

We speak Esperanto!

Appeal for the use of Esperanto within the New Church

1. The appeal

Ideas need language. So, let us express our ideas in Esperanto as well! Let us use Esperanto for international communication amongst the Swedenborgians that are scattered all over the world! Let us unite with the help of Esperanto!

Please do support the following steps and goals!

- 1.) We support the learning of Esperanto within our communities through our personal example, our appeals, courses, and other actions.
- 2.) We support the translation of the works of Swedenborg and of New Church literature into Esperanto.
- 3.) We support the use of Esperanto at international meetings of Swedenborgians.
- 4.) We support the use of the Internet for worldwide communication amongst Swedenborgians in Esperanto.
- 5.) Please do support these goals as an individual or within the Esperanta Svedenborg-Societo (Esperanto Swedenborg Society).

2. One belief, one language: Uniting through Esperanto

An international language for an international Church!

Languages are teachings in a spiritual sense, this is what Swedenborg said in his interpretation of the Babylonian confusion of languages. In this sense Swedenborgians all over the world speak *one* language already. But still, external language barriers have remained. Esperanto offers an additional option, alongside English as the language used de facto, to make this worldwide community more visible and more perceptible.

The New Church is in fact spread all over the world. Larger or smaller groups exist on all the continents. Together we are stronger than if separated. Esperanto encourages the merging of the regional groups into a worldwide movement, a movement that speaks spiritually and naturally in *one* tongue.

The Internet offers the opportunity of free communication around the globe. Technical prerequisites are all in place, but what remains is the confusion of languages. Esperanto is a well-proven response to this issue.

3. Introducing Swedenborg to the Esperanto speech community

By translating the works of Swedenborg into Esperanto, his voice will also be heard within this particular speech community which is tolerant and has its own visions and ideals. There are only estimates available of the number of people speaking Esperanto. Some indicate about a million, others up to five million. Esperanto is at any rate a living language. There are numerous translations and also works written in Esperanto originally. In 1993, the Esperanto PEN Centre was accepted as a new section of the International PEN.

One work of Swedenborg is, apparently, already available in an Esperanto translation. Hyde No. 1932/3 lists »La dogmaro pri la vivo por la Nova Jerusalemo« (The doctrine of life for the New Jerusalem). In the catalogue of the Esperanto library in Aalen one can find a (brief) excerpt from »Pri la chielo kaj la infero« (Heaven and hell). Also, there is a text entitled »La novkristanaj interparoloj kaj prelegoj« (New Christian colloquies and lectures) for which Swedenborg is again mentioned as the author. These are tentative beginnings.

4. Why Esperanto as an international language?

Why do we suggest Esperanto for international communication?

Nobody will probably want to suggest Latin, the old universal language, for this purpose any longer, although Swedenborg himself still chose it in precisely such capacity during his time. Considering English, the language used de facto for worldwide communication on a global scale, is a far more realistic approach.

We are not concerned about replacing English by Esperanto; nor are we concerned, of course, about replacing the mother tongue by Esperanto. Also, English is top-ranking amongst Swedenborgians, in particular, not least due to the fact that significant communities and organisations are located within English-speaking countries and important amounts of literature are published in that language. We are far more concerned about introducing and establishing Esperanto as a supplementary and powerful means of international communication. This is because Esperanto comes up with some special advantages. We lose nothing by using Esperanto, however, by doing so we open up supplementary ways of expression and areas where we can be effective.

We see the advantages of Esperanto in three areas. These are first of a practical nature, second of a social nature; and then there is also an ideational aspect.

4.1. The practical advantage

Esperanto can be learnt within the fraction of the time that is needed for acquiring an ethnic language. Esperanto can be learnt four to ten times more quickly; the exact factor depends on the foreign language Esperanto is compared with, and, of course, on previous linguistic experience. The grammar is ingeniously simple and can be mastered by means of sixteen rules only. There are no exceptions to these rules. Everything is pronounced the way it is written. The words originate for the most part from Latin or the Romance languages, but also from the Germanic languages, in particular from German and English; furthermore, there are a number of words from the Slavonic languages, in particular from Polish and Russian, and from Greek. The learner will recognise familiar stems at every turn. For many people Esperanto was the first foreign language they have ever learnt voluntarily.

4.2. The social advantage

When using English, second-language speakers are always at a disadvantage owing to the fact that they, being second-language speakers, are unable to draw level with the native speakers. The use of Esperanto, however, puts the speakers in a totally different situation. As Esperanto is (basically) nobody's native language, only people using this international

language as a second language meet each other. Esperanto therefore allows communication between speakers that are on a par with each other, which in turn means communication without the usual differing levels of competence.

4.3. The ideational aspect

There are certain similarities between the New Church and Esperanto. Both of them involve movements that are borne by a magnificent vision but are nonetheless still waiting for the big breakthrough. In both movements the spirit of international understanding, of tolerance and ecumenism is alive. In 1893, the Swedenborgian Charles Bonney initiated the Parliament of the World's Religions. In 1887, the ophthalmologist Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof publicised Esperanto, the international auxiliary language. Both movements are concerned about mutual understanding, in spite of huge differences of thought and native languages.

In 1912, L. L. Zamenhof wrote: »The inner idea of Esperanto is: to remove the walls between nations on a neutral linguistic foundation and to get everyone used to seeing in his neighbour just a human being and brother.«

Let us help each other in this difficult situation! Do help the supposedly weaker brother and you will find help yourself, even if this should never be the intention behind your actions!

5. Religious communities within the Esperanto speech community

The New Church would by no means be the first denomination to use Esperanto. Let us finally have a look at bigger and smaller communities with a more or less long tradition of Esperanto:

The Catholic Church has been using this language for a long time. Since 1910, »Internacia Katolika Unuigo Esperantista« (International Union of Catholic Esperantists) has been in existence. Since 1903, the magazine »Esperanto Katolika« (Catholic Hope) has been appearing. Vatican Radio has been broadcasting in Esperanto since 1977. In November 1990, the Vatican approved the texts for the celebration of Mass in Esperanto. Between 1994 and 2004, Pope John Paul II included Esperanto into his Easter and Christmas Messages. Pope Benedict XVI has continued this tradition since Easter 2006.

Even Churches that broke away from Rome can be found active within the Esperanto movement. Since 1911, under the name of »Kristana Esperanto Ligo Internacia« (International Christian Esperanto League), an association of Christians from predominantly Reformed Churches and groups, has been in existence. The organ of this association is the magazine »Dia Regno« (Kingdom of God), appearing on a bimonthly basis and founded as early as 1908. Since 1985, there has also been »Tutmonda Ekumena Ligo« (World Ecumenical League). In the mid-1990s, a small group of Orthodox Christian mainly from Bulgaria founded »Tutmonda Ortodoksa Ligo Esperantista« (World Orthodox Esperanto League).

In 1912, the New Testament in Esperanto appeared. An English committee under the direction of the clergyman John Cyprian Rust had already started with the translation in 1909. The entire Bible (without the Deuterocanonical books) was published in 1926 in

London by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Zamenhof had translated himself the Old Testament from Hebrew. But, although he had completed this work in 1915 already, the manuscript could reach England only after World War I, where a Bible Committee was engaged between 1919 and 1926 in its revision, correction and linguistic levelling with the New Testament. In a way, Bible readers can now learn Esperanto whilst reading the Bible in Esperanto.

There are also followers of non-Christian religions amongst Esperantists. Of these, the Bahá'í Faith and the Japanese Oomoto-kyo Religion are to be mentioned in particular. Furthermore, there is a Buddhist Esperanto League and, since the 1990s, a Universal Islam Esperanto Association has been in existence.

6. Your contact person

Your contact person for all further information is Pastor Thomas Noack from the Swedenborg Centre Zurich (Apollostrasse 2, CH-8032 Zurich, swedenborg@web.de).