christian message to the poor and underclass people he met and worked with along the way. His wife claimed that his aim was never to seek conversion, yet it seems clear that some who heard his message were indeed converted.

Christianity currently makes up about 3% of this country that was once entirely Hindu. Islam has also made inroads. Such dilution, while notably very slow, has not sat well with many Indians. Those who hold tightly to tribal customs have shown little tolerance for the deviations that Christianity and Islam will naturally tend to produce. Not only this, but some lower class people have taken to heart the Christian message that teaches that people can be raised up through hard work and mutual cooperation. This type of change of attitude about a person's station in life raises the sometimes unwanted possibility of major social change, putting at risk India's established social hierarchy.

Missionaries like Graham Staines have, by their very presence in India, generated a great deal of anger among those who jealously cling to India's age-old social, religious and political structures. So it was that on the 23rd of January, 1999, an angry mob surrounded the old station wagon that Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy and Phillip were sleeping in. They blocked the doors so that no escape was possible, poured petrol over the car and set it alight. The three occupants had no chance. It was a story that both touched and angered people the world over.

A strong and concerted movement has continued to grow among those who wish to re-convert those fellow Indians who over the years have converted to other religions. Hundreds are being put through, perhaps forced through, elaborate and sometimes gruesome rituals to bring them back into the Hindu fold. Some of the leaders of this movement have avoided calling this re-conversion, instead preferring to call it a "homecoming". Recent newspaper reports indicate that some of these "homecomings"

have taken place in the region where Graham Staines once worked. His wife Glades, who had worked by his side, is said to be devastated. On the surface it might seem as if over 30 years of Graham's dedicated work plus the senseless deaths of he and his sons have been in vain.

From a New Church perspective it is hard to know what to do with stories like this. My first reaction to hearing news of this re-conversion was to feel some cynicism towards those who may have originally converted these people with the message that only Christians are saved. I privately thought, "Don't they see that the Lord accommodates His message to suit the personality and culture of those receiving it? Why do these people feel like they need to go out and convert Indians? Perhaps they will now start to leave them alone." In retrospect, I wish my reaction had been different.

The Writings for the New Church seem, in fact, to promote the active conversion of people to Christianity. In the work Divine Providence no. 260 we find a condemnation of the Jews for not accepting Jesus Christ as their Messiah and converting to Christianity, even though they have been living among Christians and exposed to the Christian message for centuries. Swedenborg himself indicates that in his journeys through the spiritual world he actively tried to convert people to the message of the Lord's Second Advent.

Ideas such as these have now made me much more sympathetic to the work of Christian missionaries. I have always admired their compassion and the spirit of their efforts. Now, I feel more drawn to support the details of their work than I have tended to before. We know that there are Islamic heavens as well as heavens that reflect the various sub-branches of Christianity. No doubt there are Hindu heavens as well. We also know though, that these divisions are along cultural lines. They do not, as is the case in this world, reflect fundamental differences in their idea of who God or the Lord is. Indeed, all those who are in heaven accept that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. Hindus may in some respects remain Hindus after death. Their ideas about God though, will ultimately become much more Christian. Indeed, much more New Church.

It is hard to know how many compassionate and dedicated people have lost their lives trying to take the Christian message into different and sometimes hostile cultures. Graham Staines' mission was one of peace and hope. He and his sons died senseless and brutal deaths at the hands of people whose actions can never be justified. It is one thing for a person to promote and defend their religion and culture. It is a very different thing to torture and kill other human beings.

We pray then that events such as these do not turn people away from their missionary callings. And, we thank the Lord that there are people in this world who care enough about others to try to help them both as to body and spirit. The missionary spirit of outreach and caring is something we can certainly all feel inspired by.

Shakespeare, The Motivator and More

By Norman Heldon

What has William Shakespeare to do with the recent successes of the Australian men's and women's field hockey teams? Quite a bit according to former coach Ric Charlesworth. Charlesworth himself represented Australia in hockey, as well as his state in cricket. Shakespeare, he says, is the Great Motivator, and he has used quite a lot of his sayings to inspire his teams. He has even written a book titled, "Shakespeare The Coach", quoting lines such as, "Be as great in act as you are in thought" (*King Lear*), and "To business that we love we rise betimes and go with delight" (*Antony and Cleopatra*).

Shakespeare has been an influence in many fields of human activity. He has surprised many with his knowledge of the law, family life, the sea, the court and nature, to name just some. It is obvious too that he had read the Bible, and his memory was astonishing. Some of his Biblical allusions are almost quotes. There are several in the play, *As You Like It*. Orlando complains to his older brother Oliver that he is depriving him of a rightful share of the inheritance. He says, "Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent that I should come to such penury?" This is obviously a reference to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Adam, Oliver's servant, giving him money says, "Take that, and He that doth the ravens feed and providentially caters for the sparrow..." With this same Biblical reference in mind we might recall the words of Hamlet when he said, "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow."

In the *Merchant of Venice*, Olivia, disguised as a judge says to Shylock, "And earthly power doth show likest God's when mercy seasons justice, therefore Jew consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation." We read in the Word, "If Thou Lord should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? ... But with You there is forgiveness."

Also, in *As You Like It*, the banished Duke, to his loyal followers in the forest of Arden says, "Hath not old custom made this life more sweet than that of painted pomp? Here feel we but the penalty of Adam, the season's difference; as the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter's wind".

A further observation - Shakespeare thought and wrote in metaphor. It makes his writing more pleasant and more powerful. Typical is this, "Good name in man or woman, dear my lord is the immediate jewel of their souls." In this way we value our reputations, what people think of us, as we do a jewel.

Metaphor, I think is a third cousin of correspondence. However, correspondence is a spiritual comparison. A natural thing in its form and use corresponds exactly to a spiritual quality. Not only that, but the spiritual quality of something good and true actually brings into existence the corresponding natural thing. For instance, understanding is a spiritual quality, so we have the sight of our eyes, which is why we say, "I see" when we mean "I understand".

Shakespeare, if he is in heaven, and I'm rather confident about that, will embrace correspondence joyfully and will use it in his writing. I believe it is quite likely that he is an angel, for readers of his plays, for one thing, will notice that he is always on the side of good against evil, and because of that his plays have been a force for good and ever will be perhaps.

A Tough and Pressing Issue

By Rev. Garry Walsh

We live in an increasingly electronic age where millions of people are now connected to the internet. The result is that the internet is where many people start when they are searching for information. Search engines like Google and Yahoo can usually find a vast array of references to any subject that a person chooses to search for. So it is that if someone searches for "*Swedenborg*" or "*Swedenborgian*" hundreds of hits will be found.

In an ideal world, all sources of Swedenborgian information would speak in harmony with each other. The reality, though, is that we don't live in an ideal world. The individual ideas and conclusions of people who fall under the Swedenborgian/New Church banner vary widely. Many of these ideas find their way onto the internet. For someone searching the web for information, this variety can lead to confusion. It can also, at times, present the inquirer with a picture of New Church doctrine that is very different to the one that the General Church generally understands to be true.

This challenge is particularly problematic when we consider the issue of homosexuality. In all branches of the Swedenborgian/New Church, people understand that the Lord loves everyone and that He works toward leading everyone to His heavenly kingdom. This does not, however, mean that all human behaviours are conducive to heavenly life. Some behaviours, like murder and stealing are pretty much universally condemned as being evil. When it comes to the subject of human relationships and sexuality though, the picture is often far less clear.

It is in the area of human orientation and sexuality that the organization calling itself "The Swedenborgian Church," (also known as "The General Convention") sets itself at odds with much of the rest of the broader New Church community. An internet search for "Swedenborg" and "homosexuality" will quickly lead to Swedenborgian Church messages on this subject. And, those messages are regularly supportive of same-sex unions. Indeed, they are becoming well known in the US as a gay-friendly church.

This support of co-called "same-sex marriages" is completely contrary to the thrust of Swedenborg's teachings and is certainly in stark contrast to the message that the General Church has always stressed. Regardless of how much true compassion we might have towards those who are burdened with homosexual desires, the truth still remains that homosexual behaviour is condemned by the Lord in His Word. There are only two

occasions where such acts are described as being attempted. One involved the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:5). The other involved the men of Gibeah (Judges 19:22). In both cases the acts that these men were seeking to commit were instantly recognized as being "wicked". Such recognition is reinforced in the Law as it is presented in the book of Leviticus. There we find the words, "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

The Lord came into the world with the message that said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). Nothing in the New Testament Word suggests that the Lord ever diluted the strong message against homosexual behaviour. He did, though, reinforce the positive message of the true and heavenly union of one man and one woman. Later in the Gospel of Matthew we find the well known words that are often read in New Church marriage ceremonies:

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

The teachings of the New Church constantly reinforce this message of true married love (or conjugal love) being only possible within the confines of a one woman, one man relationship. Here is a typical example of this message:

"True married love - which is the love of one husband with one wife - is celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean, more so than any other love....chastity, purity and sanctity are present only in true married love..." (Married Love/Conjugal Love 346).

The Lord created men and women to find one person of the opposite sex to be their eternal partner. If providence allows, two people will find each other in this world and the loving couple will go on to become the parents of the next generation of future angels. And, even if parenthood is not possible, the Lord still provides that a married couple can contribute to the world as a team in a way that is not possible as individuals.

We may know people, and indeed we may feel love towards people who are afflicted, beyond their own control perhaps, by the evil tendency that is homosexuality. We can support them and we can embrace them, but we cannot say that homosexual behaviour is right or that it is just another natural variant on the human condition. The fact that a fellow Swedenborgian/New Church organization is both supporting same-sex unions and in fact is conducting same-sex marriages is an affront to the Lord and should be taken very seriously.

It would be completely inappropriate for us to condemn homosexual people themselves. And we should be careful that if we are judging with "righteous judgment" (John 7:24), that we are not at the same time violating the spiritual dictate to, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). In other words, we are required to judge the morality of an

act while not judging the spiritual state of the person engaged in that act. As an extension of this principle, we should also avoid condemning others who, moved by compassion, have embraced those who commit immoral behaviour.

Having said this though, we should be very clearly presenting the Lord's message that some things are simply not acceptable now, have never been acceptable in the past and never will be acceptable in the future.

A Reading from the Writings about "Compassion"

One of the central ideas that the Lord tries to teach us is that we should have compassion towards others. But, that our compassion should be directed and moderated by wisdom. With this in mind, we include here a story from one of Swedenborg's experiences, this time involving a man who was yet to really grasp this important life lesson.

Spiritual Experiences 5890, 5891

There was a spirit who stood near me, a little above, and who inflowed into the lid of my left eye, with the purpose it seemed, to produce tear-drops. I was then able to perceive that this was a spirit who was in external compassion. I afterwards spoke with him; and he said that he often felt such compassion for the poor and the wretched that he shed tears. But, on being asked whether he gathered knowledges of truth and good which are of the Church, he said that he did not apply himself to learning those, but still that he was in external devotion. Hence the suggestion was conveyed to him that he was not in internal and genuine compassion, which does not exist except through the knowledges of good and truth. He inflowed into the left side of my chest with a certain painful sensation, in a similar way that that which can be experienced by people in external devotion. He said that he had been in heaven with angels, but he did not want to return there. The angels said that he had come to them, imagining that he could stay with them; but they told him that he was not able to endure them nor they him, because it was perceived that he was only in externals; but, that if he wanted to be there, he might perhaps be able to stay in a certain quarter of the society where the simple good were. He withdrew from these angels and mingled with those simple good; but they were unable to endure him either. One or two of them went to a certain governor, saying, that it was better that he be told to go elsewhere, because his compassion was moved towards everyone whatever, and he did not inquire whether it was of use; but that they see, first, of what manner they shall pity them, with discrimination. In consequence of this, he was told by the governor that it would be better for him to go away to some other society where there were people like him, and that he would there enjoy the delight of his own heaven; which, also, he did. He had no wish to harm others.

General Church Assembly 2005 Renewing Our Purpose

"It seems useful that there should be ... Assemblies, that the Bishop of the Church should meet face to face the members as he goes around, not only individually, personally, and socially, but also in such a form as this, that those who are leading in the affairs of the Church may come in touch with the members, and so be acquainted with the state of the Church; and it is useful also for the members of the Church to be in touch with those who lead."

These words were written in 1898 in *New Church Life* when the first assembly was discussed, but they are certainly still apropos. Please come to the 34th General Church Assembly in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, USA, from June 5th - 8th, 2005 to assure that the leadership understands the state of our beloved Church. It will be the first Assembly with our new Bishop, Tom Kline. The theme for the gathering is "Renewing Our Purpose". Please plan to be a part of the refocusing and future of our beloved Church.

Hurstville Society News

The past few weeks have seen **Trevor Favell** spend time in hospital suffering from a series of stroke-related problems. It is nice to report that his condition has stabilised. He does however require more care than he has in the past. This means that he will not be able to return to the nursing home where he has been living for the past several months. There is good news though. Trevor has now moved into Hurstville Gardens nursing home where his wife **Audrey** has been a long-term resident.

The end of September into October is proving to be a popular time for travelling between Australia and the US. **Laurel Walsh's** parents, **Barry** and **Lynn Smith** are currently here for a month-long visit. And, going the other direction are **Mike** and **Kerry Lockhart** who are off to spend a month in the US, including being in Bryn Athyn for Charter Day as well as visiting son **Scott** and wife **Kimberley**.

Naomi Heldon has continued her backpacking adventures in Thailand, Laos and more recently Vietnam. Her emails indicate there is never a dull moment! We look forward to her safe return in mid October.

Carolyn Heldon has stopped travelling and has settled into her job as hotel receptionist at the Arisaig Hotel on the north west coast of Scotland. It's an idyllic spot and the people are great. Much more fun than managing a large Sydney hotel where everything that can go wrong does go wrong!

Murray Heldon's job has taken him to South Africa, India, Indonesia, Taiwan and Australia in recent times.

Society Meeting

Looking ahead, please note that our semi-annual Society Meeting will be held after church on the **17th of October**. Please join us as we consider important details of how the Society is going as well as planning for events at Christmas.

Pastoral Absences

Also note, from the **23rd October through 4th of November** the pastor will be away at a General Church minister's study retreat in South Africa. At this stage Garry is planning on stopping through Perth and giving Holy Supper plus a class on the evening of the 3rd.

The pastor will also be away for a short holiday from the **5th through the 7th of October**. As a result there will be NO reading and discussion class on Wednesday 6th October.

Birthdays

Birthday Greetings to **Robert Ridgway** (7th), **Vera Buck** (8th), **Stuart Heldon** (10th), **Laurel Walsh** (10th), **Audrey Favell** (12th), **Murray Heldon** (13th), **Alyssa Wende** (14th), **Darren Kermond** (20th), **Cameron Walsh** (20th), **Sonia Hicks** (22nd), and **Shirley Taylor** (27th).

October 2004 Calendar of Events

Note: All events are located at the church at 22 Dudley St, Penshurst 2222 (off Hillcrest Ave) unless otherwise stated. Contact the pastor **Rev Garry Walsh** on (02) 9580 1589 for more information or email Garry at newchurch@optusnet.com.au

All are welcome and refreshments are served after church each Sunday.

Friday	October 1st	7 00 p.m. Dinner and Class
Sunday	October 3rd	10.00 a.m. Worship (HOLY SUPPER) and Sunday School

		followed by Property Trust Meeting
Monday	October 4th	PUBLIC HOLIDAY (Labour Day)
Wednesday	October 6th	<u><i>NO Discussion Group</i></u>
Sunday	October 10th	10.00 a.m. Worship and Sunday School
Wednesday	October 13th	9.30 a.m. Discussion Group
Friday	October 15th	6.00 p.m. Young People (at Roseville) 7.30 p.m. Doctrinal Class
Sunday	October 17th	10.00 a.m. FAMILY SERVICE followed by Society Meeting
Wednesday	October 20th	9.30 a.m. Discussion Group
Saturday	October 23rd	<u>Pastor departs for South Africa</u>
Sunday	October 24th	10.00 a.m. Worship and Sunday School (Lay Service)
Sunday	October 31st	10.00 a.m. Worship and Sunday School (Lay Service)