

THE NEW AGE

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4 Shirley Road, Roseville NSW 2069

THE NEW CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

PRESIDENT

Rev David Moffat
P O Box 2224
Mt Waverley VIC 3149
0402 944 889

TREASURER

Mr Graham Hanna
75 Regent Street
Bonnells Bay NSW 2264
02 4973 4141

SECRETARY

Mr Kevin Attwater
P O Box 9043
Port Macquarie NSW 2444
02 6582 7229

SOCIETIES AND GROUPS ARE LOCATED AT

ADELAIDE

287 Oaklands Road
Marion SA 5043
08 8277 1891

Leader

Mrs June Johnson
33 Freebairn Drive
Hallett Cove SA 5158
08 8326 9665

Secretary

Mrs June Johnson
33 Freebairn Drive
Hallett Cove SA 5158
08 8326 9665

BRISBANE

1/24 Railway Terrace
Dutton Park
QLD 4102

Minister

Rev Darren Brunne
9-11 Dunbar Road
Burdpengary East QLD 4505
0421 319 252

Secretary

Mr Cor Visser-Marchant
0416 243 242

MELBOURNE/SCV

3 / 20 Duerdin Street
Notting Hill VIC 3168
P O Box 2224
Mt Waverley VIC 3149

Minister

Rev David Moffat
P O Box 2224
Mt Waverley VIC 3149
0402 944 889

Secretary

Neville Jarvis
"Ellsmere" 1/15 Parkside Street
Beaumaris VIC 3193

BALLARAT

318 Fussell Street
Ballarat VIC 3350
03 5331 5638

Leader

Mr Len Robinson
318 Fussell Street
Ballarat VIC 3350
03 5331 5638

Contact

Mr & Mrs Len & Judy Robinson
318 Fussell Street
Ballarat VIC 3350
03 5331 5638

PERTH

SYDNEY

4 Shirley Road
Roseville NSW 2069
02 9416 7026

Minister

Rev Howard Thompson
4 Shirley Road
Roseville NSW 2069
02 9416 7026/0432 357 475

Secretary

Mr Graham Hall
263 Trafalgar Street
Annandale NSW 2038
02 9692 0941

CANBERRA

Convenor

Philip Richards
02 6282 1157
philip.richards01234@gmail.com

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First, I want to say sorry for the lateness of this issue which is with you in mid-January rather than mid-December. It's simply the result of much travelling and busyness. But here we are with it, and a main article about whether a person will be in hell for ever, or not? Can we actually know?

This new year (which I didn't see in) brings wishes of a happy new year for a while. I decided to wish people a happy January 2nd, breaking the pattern a bit, and hopefully suggesting that each day is its appointed time and responsibility. Jesus said, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6 v 34 end) Notice that Jesus did not say its own joy or its own wonder, but its 'trouble'.

Psalm 118 v 24 says, "This is the *day* the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." This says the opposite, no mention of troubles but joy and gladness. It's not really the opposite because that would be a contradiction. It's the other side to trouble, and trouble is the other side to joy and gladness. This can only be seen spiritually (I think), where down times can take us into new strengths which make us feel surer and even glad. "I learned much from it."

Conversely, unending ease and being fine will almost certainly deaden us to anything else than comfortableness. So in a curious way it doesn't actually happen for more than a bit, before some issue, some worry, some irritant spoils it for us.

Genesis 1 creation story talks about the evening and the morning. That's helpful and accurate. Popular notion is that morning leads on to evening and night. That too is helpful and accurate. It's the double-edged sword of a single day. A day is a bite of life (or is that a byte?)

You don't need telling that a "day" is not really twenty four hours or July 11th, but a single state we're in at one moment, at each frame in the sequence. Far more important is that 'This is the day the Lord has made.' Then we will certainly begin to understand things.

Julian

SERMON: "I Am The Lord Your God"
A sermon by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

Life progresses.

I'd like you to think for a moment about what your life may be like a year from now. Countless things will happen to all of us between now and then. We will experience another Easter, another Thanksgiving, another Christmas. Some of us may retire. Others may change jobs, or become grandparents for the first time, or move. Those of us who are married will celebrate an anniversary; it may be a third anniversary, or a thirtieth or fortieth anniversary. Those of us who are parents will notice that our children will develop substantially: they will become more independent and more competent. This might be the year for a child to move out of the house – even get married. We will all celebrate a birthday this year.

Whatever activities or landmarks fill our time, we can be assured that life will keep rolling by. Each day brings with it new experiences and challenges; some which give us joy, and others which test our endurance. Through it all we will be developing as people. Our perspectives will change as we see more of life. We know that beyond the various things which fill up our day, we are supposed to be making spiritual progress.

Each year we get closer to the time when our lives in this world will be over, and we will enter the spiritual world, which includes heaven and hell. Our primary goal in this world should be to prepare for that time – to be led by the Lord towards heaven.

From time to time, then, it's useful to reflect on how religion will play a part in our lives. How will the Lord Himself help us to make some spiritual progress this year? What is He leading us towards? What does He want us to see about our choices and ways of acting, and consider changing? What is most important to Him? The First Commandment. Today's focus is on the most central religious principle to keep in mind as we strive to make progress in



our spiritual lives: dedication to the Lord our God. look at the First Commandment today – the first thing, and in one sense the most important, which the Lord commanded from Mt. Sinai. He said: "I am the LORD your

God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before My face. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:2-6).

"That which reigns universally." There is a teaching in the Writings for the New Church which says: "What is stated first must be held in mind and must be seen to reside universally in everything that follows" (Arcana Coelestia 8864:3). In one sense this means that the First Commandment must be held in mind when we look at the rest of the commandments, for it "reigns universally" in them. For example:

- The next two commandments teach us how to worship the Lord alone or have no other gods before His face: we are not to take His name in vain, which means that we honour and revere Him; and we are to remember the Sabbath day, or take time to focus on the Lord and make Him a priority.

- We are not to steal, because the God whom we worship forbids it.

- He commands us not to commit adultery because He is the God of marriage.
- We are not to murder, lie, or covet because in doing so we are not loving the Lord nor keeping His commandments, as the First Commandment requires.

In general, the First Commandment calls us to commit ourselves to the Lord to let Him reign in our lives. If we think about it, we need this command. For religion to make any sense, we have to know who the Lord is – He is the central focus, and the object of all our religious devotion. For us to see value in the Bible we have to know the Revealer of it– then it can be a Divinely authoritative guide for us. If we are to accept the path of regeneration or spiritual rebirth, we need to worship the Saviour who makes it all happen.

One teaching in the Writings for the New Church says: "What reigns universally with a person is that which is present in every idea of his thought and every desire of his will... *That which reigns universally within a person should be the Lord*" (emphasis added, Arcana Caelestia 8865).

Another teaching says: "A person's whole character is determined by the nature of whatever dominates his life" (Arcana Caelestia 8858). The Lord asks us to let Him "dominate" our lives. He asks that we love Him above all things, that we make Him and His ways the priority in our lives, for He is the Source, the Beginning, the Lord our God.

The Tone. One of the things we notice about the First Commandment is that it is given in the negative: "You shall have no other gods before My face," rather than "You shall worship the Lord your God alone." If we fail, He will "visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate [Him]." For He is a jealous God and one whom we should fear. We might wonder why this is the case. If worshipping the Lord alone is so important, why does

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He appear so foreboding, commanding, and manipulative – so distant?

As you may imagine, there are several reasons for such a tone. First, the Israelites, to whom the Ten Commandments were first revealed, needed such an image. They would not have listened unless a powerful, jealous God was speaking. Such an image caused them to pay attention!

But another reason for the tone is that it teaches us how to make the Lord our central focus. "You shall have no other gods before My face," it says. How? By not carving any images, or making any likenesses of anything in heaven, on earth, or in the waters below. All these represent things which stand in the way of letting the Lord reign in us. "Gods" can mean selfishness – putting ourselves before the Lord, which is the root of all evil. They can also mean worldliness, or a lack of concern for anything beyond what we can see and experience, namely the Lord and heaven. A "likeness in the heavens above or the earth beneath" means pretending to be a good person. A person who acts like a spiritual and moral person but only outwardly, is making a likeness or putting on a façade. The Lord calls such people hypocrites.

When we get to "the waters under the earth" we come to the direct opposite to worshipping the Lord. The waters and the things they contain represent a bodily-oriented person, who cares only for external pleasures. Such a person is dominated by appetites for worldly things such things as food or possessions, or for physical, lustful pleasure. This is a far cry from what is orderly, with the Lord at the top, and these cravings much further down the list in their appropriate places.

The purpose of stating the First Commandment in the negative is to warn us that we all have tendencies to love ourselves, to make ourselves appear like good people, to seek pleasure. If we focus on these things alone, the Lord cannot help us. Without Him, we live lives which are pictured by the Israelites in the land of Egypt - in bondage,

controlled by negative influences which come to us by means of hell. Our lives will have qualities to them which don't bring us happiness, but instead make us feel miserable. We will act in selfish and manipulative ways, and cause harm to the people around us.

But the Lord wants us to realize that it doesn't have to be that way. He can free us from these negative influences. If we put Him first, He delivers us from the influences of hell. He gives us a rationale for the way things should be, with Himself at the top governing and directing our lives, with charity to other people next, as He commands. Then we can take care of our own needs, and experience pleasures in their proper measure. Amen

SOCIETY REPORTS

ADELAIDE

The Adelaide Society had its AGM recently with no change to committee and one new member, Glenda Burr , added to the membership.

Two palm trees planted about 20 years ago at front of the Church had grown to such an unexpected height and were dropping so many fronds that we had them removed at considerable cost. Pauline Merritt will be travelling to Essex in the UK for her sisters 90th in January.

Our Christmas Carol service will be held on December 17th with a BBQ afterwards. We wish all fellow readers a happy and sharing Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Randall Rabone

VICTORIA

Swedenborg Community of Victoria

Activities have continued under the leadership of Rev. David Moffat, mainly taking place at the Church premises with wider involvement utilising Zoom and YouTube. Series considering chapters from Swedenborg's True Christianity and Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation chapters 2 & 3), on which David has generally based two Sunday services each month, have recently been completed. The second Sunday of the month continues to consider and discuss chapters from the work Doctrine of Life. Other services have incorporated interesting questions raised through David's participation in social media. David has now begun a series of talks mainly geared to children, but much appreciated by everyone present, providing an overview of each Gospel and the Gospels as a whole.

Sessions for 'Question Time', on Thursday mornings and evenings, and Bible Study, on each 2nd Monday evening, via Zoom have continued as have the monthly Friday evening Swedenborg discussion meetings, including Dr. Noel Kanagaraj, visiting from Brisbane to talk about his recently published book Discovering Swedenborg, and Joe Vandermeer speaking via Zoom from Sydney on What makes things sacred.

In October, David led a service at the Church erected in 1887 by the Bucknall New Church family at Rodborough in Central Victoria. Bucknall descendants and New Church members were among the congregation. David has been invited back to conduct another service there in early 2024.

Two changes in Board (now Committee) membership took place at the AGM in late November, Alexis Jarvis retiring and Rohan Pereira stepping up to fill that vacancy. Alexis was warmly thanked for her 5 years of service and Rohan welcomed with acclamation. Interestingly, Rohan had spent a weekend at the Brisbane Society in August on a

fact-finding mission about approaches being taken to activities there. He joined David Moffat who was also there participating in a Council of Ministers meeting. Rohan subsequently reported back with suggestions worthwhile for adopting in Victoria.

David continues to upload videos to social media of Melbourne-based activities as well as short informative ones on various topics. In recent months there has been a significant and encouraging growth in views of them along with followers being added. Participation with the local Inter Church Council and with the Monash Interfaith Gatherings, the latter which occasionally take place at the Church premises, as well as involvement on social media, have generated interesting contacts for David. Further visible growth in these areas can be looked to in 2024.

Four members have recently achieved milestone birthdays – Sam Teed, who holds position No. 1 on our roll, turned 100 in October; Margaret Lennon, our No. 2 member reached 90 in December. Committee member Colin Batchelor was 60 in October as was Kim Bentley in December. Congratulations to all.

A Christmas Eve evening service (7.30pm) and a Christmas Morning service (9.30am) will be held this year. They will be available to view on both Zoom and YouTube and everyone is welcome to join us. Details can be found on the Swedenborg Community Victoria website. Finally, greetings are extended to all readers of The New Age with wishes for a happy and blessed Christmas and a healthy 2024.

Neville Jarvis

ROSEVILLE, SYDNEY

Starting on a happy note, our minister, Howard, reports that there are about twice the number of views of his Spiritual Shorts YouTube videos since he changed their format in the last couple of months. Begun during Covid lockdown they were originally a devotional twelve minutes or so, a mini service of worship, that partly solved the problem

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of people not being able to get to church. But now they are simply a five minute talk based on the next Sunday sermon topic. Clearly people are jealous of their time and have responded favourably.

Howard has started a Christmas tradition in the last few years by making available Christmas Readings that have been put together by a ministerial colleague in America. As part of our outreach programme of flyers put in letterboxes in neighbouring suburbs, we have advertised these readings that feature bible texts, along with Swedenborg quotes and related commentary. Where there has been little uptake of the offer of hard copies of this booklet we hope that it not the case with people obtaining an online copy that was also advertised.

We wrapped up our year of bible study this week with a bit of a Christmas party. In recent months we have been concentrating on the letter of the Word - where Swedenborg says the Word has its sacredness, divinity and power - and find it seems to be inexhaustibly interesting. Quite fascinating, in fact.

Something new this Christmas is a carols service that we'll be having in the evening. Forecasts suggest the day will not be particularly warm. which is good as Howard and his wife Debra are looking forward to having candles as a central part of the service - a tradition that they understandably love given their northern hemisphere background. It's been many years since we had an evening service like this, but we still remember how warm the church was with all the burning candles.

While the church retreat in January had to be unfortunately cancelled, we will be having a mini one here at Roseville in Sydney over the weekend of 20-21 January. The full retreat was to have had the theme of "What's the Use?", and that will still be the case as we will be looking at the relevance of the church in the wider world, among other things.

To everyone around Australasia, a very happy and blessed Christmas and happy new year from everyone here in Sydney.

Wayne Kasmar

IS HELL, THEN, FOR EVER?

Preamble

I want to make it clear at the start that in this article I am not pushing any 'position' on this question of being in hell for ever. Nor am I putting the position of each Yes vs No 'side' in this discussion. What I am attempting is to lay out hopefully some or all of the main teachings, ideas and considerations on the topic so that we can all make up our own mind if we feel we need to do that. Or stay in thoughtful open-mindedness. I really do believe that it is okay and right to say that we cannot know but God surely does. The question, after all, is such a big one, and involves every human being, and each human being is pretty different from others. But there are also spiritual laws which operate universally and consistently, and these can assist us.

The Issue

Over the years, I've noticed that the one subject which comes up again and again in New Church casual discussions is whether someone - who has apparently or hypothetically chosen a hellish way of life and is then in hell because that is their deepest love - will they then be in hell for ever? Or is there scope for them to be led gradually from hell to heaven? Or at least some redeeming development...? Over the years I have heard many 'takes'.

I really do understand why this is such a regular discussion point. In this article we'll be going through a stack of considerations and various doctrines, but I guess that the majority of well-meaning people would want hell to be ideally like a "correction centre" where, finally, (whenever that is!) when you have got it sorted that there are other ways to be than

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being entirely self-absorbed with all its many manifestations, along with some idea of God that you've gained, you will then leave this tragic state.

Then there are others who feel that being in hell must be in being there is now, for ever. Some of course see it as a punishment, a just reckoning from God for a godless life, for rejecting the sacrifice of Jesus for us, for a completely sinful life doing who knows what, and for being born into sin - it's called "the curse" - and never choosing to be set free by God's grace.

But others are not so condemning, but still hold the view that being in hell is being there for ever. This view is that if you have made your life's delight a life of self-absorption with contempt of others, much manipulation, insincerity and a fear of losing all this, and a lifetime of reinforcing this by scoring it ever more deeply inside you, and coming to love being like this, then, held by it, you will seek it in eternal life. It is what you have come to love being. It is heaven...but, it isn't.

The stunning thing to me is that there isn't a New Church book on this. Granted, it may get dealt with in other books - although I've never come across that - and, so far as I'm aware, there's only one fairly recent paper on this whole question. I have deliberately chosen not to read it while preparing this article, since other people's views affect our thinking ... but I'll certainly read it when I'm done.

There are many clear and graphic moments in the spiritual writings of Emanuel Swedenborg where he states that if a person has not reformed during this life they will not be able to reform after death in the spiritual world, or words to that effect.

Let's have one example:

It comes from Swedenborg's smaller book covering many topics, "New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine, paragraph 239 (which is at the end of an additional section on heaven and hell). I'm using the New Century Edition wording:

"Our life cannot be changed after death. It retains the nature it had, because the nature of our spirit depends entirely on what our love is like, and a hellish love cannot be transformed into a heavenly one, because they are opposites. This is the meaning of what Abraham said to the rich man in hell: "Between you and us there is a great gulf, so that those who want to cross over to you cannot, and neither can those from there cross over to us" (Luke 16:26). This shows that people who enter hell stay there to eternity and people who enter heaven stay there to eternity."

The "What is true?" dilemma

"The truth is..." those are fine-sounding words which, if we are not careful, we will over-simplify in the rush to get things clear or to sound authoritative. On the level of mere information, there is no problem. I tell you Paris is the capital of France, and you say, 'True' and there's nothing left to say. Spiritually, it doesn't quite work like that. Spiritual truths are true when we take a number of relevant factors into consideration to build up a fuller picture. Sometimes the context of things is tremendously important.

So I will say that doctrinal statements may look like they are absolute and definite but in reality they are making a statement which contributes to the point in question. This is tremendously important. In themselves they are not the whole truth, much as we might like them to be that or parade them as being that. One temptation of the church is to be categorically certain of its position.

A classic example of this "cluster" can be seen in the teaching that we live as if of ourselves. Let's spell out the whole thing. "Everything I am is a gift from God yet it all feels to be entirely my own." In that statement there is the one truth yet it needs two parts to it to be accurate and complete. If we were to take either one and make it the whole, it would be untrue. But this is what often happens with "literal" statements in Swedenborg like the one quoted above. It's seen to be "the truth".

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Let's now point out the great golden truth that everything God ever does is 100% benevolent. I fully believe that! He can't be anything else and he will not punish or ever be angry (in spite of Biblical verses apparently saying he is). But his benevolence is clothed in provisions and permissions and accommodations. God is certainly not simply 'a nice guy' but he is all-forgiving, and his all-forgiving is not in telling us it's alright but in endeavouring to help each of us see ourselves better, realise our need, and make decisions which are deep-abiding and not just the moment. In that sense, whatever we have been like isn't the issue, but what we will adopt and install in us is the crucial thing. The benevolence is active and outcome-based. We've only to ask God to help us, and mean that, and God will. In short, God has two aims: to bring each of us to His heaven, and to make our existence as orderly as possible.

So, when we say God is only ever benevolent, it is absolutely true but it is not enough just to say that. God's benevolence is universal but it's fully-focused on the situation with each of us at any one moment.

Unhelpful ideas of time

Most people with an active spirituality know that time is an awkward thing, standing in the way of deeper understanding. Swedenborg is big on the unhelpfulness of time and tells us that to understand spiritual things we must push away time (and space, number, person, place and matter...) and work more in 'states'. State is the way we are in ourselves, both at any one moment and also with what we have come to see and love. Clock time does not exist in the spiritual world. Sequence - from one thing comes another - definitely does.

Our state changes inevitably and at times we are sure, and other times less sure; full of powerful thoughts and feelings, other times caught in confusion, the way things seem to be to us, and taken up with life's demanding needs.

Talking about being in heaven and being in hell is fairly awkward because it raises an idea of a place when it is really a personal state.

Talking about being in heaven or hell for ever raises the thought of never-ending time from now on. This is not the real way to speak about spiritual, state-based, personal and eternal things.

It is where we are at each moment, what we are feeling, what we are seeing, what we are choosing, and what we are confirming or repudiating. However, this is not simply the 'here and now', because in our responding to our state we build - or rather God builds - a stronger tendency towards our felt preference. In short, 'time' in heaven is a matter of sequences and outcomes.

The same principle applies to the idea of space. To think of being in heaven or hell is incorrect if we see it as a non-confinement or confinement. It is a state of being either in the idea of the loving presence of God or in the strictures of our own delusions and obsessions.

God is always far more than we can ever imagine

Here is an analogy we use. We often liken God and us to a parent with a child. The parent lives for that child's safety, well-being, progress and confidence. To develop these requires guidance and explanations and boundaries. Behind and within these is the parent's deep love. The child doesn't understand what the parent says and does but it knows what's what and feels the love behind everything. God seems to be like a kind of parent. After all, we say Our Father.....

It may be a helpful analogy, but it's way short.

God is not like a human parent. God does not try and work things out in what is going on, because he already knows everything. He knows everything in a way we cannot know or ever describe. We can't have a thought or a desire or an intent or anything without God knowing everything about it and what will come from it. Add to that the thought that God knows every future ramification or potential range of outcomes from every momentary impulse we ever have. Then add to that that God sees the deepest most ancient causes for every impulse that sweeps

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over us. And this is only scratching the surface of God's knowledge of us.

God sees everything and seeks our completeness in being who we are, so God must work towards that outcome, in seeing what he set down. I would readily think of God having the picture of the person that each of us can potentially be and for which he created us, and I'd add to that the idea that each person is an intentional creation, unique, purposeful in the whole scheme of God. God is extremely well-equipped in his benevolence.

In aligning with God

It certainly sounds like God has got everything sorted. Indeed He has, and if we put our whole trust in God then our inner life will run well. Physical life is a different thing altogether. Putting our trust in God means believing in God, receiving God's light, love and life, living our life according to God's direction, believing that we are being led by God and that God is always leading us to what is good, and lastly, that we keep turning away from whatever goes against God.

If you look carefully at that set of trust ingredients, you will probably arrive at the one thing that God cannot be for us. He cannot be us! He can be in us, with us, for us, over us, under us and around us, but not be us. He can't be me. I am me. God created me (outside of himself, Swedenborg says) and at that very moment completely enveloped the new me in the love and wisdom of God, I am a being who is not God, but I am experiencing God. This cannot ever change or be modified. It is fundamentally and simply true. I am always on the receiving end of so much, but it is for me to be consciously receptive of God and feel I am receiving and then work my life on that basis. This is a foundational truth with (pause) some other aspects to it too. Think 'clusters' of truth.

My responsibility for myself

The follow-on from being distinct from God means that I become responsible for what I am.

Of course I can come up with quite a list of things which seem to have made me the person I am, such as my hereditary patterning, or my early years, my basic personality and disposition, and other things. These may well have shaped quite a lot of my nature on the external level, but in the way I am loving to others, respectful, forgiving, kind, positive, involved, or indeed, all the opposites to these, this is for me to activate, they are my own responsibility.

They come to be more a part of me when I make a choice to be like them. They don't come just by me becoming adult. They don't come by me thinking about them or being told I should change a few things about my handling of life. They do not come because I've heard that doing them will get me to heaven and I'm doing them for that. They ONLY come when I start to implement them and put them deliberately into practice, and actually live them from now on. The core memorable principle is that "I am only loving when I am being loving".

Where my self-responsibility takes me

If we decide to install spiritual truths and the teaching of the Word of God into our conscious life, we will feel a development. We will increase our affection, love of, love for, delight and commitment to this responsibility we hold. We get stronger in what we set ourselves toward. The saying that "Practise makes perfect" is an accurate spiritual law.

However, alongside this, and equal to it, is our need to deal with the wrongs we find ourselves involved in. Everyone is involved in these wrongs just by being a human being in a world full of appearances and attractions. We have a lower nature (it's a long story why...) but we do and we need to acknowledge this and see where in us our lower nature is busy, and, because of our commitment to spiritual practice, we must turn ourself away from it. We need to manage it.

Note that I've used the word 'wrongs'. These are not usually huge wrongs like murder, stealing, adultery and lying. Subtler wrongs are attitudes, criticisms, self-focus, negativity, and preoccupation with pleasures. These hang around and come in when no one is looking.

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They need exposing and revealing and taming. Spiritual loves do not replace our lower nature with a "higher nature" but make us more alert.

All this builds us, especially when it is the love of our being to follow God. It creates heaven in us and we are in heaven, while still in this life. Discard all media definitions of "heaven" and forget about getting to heaven or going to heaven. Stay with the real thing. Never let it go should be our constant prayer.

Swedenborg picks up on this situation regularly and says that if we are in heaven now we are in association with angels and spirits in heaven and we will come into heaven when we are in the spiritual world. There is an effective continuum.

The converse of all this

In working towards whether people stay in hell for ever, it is essential that we cover the situation of people who build up in themselves an inner pattern of life which leads towards a deep love for what hell is. It is the opposite (from 'opposed to', note) to everything we have covered in the previous section about building heaven in us. We won't wade through the details. We will use just one instance of where hell can get built up into an entrenchment.

One quick point first. Earlier we included the need for people adopting spiritual practice to also see and turn from their own wrongs. People allowing their evils to roam and reign do not do this. There is no check. If anything they turn away from any good prompts and residual feelings for these.

Imagine someone who early on felt that everyone else seemed to be okay and they are not. This situation is not uncommon because it's from the appearance. But it's a tough one. In itself it doesn't sow the seeds of hell and with care, thought and help it can be dismantled. But this person doesn't. Over time, the problem is still there, it leads to a pattern of looking for people's weak spots and faults, and the wheel of holding these in private thoughts. This becomes an important part of this person's own life and any initial idea that it is incorrect or wrong or a

waste of a life slowly fades. Any idea of having a talent or skill is never looked at.

A dangerous development comes when this person begins to sense a pleasure in privately demolishing other people. Rather than loving others for what they are and give, it's now a love of finding their pathetic sides which kicks off with several guesses if there isn't one that's obvious. 'Hey, I'm good at this,' is a frequent line.

Another development is a growing sense of power over other people and a litany of all the ways they could be brought to open insult and derision. This power feels great and one result of it is a wonderful flood of good feelings about the person themselves.

An interesting development is a sense of amazement about how quickly opinions, ideas and opportunities come to foment this further. They just come in, like that! Rather than wondering if he* is in league with the devil (about whom he doesn't give a toss, nor God either) and maybe in danger of selling his own soul, he can only credit himself with crazy aptitudes and a mind like a rocket. And while people don't get close to him and he has no real friends, this is all only in himself. It's a whole exciting wonderful world.

(* or she, so this doesn't pick up unhelpful gender factors...)

A thought comes in from somewhere that he could start a great game and quietly drop a comment about person A to person B. Nothing too serious, just a ruffle but it will get picked up and maybe shared. Oh, the joy.....

But before a first test-out of this he is hit by a truck and wiped off the face of the earth. He is now in the world of spiritual realities with a form to live in and a sense of not really knowing where he now is.

We will not go through the process of progression in the spiritual world for this person, until he of himself adamantly demands to go 'that' way,

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feeling it attracts him and will also take him away from these people here who he can see are about the most hypocritical people, smarmy as they come, when he can see their disgusting thoughts.

He leaves and the light dims..... The relief is unbelievable. Now, where are we?

Will this person, now in self-chosen hell, stay there?

Here are some considerations -

- # We need to stop thinking about this in terms of time and more in terms of each moment in turn and what is going on then in the person.
- # God, being benevolent, wants the greatest order to exist in all lives and that each community, heaven or hell, reaches some stability and order.
- # God, from perfect love for all, reduces the presence of the opposing loves and thoughts to those which dominate within a person;
In heaven, temptation swings are reduced by the strengthening of the angel's trust in God's power, purpose and goodness;
In hell, conscience (reminders of other considerations) are reduced by the strengthening and deepening of the evil spirit's core love, own dialogue and renewed intent.
- # God, who sees all things and all possible outcomes of 'this, now' is infinitely benevolent and brought this person into being with intended purposes.
God can only desire, work and endeavour to bring a person out of hell to heaven. This is handled by God without time but in an eternal determination
- # The person in hell is increasingly being only led by his love, and all thoughts are entirely subject to the will of that love

- # In every created person there are remnant states which remain with us eternally
These are the result of some type of heavenly experience, whenever it was. This may be a determining factor at some moment or at least come into play
- # A spirit in hell continually feels and sees itself being absolutely in seventh heaven, with moments of despair and frustration
- # I'm including this interesting "inverse" passage about how angels remain in heaven:

"The same thing is also clear enough from the consideration that we have no goodness or truth whatever except from the Lord and that all our vices and distortions come from our selfhood. If people — or spirits, or even angels — were left on their own for even the smallest moment, they would make a spontaneous rush for hell. For this reason the Word says that heaven is not pure [Job 15:15]. The angels acknowledge this, and no one who fails to acknowledge it can be among them. The Lord's mercy alone frees them from hell, indeed removes them from hell and keeps them from voluntarily plunging right back in."

(Arcana/Secrets of Heaven 868 New Century Edition, Cooper trans.)

- # I feel the need to close with the thought mentioned right at the beginning, that we cannot ultimately know, and that God can and does know in all the states we exist in, and provides for that from his perfect infinite and eternal love and wisdom and use.

Julian Duckworth

THE NEW CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

MINISTERS' EMAIL ADDRESSES

Rev. David Moffat	d_a_moffat@yahoo.com.au
Rev. Julian Duckworth	julian@duckworth.me
Rev. David Millar	dwmilla@gmail.com
Rev. Darren Brunne	drbrunne@gmail.com
Rev. Howard Thompson	revhathompson@gmail.com
Rev. Ian Arnold	im.arnold@bigpond.com
Rev. Sarah Walker	sarah.walker@logopraxis.online

RETIRED MINISTERS' CONTACT ADDRESSES

Rev Julian Duckworth 9 Catherine Street, Port Macquarie NSW 2444 0427 938 732
Rev. Ian Arnold 12 Norell Place, Eight Mile Plains QLD 4113 07 3841 2552
Rev. Trevor Moffat, Unit 137, Walridge Country Estate, 45 Berkshire Road
Forrestfield WA 6058 08 9359 5137 (m) 0427 995 879 moffattrevor1@gmail.com
Rev. John Teed, BUPA Aged Care, 2 Sullivan's Road, Woodend, VIC 3442

NON-ATTACHED MINISTERS

Rev. Brian O'Neill 0478 686 701 oneillpsychology@gmail.com

SWEDENBORG CENTRE

Mr. Joe Vandermeer (Director) Centre Address is: 4 Shirley Road, Roseville NSW 2069
Centre ph: 02 9416 2812 Joe mobile: 0402 202 456 website: www.swedenborg.com.au

AUSTRALIAN NEW CHURCH COLLEGE

Rev David Millar - Director of Spiritual Training - mob 0412 492 587
dwmilla@gmail.com website: anccollege.org email: enquiries@anccollege.org

LOGOPRAXIS

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

<http://logopraxis.online> Email inquires: enquire@logopraxis.online

Rev. Sarah Walker Email: sarah.walker@logopraxis.online

THE NEW CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Mr Kevin Attwater (Secretary) P O Box 9043 Port Macquarie NSW 2444
02 6582 7229 email: attwaterk@bigpond.com

HURSTVILLE SOCIETY OF THE GENERAL CHURCH

22 Dudley Street Penshurst NSW 2222 www.hurstvillenewchurch.com

Minister: Rev Todd Beiswenger 26 Dudley Street Penshurst NSW 2222

02 9580 1589 todd@hurstvillenewchurch.com

PERTH GENERAL CHURCH GROUP

The General Church in Perth: Aurora Circle

20 Clydesdale Road, McDougall House, Como

Rev Todd Beiswenger www.newchurch.org/perth-gcnj

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland Society www.newchurch.nz secretary@newchurch.org.nz

Secretary: Mrs Lis Keal, 46 Daffodil St, Titirangi, Auckland New Zealand

Minister (Retired)

Rev John Sutton 59A Balmain Road, Birkenhead, Auckland 1310 NZ

0011 649 419 7509 johnsutton41@gmail.com

