

What Is New Church Education and Why Should We Care?

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When you hear the phrase, “New Church education,” I wonder what comes to mind. I believe many people think of a system of schools, from preschool up through college. Others might think of Sunday School settings, videos and other child-related programs sponsored by the General Church. Others still may think of a church-sponsored commitment to education as a core use.

For the purposes of this article, I ask you to set aside, for the time-being, all those manifestations of New Church education. There is value in rising above any attendance or budgetary issues, as well as debates about the best delivery methods or curricular decisions, to focus on the use itself. What does the Lord’s Word have to say about it? How would He have us hold it? When we open ourselves to this exploration, we discover things not only about the use, but also about who is to carry it out, and some inspiring descriptions about how to do so. The first half of this article, published here, focuses on defining the use. The second half, which will publish in the next issue, will delve into teachings about who and how.

Eight ways of framing the use:

For the purposes of this article, then, I would like to offer eight ways of defining the use of New Church education. Each one springs from a few key quotes in the Word, and seeks to capture in simple form what the Lord is calling us to rally around.

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 “so that He might touch them” (Mark 10:13-16). 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.” This quote, perhaps more than any others in the Word, has become a focal-point for the use of New Church education. The image of the Lord surrounded by children has long been portrayed by artists. In my own family my mother did a beautiful

rendition of it which hangs in my office as I write.

The Lord’s love for children is further taught in the Heavenly Doctrines, where we learn that “all children are under [His] direct care...” (*Heaven and Hell* 332). So it is that a team of people at the General Church central offices came up with the beautiful way of framing the use of New Church education as “Bringing the Lord to children and children to the Lord.” It’s an intentional acknowledgement that the Lord wants to influence their lives, and that they have been created to have an almost innate openness to Him. Surely it is easy to see many manifestations of this goal, in classroom settings, home worship settings, blessings before meals, conversations about the Lord, Sunday School, and so on. Every time parents take their children to church, they are bringing them to the Lord. Every time they talk to their children about the Lord, they are bringing Him to them. Perhaps obviously, the more this happens, the more children grow with the living sense that the Lord is a part of their lives.

2. "An Extension of the Home."



Another key quote from the Word that speaks to the use of New Church education comes in the book of Deuteronomy, when the Lord was establishing His covenant with the ancient Israelites. After calling them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and strength, the instruction continues, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Many a parent has correctly

heard these words as speaking to them, urging them to raise their children with the Lord in mind, teaching them the Lord's commandments.

This willingness of parents to focus on the spiritual welfare of their children is further taught in the Heavenly Doctrines, where it says:

Spiritual parents love their children for their spiritual intelligence and moral life, loving them thus for their fear of God and for their piety of conduct or life, and at the same time for their affection for and application to useful endeavors of service to society, thus for the virtues and good habits in them. Out of a love for these traits principally do they provide for and supply their needs. (*Conjugal Love* 405)

This spiritual calling is what inspires many parents to turn to the Church for support. In response, the Church has developed venues such as Sunday Schools or day schools which strive to cooperate with parents in the spiritual education of their children. While we may acknowledge that not every home is perfect, and that sometimes the school or Sunday School can become a substitute for what is not happening in the home, the goal is to engage with parents in what they most want for their children, namely to help them launch into life with a strong desire to be good people.

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 striving for a kind of worldly stature or opulence that is not always healthy. Today we remind ourselves that the word "success" can capture a much more noble pursuit. Nowhere is that better evident than in the book of Joshua, where the Lord instructs Joshua himself to meditate in the Book of the Law, ensuring that he "do according to all that is

written in it. For then [he would] make his way prosperous, and then [he would] have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Ask any parent if they want their children to be successful, and you will get a resounding yes. If you dig a little deeper, most parents would welcome the qualifier of "goodness" along with that success. The phrase "good success" brings into the equation the Lord's definition of achievement. It means being a good person. It means successfully living according to the teachings of the Word, so that the Lord is able to form them into people who can live in heaven. It means framing our goals on, and celebrating milestones, that accord with what the Lord says is most important. That could include successfully

raising a family, or serving in a job that intentionally makes the world a better place, or developing skills of truly wise friendship.

In terms of New Church education in a school setting, this concept of good success is captured in the phrase, “success in this world and the next.” It implies a trajectory of life that is eternal. The beauty is that it can include the pursuit of excellence in science or math or any other educational discipline, because these can help people to be useful human beings. But ultimately it is the spiritual focus of the education that ennobles the whole educational process. It is, again, the focus on what is eternal, as stated in this compelling teaching: “What more ought anyone to have at heart than his or her life which lasts to eternity?” (*Arcana Coelestia* 794).

4. “Opening the Eyes to Spiritual Reality.”



In the Psalms we read, “The eyes of all look expectantly to You...” (Psalm 145:15). Implied is a conscious turning to the Lord as the One who provides what we truly need. In the Gospel of Luke, we learn of two disciples on a journey to a town called 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 use of New Church education. The goal is to open the spiritual eyes of children and young people, so that they may come to know the Lord, and behold the things that the Lord would most want them to see.

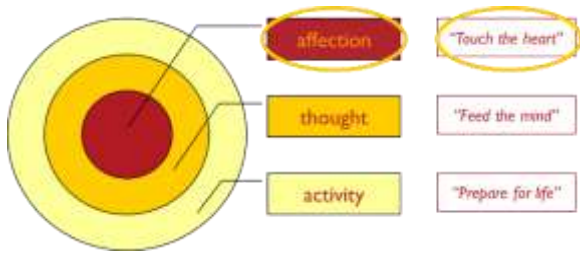
There is a learning component in this description of New Church education. Seeing with the eyes corresponds to seeing with the understanding. In this vein, we could ask ourselves what we most want children to come to understand as they grow. One teaching lists for us the following:

The truths that people learn and believe in their earliest years when they are young children but which later on they either endorse, have doubts about, or refuse to accept, are in particular these: There is God, and He is one; He created everything; He rewards those who do what is good and punishes those who do things that are bad; there is life after death, when the bad go to hell and the good go to heaven, and so there is a hell and a heaven; the life after death lasts forever; also, people ought to pray every day and to do so in a humble way; they ought to keep the Sabbath day holy, honor their parents, and not commit adultery, kill, or steal; and many other truths like these. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5135:3)

There is a world of spiritual information in the Word that the Lord would have us all learn. So it is that parents might rightly turn to the Church for help in the systematic exposure to all that the Word contains.

But there is another, related, way of answering the question, “What would we most want children to see as they grow?” Wouldn’t we want them to see people worshiping on a regular basis, praying, opening copies of the Word and learning from them, and so forth? And wouldn’t we want them to see examples of honesty or kindness or usefulness, because these things are taught in the Word? Opening the eyes to spiritual reality, then, includes learning as an intellectual process, and also as an experiential process.

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



There is a phrase that captures the goal of some of our General Church schools, namely to “feed the mind, touch the heart, and prepare for life.” The purpose for now is not to focus on the school setting but to see this as another examples of how to regard the use. This three-part purpose was chosen because it describes who we are as human beings. 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. It is this essential trilogy which makes us the human beings we are.

The clearest teaching I have found on the subject comes in the work *True Christianity*:

There are three things that flow as one from the Lord into our souls. These three-in-one, or this trinity, if you will, are love, wisdom, and usefulness. Love and wisdom do not actually take shape, except in some conceptual form, because they reside solely in the feelings and thoughts within our minds; but in usefulness they become real, because then they come together in some activity and work on the part of the body. (*True Christianity* 744)

Other teachings focus on parts of that three-fold picture. For example, concerning our ability to learn and love, we read, “The Divine resides in a person in these two faculties, in the faculty for becoming wise and in the faculty for loving—or rather, that He is able to do so” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 30). Another, focused on the goals of these things, states, “We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others. That is, we are not born to live for ourselves alone; we are born to live for others” (*True Christianity* 406). All of these things together: a desire to become wise and loving and useful, is what makes us “truly human” (see *Conjugal Love* 269).

The beauty of this way of framing New Church 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.” “Was that smart?” “What would be a wiser way of handling the situation?” “Can you help me?” “Hey you’re really good at...” And so on.

6. “Forming Spiritual Habits.”



Another useful question that could be asked with regard to children, is what we most want to become habitual with them. As the picture associated with this way of framing New Church education indicates, we learn through repeated trial and error, or through practice. One teaching makes the claim that “people

are not even able to walk, or to talk, until they learn how to do so; and the same applies to everything else” (*Arcana Caelestia* 1050). It continues, “The things they learn to do become, through the performance of them, habitual and so to speak natural” (*Ibid.*).

Consider almost anything you know how to do, from driving a car, to looking both ways before you cross the street, to calculating times-tables in your head, to exercising, to playing an instrument. All of them involve habits—habits of practice or diligent effort, habits of frequency or things we choose to do on a

regular basis, and habits of skill or things we come proficient in. So it is that we can see the whole process of education 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, of the development of a heavenly disposition. We read, "Everyone acquires a disposition or nature from frequent practice or habit, and that practice or habit from the things he or she has learned" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3843). This teaching goes on to say that what becomes internalized through frequent practice or habit "flows into action spontaneously."

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

An intriguing teaching along these lines says, "It is easy for manual laborers, porters, and farm workers to work with their arms from morning till evening, but a delicate person of the nobility cannot do the same work for half an hour without fatigue and sweating" (*True Christianity* 563). Along these lines, we'd love spiritual practices and good actions to become increasingly easy for children as they grow.

7. "The Formation of Conscience."



A seventh way of viewing New Church education regards the intrinsic motivation of each child. Yes 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 great if you took greater 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 knowledges of goodness and truth which children have taken in from parents and teachers and later on from their own devotion to doctrine and the Word" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2831). Since "conscience is formed from things revealed in the Word" (*Arcana Coelestia* 371), it is important that information from the Word is shared with children as they grow. Teaching good from evil, and coaching in what works and doesn't, gives the Lord the tools to form that voice of conscience within a person.

But conscience is also 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."

Another beautiful teaching says that "those who possess conscience speak from the heart what they speak, and do from the heart what they do" (*Heavenly Doctrine* 131). It's not someone else making them

behave; it doesn't even have to do so much with correction; it's about helping people to experience the joy of choosing freely things that work.

8. "Fostering Innocence."



A final way we could define the use of New Church education is as an effort to foster innocence. Innocence is a fascinating word. To most of us, it calls to mind childhood purity and naïveté. It invites us to think about sheltering children from what is harmful or disorderly about society.

While it is certainly true that parents, teachers and others may choose to steer their children away from certain things, most of us wouldn't say that mere avoidance is the life-long goal. In other words, innocence has other dimensions, valid and beautiful as an untainted nature is.

One place where the concept of innocence is expanded for us, was when some people asked the Lord who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In answer, the Lord took a young child, set him 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 18:3). It isn't hard to see that the Lord's urging is towards internal purity, the kind of purity we see in little children. For adults, and even for children as they grow, there can be great use in looking within at what's going on with an eye to work on what needs to be changed. It could also include the life-long goal of living with less to hide, less that we are ashamed for others to see about us. Our efforts to work in these directions, and to help children do so as well, will result in more of this quality of innocence.

But there is another facet of innocence that is key. Children generally have an openness to learning and being taught. Of course they can be stubborn and self-centered at times, 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. We learn that "innocence is a willingness to be led by the Lord and not by ourselves" (*Heaven and Hell* 280). The innocence of wisdom—an adult version of innocence, is to freely submit ourselves to the Lord's leadership, just as children so often submit themselves to the leadership of their parents. We learn further that this innocence or openness to the Lord is "that essential human quality into which love and charity from the Lord can enter" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4797).

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 and more often in their lives, and to bring the Lord into the equation as often as possible. By doing so, we are laying a vital foundation for them in terms of their willingness to be led by the Lord—a willingness which allows the Lord to guide them by means of conscience, to become loving wise and useful human beings, to see and honor the reality of the spiritual dimension of life, to live lives of success and usefulness in this world and the next, and to experience greater joy within their homes together with their families.

So we gather up all these teachings, and all these concepts about the use New Church education. Is it not evident that the Lord has a great deal to say about the importance of this use? There is a calling to every parent to provide for this level of guidance for their children. Those parents who are so motivated

will naturally turn to the Church for support in this endeavor. And the Church can and should respond by providing a rich array of support for children as they grow.

Part Two: Who and How

I have often been struck by two very similar phrases in Scripture that speak about the Lord and what He expects of us. We hear in the gospel of John, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, 9:5). That’s not too surprising. We know, when we stop to think about it, that the Lord is the Source of all wisdom. We can easily grasp that He came to our world to be a beacon of truth in a very dark and confusing time.

But then the Lord turns the tables on us, and says in His Sermon on the Mount, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). My own discomfort with these words begins with the thought that I’m not anything like the Lord; those words belong to Him, not me. But there He is telling me that I have something of value to offer. Not only that, but I have a responsibility to share of my best understanding and to do things that bring the truth to life, for He says, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

This article is part two of a presentation on New Church education which focuses on the interrelated questions of “What is New Church Education, and Why Should We Care? Part one focused on the use itself: of bringing children to the Lord and the Lord to children; of helping children become loving, wise and useful human beings; of opening their eyes to spiritual reality; of fostering innocence; of helping them develop and live according to conscience; of forming good spiritual habits that flow spontaneously into action; and so on. Part two focuses on who, according to the Word, is invited to participate in this use, and some of how they are called to go about it.

As the Scripture we’ve focused on so far indicates, *you* are called to participate in this use. “You are the light of the world” for the children in your purview.



On the Lord’s Team. One way to hold this is to hear the Lord inviting each of us to be a part of His team. I draw your attention to the creation story in the book of Genesis, where the Lord says the words, “Let Us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Many Biblical scholars has concluded that this verse refers in some way to the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the Heavenly Doctrines clearly state that it is not a tri-personal God that is indicated here; rather it is the one God and the team of human beings He uses to help people choose the path that leads to heaven. Regarding the regeneration of a person we read, “Now because this is done through the ministry of angels, it is said here, in the plural first of all, ‘Let Us make man in Our image’” (*Arcana Coelestia* 50:3). Angels are part of the “us” in this verse of Genesis.

This passage continues to describe what those angels do. From the Lord they “distract [us] from plunging into utter evil, and so divert [us] towards something good.” When we respond, they are able to draw nearer, “[breathing into us] every kind of good and truth, as well as a horror and dread of evils and falsities” (*Ibid.*). Leading away from bad things, and inspiring good things: doesn’t that sound like what parents do every single day? The powerful thing to consider here is that the Lord calls parents—and teachers and anyone else interacting with children—to be like guardian angels for the children in their

care. We are invited to be a part of the Lord's team, as He leads them to grow and develop into the kind of people who can live in heaven one day.



The Lord's job description for parents. Let's focus first on parents in this regard. Almost everyone who has held one of their newborn children has felt that awesome responsibility to care for this tiny person. The love that flows in is incredibly powerful at such times, opening the mind to the Lord as Creator, and the wisdom of turning to Him for guidance in how to be a good parent.

In many cases this leads families to seek baptism for their young child. Often by means of the baptism experience, and also by other means, parents can become aware of their parental responsibilities, according to the Word.

For the purposes of this article I would like to point to ten such invitations from the Lord, directed specifically to parents, in an effort to demonstrate the significant role that the Lord asks them to play in the lives of their children as they grow.

1. The purposes of baptism. The first has to do with baptism itself. Specifically, the baptism process calls parents to introduce their children to the church, so that they may be brought into the sphere of Christian life (*True Christianity* 677). It also reminds them to help their children to "know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ [as their] Redeemer and Savior" (*True Christianity* 681). Finally it calls them prepare their children for their process of salvation or regeneration (*True Christianity* 684).

2. Spiritual Parents. A second place where we find guidance for parents is in the fourth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). Not only does this speak to healthy family relationships, but it also contains deeper levels of meaning when "father" and "mother" are seen symbolically. We read, "In the spiritual meaning, honoring your father and your mother refers to revering and loving God and the church" (*True Christianity* 306). So it is that parents are called to consistently draw attention to the Lord as Heavenly Father and the Church as a nurturing spiritual mother in their lives. They do so, among other things, by talking about the Lord, saying prayers to the Lord, and bringing their children to worship services.

3. Protecting and maintaining. A third responsibility that the Lord gives to parents is to "protect and maintain those who cannot protect and maintain themselves" (*Conjugal Love* 391). The intriguing thing about this passage is that it brings us back to the fact that we are a part of the Lord's team. It adds, "Since this cannot be done by the Lord directly in the case of living beings to whom He has bequeathed free judgment, He does it indirectly through His love implanted in fathers, mothers and nurses" (*Ibid.*). His love given to us as parents is what inspires us to do the daily work of protecting and maintaining, from teaching safety around cars, to being advocates for them, to giving them the spiritual tools to make wise choices, and countless other things.

4. Useful members of society. A fourth calling to parents is to guide their children to "contribute useful services in human societies" (*Conjugal Love* 404). Parents see the unique personalities and strengths of their children, and do many things to nurture that potential. They also can, in so many ways, foster a desire to do useful things for others, and, to use a cliché, make the world a better place.

5. Good qualities. Another passage in the work *Conjugal Love* includes a powerful list of things that parents can help their children develop: “spiritual intelligence,” “a moral life,” “virtues and good habits,” “fear (or love) of God,” and “piety of conduct or life” (*Conjugal Love* 405).

6. General doctrinal concepts. While many parents do not consider themselves theologians with deep doctrinal knowledge, there is truth to the fact that each parent can be a “light of the world” for their children, by sharing the knowledge of the Word that they do know. For many of us, that’s more than we often give ourselves credit for. One passage in the Heavenly Doctrines lists some of the things that the Lord asks parents to teach their children, which is within the grasp of all: “there is God, and He is one,” “He created everything,” “there is a hell and a heaven,” “people ought to pray every day..., keep the Sabbath day holy, honor their parents, and not commit adultery, kill, or steal” (*Arcana Caelestia* 5135:3). It may not be in formal settings, but conversations about the Lord and the things of spiritual life are a wonderful way to serve in the use of New Church education. It ties in with one of the ways of framing that use, namely to open the eyes to spiritual realities.

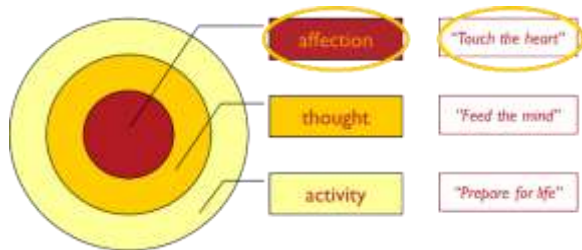
7. Preserving innocence. Interestingly, the teaching that speaks to this dimension of parenting talks about it in a progressive sense, namely that a kind of childlike innocence recedes over time “as children gain knowledge and are able to act on their own independently of their parents” (*Conjugal Love* 298). Nevertheless, the openness to being taught and guided, and the willingness to comply with parental directives, can form a powerful seedbed for an advanced type of innocence that is willing to be led and guided by the Lord (see *Heaven and Hell* 341). The point is to do what we can to preserve an openness to what is good and useful and wholesome, and to lead away from, or even at times protect kids from, what is hurtful and destructive. This is in keeping with the guardian angel concepts we addressed earlier.

8. A healthy concept of marriage. You may have heard the saying, “the greatest gift a father can give to his children is to love his wife.” Without implying that all marriages are perfect or even work out, there is power in hearing the Lord’s call to parents to pass on a healthy concept of marriage to their children. This is done by parents who “shun adulteries as hellish, and love marriages as heavenly” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1002). Certainly there is much we can model in terms of healthy interactions, even when there are disagreements. And most parents find themselves striving to provide helpful guidance on healthy relationships between the sexes as their children grow.

9. Indelible marks of goodness. The Heavenly Doctrines use the term “remains” or “remnant states” to describe times when something heavenly touches the life of a person. The Lord stores up that positive experience, and uses it as a storehouse of spiritual energy in the person’s life, inspiring them to want those good things again. Parents are asked to provide the environment in which many of these heavenly touches can take place. One teaching describes them as “states of love towards parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and friends; states of charity towards the neighbor, and also of compassion on the poor and needy” (*Arcana Caelestia* 561). It does not take much imagination to see how parents can cooperate with the Lord in this way, by leading their children to do kind things, by fostering healthy family relationships, by building warm family memories, and the like.

10. Happiness to eternity. A final teaching we turn to, relating to the role that the Lord asks parents to fill, stands as a summary of all the other things we’ve explored. It talks about the many ways parents care for their children, from feeding and clothing, to helping them become good citizens, to “introducing them to heaven through religious instruction.” It concludes, “In this way they provide for their prosperity in time, and happiness to eternity” (*True Christianity* 305).

Gathering all these strands together, it is useful to see the value that the Lord places on the family. In His vision, parents have an incredible role to fill in the upbringing and launching of children into adult life. With humble recognition that all of us are flawed and haltingly successful in rising to this use, it is important for us to do our very best in this regard. Parents wear many hats, including that of counselor, organizer, coach, arbiter, and financial advisor. It appears from these teachings that the Lord would add a hat to the mix, of New Church educator.



New Church teachers. Speaking of educators, we know that the General Church has a rich heritage of day schools, with hundreds of people who have dedicated their professional energies to this use. Is that use spoken of in the Word?

The answer is yes. While the Heavenly Doctrines don't mention religious schools per se, they repeatedly use the phrase "parents and teachers" in the context of religious instruction. Parents and teachers are to: "maintain children in an affirmative attitude toward anything said or taught" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2689); help in the formation of conscience by means of guidance (*Arcana Coelestia* 2831); inspire "love toward the neighbor and toward the Lord" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3762); cultivate what is "decent, public-spirited, and honorable" (*Arcana Coelestia* 5126); lead children to "mend their habits" (*Conjugal Love* 202); open the mind to "religion, worship, what is good and true, God, and eternal life" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 333); help children "abstain from evils" as sins as taught in the Ten Commandments (*Divine Providence* 258), live moral lives (*True Christian Religion* 374), and be faithful and charitable (*True Christian Religion* 443). Again this is quite a daunting list, but it points to the fact that the Lord includes teachers as part of His team.

It may be useful to bring forward one of the ways of framing the use of New Church education itself, namely to help children become loving, wise, and useful human beings. If you recall, the teaching underlying this way of viewing education relates to the human beings we are: people who have minds that can think, hearts that can care, and bodies that can do. It is not difficult to translate that from child to teacher. New Church educators are people who consistently feed their minds with information that helps them to teach effectively, whose hearts are continually inspired to care for the spiritual education of children, and whose bodies work in many ways to bring their educational goals to life.

Two conclusions seem evident. One is that the Lord envisioned teachers in students' lives who would help them along in their spiritual development. Another is that there would be places where such teachers would be able to do this work. It is not difficult to find support for Sunday School classrooms and even New Church day schools based on these teachings.



Educational methodology. Having considered the use itself, and who is invited to participate in the use, we now turn to guidance from the Word on *how* to engage in it. Such an exploration will be cursory at best, for there are many, many teachings that bear on the subject. One gathering of such teachings, however, appears in the chapter of the work *Heaven and Hell* relating to "Children in Heaven." That chapter deals with the upbringing of children who have died in infancy or childhood, and it describes in many ways the way angel teachers and parents carry out their work.

Reaching through that chapter, we discover many pearls of wisdom. For example, there is an attitudinal clue in the teaching, “Every child (who dies)...is accepted by the Lord” (*Heaven and Hell* 329). The implication is that New Church parents and educators can usefully send the message to all children, “You are accepted by the Lord.” Along the same attitudinal lines, another teaching reminds us that kids are works in progress. They have the “rudiments of becoming angels” and “have not yet let evil take root” (*Heaven and Hell* 330). The implication is that we view children as potential angels or angels in the making, who are have not entirely figured out this thing called life.

Regarding those who teach, it says that they are “angels who had loved children tenderly..., and had loved God as well” (*Heaven and Hell* 332). It appears, perhaps obviously, that the best qualifications for educators are a love for children and a love for God.

Any experienced educator, and most parents, know the truth of the next teaching: “Children have different natures...” (*Heaven and Hell* 333). A subsequent teaching says some children “think and talk and act more gently,” and others “are not so gentle” (*Heaven and Hell* 339). Again, most of us could smile and nod our heads, knowing what this is talking about. It does imply that we refrain from a one-size-fits-all educational model, and it reminds us of the delightful variety of young human beings who are trying to find their way.

Regarding the way children learn, we read that their initial focus is on “the kinds of thing they see with their eyes that particularly delight them” (*Heaven and Hell* 334). We learn further that “...it is as though everything were alive” to them (*Heaven and Hell* 338), and that “they learn by practice to walk, to do things, and to talk—even their senses, such as sight and hearing, are developed by use” (*Heaven and Hell* 331). The implication here is that engaged students learn the best, and that working with all their senses in the educational process is wise.

This chapter in *Heaven and Hell* also reminds us that children are taught by “images suited to their natures,” leading us to consider what is age or state appropriate (*Heaven and Hell* 335). It also reminds us that with children, “nothing has closed these off, as happens with adults” (*Heaven and Hell* 336), meaning there is a refreshing openness and receptivity about them. We are also reminded that they come into a “gradual awareness of what is good and true” (*Ibid.*), meaning that they won’t get it all at once, and that education is a process.

A couple of other indicators: Children feed on “things that nourish their minds,” namely, “spiritual food” (*Heaven and Hell* 340). The implication is that the food most appropriate to the maturing spirit is spiritual food from the Lord’s Word. Angel instructors also help children “gain an identity given by the Lord” (*Heaven and Hell* 341), and they foster a kind of selfhood, even inspiring them to react with a healthy “That isn’t so” at times, so that “that they will not let themselves be led (eventually) by anyone but by the Lord” (*Heaven and Hell* 343).

Even this brief survey of teachings demonstrates the wealth of information that the Word contains on the art of teaching. The point for our purposes is to remind ourselves of the range of things that the Lord has chosen to share with us relating to this precious use. Not only does He describe the use itself, but He tells us in great detail who should be involved in it, what He asks of them, and how He advises that they go about it.

So what is New Church education and why should we care. In answer, we return to the story of the Lord surrounded by little children. Parents had brought them to Him, that He might touch them. The disciples 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 10:13-16). It is readily apparent that the Lord cares deeply about the upbringing of little children—about the use of New Church education.

What is this use? My present way of framing it is as follows: Introducing young people to the Lord and the things of spiritual life, so that they can become loving, wise and useful human beings, as they choose the path that leads to heaven.

And why should we care? Because the Lord clearly invites us to.