

THE NEW AGE

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Here's the next issue of The New Age and we invite you to a good read.

One of the most telling bible verses is Luke 17:17 (easy to remember) which says, "So Jesus answered, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the nine?' " Nine-tenths of the group of lepers failed to return to give their thanks to the One who'd healed them; only this one came back, and he was a Samaritan! Jesus seems a bit astounded, "No one came to give glory to God except this foreigner."

They had, after all, been healed from leprosy, a big long-term disfiguring disease. They hadn't been healed from a bit of a cough. Who would not feel thankful from the bottom of their mended heart? But nine didn't. So overcome with joy that they forgot? Who knows? But it is a telling moment.

Thankfulness is a major part of our life from its start to its earthly finish. Thanks for a baby's birth, thanks for a life that was well-lived, thanks that someone once said 'Yes, I will', and you can fill in lots more in between these. Along with the good manners and rightness of saying thank you is the real importance of feeling thankful on a regular basis, not only for the delightful things that have come your way but also for the tough things, shocks, dramas, difficult people and life's dilemmas, all of which do not naturally bring up gratitude but complaint and criticism (and often, silent anger). For these are often our teachers.

I've just finished reading a book on World War Two which I'm thankful to have read, but which certainly pulled no punches. Village atrocities and violent revenge, never mind the military manoeuvres. I found myself gasping thanks for being born in 1948 not 1938 and then I felt ashamed.

And then other thanks began to emerge, thanks for me having beliefs in the Lord's eternal care for us all, thanks for transferring people from a life of horror to a life of help, hope and healing. When we say thanks, let's widen out where our thanks are due and give thanks to the Lord.

"Joy in the Lord's coming" A Christmas sermon by Rev. David Roth

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him . . . And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." (Matthew 2:2,10)

Most likely each of us has our favourite story in relation to the Lord's birth. We could even ask ourselves whether it was the wise men or the shepherds who responded in a more favourable way to the announcement of the Lord's advent. But this question isn't really very important when we reflect on the fact that **both the wise men and the shepherds DID respond**. They both heeded the Lord's call but in different ways. All responded according to their own states - different states, yet states that were acceptable to the Lord.

How can you and I then apply the responses of the wise men and shepherds to our own lives on Christmas day? As we examine the stories of the shepherds and the wise men, the spiritual idea shows us clearly their application to our lives.

The first thing we've got to understand is the importance of the Lord's birth. Without His coming we could not have our freedom to be regenerated by Him. His coming redeemed mankind; that is, He put the hells back where they belonged, put the heavens in order so that they could be safe from hell's attack, and began a new church where people could love the Lord and their neighbour (look at True Christianity 86). By His birth and fulfilled life here on earth the Lord is now present with us fully and powerfully in His Word. We haven't been left alone. It was this message involving all this wonderful work to be done by the Lord which the shepherds were told, and which the wise men sought to see fulfilled. As the angel of the Lord proclaimed to the shepherds:

"Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11) The message was clearly one to pay

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attention to, one to be happy about. A Saviour had come, whose kingdom would never end.

When we consider the call of the shepherds we see a unique response. The shepherds at this time of the year lived out in the fields with their flocks day and night, always keeping a watchful eye on their flock and fold. Perhaps we see it being cold and dark, with the shepherds staying close to keep warm. This pictures the kind of world into which the Lord was born - cold from the lack of charity and love, and dark because of the false understanding which had swamped people's minds. Yet even in all this cold and darkness there were a few who possessed an innocence and a willingness to be led and taught by the Word.



We can see this in the story of the shepherds. A shepherd spiritually represents one who teaches the truths and goods of faith. A good shepherd, that is; one who guards and protects his flock; it shows us a picture

of someone who is learning, protecting and storing up goods and truths, his own inner flock.

This is a picture of a basically good person, yet someone who believes that life is his own, and that most power is from himself. He has been working hard to learn the truths of the Lord's Word; however, he remains in a state of darkness as to how it all applies to his life, and how it leads him closer to the Lord and away from self.

But with this learning of truth and innocent willingness the Lord is able to come to us and be born in our hearts. The first thing which the angel said to the shepherds was, "Fear not." This represents a renewal of life, meaning that the Lord will create a new heart within us, a heart that acknowledges the Lord as our Saviour and not ourselves.

This can actually be a real cause for fear. We read, "For all who come suddenly from self-life into any spiritual life are at first afraid, but their life is renewed by the Lord" (look at *Apocalypse Explained* 80). It can be a difficult and scary thing to give our life over to the care of the Lord when we feel so strongly that life is our own, and that we have the power from ourselves to conquer evil.

When the Lord draws near to us, the result is temptation, and if we are good we will fear for the loss of good and truth. His nearer presence makes us feel as if we are losing what good and truth we have. But it is when we do follow the Lord, when we listen to the angel's good tidings, that He can truly care for us. The manger in which the shepherds found the Lord represents spiritual nourishment. It is here in the presence of the Lord and His Word that we are nourished and instructed. The Lord doesn't lead us to Himself and then starve us; He will fill us to overflowing. The baby wrapped in swaddling clothes means first truths - truths about innocence from the Lord's Divine Love. When we come to the Lord He nourishes and instructs us in those things which will make us ready for His kingdom, a kingdom of innocence, love, and use.

After seeing the baby, "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them" (Luke 2:20). This response by the shepherds stands for true confession and worship, which comes when we acknowledge in our hearts that there is nothing of good in ourselves, and that we can do nothing of ourselves - and, on the other hand, that all good is from the Lord, and that the Lord can do all things (look at *Arcana Caelestia* 1210).

The Heavenly Doctrines say further about this response, "When a person is in this acknowledgment, he puts aside what is his own, which belongs to the love of self, and opens all things of his mind, and thus gives room for the Divine to flow in with good and with power" (AC 1210). The shepherds heard the Lord's call and followed it. We

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can be like the shepherds ourselves when we make the same sort of acknowledgment regarding the power of the Lord. He will call us in His Word, but if we are looking to ourselves for strength we will not hear Him. We may celebrate the Lord's advent, but not with the same conviction for the Lord as we would do if we humbled ourselves and gave glory to the King of glory.

From this beautiful picture of innocence as seen in the story of the shepherds we now turn to a different scenario: one of wisdom and perseverance - the story of the wise men.

The wise men seemed to have a special quality about them. They knew about the advent of the Lord because they had a knowledge of the Word and its prophecies. About them we can read, "The knowledge of correspondences survived among a number of those in the east, even until the Lord's advent, as is evident from the wise men of the east who came to the Lord at His birth" (look at Sacred Scripture 23)

It's interesting to think about the fact that those who were of the Jewish faith who had the Old Testament Word, and should have known that the Lord was to be born, had no idea of it. When the wise men came and asked Herod, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" he had no answer, but called the chief priests and scribes together to help. We can imagine that perhaps Herod was a bit embarrassed that he, the king, did not know this. The Word says that "He was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Whatever the nature of the response, again it was quite indicative of the state of the Jewish Church at the time. Not only was their knowledge of the Word lacking and false, but many, like Herod, had an all-out hatred for the Lord. This is plainly shown in Herod's plot to kill the infant Lord, a plot which resulted in the slaying of many innocent children in Bethlehem.

The Jews at this time, it seems, were not planning for or looking for the Lord. And when they did find out that He had come, there was no

room in their hearts nor their inns to greet Him. Yet, as with the shepherds, we see in the story of the wise men, others who were ready for the Lord. But we should notice a difference in their response to the Lord's coming, the main difference being that the wise men were actively seeking out the Lord. They had seen His star in the east and had come to worship Him. They travelled a long distance to see the star that had come out of Jacob, the Sceptre that had risen out of Israel, He who was to be born King of the Jews.



In the spiritual sense, the east represents love and the star that went before them means knowledge from heaven (look at AC 3762, SS 23). The travelling of the wise men to the land of the east is a representation of someone who in their life is moving toward what's

called the good of faith. This, the Heavenly Doctrines teach, is nothing else than charity toward the neighbour, or living by the Lord's commandments (look at AC 3249). In this spiritual picture we can see that it is the knowledges of good and truth found in the Lord's Word, pictured by the star, which guide us to a life of charity or love, which is what guides us to the Lord Himself. This paints a beautiful picture for each of us. We see that it is through the learning and living of the Lord's truths and commands that we are led to Him.

Still, the most beautiful aspect of the wise men's response to the Lord's advent gets shown when they depart from Herod for Bethlehem and the star reappears before them. "And behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with *exceeding great joy*." Exceeding great joy! What kind of feeling did they have? It must have been an overwhelming feeling of excitement and internal peace over having embarked upon the last leg

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of the journey to their Saviour, the star's reappearing to assure them that the Lord was with them as they continued their trek.

Can we ever have such feelings of great joy in our religious life? We certainly can, and we must! Talking to a person who has only recently become aware of the wisdom and love found in the Heavenly Doctrines can certainly emanate exceeding great joy. Or a newly engaged or married couple show it to a certain degree. Perhaps we can even relate it to the expression a young child shows on Christmas morning. However, if we are raised in the New Church, do we lose this excitement or never let it show? If we do, how can we regain this feeling or bring it out so that others can share it? One answer is to be like the wise men: to seek out the Lord in His Word and then come to Him when we see the star - those knowledges from heaven contained in the Word.

We should also be prepared to accept that we might not find the Lord right away. Even the wise men thought they would find the Lord in Jerusalem, but He wasn't there. They could have given up, but they asked others where He could be found. This illustrates how essential it is to talk with others about our beliefs and our quest for the Lord. They can add to our understanding and love for the Lord. And perhaps our picture then becomes clearer for us, which can eventually lead us to Him. Notice: the star showed itself again until it came and stood over where the young child was. It led the wise men right to the Lord. We need the truths and goods meant by the star to lead us, and to keep leading us all through our life.

It is important to realise that truth will lead us to the Lord and make us happy, but the real joy for us in our spiritual lives will be when we come to the Lord offering gifts to Him, as the wise men did. These gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were more than just earthly treasures. They represented declarations of our heart or our will, the heart found in a person who is truly thankful for all that the Lord has done for him or her, and shows it by following His Word. These gifts

represented things pleasing to God because their origin is in love and faith toward Him. Love is represented by the gold; our faith by the frankincense; and by the myrrh is represented our love and faith grounded in things external, which is a life in obedience and love to the Lord and to our neighbour. These are the gifts which the Lord is asking us to carry on Christmas day and beyond. But more important for us to know, they are the gifts which He gives us and wills to give each of us when we **respond** to His coming.

So, at Christmas, let's ask ourselves the following question with a fervent desire to find the answer: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" Let's then search diligently for His star in the east and come to worship Him - that is, live a life of charity and faith in Him, because it is in this kind of life where we too can share the vision of the shepherds and the excitement of the wise men. Amen



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE The Lord's Prayer

γεννηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου

Your will be done

Think about something you want. What happens next? Just because you want something doesn't mean it will automatically land in your lap. Between desiring the thing and actually achieving it, there's the effort that goes into bringing it about. All of that is wrapped up in this phrase, "Your will be done."

Now that's our own desires, but what of God's desires? Is there really any reason to suppose that God's Will WON'T come about? Eventually? As for ourselves, we are so often only half committed to what we think we want, but the same can't be said of God, can it? The word we translate as "done" in the prayer means "to come into being, to become". It is closely related to the name of the first book of the Bible, "Genesis", and refers to

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God's great expressive outpouring through the work of creation. It may be a work in progress at any given time, as might also be true of our own desires, but it stands to reason that we can be confident of God's ultimate fulfilment.

This raises a question: why include a request such as this in the prayer? If we can be certain that God's desires will be made manifest, why ask for their fulfilment at all? This is perhaps the clearest indication that the prayer is intended to be put into practice. We must Live the Lord's Prayer, and we do so by committing ourselves to that Will.

The Lord's will is variously expressed as, "heaven", "salvation", "eternal happiness" ... and I'm sure you could think of many other descriptors. These are all manifestations of His Love. But this requires the supplanting of man's will with God's: to turn away from our own selfish desires and to prefer His instead, acknowledging that His Will is the only one that can truly be called, "good". In so doing, we are removing the blocks from our lives which prevent the Lord's inflowing life. But, of course, that is not easy. We resist letting go of what we believe is good for us. We see Jesus go through the same struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39 NKJV)

This phrase follows sequentially on from the previous one, "Thy kingdom come." It is the counterpart to it and a development of the same theme. It is, as it were, the full expression of the kingdom, because when any king's will is done, his rule is complete. He can rely upon the fact that what he commands is carried out, and not in the half-hearted way that is sometimes the result of mere obedience, but it is carried out to the letter, with enthusiasm, with care, and with attention to detail. But the only reason anything takes place in that manner is because the king's will is loved by the doer. So, there is a definite progression here. It begins with the (sometimes begrudging) obedience of "Your kingdom come" and is followed by a developing devotion which supplants the desires of the individual subject.

The Lord's will is done when my own will and destructive tendencies are replaced. But we can only say we've replaced one desire with another to the extent that the former desires have become repugnant to us. I have heard various people relate their own personal examples. You know you've conquered smoking when you hate the smell of cigarette smoke. You know that you've fully converted to a vegan diet when meat just smells like burnt flesh. So finally we arrive at an acceptance of that will, from which comes a desire to facilitate it, to help it happen and be a part of it. This surpasses our earlier obedience, and stands in total opposition to our initial resistance to it.

It's also worth remembering that the Lord is no earthly king. Often when we gain a new ruler - think about some of the recent elections that have taken place around the world - she/he is greeted with enthusiasm, but as the difficulties of life get in the way and unpopular decisions need to be made, some the shine wears off. A dictator seeks to impose his will by force, even indoctrinating an ongoing sense of loyalty into his subjects. But the Lord doesn't seek external devotion. He wants a total change of heart and mind, and only because He knows the true nature of love from Being Love Itself. That can never be forced and He will never force us. It must be freely entered into, chosen. This is one of the reason we find real change of any kind so hard, perhaps especially spiritual growth and development. We must find an inner compulsion, we need to be personally committed to the cause.

Finally, notice that there's a kind of Trinity here in these first few phrases of the Lord's prayer.

Our Father in the Heavens.

Hallowed by Your Name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The End of Divine Love, the Cause of Divine Wisdom, and the Effect of Divine Will in Use and action.

What's next, I wonder?

David

SOCIETY REPORTS

ADELAIDE

Our AGM was held on October 17th resulted in two members coming off committee. June Johnson was elected as Leader/Secretary, Raymond Nicholls Treasurer, Randall Rabone as Chairperson/Deacon, Michael Delbridge as Deacon, Pauline Merritt as Committee member.

An unfortunate incident recently occurred at our Church. June, arriving one day, noticed water pouring out from the wall and on closer inspection found that copper water pipe had been removed and stolen. Turning off the supply at the meter and calling an emergency plumber the problem was fixed the same day.

Luckily, as the hall had been booked by the local citizens group for a meeting that very night. The plumber remarked that it was his third call out for the same thing that day.

On a brighter note, our carol service and BBQ to finish the year off will be held on 19th December. Best wishes from the Adelaide fellowship to all our New Church brothers and sisters for a loving and happy Christmas.

Randall Rabone

BRISBANE

In November we had the pleasure of welcoming four new members to our Society, namely Chris Williams, Jane Kennedy, Guang bin Liu, and Paul Manning. It is lovely to see our community increase with the enthusiasm and inspiration that we all enjoy when meeting Swedenborg's works and start to understand and appreciate the spiritual correspondence of The Word and life.

We will finally have a communal lunch this first Sunday of December after our Family Service and on Sunday, 19 December we will enjoy a Carol Service accompanied by the Children's Pageant...always fun to see the Christmas story acted out and a wonderful way to seal the

story in one's memory! Sadly, our wonderful organist, Allison Chambers, is unable to play for us this Christmas at our Carol Service, so Max Fitzgerald has very kindly offered to stand in with his own keyboard.

With the relaxation of some international travel restrictions Bev Sheppard and Haly Harris have taken the opportunity to visit friends and family in both the USA and the UK and we trust they will be able to return as soon as they wish in good health and without further restrictions. Haly and Glen Harris' son, Ben, is about to finish his first semester at Bryn Athyn College, and Jordan Brunne will graduate from the College in the New Year. Exciting times for them both.

Hospital visits and ill health, though none of it Covid-related here I understand, have affected some of us in Queensland and we wish all, including those who have struggled with the accompanying lockdowns and isolation, a safer, healthier and happier time ahead.

Happy Christmas and New Year to all our New Church friends.

Gaye Heldon

PERTH GROUP

Worthy of a mention in this report is the awarding to Rev Trev of the Brian Aitken volunteers excellence award from People Who Care. This award is given annually to one volunteer from People Who Care for their above and beyond commitment to the cause. Trevor spends 2 days each week assisting SOS (Starting Over Support) with repairing furniture donated for distribution to needy families in the community. He was delighted to receive the award but gains more delight by being able to help with a very needy cause. But well done Trevor.

Joy also gains much enjoyment from volunteering at SOS where she packs orders to go out to families and people in need. Other members of our group also volunteer for various charities. Helen Cozens does

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for Wheelchairs for Kids, an organisation which makes wheelchair for disabled children in third world countries. This group have sent over 50,000 chairs overseas since their beginning. The workers here are mainly retired folk who again gain so much from their volunteering.

We continue to hold fortnightly services in homes generally followed by a shared lunch. On one such occasion in September we drove a short distance from the home of Trevor and Joy Moffat, to a park overlooking the coastal plain where we enjoyed a picnic. Following lunch we took a short walk into the nearby bush to look at the many wildflowers. This year has been a particularly wonderful season for wildflowers following the very wet winter.

Our two wonderful worship leaders have both had their share of health issues. Trevor had to have a cardio version to shock his heart into regular rhythm. Fortunately this was successful and Trevor is now feeling a new man! Unfortunately David has had a number of procedures and is still dealing with ongoing problems. We pray things will soon improve for David.

The ladies met at the home of Lyn and Cliff Rocke one day in October for a shared lunch, while Trevor and David went to lunch with Cliff to a seaside cafe. Everyone enjoyed the day meeting together and it was great to see Lyn and cliff again as they are unable to make services at the moment.

We now look forward to the Christmas season and sharing in the celebrations of this special time of year when we remember with joy and love the birth of our Lord into the world.

May all friends and readers enjoy a blessed , happy and peaceful Christmas time.

Joy Moffat



Perth photo 1 A group of people sitting outside



Perth photo 2 A group of people standing together

VICTORIA

After a long period of crippling lockdowns Melbourne was opened for business (shopping) on Friday 29th of October after 6.00pm. The lockdown measures were unprecedented in their scope and effect on the lives of six million people. It effected our children's education, kept families apart and divided our state. It also inflicted a financial and mental toll we will be bearing for years to come. Over the last few weeks hundreds of thousands of people have protested in Melbourne against vaccine mandates and new pandemic laws in the making.

In addition to the lockdowns Victoria experienced an earthquake on the 22nd of September 9.15 am. It was the biggest earthquake recorded in modern instrumental era (post 1900). The magnitude of a 5.9 quake had its epicentre 15km north east of Wood Point a town about 130 km east of Melbourne. Building Inspectors have found 14 sites that have suffered damage. Geological experts say that despite escaping the tremor relatively unscratched it was a wakeup call to boost Australia's preparedness for future quakes and check the structural integrity of key assets.

On the 25th of September Victorians experienced a little highlight. The Grand Final. The Grand final week has always been the best time to be in this state. It is Victoria at it best. It is when this place truly shines, from the parade to the backyard barbeques and the match itself. None of that happened this year; it was indeed the same last year. Because of the lockdown, Perth hosted our premiership celebration.

This year footy has kept many Melbournians sane. For the Melbourne Demons this was the first time in 57 years that the premiership drought was broken. The Demons with a thrilling match won the 2021 AFL premiership and delivered footy's greatest fairy-tale.

We welcome Melbourne City Council doing all it can, by investing in the spirit of Christmas with many decorations, carnivals, night markets and a host of family-friendly attractions.

Church News

Rev David Moffat continues utilising the internet to make Bible study and other ongoing projects available to members via zoom and /or You tube.

At our Annual General Meeting on Sunday 24th of October we considered a name change as we become Swedenborg Community Victoria. This change will allow us to reach out to the wider community at large and present the teachings of our church more effectively. Our spiritual leader Rev. David Moffat feels very excited about our future and he hopes that with time everyone will begin to feel comfortable about the changes.

On Sunday the 31st of October we had a joint event with the Roseville New Church in Sydney a service led at Roseville, followed by a talk given by Rev. David Moffat entitled "The Chasm and the Veil." We hope that we can do it again and possibly open it up to wider participation.

Bible Studies

Are conducted fortnightly on Mondays at 8.30pm. We are continuing our journey through the Book of Genesis.

Question Time

Takes place on Thursdays at 10.00am and 8.00pm on a weekly basis. This is a very much liked program as it helps us communicate with members who live remotely. I hope this will continue to be a permanent program.

Heaven and Hell

We are continuing our project reading and commenting upon Swedenborg's most well-known work, Heaven and hell.

Reading the text of Chapter 30: (video) is available.

Reading the text of Chapter 30: (audio) is available for download.

The notes to chapter 29 (video): is available for download.

The audio notes to chapter 28 are available for download.

News of People

Rev. and Mrs Moffat have spent two weeks in Gippsland; for a long overdue holiday. They cycled their way through delightful countryside and enjoyed the sights of Gippsland. Since they have arrived here both David and Pam worked very hard to keep our Church functioning during a rather difficult time. Because of David's impeccable computer skills, we enjoyed Church services and other discussions via zoom during the long lockdown period. Rev. and Mrs Moffat are to be commended on their extraordinary work to revive the Church into the thriving organisation it has become today.

After well over three decades of active service Karl Robinson has decided that it is time for him to retire as the Chairman of the Board. Following last Sunday's Church service, Rev. Moffat has presented Karl with an engraved ornamental commemorative plaque to mark the occasion. During his office Karl served the Board with unsurpassed efficiency and excellence. He was a dedicated and good steward for the Church he has skilfully managed and carefully guarded our modest share portfolio to last the distance. During his office, his wife Rose was his unofficial secretary and provided valuable assistance to Karl by skilfully typing all correspondences and other official reports. After the untimely death of Rev. Skinner close to five years, Karl and Neville Jarvis have kept the Church's doors open as Lay Leaders until Rev. Moffat has accepted the Board's invitation to be our new Minister.

We would like to thank Neville Jarvis for his hard work during the year as Secretary of the Board, Finance Officer and News Letter editor. Rev. Moffat is looking for new Board members to take on some of these roles to ease Neville's load. These jobs are very tedious and time consuming for one person.

We also would like to thank Mrs Pamela Moffat and Mrs Alexis Jarvis for their dedication and hard work, they both have put into the running of the Sunday School.

As Christmas is upon our doorstep, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a blessed Christmas; a time for sharing and a time of knowing the birth of Christ within your own souls.

With Love and Light,
Marika Sivak

SYDNEY ROSEVILLE

Almost back to normal with our church services here in Sydney. Whilst we are still required to be wearing masks we were invited by the minister to actually sing along with a hymn this last weekend. It is strange to find singing in church to be an unfamiliar experience.

Howard has made good use of the church's audio-visual system supplementing services musically during his three years plus here in Sydney, but especially during the last two years when singing has been banned.

Sadly, the threat of COVID lockdown has dissuaded us from planning and holding more substantial events like a Christmas party or Carols by Candlelight. Just hoping it will be different for next year.

Howard has however provided the local community with an attractive and thoughtful Christmas display featured in the glass doors of the church. Anyone walking by on the street at night will see simple Christmas figures lit up in the dark along with changing text explaining what Christmas is really about. That, along with a local letterbox drop, may prompt someone to join us in church in the coming weeks. That's the hope, anyway.

Wishing everyone across the continent a wonderful Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Wayne Kasmar

A STRATEGY

When I was a young adult in the church, we were surrounded by apparently successful, born-again church organisations who had a strong emphasis on natural charity. When these things were discussed with church leaders the response was, that in the New Church we had a different approach and that we had to be spiritual in dealing with these things? Two things arose from this approach; one, we seemed to be out of touch with the suffering going on around us and two, nobody told us what the spiritual way of doing things was. The church appeared irrelevant to what was going on in the world about! Talking with peers at that time it was a major factor in a lack of interest in the church.

We must not, indeed we cannot allow this to happen again. We need to show the relevance of our church's teachings to life's situations, especially those that confront us now. Trying to copy what other churches do is not the answer, especially if we are striving to be spiritual in our understanding and application of our teachings in a meaningful and relevant way. We need to look to Divine Revelation for the answers! **The strategy is to teach people the doctrines in such a way that enables them to see their relevance to what is going on about them.** A strategy for growth and connection must come from internals and an external plan then built to facilitate it. Having an external plan built on the appearances of life and trying to fit the spiritual elements into it is contrary to order and will not work. HH87-107

Turning to Divine Revelation we note that in the Word, in Rev.12, the lack of growth in the infant New Church involves the dragon and the wilderness. The dragon is also referred to as the serpent of old. It is referring to the sensuous level of life. It is the level where we accept the appearances of life as reality. It is the state, as we know from the Genesis story, when we believe that we have life in ourselves and as a result put ourselves at the centre and see happiness coming from

the people and things around us. They are there to serve us. It is a state in which we judge others in comparison with ourselves and the thought that we know best. But such a view brings fear. Fear of loss of material gain, of loss of reputation and loss of the ability to pursue selfish goals and in the present world situation, fear of severe illness and death. Then there is the lack of courage in owning up to holding a different set of beliefs, even acknowledging belonging to or going to church or not wanting to be different!

The wilderness is also descriptive of the sensuous state describing the lack of growth in such a state.. It pictures a lack of growth of the church in general and of the church in the individual ie regeneration. The wilderness is a state in which the sensuous dominates and is also temptation and nothing spiritual grows in the sensual. AC 2708. 6&7 It is also described as the church being amongst a few (which is the internal historical sense) but it is also saying that there are few things of the church amongst or within the person. Those few things are the truths of faith received and implanted in life. The love of the neighbour or charity meant by the woman exists but is undeveloped.

So the question is, what is the strategy for turning things around? How can we show how the church is relevant to the things that are going on around us? How do we actually be spiritual when we deal with life's issues? In Joshua 1:7 we are told to be strong and courageous and "observe to do according to all the Law," and "do not turn to the right hand or to the left that you may prosper wherever you go." Do not stray into what we imagine to be good or err into what appears to be true. Act in compliance with Divine revelation! The earth that helped the Woman to overcome the dragon is such revelation. By the earth is meant the Word in its fullness (as to the sense of the letter) and the Heavenly Doctrines. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jn 3:14

There are four things needed here. First, not to let our understanding of Divine Revelation be limited by the appearances of life, and two, to fully understand how all life flows in and the benefits

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that arise from this. The third thing is to not just know about correspondences as a key to understanding Scripture, but employ them as a part of the way we understand life and connect with heaven. The fourth thing is to learn to make distinctions in the way we love the neighbour so that we practice it with wisdom. In this way the few become many. This is essential for the growth of the Church for the Church grows according to the growth of Charity.

All Life flows in

When we look carefully at the faith of the New Church, we will see that essentially it centres around influx. It is the acknowledgement of influx that is counter to the serpents prompting that we have life in ourselves. All life flows in! Do we get it? Do we really understand how it works? Not to begin with. That is the reality of the woman in the wilderness. "If people believed, as is the truth, that all good and truth originate from the Lord and all evil and falsity from hell, people would not appropriate good to themselves and account it meritorious, nor would they appropriate evil to themselves and account themselves responsible for it." DP 380 The Divine Providence reveals so much about the manifestation of spiritual states that trouble people. The work Heaven and Hell is not just about the nature of life after death, it also reveals the nature of the many states that flow into our lives today!

Correspondences

They are not just a code for understanding the Word, they are the means by which there is a connection with the spiritual world, Not just outside of ourselves but within. The inflow is not like something coming down a pipe but more like a chain reaction down the levels of life. HH109 The levels of understanding correspondences are explained in HH115. They are treated of in relation to the earlier ages of the Church. By removing thought from person, place and time we see states which we can strive to develop. The first is to think from correspondences, the second is to think not from correspondences themselves, but from a knowledge of correspondences. The next

level down is with people who have some knowledge of correspondences, but do not think from the knowledge on account of their being in natural good thus not in spiritual good. This would seem to be the state of an infant New Church in the wilderness. The fourth state is to have no knowledge of correspondences at all. We need to train people in the art of thinking about and from correspondences so that they are enabled to understand the world about them and also the world within. They are enabled to see the connection of the spiritual or the cause with an effect. To see the relationship is to recognise what is relevant! We should be asking ourselves, "What is climate change telling us about the spiritual climate?" "What is the covid pandemic teaching us about a spiritual disease that is widespread?"

Love of the Neighbour

The internal life of the church is charity or love of the neighbour. This is what has to grow if the church is to grow numerically. This will only happen when we learn to love the neighbour wisely, with discrimination and intelligently. NJHD 85 , 86. "The distinctions in the neighbour, with which the person of the church ought to be well acquainted, are according to the good which is in everyone." These distinctions are the classes of the neighbour described in NJHD 107. This passage also points out the state of those who start with understanding the Word simply ie. literally, such as children and novitiates, and who understand those who are meant by the classes of the neighbour literally. As a result they practice the external things of charity, but that is okay, for it is permitted in order that they may be introduced into its internal things. So rather than discouraging natural charity we should be seeing it as a learning state and tool. There are and have been programs involving natural charity in the New Church which younger people have participated in but maybe we have not been focussed on the ultimate goal?

Some useful tools

We do not have to re-invent the wheel! As teachers, leaders and disciples we just need to shift our focus and goal. Re read Heaven and

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Hell and the Divine Providence. There are also programs and material available to assist such as Logo Praxis and The Joy of Spiritual Growth. Start the conversations! Maybe we should be sticking up all over the place, the picture of the house with the beasts in the basement and the lord and the angels at the top as a constant reminder or the reality that all life flows in! **How is that for a strategy?**

Richard Keyworth



THE JANUARY 2022 VIRTUAL RETREAT

THURSDAY JANUARY 6th to SUNDAY JANUARY 9th

Usually in January, the Australian New Church holds a physical week-long retreat. In the last two years, of course, this has been made impossible. We're now creating some ways to have an online retreat which may lead towards a later physical one down the track.

Rev David Moffat has organised a four-day retreat on Zoom with set times over those days for certain sessions being led by David, Julian, Joe Vandermeer, Sarah Walker, Ros Taylor and maybe others too.

Event details can be found on swedenborg.com.au and www.swedenborgcommunityvictoria.net.au as well. To interact with a presenter during a few of the online events, you'll need to obtain participation details from David (d_a_moffat@yahoo.com.au). The websites show which events require such participant registration.

All of that is also being made available on the New Church Google Group (new-church@googlegroups.com)

Everybody is very welcome and invited to take part.

A (SPIRITUAL) HISTORY OF HONEY

I was simply astounded to be told a few years ago now that of all the foods that humans eat, there is one which never perishes, moulds, rots or decays but remains edible FOR EVER! The title gives the game away - the answer of course is ... honey. Apparently, they have come across fragments of honey as old as the pyramids and while a touch crystallised perhaps, wipe your finger across it, insert in your chops (or perhaps Cheops) and mmmm! "Most micro-organisms do not grow in honey, so sealed honey does not spoil, even after thousands of years." (Wikipedia)

Now, while the cynical part of me wonders if this is true or fake news, I warm to this idea spiritually because in the Bible, honey gets such a mention and it has such a great spiritual correspondence and meaning for us personally. So let's get going and start with the fact of honey.



It is made by foraging bees who drink up nectar or honeydew (aphid secretion) into their honey stomach next to their real stomach. They go back to the hive and regurgitate all this to the hive bees who in turn regurgitate it several times to add air, adding salivary enzymes. In time this

thickens the mix with slight fermentation and then it is stored in the honeycomb.



Honey itself has about the same glucose content as sugar, and also has fructose and maltose. It has been used through many thousands of years for remedies and for rituals. It is used to alleviate coughs, heal wounds and burns, and as an antibiotic. If eaten excessively it can

bring on anxiety, insomnia and hyperactivity but this is rare.

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Ritually, it is poured over deities in Hinduism, it is eaten at Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, it is given to Buddhist monks to commemorate the monkey giving honey to Buddha, and it is an entire sura in the Quran in Islam, called 'The Bees'.

The Bible mentions it a lot, in all kinds of settings. The land of Israel is described as a land flowing with milk and honey. John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey. Jonathan, son of Saul, innocently licked honey off his finger from a wild bees' nest while his father the king commanded that anyone who had eaten should be put to death (1 Samuel 14:24-47) and by public demand, lived. The book of Proverbs is a bit ambiguous: "Eat honey, my son, for it is good." (Proverbs 24:13) but "It is not good to eat much honey" (Proverbs 25:27) And Psalm 19 outdoes honey, "The law of the Lord is perfect.....the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (v7, 9-10)

So what does "honey" mean, for us, spiritually, personally?

It is, according to Arcana Caelestia/Secrets of Heaven 5620 "the pleasantnesses and delights of the affections for all that is good and true in the spiritual world, for everything celestial, spiritual and natural." Wow! To me, that is really saying that everything in us which genuinely loves the things to do with the Lord gets the same level of feeling as if you are eating honey.

We could explore this for a long time and include so much but not now. You could come up with your own experiences and feelings about the Lord. But we should end with the point raised in Psalm 19 - that the laws and judgments of the Lord are even sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. We're not to revel in how wonderful it is to know and love the Lord; we are to go beyond that and to keep the laws and judgments that the Lord commands us to keep. That's the ultimate honey, which is designed in divine creation to last and last for ever.

Julian Duckworth

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