

THE NEW CHURCH

WHAT IS NEW OR DIFFERENT ABOUT *THE NEW CHURCH*?

A POSITION PAPER
BY
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UPON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF *THE NEW CHURCH*
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Several folk have asked me, “Is it possible to get something fairly clear, and really concise, about what is different or new about *The New Church*?” Well, I am never sure about what is clear. I often think I am exceedingly clear, only to discover that some people were unable to follow what was being said. (Whether their fault or mine we will not delve into. I always have to assume it is mine.) And concise? Much of Christendom is turning our Faith into something so clear and simple that it is completely stupid and irrelevant. Fast and simple explanations, like fast food, are very popular, and really bad for us.

Still, I do understand the request, and consider it worthy of an attempt on my part. For your part, please take each of these comments as more of a hint than a locked-down explanation. And it would be wonderful if you would ponder each one until you understand the ramifications and can rephrase each one in your own words. (If the people of *The New Church* decide to revise or rewrite all or parts of this paper, that might be wonderful.)

I have put this position paper into thirteen (13) comments, or axioms. (Did not want to end up with 7, 10, or 12.) In each case, you will quickly realize that most churches – most of Christendom in our time – would not teach what *The New Church* is teaching; they would not agree with it, and in fact would dramatically disagree. I mention this because some of you tend to hear and understand what is being preached and discussed in *The New Church* as if it were the common or standard fare of today’s Christian beliefs and teachings. But that is not the case. You will find little of it anywhere, and all put together you will find it nowhere else.

1.) The Second Coming of Christ has already happened. Jesus is not “coming again” in any of the traditional expectations (on the clouds, to close out the present age). The Second Coming of Christ is Easter! And Easter is in two parts: the Day of Resurrection (He is risen!) and Pentecost, the coming of His Holy Spirit to personally guide and direct each believer’s life.

The Second Coming is one of the church’s great misunderstandings. It was not Jesus’ intention to close out life on earth as we know it. And certainly not “soon,” as two thousand years have now proved. It was Jesus’ intention to establish “the church”: Disciple Bands of followers who would be faithful to Him and to the New Kingdom (not of this world), and who would continue to gather all willing souls into His New Kingdom – to live out the rest of their lives, generation after generation, in this broken world. Of course, He takes us continually into new and greater realms when we die here. But He is not coming here again, except as Holy Spirit. He is not coming here – we are going there!

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2.) The Holy Spirit *is* the Risen Christ! We do understand “The Trinity” as more of a worshipful and poetic construct than as dogma or creed. “God in three persons” is not a biblical concept (not that this rules it out). In any case, Jesus was here on this planet in the flesh before the Resurrection, and He is here as the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection. To miss this is to miss the whole point and purpose of His coming.

3.) “The Fall” is a necessary part of God’s design: the granting of free will. We all have a destiny with God, and none of us are predestined to be automatons or puppets – for good *or* evil. (This includes Jesus and Judas, by the way.) The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is conscious choice. We “wake up” to our individuality ... and then we choose God, or not. Along the way, we choose many things besides God: ourselves; another person; an ambition, or cause; fear, or hatred. But the hope is that more and more we will “return to God” and choose God. All life is lived between two gardens: The Garden of Eden (“*not thy will but mine be done*”) and the Garden of Gethsemane (“*not my will but thine be done*”).

4.) The Prime Directive follows #3. God does not break natural laws or principles, and God does not favor favorites. “*He makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.*” We abandon superstition and the hope for special miracles. We remember Jesus’ reply to Satan in the wilderness temptations: “*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*” Still, God’s influence is very great. If we align ourselves with God’s presence and love, amazing things happen. But that is consistent with universe law; it is not superstition or wishful thinking.

Most of “the wrath of God” is the consequences of God’s principles of creation at work. The only real “wrath of God” is our sorrow and shame when we experience how much we are loved and forgiven – when we discover grace and mercy where we deserved and expected punishment and judgment. We sometimes wonder if other people are “sensitive” like we are. But the truth is, under all the shields and posturing, we are broken-hearted when we discover ourselves alienated from God and unloving.

5.) Scripture is not inerrant. In fact, the Bible is full of the errors and perspectives of its writers and of the ages in which they lived. (That is, the world is not flat; many people in Jesus’ time were buried alive; some demons are germs; we all walk among “miracles” every day that would have completely stunned the twelve apostles: automobiles, airplanes, open-heart surgery, light bulbs, computers, and so on. Not all of them are unmixed blessings, of course, but then miracles never are.) This means we have to keep thinking, keep alert, keep seeking the truth behind the written words. The Bible is not the Word of God. JESUS is the Word of God: the Word made flesh. (We know this because the Bible tells us so. (John 1))

6.) The Virgin Birth is demonstrably an error, an error revealed in the biblical information itself. (This information is readily available from me or [elsewhere on our website](#). Or if you prefer, you can get it from Raymond Brown, one of the most respected biblical scholars of the Roman Catholic church.) And since it is wrong on Monday, it is also wrong on Sunday and at Christmas time. That is, most clergy know this and will even teach it in classes, in Bible study, or in private. But it is “inconvenient” to upset people on Sunday morning or at Christmas time, so the error is perpetuated generation after generation.

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Some suppose that the error is of no consequence. (“You shall perpetuate the lies, and the lies will set you free.” How long will we go on believing that?) But this particular error continues to have far-reaching consequences. It weakens or eradicates the Incarnation, saying that Jesus is not really like us – not really human. It shifts loyalty and focus from Jesus to Mary. It puts emphasis on virginity (and miracle) that belongs on motherhood and God’s true design. It feminizes the church, not with true feminine virtues but in ways that weaken our commitment, excuse our lack of commitment, and weaken our desire to truly follow Jesus and be His intentional disciples.

7.) Hell is not a physical place or a physical punishment. Many generations of Christians have used the fear of Hell to try to control people and “save” them. The result of course, in many hearts, is the fear of Hell instead of the love of God. It has been a terrible and costly trade-off. In most of Christendom, Hell is symbolism gone wildly astray – from Gehenna (the garbage dump outside Jerusalem) to Dante’s “Inferno.” Hell is real, but as a place of inner anguish that we all know: the fear, loneliness, shame, and sorrow of our separation and alienation and rebellion against God. Many are the deeds (sins) that follow such separation. Some of us get fixated on the deeds that reveal our Sin, but the *source* of such deeds is even more important: the Sin itself – our “distance” from God.

8.) “Church” is never about bricks and mortar; it is never about earthly institutions. Church is the people of Jesus who gather to study, to share, and to support, learn from, and teach each other – and, if the Spirit directs it, to work together. Church is never a place or a building; it is never an organization or a denomination. Church is a group of intentional followers of Jesus: a Disciple Band, gathered in His Name.

9.) The biblical record we have of what Jesus did after His Resurrection is important to those of us who would follow Him. Many Christians honor the Gospels but ignore or pay far less attention to the Book of Acts or the letters of Paul. What, we don’t believe in Easter? The Gospels tell us about Jesus before the Resurrection. Acts and Paul tell us about Jesus *after* the Resurrection. And since that’s when all the rest of us meet Him too, it’s sad that a lot of Christendom neglects the post-Resurrection story and reveals small awareness of what Jesus’ life here was leading toward.

10.) *The New Church* is not creedal – it is anti-creedal. Creeds lock things down. Creeds assume that humans have the truth figured out, and that the good guys believe correctly and the bad guys have it wrong. Creeds try to supplant the Holy Spirit, making the traditions and creeds of the church more authoritative than the influence, in our hearts and minds and prayers, of the Holy Spirit of our Resurrected Lord. That is a huge mistake, from our perspective.

Among the worst fruits of creedalism has come a “doctrine” of the Trinity that is neither worshipful nor humble. In its wake has come another of the greatest errors in Christianity: that Jesus is God. Jesus is *not* God! Jesus *came to reconcile us* to God. Jesus would have been horrified at the thought that His followers would equate Him with God. Jesus and God were one in purpose and intention, but not in identity. No New Testament writer thought or believed that Jesus was God. This terrible aberration was invented 250 to 400 years later. It is part of an unintentional but diabolical plot to make Jesus divine rather than human (with assistance from the Virgin Birth), and thus to remove any genuine attempts on our part to identify with Jesus – and hence, cancels out the Incarnation. This has robbed “the church” – Jesus’ people – of significant dedication, commitment, and true “following” of Him; He is too high and distant for personal loyalty and love.

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From this tainted perspective, the Holy Spirit has become vague and futurized and, most significantly, is not to be trusted. The Holy Spirit is merely the subjective whims of prayer and the faithfulness of mere individuals (like Paul, Peter, Luke, Origen, Augustine, and Luther, to name just a few). Therefore we are told we must listen to the priests or the pope or the traditions and creeds of the institutional church.

Institutional Christianity has proven itself to be in error over and over again: the world is flat; burn Copernicus; evolution is nonbiblical; blacks are inferior to whites; God hates gays; God thinks men should dominate women; and on and on. Of course, individuals can make mistakes too, but it is easier to correct individual errors than it is to correct the errors of vast institutions. And even individual errors are not easy to correct if there is no humility or repentance.

11.) True prayer is not ordering God around. (Most of the prayers we learn and hear in normal churches is us ordering God around.) Prayer is an attempt on our part to align our lives and our purposes with God, in humble obedience and as servants, in the hope that God will be able to support and boost the energy of our human connections to those we care about, and to flood them with healing power. This explanation is terribly truncated and in such “short form” that few will pick up many of the implications without hours of discussion and pondering, something *The New Church* welcomes and encourages.

As far as what God will or will not do in response to our prayers, we have said we do not believe God will break natural laws; however, sometimes spiritual laws outrank natural laws. And we do believe that God has enormous influence in Creation. After all, who is the Creator who designed it all?

12.) Heaven is not static; it is not a place of perfection. We do not expect harps (well, not only harps) or streets of gold. “Rest in peace” is one of the less intelligent (unless we go back to the older and more accurate definition of “peace”) remarks ever associated with Heaven. The drama will continue in the next realms. We pick up there where we left off here! Everything we have learned here will have applications in the next realms. This is an assumption on our part, of course. But it is based on our assumption that God is intelligent, purposeful, and intentional. There is rhyme and reason to this “boot camp” we find ourselves in here. Therefore our faith (trust) in eternal life is a constant reminder of the principles and realities we are in training for and under. It changes everything we think about, and it often changes our choices and our awareness of what really matters here. Mostly it changes our awareness of how important the people around us really are.

13.) The Holy Spirit (of our Resurrected Lord) is the core and focal point of everything we hope and believe about the practical side of the Christian Life. We want to be true and authentic followers – intentional friends and disciples of Jesus. We expect to find constant repentance necessary. We expect to discover new directions, continual growth, and continual change. We never expect to be or to get perfect. Our only hope is God’s mercy, grace, and undeserved love. (Is there ever a deserved love?) But the reality of any and all of this depends upon daily communication – guidance, strength, correction, inspiration – from the personal relationship between us and the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

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It is interesting to notice that nothing said above disputes or takes away from what the first few generations of Christians believed and were so excited about, with the exception of the “Second Coming.” Jesus warned them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (something many of them already had inklings about), which happened in 68-70 A.D. But in the minds of the early disciples, it was a future event – something coming. This mixed in with their apocalyptic expectations, which were essentially shared by all faithful Jews and had been believed with more and more fervor for the previous three hundred years. We sometimes forget that Jesus often tried to enlighten His followers about things they could not fully grasp, and it is helpful to remember that any of their former beliefs which did not get fully understood and reworked by Jesus’ teachings would have been carried on into the New Testament writings. The belief that because He was the Messiah, Jesus would come again and close out the age within a generation is one of these errors.

The twelve disciples had barely begun in their “Christian Beliefs” when Jesus was crucified. The Crucifixion and Resurrection caused all of them to rethink everything they had ever known. And we further see them growing and changing by leaps and bounds from then on: Pentecost; Peter and Cornelius; carrying the new faith to Gentiles; and on and on. Hopefully we are still part of this dynamism and will never again be content to “understand it all,” “lock it all down,” or stop praying to be faithful followers ourselves.

Naturally, if anything said above is true, we can expect the constant need for revision. But what you really need to remember is this: **THE MORE PEOPLE YOU TELL AND THE CLEARER YOU GET, THE MORE YOU WILL DRAW FIRE.**

Personally, I like things peaceful. So far *The New Church* has had two years of relative peace and quiet. And we certainly have needed them. But that also means most of you are either oblivious or haven’t decided to get into the game yet. That is fine with me. I appreciate it. But my hunch is that somewhere in our third year, this will begin to change. Just a little warning. Meanwhile, I hope you will enjoy, maybe even appreciate, this position paper in honor of our second anniversary as *The New Church*.

Perhaps to celebrate our third anniversary we can have a position paper about what we believe about God; about how Jesus saves us; about the presence of the Holy Spirit; about what our true goals and purposes are. And knowing that I am a Christian, is there anything (are there any things) “the world” can trust me about and trust me for? For that matter, is there anything a fellow Christian can trust me for or trust me about because I am a fellow Christian?

Until then ...

Peace and Love,

Bruce