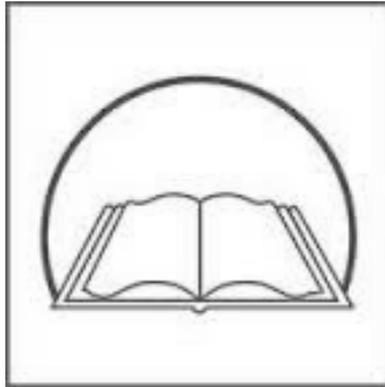


# THE NEW AGE

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Being English, I've been very aware of the transfer of monarchy with the Queen to the King, and the transfer of Elizabeth into eternal life. I keep hearing how, for the great majority of people, the Queen was always there, no other monarch known. Seventy years of her reign.

That made me think about the things that are always there for us in our lives, whether we're in a strong and confident state or whether we're in a state of uncertainty, fear, confusion or negativity. The Lord is always there leading us through our changing states. The supreme Anchor.

The Word is always there, available to us. We read, we get reminded, we feel lifted back up, we reaffirm our faith, and we're actually then in a more direct association with heaven. In that way, the Lord is the Word because he is encountered and experienced in it. Note too that the Word's text is constant while we are not. That matters, for our sakes.

Swedenborg introduces us to those things which are laid down in us from earliest childhood (or even before!) and all through our life. What goes in first goes deepest. He calls these deeply planted things 'remains' because they remain with us, stay with us, so that we can bring them up, bring them on and feel their power.

I'd also include in this set of 'things always there', ourselves. Not so much the good us and the not so good us but just us. What we are basically like as a person. That's a constant. We can change the quality but the circuitry stays the same because it's what the Lord intended for us. So that suggests we should appreciate who we are, and use it well.

King David. King Herod. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? King of Kings and Lord of lords. Your kingdom come, your will be done. May God rule in our hearts and lives.

Julian Duckworth

## **SERMON : THE POWER OF PARABLES**

**by Rev Jeremy Simons**

A sermon about the vital role that narrative plays in our regeneration.

*And with many such parables He spoke the Word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. Mark 4:33, 34*

Depending on how you count, people have identified as many as 98 parables in the four gospels, and another 29 can be found in the Old Testament. You may not easily recognise every one of them as a 'parable', and some of them might be unfamiliar even to people who know the Word well. But all of them fit the definition of a parable: 'something conveying an intended meaning by a comparison or under the likeness of something like it.' We often say, 'an earthly story with a heavenly meaning'.

The text saying that the Lord taught by means of so many parables that it's said, 'without a parable He did not speak to them' might make us wonder. Jesus clearly said things that aren't parables. The meaning, though, is that He apparently always added stories to the things He said. Our topic is *why this is important*, and about the vital role that stories like these play in your regeneration.

Many people have noticed that people have an almost insatiable appetite for stories. From gossip to incidents told to friends, to novels and movies, people worldwide have a great need to hear and tell stories. The Irish storyteller, Pat Speight, said, 'A story is the shortest distance between two people.'

While listening to things like sermons or lectures can take effort and seem boring or tiring after a relatively short time, people can listen to stories for hours! Surely there is a deep spiritual reason for this fact. Why do we like stories? What is it they do? One clue might be in this note about Swedenborg's own stories. He was once urged by a friend to stop telling stories about his experiences. The friend recorded this conversation: "I once asked Swedenborg why he wrote and published those visions and memorable relations which seem to throw much ridicule on his doctrines otherwise so

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rational, and whether it wouldn't be best to keep them to himself and not publish them to the world. But he answered that he had orders from the Lord to publish them, and that those who might ridicule him on that account would do him an injustice. For, he said to me, why should I a man well on in years, render myself ridiculous for fantasies and falsehoods?"

Lots of people might agree with the friend, and Swedenborg doesn't explain more about the value that his stories - so preposterous to many - would have. But imagine Columbus coming home from his historic voyage full of facts and figures about a new land, but no story. Without a story it's all speculation and the obvious question is, "How do you know all this?" If Swedenborg was going to claim that what he wrote about heaven is true, he needed to provide a full explanation of how he knew.

While this idea isn't the reason for parables in the Word because the literal truthfulness of the stories isn't the issue, it does begin to show that a story makes things real for people. The Lord's own explanation makes this point: *"I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not understand."* (Matthew 13:13)

One way to read this is that He is saying, 'They are too simple and spiritually blind to understand so I tell them stories.' Another way is that He is saying, 'Stories are more convincing than direct instruction. This is how I can make these things real to them.'

A recent article in a medical journal says something similar: "Psychologists have found that pure evidence is often less persuasive than narrative (story). Experts who aim to give evidence will, in the name of science, often shun individual stories, but each time, without narratives about real people, they struggle to control the debate and usually, they lose. Narratives have been shown to improve individual health behaviours in group settings. Even more, narratives versus facts

and evidence, have uniquely persuasive effects in overcoming preconceived beliefs and biases."

There are two striking statements here: One is that narratives have uniquely persuasive effects in overcoming preconceived beliefs and biases. This makes them a good tool when dealing with people who see but don't see and hear but don't hear, in other words, a resistant group.

The second is even more remarkable: Narratives have been shown to improve individual health behaviours in group settings. That is, stories lead you to change your life. So, these two points would by themselves explain why the Lord taught by means of parables. They communicate and they are persuasive. But why?

One common-sense answer is that nobody likes to be preached at but people do like a good story. No one likes to be told that he or she is doing wrong and needs to change, but we do like hearing stories about people who are doing wrong but then change. How this happens can be intensely interesting and moving, and also identifiable with.

A good example may be seen in the efforts of Charles Dickens. Wikipedia says: Charles Dickens was keenly touched by the lot of poor children in the middle decades of the 19th century. Inspired by a parliamentary report of the effect of the Industrial Revolution on poor children, Dickens planned to publish an inexpensive pamphlet but changed his mind. He wrote about his change of plan: "You will certainly feel that a sledge-hammer has come down with twenty times the force - twenty thousand times the force - I could exert by carrying out my first idea!" The pamphlet would become *A Christmas Carol*.

A story does a number of things that a scolding pamphlet doesn't do. It refrains from the kind of painful blame that is sure to provoke reaction. It leaves people in freedom to respond as they wish, and provides for this response in several ways. Since stories are descriptions they model change and give it context.

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If people are able to identify with the characters in a story and a situation they will instinctively compare themselves. More importantly, stories provide resolution, giving a good or bad result from a course of action. This can make it seem as if a proposed change is an accomplished fact, and give a person an image of what it would be like to make that change, and strongly inspire him or her to action.

Parables are the language of angels

There are even deeper reasons why the Lord taught through parables. Parables mirror the way angels think. These short stories the Lord told, enable the influence that angels have in our lives. Swedenborg writes: *I remember hearing on one occasion the speech of angels falling into parables, something I didn't take notice of at the time. Also, it fell into portrayals of gardens like a garden of fig trees and others, in dreams. Also visions of feasts so that I would see people eating together, several times, all of which I'm allowed to mention so that it can be known that the mental imagery of angels and angelic spirits have been shown in this way, in things about which the Lord so often spoke, and which He figuratively compared heaven.* (Spiritual Experiences/Diary 3916)

*Some spirits doubted that angels' thoughts are like parables, because they didn't understand parables. So, angels tested the matter, whether their ideas came down into parables or not, and it was confirmed to be true, in no other way than in parables because parables contain general things.* (SE/D 3356)

When it says that parables contain general things it means that the scenes, situations, characters and actions that make a parable are beautifully able to convey heavenly ideas, and that heavenly thought falls naturally into these things. This of course is not how it is with sermons and pamphlets! This is why the Old Testament is composed almost entirely of narrative with very little in the way of explanation.

The details of the Old Testament history seem like ordinary accounts. In the same way, the Lord's parables with their unfolding and imagery

look like nothing more than comparisons. But Swedenborg says: *The details mentioned by the Lord in the parables look like ordinary comparisons, but in their inner form their nature is such that they fill the whole of heaven. This is because the internal sense is contained within every detail, and that sense is such that its spiritual and celestial content spreads like light and flame throughout the heavens in every direction.* (Arcana Coelestia 4637)

This connection with angelic thought has a powerful effect on the listener, adding itself to the power inherent in stories of all kinds to overcome bias and to change our behaviour.

To summarise: The Lord told parables because of the power of narrative. They make things real. They overcome resistance. They are persuasive without being confrontational. They lead to a resolution which hearers go with and look forward to getting. One reason that parables specially have this quality is that they mirror angelic thought and so bring angels near.

You may wonder why, if stories are so important, we don't use them exclusively. One answer may be in what the Lord says to John:

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth ... These things I have spoken to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father."* (John 16:12, 13, 25)

That is, parables, stories, and images are immensely important tools, especially when we are in ignorant or unreceptive states. But as we become the Lord's disciples we can understand the plain teaching within the Lord's parables, and are more able to benefit from hearing "plainly about the Father". Not that the value of stories is diminished but that we learn in a variety of ways.

Readings: Psalm 78:2-4, Matthew 13:10-16, Arcana Coelestia 403

## PRESIDENT'S PAGE Continuing with the Lord's Prayer

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors  
καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν  
τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν

When we looked at the phrase, “As in heaven, so upon the earth”, we referred to the different versions of the Lord’s Prayer, and this is another one of those lines where variations appear. There are three different words commonly substituted for one another in this line: debts, trespasses, and sins. All three are found in the Gospels and a case can be built for using any of them, but they are subtly different and found in different places.

Firstly we have “debts”, from the version of the Prayer found in Matthew: “And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12) The second word, “trespasses”, is also taken from Mathew’s Gospel, but it follows the conclusion of the Prayer and appears to be something of an explanation and expansion of what Jesus has just taught: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14,15) The third, “sins”, is taken from the version of the Prayer found in Luke: “And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” (Luke 11:4) although, note that this version still uses the word, “debt” alongside “sin”. You can see why people have learned different versions of the Lord’s Prayer.

How different are they, actually? The word, “sin” means literally, “to miss the mark”. Imagine, if you will, an archer shooting an arrow *towards* a target without the intention to actually hit it, and you have the sense of what this means. It is a purposeful fault or an ethical failing. A “trespass” means an error, a failure, or offence, which may be intentional or unintentional. Imagine wandering onto another person’s private property - “trespassing” - whether you know it or not.

While these two might be considered debts of a kind, the word “debt” itself has a somewhat broader meaning. A debt may be negative - as in the case of sins and trespasses - but it may also be positive. The Greek word for debt comes from another word meaning advantage, gain, profit, help, or benefit. It is actually the root of the girl’s name, Ophelia (used in Shakespeare’s Hamlet), and we find it in other familiar sayings of Jesus:

“For what will it **profit** a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more **profitable** for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (Matthew 5:29)

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh **profits** nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

A debt means, in effect, *any way in which we benefit at the expense of another*. That may be a positive experience. For example, if I receive treatment from you when I am injured, or help when I am in need, I am said to be in your debt although I have not necessarily sinned. That opens the scope and application of these words. We all **benefit** from the generosity and kindness we receive from others. Indeed, in the previous line we’ve asked directly for and acknowledged the benefits received from the Lord: “Give us this day our daily bread.” There’s no reason to believe we should pay it all back! So, that’s not to say we should stop benefitting from the generosity of others, and it’s also not to say that we should stop being generous ourselves. But we should not seek repayment for such debts, nor engage in any kind of “tit for tat”.

This broader application is so much harder for us to wriggle out of. We might hide or even deny our sins, believing ourselves to be “righteous” or “good” in some sense, yet we must still acknowledge our indebtedness. It would be a great blindness indeed to believe we have

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never benefitted from the kindness of others, or to think ourselves entirely self-sufficient, having no debt of gratitude to the Lord for all of life. This idea of indebtedness - to benefit at the expense of another - also brings a new appreciation of Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, found in Matthew chapter 18. Here, as elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus is recommending a more open and generous approach to life in general, acknowledging that we are not - and never can be - entirely independent of assistance from others. We cannot help but benefit from the kindness of others and even their mere presence in our lives. And, of course, our indebtedness to the Lord, if we care to acknowledge it, is beyond measure. Keeping score is utterly pointless, and seeking recompense for our own generosity is downright selfish. "*Freely you have received, freely give.*" (Matthew 10:8)

To get caught up in that kind of attitude and behaviour, is the antithesis of a spiritual life. It relates closely to that other similar saying of Jesus, "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" (Matthew 7:1) When we fall into these attitudes, we can be sure that the outcome is never good. In fact, it is hell: you can take that both literally and metaphorically.

Lex Talionis, the Law of Retaliation, expresses the idea that every evil carries its own punishment: "But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Exodus 21:23-25) While the principle is sound enough, it becomes problematic when viewed in a merely external way and understood as Divine permission (or even Divine sanction!) for taking revenge. Delight in vengeance is every bit as harmful as the original problem it seeks to redress. It becomes a justification for a lack of forgiveness.

So, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (Matthew 5:38,39) He focusses upon the inner nature of the person reacting, rather than the person or event being reacted to. He also encapsulates

the positive application of this law in what we know today as the Golden Rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Just as evil carries its own punishment, good also carries its own reward. But I think we need to hang onto the idea that these principles don't need to be enacted in a physical way for us to be subject to them. They are spiritual realities we carry with us throughout our lives and in all our interactions with others. We can choose to move through life with a basically forgiving and forgiven attitude, or with an unforgiving and unforgiven one. The same can be said of judgement, and of generosity. The choice is ours. Always.

Whichever one we choose, we can expect to meet many people who share the same philosophy. That in itself will carry its own reward ... or punishment! We will also meet many others who cling to the opposite, and some who prevaricate between the two. But none of that will actually affect the choice we ultimately make, nor should it deter us from the path that the Lord recommends.

David Moffat

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## **SOCIETY AND GROUP REPORTS**

### **ADELAIDE**

The new CCTV surveillance set up is now turned on and with warning signs in the front of Church we hope this will deter unwelcome visitors.

Three newcomers to our Church service is an encouraging sign and one, Anna, even brought her guitar and gave us two songs. They specifically wanted a Swedenborgian Church.

A garage and op shop sale will be held at our Church on Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>. This is being held in conjunction with other sales at the same time

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promoted by the Oaklands residents association of which we are part . Michael Delbridge has become involved with the Ukrainian association friends and they wanted to raise money to send back there and arranged a book and toy sale. On the sale day they wondered why not many people turned up then realised that the wrong date had been advertised. So a large amount of their left-over stock will be in our sale and some funds can help Ukraine.

Our AGM is scheduled for Sept 25<sup>th</sup> following the Service. Soon after, June and Ken Johnson are heading to the UK for about five weeks. A long-awaited reunion with family members not possible during the covid disruptions. Randall and Pauline will keep the Church operations functioning with regular services.

Randall Rabone

## **PERTH**

It was a happy group of ladies who visited Lyn and Cliff Rocke for lunch all taking something to share. Lyn and Cliff are unable to attend services now due to not so good health. We enjoyed a few laughs and news of our families and activities.

We have congratulated Viv Higgins on her 70th birthday. Viv celebrated with extended family on her birthday and had a close family celebration in the Swan Valley on the following weekend. Well done Viv and may you have many more.

Regular fortnightly services are held as usual in the homes of Ros and David Walker alternately with Joy and Trevor Moffat. A shared lunch follows each service when we catchup with each other's news.

There have been a few trips away by several of our group. Ros and David together with Helen Cozens have done a wildflower trip to Geraldton. Lyn and Cliff Rocke are looking forward to a trip with daughter and son-in-law Fleur and Chad. They will visit the town of Katanning to see wildflowers and some silo murals.

Trevor and Joy have recently returned from a five week trip away, when they were caretaking a 6,000 square kilometre native title

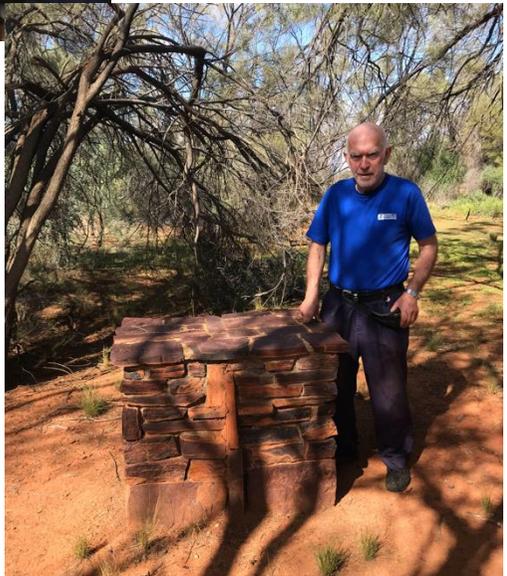
property 160 kilometres north east of Wiluna. Duties were looking after the homestead grounds and checking ,and often repairing the 240 kilometre fence line. This was an electrified fence to supposedly keep out the camels. It wasn't very effective and one day 4 hours were spent repairing 300 metres which was completely flat, tangled and mixed up with bushes. Trevor and Joy loved the experience particularly the solitude of the outback and the rugged beauty of the area with its many wildflowers.

Joy Moffat



Also sent are some nice photos - First at Cliff and Lynn Rocke's

Second, Trevor at the Bush Chapel at Lorna Glen where he and Joy were catering.



## **VICTORIA**

## **SWEDENBORG COMMUNITY VICTORIA**

We are slowly emerging from the pains of Covid and all the suffering it has caused us. It is worth pausing, to reflect on how far we have come from the depth of lockdowns. As we mark two years since the start of Covid, we should take stock and realise how much better our lives are now.

The state of Victoria has bounced back with incredible zeal. The Victorians mustered all their strength to pull out themselves of the world's longest cumulative lockdown and, yes there have been challenges on the way, but as a state we have risen timely to those challenges. We still talk of Covid and the illness is far from over. But as we see people's life return to something nearing normal, we should be proud of how far we have come.

There is still work to be done. We need to get people back to their workplaces to revive our ailing Melbourne C.B.D. during the week. And it will take some time to get over the fear of Covid – but we are bouncing back. Victoria has proven itself able to withstand enormous burdens and pain and yet, find within itself a spirit to keep going to recover, to rebuild and grow.

However, there is help on the way, the long-awaited spring has arrived and the sun is shining longer every day. Trees and flowers blooming everywhere, and the birds are singing loudly. Springtime is nature at it best. When nature resumes her loveliness, the human soul will also revive and renew.

### News from the church

We are continuing with our regular program and from time to time with some additional activities. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, we enjoyed a second Virtual Retreat following the one presented in January. It enabled people from across the country to meet and participate in a range of interesting presentations and discussions.

However, to keep with modern trends, Rev. Moffat has spent lots of time and effort to establish our presence on social media. He is using a service called Restream, enabling him to stream to YouTube and Facebook simultaneously as well as using Zoom. He is also trying some advertising to bring Swedenborg's teachings to the attention of a wider audience.

Apart from services he regularly posts a variety of things on those platforms- quotes from Swedenborg, episodes from our readings and commentary on Heaven and Hell and some short forms of videos.

Using the internet provide an opportunity for people living in an out of reach area of regular face to face attendance in country Victoria or living anywhere else to participate in a streamed Church service or in any other program. Currently, some of us are attending to a face-to-face service, some are on YouTube and Facebook and a few joins in each Sunday on Zoom. There are many more people participating online than at the Church.

According to Rev. Moffat subscribers and followers on social media are increasing. His long-term goal will be to encourage face to face attendance but it will take some time. It is hard to believe how far we have come since Rev. Moffat has joined our Church.

With Love and Light,

Marika Sivak

### **ROSEVILLE (Sydney)**

It's been an eventful time for our minister Howard and wife Debra. Firstly, Howard returned from a General Church ministers conference in America with Covid. Or at least he caught it, so he thinks, at the airport over there when he was making his way back. So Sunday services were foregone for an extra week.

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The following month he was again at Sydney airport, this time picking up his daughter, Chelsea, and her boyfriend who were visiting from America. It had been kept a secret from Debra and at least one of their two sons. Then during the visit we were all invited to spend a convivial Sunday afternoon at the manse to celebrate Debra's recent 60th birthday.

We are still working on the question of what we might do to increase attendances at our services on Sundays. Interestingly, we have had newcomers who have been coming in the last few weeks. A psychological counsellor who watched the Swedenborg Youtube channel 'Off the Left Eye' suddenly realised there is something to Swedenborg's ideas and has been regularly attending church as well as discussion sessions next door at the Swedenborg Centre. He's been accompanied by his wife and often a friend who lives in our adjoining suburb. The counsellor, who originally trained for the Catholic priesthood has some interesting insights about what may attract people to what we have to offer. Hopefully these will prove useful as our 'Futures Committee,' as we've called it, continues its work.

Wayne Kasmar

## **BRISBANE**

As the pandemic status, mask mandates, and wintry conditions lift, there is a tangible air of expansiveness that we can breathe again in taking personal responsibility for, at least, our own health; something our doctrine strongly encourages amongst many other wonderfully encouraging actions.

We are very fortunate in Brisbane to have the services of Rev. Brunne, who provides three different styles of worship each month that prove to be meeting the very different types of worship we seem to enjoy here in Brisbane. They aren't necessarily all for everyone, but we do have a choice!

We are delighted for Paul and Ruth Evans and daughter, Alexis that in early September they were able to move back into their very extensively flooded and damaged home caused by the rain inundation earlier this year.

Because of increasing frailty, Mrs Lyn Williams, 96 years old, is now more or less confined to the Nursing Home where she lives, well supported by family, especially Brisbane-based daughters, Fran and Annabel.

Meetings of the Chinese Swedenborg Study Group, led by Dr Guang bin Liu, continue to be held weekly via Zoom. This year the focus is the book of the Writings, "New Christianity" (TCR). In addition to 'locals' from around Australia, even from as far afield as Perth, others are attending from China, Japan and Taiwan, usually around 16, all told, and from time to time as many as 20.

Our Pastor, Darren, gave a second well received talk at The Theosophical Society on September 7th. Dr Noel Kanagaraj, a keen evangelist for the Writings and regular attendee at our services, is also a member of the Council of The Theosophical Society and, in this way, a lovely link between our two groups.

We were delighted to welcome Cor and Sally Visser-Marchant, son Jasper and daughter Holly, to our Family Service on September 18th. Cor and Sally, with all their family, have now moved permanently to the Gold Coast, to Reedy Creek, and it will be lovely to have them involved with the Church here.

We are happy to say that we will have the pleasure of the company of Rev Mike Gladish, and Murray and Lori Heldon at our Sunday, 16 October service with a short time to catch up with them before the commencement of our AGM. Mike is visiting from the USA his sister, Lori and Murray for the first visit Down Under in a long time, thus they are flying about the country enjoying old haunts and (dare I say) older faces, with some very new ones thrown in for good measure!

Gaye Heldon

**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS FACE-TO-FACE MEETING  
PORT MACQUARIE: SEPTEMBER 5th - 8th 2022**

It was high time in several ways that the Council of Ministers got together and met up in person. We used an airbnb just a bit back from the beach in southern Port Macquarie, overlooking the well-known lighthouse on the headland, which closely resembles an Eastern Orthodox church from a distance.

Present were David Moffat, David Millar, Darren Brunne, Sarah Walker, Howard Thompson, Todd Beiswenger, Martin Pennington, Julian Duckworth, and also Ruth Duckworth who took charge of the catering. We arrived before 4 p.m. on the Monday and left by 10 a.m. on the Thursday.

After dinner on the first evening we gathered for the very special occasion of the ordination of Sarah Walker as a Regional Spiritual Director. This was a moving and lovely occasion, and so fitting that it took place physically at the Council of Ministers meeting. David Moffat as President led the ceremony and service, and Sarah spoke personally to her deep belief that this is her path and her use to all people taking up their spiritual and personal work and practice in the Word. (Please see the next article for more.)

This led easily into the celebration of the Holy Supper which was led by Howard. He mentioned that the first Christians met around a table to celebrate the Lord's command to 'Do this in remembrance of Me'. We nine were around a table. Howard spoke about the bread and wine, the body and blood, the good and the truth, all meant in this sacrament and in our re-commitment to the Lord.



Tuesday and Wednesday were each fairly full days with some free time during afternoons and or evenings.

Sessions included 'The role of the New Church in the new Christian Church of the 21st century' given by Martin Pennington. This brought on quite a lot of discussion about the state of churches generally, the culture of younger people with beliefs or searching for meaning and the effects of today's culture, changes, gender issues, technologies, and so on.

David Moffat introduced a session of "blue sky thinking". He threw in the question - "What would you do?" if there were no limits to our and your resources. While it was a bit of a dreaming time, and at times full of fun, the serious side of it opened us all up into all kinds of

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opportunities and exploring major projects, and their ethical nature and also our responsibilities in managing consequences.

This was followed by the first session on agenda items sent in from church societies and some individuals. These covered a wide range of topics, some of which asked us to think about specific areas, others asked us for a New Church position on various issues. There will be soon be some communication back to the enquirers, if it hasn't happened already. One important point to us was the emphasis of helping people and groups towards how to think (from an understanding of our church teachings) rather than telling people what to think.

Howard Thompson led an afternoon session on 'Touch' and its importance in communication and relationships. He drew on doctrinal passages relating to touch, of which there is a large number, and how touch spans the physical level of life but also the spiritual and emotional level. Part of Howard's presentation was on the way that the pandemic had prevented us from mutual touch and meeting up, and how this seems to be an essential part of our shared life and church.

David Millar, as Spiritual Director of the Australian New Church College opened up on a session on the nature of self. He expanded on this in several ways and got across to us the point that an understanding of self and of ourselves in relation to the Lord and the Word lies at the heart of our spiritual life and practice.

David went on to take us through the whole area of the work and activity within the Australian New Church College. This was done on a large sheet listing everything happening and grouping things in colour.

Logopraxis, students training, courses, groups, finance, resources, growth and challenges were all brought to our attention and shown.

On Wednesday, Julian Duckworth led the opening session with a deliberately experiential topic, that of "What goes on when someone awakens to the presence of the Lord and the Word in their life." He covered the changes that this brings, and how it becomes a heart matter and less a head matter. He also brought up that this switch is a perfectly natural outcome for us when we are involved in spiritual living. On a side note, Julian emphasised our need to find new, meaningful, personal vocabulary and gave several examples.

Sarah Walker led a tranquil and rewarding session allowing the Word to speak to us, enter us, touch us, and so many other processes which take place when the Word is spoken. This is the Lord who is the Word. Sarah used one of the Psalms and simply read each verse and then let the Lord work in us in the quiet space that followed.

In the afternoon, David Moffat threw around butcher's paper on tables, with headings such the New Church in Australia Board, the Council of Ministers, Church Societies and Groups, The national church, and our collective job was to write on these sheets our individual comments as to their place, role and purpose of each of these in our organisation.

At the beginning of the whole gathering we had each spoken about what we are doing, how we felt, and the issues we work with. This was important and it brought on an openness to our discussions. At the end of our time together we kind of did the same again after being together, and this was very productive and with planning ahead.

One key aspect of our time is us ministers just being together.

## SARAH WALKER'S ORDINATION AND HER ORDINATION PRAYER



]Sarah Walker is the first Regional Spiritual Director to be ordained into the ministry and her role and work will be focused on developing Logopraxis in all kinds of ways with people and groups, in conjunction with the Australian New Church College.

Her ordination was a moving experience for all of us who were there. David Moffat, President of the NCIA, invited Sarah to come forward, speak her personal words of prayer, and laid his hands on her and led her into ordination, and blessed her and her work in the name of the Lord.

Sarah has generously and lovingly allowed us to read and listen and feel her prayer.

### *An Ordination Prayer*

*May the Lord be in both my mouth and my heart as I speak these words.*

*To the one who seeks Him...*

*My gift to you is all that the Lord offers me.  
It is all I have that is of real meaning to me.  
My heart's cry is that I may offer all of it freely, as freely  
as I am able as a finite form.*

*I answer the calling of the Lord to my life in this.*

*I answer it willingly, consciously and with an awareness that my sense of self in all of this is a gift too. That it is the Lord's gift to me and therefore to you.*

*I am committed to this with every being in my body, in every level of state of mind that I experience.*

*I have found my home by responding to this call.*

*It has been calling to me all of my life.*

*And my soul is filled with such immeasurable mercy and gratitude that I have finally been awakened into it. That I am now able to see how to start responding to it.*

*I am here. Present now.*

*I am here to love the understanding of truth in you that is bright and strong and wise in the Word.*

*I am here to support that growing in you. I have a love of seeing it grow.*

*To see it find its solid footing in its application to a life that has the Word as the Lord as its centre.*

*I am also here to nurture your earnest desire of seeing others find their true self in the Word as the Lord.*

*I am here because you need me to breathe. Because when you struggle to breathe, my heart aches.*

*I want you to breathe so that you too can find your true self in the work of the Word for others.*

*Because when you breathe, I breathe.*

*Part of my service to you and the Lord is to stay watchful and awake to what I need to do for my own individual work.*

*To work to stay open to what the Lord offers me.  
To work to be in an ever-deepening trust of the Word.  
To continually be in the effort to choose life over death.*

*To allow His presence in you to touch me and blossom.  
To share my delight of the Word's life in me, without need of return.*

*To listen when I am instructed to look after myself.  
To prayerfully choose paths that will nurture what you cannot. To turn implicitly to the Word in this.*

*I know that if walk in these ways in the Word, then I answer His call to love and serve what is of a genuine form of truth within you. That if I let the Word be my guide in this, then I will be moving always into increasing chastity.*

*Into an ever-increasing spring time state of love that is truly His.*

*May the Lord be in both my mouth and my heart as I live these words....*

*Amen.*

## "SO, YOU'VE COME ACROSS SWEDENBORG"

I'm convinced that in today's world, with its changing culture and way of speaking, our New Church vocabulary is in need of some overhaul. Of course, we're already seeing moves towards this, with current versions of Swedenborg's writings, much Swedenborg video material and the language used in services and presentations. That's all good and going well.

But, put yourself in the place of someone who is say, around 30, aware of religion, Bible-reading but puzzled about it all, a bit disillusioned with standard church, and not really drawn to Buddhism or Hillsong. Someone who's looking for and open to spiritual relevance to their life.

And, in whatever way it happens, they come across Swedenborg and check this out with a google and they get a point of contact. And this brings them into the world of Swedenborg terminology. Put aside church, put aside Swedenborg the man, put aside whether we're Christian, New Christian, or Protestant or what we're "closest to" and **just stay with the language we use.**

Here are some samples: regeneration, spiritual sense, correspondences, internals, vastation, the hells, generals. influx, conjugal, proprium, degrees, the good of truth, divine providence, ultimates, temptations, series, inmosts, scientifics.

Now, do understand I am not knocking these for what they are. These "terms" are great, precise, explanatory, but so inappropriate for someone who is taking their first tentative steps with Swedenborg stuff. They're the yawningly deep end of the swimming pool.

Every spiritual approach runs the risk of leaving a first-step 'gap' (gulf?) between the interested enquirer and the spiritual concepts. The enquirer is after getting the drift. The difficulty with spiritual things is that they start off looking **invisible** to us so our handling has to be clear,

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understandable and most of all, given in language that people use today. And I'd add including warm loving language where we can.

"So you've come across Swedenborg. Great! The stuff itself is mostly about things that are already going on in us. You know, good things and things that aren't. And the way we make sense of these and deal with them. I don't like being like this! I do like being like that! Maybe you've looked at the Bible. Swedenborg says that the Bible is, well, kind of pictures of things that we get going on inside us. Like being stubborn. Like feeling crap. But also like feeling there's something I'm missing which I want, and how to. And that really is probably the whole meaning of God for us. And then there's also the thing about us still being there after we've died and how all that falls out. Swedenborg say how we'll go after what we love most and the rest will kind of drop away....."

That's a quick sample. It's not that good but it is a start. It mentions the 4 core things of God, the Bible, the spiritual world and regeneration.

It's probably a good exercise to have a Swedenborg Translate list (online program???)

I'm going to have a try at making a "So you've come across Swedenborg" document. In it, the language will be clear, modern, flowing, unambiguous. But, to work, it's also got to actually get across very accurately what Swedenborg is on about. If that isn't there, it's a waste of time.

It's also important to realise that whatever we give anyone, helping them get it, there's the extra thing of how it all begins to sit in them and work for them. We might help, but that is beyond us. That's where God comes in with them and takes it further. We can start though, so that hopefully that can fire up.

Julian Duckworth





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## LOGOPRAXIS

A spiritual community based on the practice of the Word : online and face to face groups

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