

## CONTENTS

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Editorial   | page 2  |
| Sermon<br>"When Prayers go Unanswered"<br>by Rev Kent Rogers      | page 3  |
| Society Reports<br>(Brisbane, Perth, Sydney (Roseville), Victoria | page 13 |
| From the heart the mouth speaks<br>Martin Pennington              | page 17 |
| Euthanasia: Is there a New Church<br>answer?<br>Todd Beiswenger   | page 20 |

Here is the Autumn issue of The New Age, slightly later than usual for various reasons but also coming close to Easter for which there's a sermon. There are other interesting articles too, so enjoy a good read.

Years ago, a friend of ours commented that she had a Silky Oak tree in her front garden and that every season of the year it shed something. In spring it dropped the casings of the buds which made the ground sticky. In summer it dropped the flowers which piled up and blew everywhere. In autumn it dropped the fruit, hard round balls you could slip on, and in winter, a lot of the leaves came off with obvious messes. "But it's all worth it, even so," she laughed. "But you never get a break!"

The tree is just being a tree. It's not dropping things to annoy anybody. The annoyance is in the spectator and the sweeper. This is actually a tremendously important spiritual truth. We are choosers between holding a personal irritation which will then almost certainly spread to other things in our life, and holding a love for a tree which is beautiful, does us no real harm and gives shade on a burning sunny day. Its litter on the ground is incredibly trivial unless we let it wreck our whole life.

We're used to the idea of us being choosers, making choices. It's from our God-given free will. Yet it pays to explore it some more. When we choose, either way, we may well be tipping things that bit more in that direction. In many ways we take up what we give our attention to and we let go of what we don't focus on.

That sounds obvious perhaps, but wait, this is something to watch like a hawk! We know all about it, but we've got to start choosing, making some choice. A friend of mine described this as choosing to choose! And many of the really important choices are not what to have for lunch but qualities I want to focus on and develop in me and other qualities I want to recognise and diminish, weaken, manage and send packing. "Choose this day whom you will serve!" (Joshua 24:15)

**SERMON: "WHEN PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED" KENT ROGERS**

Few people I know complain of a shortage of difficulties and trials in life. Regardless of creed or caste, life hands us plenty enough trouble. But for Christians, among the most challenging times we face is when God seems silent, distant, unconcerned. Our prayers go unanswered. We might well wonder if they are heard at all. We may get pushed to a place where we begin to doubt if God actually loves us, or if God even exists. These are among the darkest, loneliest and most distressing times we face as followers of Jesus Christ.

There are many kinds of prayers; some are relatively petty. We pray for a project to succeed, for a hassle free flight, or the like. Other prayers stem from the deeper, more altruistic aspects of our being, given to us by God. For example, we may pray for a loved one to be relieved of a terminal illness, addiction, or depression. We may pray for improvement in our marriage. We may pray that God helps us improve ourselves and overcome our own weaknesses. And though we may pray for these things consistently over a long period, sometimes nothing changes or improves. God seems to have forgotten to rain down His presence and love onto us. Our spirit is suffering a period of drought. But it is not that God has moved away from us or stopped loving us. Drought of the spirit is caused by a blindness or inability to sense God. Our minds lack the spiritual lens, the truth; we need to see God. (see Apocalypse Explained 481).

What's going on when it's like this? Why are we left feeling so alone? What purpose is God achieving in our seeming abandonment? Near the end of I Kings, we read a story of a contest to end all contests. We could call it the 'War of Lords', or the 'Battle of the Gods'. The setting is at the end of a three-year drought. Yahweh Himself has arranged for the contest.

He tells His prophet Elijah how it is going to go. The worshippers of Baal are to erect an altar to Baal and place a sacrifice on it. Elijah repairs an altar of Yahweh and places a sacrifice on it. Elijah then has a trench dug around the altar and enough water poured onto the sacrifice and altar to fill the whole

page 4

trench. Whichever God or so-called god is able to bring fire down from heaven and burn the sacrifice, that God shall be proved the true God. Elijah gives the worshippers of Baal a head start. At the crack of dawn, they pray and pray to Baal. They shout and dance themselves into a frenzy in their petitions to Baal. "Oh Baal!" they cry out as loud as they can till the sun goes down. They even go so far as to cut and slash themselves in hope that Baal will honour their self-sacrifice and bring down fire from heaven. But Baal remains silent.

It is now dusk. It is Elijah's turn. He calls out to Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Immediately Jehovah responds by sending a fire so fierce that the stones are split, the sacrifice is utterly consumed and the water is instantaneously dematerialized. The winner is undeniable: Jehovah.

When we hear this story, our instinct is to rejoice and think, "Yes, that's my God, the Lord. He always wins." We place ourselves on the victor's team. And in some sense, yes, Jehovah is our God and He does always win. But not infrequently, we misunderstand the true nature of our God, Jehovah. And it is at these times that life seems so dark and scary.

The word "Baal" means a "lord." Strangely, it is this very word, lord, that is invariably substituted for the Hebrew letters YHWH (Jehovah) in almost all translations of the Bible. In our prayers and conversations, we also use that word, Lord, when we mean our God, YHWH. The word Lord is synonymous with Master and the chief characteristic implied in that word is Power or Powerful. Although all power is inherent within, God's true name, YHWH, does not chiefly, denote power, but Reality or Existence or Being. YHWH means, "Who is Being" or "The I Am" (Arcana Coelestia 7636).

At the end of His **Sermon** on the Mount as well as elsewhere Jesus said, "Not all who call out to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will be received." And anyone who has petitioned God and felt that stony silence in return

can testify that at times, this is true. We call out, "Lord, Lord" but our words are not received.

When the worshippers were dancing around the altar, shouting, and cutting themselves, they were calling out, just as if we do today, "Oh Lord!

Hear our prayers!" The only thing that was different was the language they used. We might be tempted to think that our minds and hearts are in a different place than the Baal worshippers, because, after all, we are thinking of Jehovah, and not Baal.

But when we are trying to get God to change reality according to our will, even when our will seems right and good, it is power that we are seeking and power that we are worshipping- as our Lord, Master, or Baal. We make ourselves disciples of Baal, power, when our worship stems from concern for self and the world (Apocalypse Explained 160). Power does describe an aspect - an very important aspect - of Jehovah. He is omnipotent. But He is so much more. His chief aspect is not power but Love (True Christian Religion 43). This is what He showed us when He took on the form of a human being and walked among us as Jesus Christ. He had a singular message and command- "Love others as I have loved you." His life's story in effect says: "I am totally willing to suffer and die for the sake of loving and helping you."

The word "Lord" is not the problem. "Throughout heaven [Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world] is acknowledged and worshipped as Lord, since He has all power in heaven and on earth" (Arcana Coelestia 14). But when we say or think the word Lord, it is important to think of Jesus Christ and His essential quality and message of love.

If Divine Love is Jehovah's primary characteristic, Divine Wisdom must be His second (Apocalypse Explained 1124, True Christian Religion 43). God has a plan and the plan is good. God knows what

page 6

He is doing. If this is not true, than all the love in the world and heaven will not be enough. Only in context of His Divine Love and Divine Wisdom does his Divine Power take its proper position (True Christian Religion 56). His power is to create angels out of mere mortals. His power is to save sinners. His power is to bring joy and love to hearts that are riddled with sorrow and despair, rage and fear. His power is to evolve love within the human heart and within human society. In short, His is the power to save (True Christian Religion 56).

When something goes terribly wrong in our lives; when something does not go according to plan; when our prayers and petitions fall on deaf ears, it is human to reach the point of anger. "Lord!" we may cry out in utter despair, "You hate me! Lord, You have abandoned me. Lord, You don't exist, do You?" In one sense, in this last idea, we have finally reached the hard-learned truth-that Lord whom we have been petitioning no more exists than does Baal.

This is not a happy, warm message, but it also is not condemnatory. By putting ourselves in the shoes of the Baal worshippers, I certainly do not mean to evoke guilt or shame. My hope, in fact, is to share a certain peace and relief from that awful feeling of abandonment and separation from God. In the story, the Baal worshippers are slaughtered. Elijah, the good person, then asks God please to give him death because, frankly, he has had enough of life. God sends him up to a mountain to witness a wind so strong it splits apart rocks. Jehovah says that He is not in that wind. Next, there is a terrible earthquake, shaking the foundations of the earth. Jehovah says that He is not in that earthquake. Next, a fire destroys and consumes everything in its path. Jehovah says that He is not in that fire.

Finally, there is a still small voice. This can be translated a delicate whispering voice (New Spirit Filled Life Bible NKJV text notes for I Kings 19:12). In the original language, the word translated 'small' literally means pulverized or crushed. Jehovah says that He is that

whisper. In the nitty-gritty of our day-to-day lives, love is so tiny, so delicate and fragile. Someone cuts us off, a wave of anger rises and love is forgotten. We face a financial crisis and love is drowned in the sea of worries. Selfish lusts and desires beat and thrash love in the back-alley of our mind. Almost everything seems more powerful than love. Even simple boredom and routine have an evaporating effect on love. We see our spouse every day and forget what an amazing human being she is. We see our kids every day and forget how precious they are. Love is so small, so delicate, so fragile and crushable.



In Jesus, we see this. He did not bring down fire from heaven. He did not call on His legions of angel warriors. He did not speak back to His accusers. He did not even step down from the cross. He was crushed by the hate of humankind. However, while love seems so small and so frail, love is in fact, invincible. Love is omnipotent because God is Love. This is the bedrock doctrine and fundamental tenet of Christian faith. It is the true message of

Easter.

So what do we do about these challenges to faith, when life seems cruel and God seems silent? Even in this story, we may wonder how the God of love would have the prophets of Baal slaughtered. Could not a simple conversion ceremony have sufficed? Likewise, we may wonder why a loved one must suffer so terribly with cancer, with alcohol, with depression, with loneliness or something else.

This sermon is not going to answer these questions. Rather, this sermon is here to offer a simple, but effective spiritual remedy, which we can employ when we face these times of deep despair.

page 8

God's plan for us is that we love one another. That is the plan. This sermon is offering that spiritual remedy. What do we do when our loved one is debased by heroin; what do we do when our own body is devastated by debilitating pain; what do we do when God does not answer our pleas for escape from our personal hells? We keep on trying to love, because that is the true God. The God that does not answer us and does not give us what we want - that is Baal. It is good to get so frustrated with this false god that we give up on that lord. When we do, it is as if the prophets and worshippers of Baal that are living inside of us are made no more. They are slaughtered. It is important to note that Jehovah did not order the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Elijah himself ordered that. However, our true God, Jehovah, bends human mistakes into healing for others (Divine Providence 281, 240). This story helps to heal us and bring us into states of love. We are happier. We make others happier.

No matter what is happening or not happening in our lives, our goal is to love. Our peace is in loving. Our freedom is in loving. Our eventual happiness is in doing the exercises of love. When we seek to use God as a means to power, we are going to be enslaved by the false god of power, Baal. Seeking power makes us slaves. God's name is YHWH; we might say life or reality or even as is.

Often, we do not like this God. Life is not often easy. Reality is not usually as comfortable as a stiff drink, or an hour drone into the TV, or a plunge into fantasy. Often we want power to change reality more than we want to love reality. But God is the Author of reality as it is. It is the best possible plan for us. It is the ever-unfolding flower of pure love. Although this is easy to say, it is almost impossible to feel at times. Even the good person, Elijah, longed for death. He did not like reality as it was. Even Elijah was forgetting that God is not big power, but frail, fragile love.

No matter what reality is dishing out, our job is singular, same and simple, to love in each moment, the best we can.



That is what it means to be a follower of Christ. That is what it means to be a Christian. This idea is not grand or even that appealing. But it does refocus our mind onto the real God, and His real message to us - love others. And in those very dark times when God seems absent or even cruel, it is comforting to realize that we have been petitioning the wrong lord without even knowing it. In those dark times, usually we will realize that we have not been seeking first and foremost to love others, but rather we have been seeking God to do something to suit our will and personal idea of what should happen in life.

Now let us look at the bad people in the story - Ahab and Jezebel. This pair is said to be the worst of all Israelite history. In Kings, Ahab was spurred on by his wife Jezebel. I was dumbfounded to find out what their names mean. Ahab means, Friend of the Father. And Jezebel means Chaste. These two joined together in unholy matrimony bred the most rampant and flagrant worshipping of Baal that Israel had ever seen or would see. And it is so squeamishly true in our lives too. "God, Father! I am Your friend! From my youth I have loved You and served You! I am chaste! Please, O Lord, answer my prayers. Fulfil my petitions!" And the unspoken subtext is "I am good! I am deserving. Give me Your power to wield." Our rational has been wed to our selfish desires and in this state we misperceive ourselves as good when of course God alone is good (Apocalypse Explained 1146, 160). From a self-righteous state of mind, we are praying to power, to Master to Baal. And mercifully, Jehovah does not respond to prayers offered up to that name.

He allows us to cut ourselves in service to this Baal until we despair of that false "Lord" We stop crying out, "Lord, Lord!" and start remembering our real duty - to keep loving in the moment, no matter what reality happens to look like.

It is no easy task, but it is the only task. And there is something comforting in having a focused goal. The false prophets are killed. The rain finally falls from the heavens. We hear the fragile little voice, "love

page 10  
one another."

In this, we see one aspect of meaning in the idea that Jehovah is the "Father" of Jesus the "Son." Reality, or Life as it is, brings about states of Love in our heart. The Father in the Old Testament is a scary, terrifying depiction of God. But from that comes Jesus, a most humble, beautiful depiction of endless, tireless love. Life as it is, is often terrifying and lonely. But after wrestling with it long enough and frequently enough, God begins to plant that holy seed, Love into the human heart. We begin to see that all of our jockeying for position and power, all of our effort to gain material security, all of our attempts to strong arm God into doing things our way, are simply pointless. In the final count, the only thing that matters is loving the people God brings into our lives.

We can see this "Father-Son" relationship. But we can take it deeper as well. After that seed of Love is planted in our hearts and minds, we come to see that Jehovah's reality is in fact pure love. It is what produced love in our heart. So in one sense, Love is the essence of the Father, and the Son is the ability to see that love in life around us. The Son is the Truth or ability to perceive reality accurately (Arcana Coelestia 7499). And it is not a very difficult leap to see that in essence both the Son and Father are therefore one--Love. As Jesus said of Himself, I and the Father are One (John 10:30). Jesus called Himself the I AM (John 8:58). We can say it this way: The Truth in Life is Love.

It does not matter if our spouse is kind or cold. Our job is to love. It does not matter if the trip we have planned for months was ruined by rain. Our job is still to love. And in the loving, we begin to feel a certain peace and joy. The ups and downs of reality no longer matter all that much because they are inconsequential to our job.

We begin, as it were, to ascend above the earth in a chariot of fire. The fire is God's love made real in practice, and the chariot are the

ideas derived from that love and practice which sustain us and allow us to feel God with us. We just keep being lifted up on the simple, singular, same and soft task of loving others to the best of our ability in each moment, as it is, in the name of our true and visible God, Jesus Christ.

We are not good.

We are not chaste.

We are not friend of the Father.

We are just lucky to be given the chance to try to love. And that is the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. It is His chariot.

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## SOCIETY REPORTS

### BRISBANE

The new year, 2023, for Brisbane New Church, started with a 'Sacred Circle' facilitated by Cor and Sally, at the church with about 9 participants, including a visitor from Canberra, Ada Marchant. Sacred Circle group will be on every second Sunday, with Rev Darren Brunne, his new year series starts with 'The Draw Net'. The reordering of our Inner States; Matt 13:47-50.

On February 5th, we had our first family service, Rev Darren Brunne preached on 'Mark and the Messiah', The Lord's explanation of the parables and the Gospel of Mark 1:1. There was a good turn up. Rev Darren Brunne ran an 'Abiding in the Vine' series on the second Sunday on Kindness, which was really inspiring.

Guang Bin Liu has been doing a fabulous job at working hard on promoting the sermons and sacred circle sessions on his youtube channel; <https://youtu.be/C5XzbrMLCe8>

Rev Darren Brunne will be compiling his series on Virtues, called 'Abiding in the Vine' series into booklets for distribution. Dr Noel will be assisting with that job.

page 12

During the break in January, a working bee was formed by a group of members, who met at the church. They kindly did a spring-clean, and moved the furniture downstairs, so it is easier for members to access. It works better, looks great and feels like a new sphere of Angels has opened up.

We have been holding Rev Ian Arnold in our hearts and prayers, as he has been recovering from a car accident in January. Please join us in our daily prayers for him. Thank you kindly.

Warm blessings, Sally Visser-Marchant

## **PERTH**

Well here it is, March already. We don't have a lot to report as there are not many of us now.

Trevor and Joy Moffat had a lovely time over Christmas with their family in Melbourne. At first they stayed with David and Pam and then later moved to a b-and-b, as their grandchildren had arrived from Canberra and Germany.

Apparently David caught Covid19 at the time so he had to isolate from everyone for a week, which wasn't much fun.

The rest of us spent Christmas in the usual way, visiting family, hosting family dinners and the like.

Our Sunday services have recommenced. We have services on the first and third Sunday of each month generally, alternating between the Walker's and the Moffat's homes.

Hopefully we can continue with this for the rest of this year. Unfortunately both Trevor and I have some health issues so things may change in the future. Everyone is now over seventy and life is necessarily conducted at a slower pace.

We were all shocked to hear of Ian Arnold's car accident. Pretty hard when you are hit while stopped but I know from experience that it happens.

Hopefully he is well on the way to recovery. We all wish him well.

Our very best wishes go to all members and friends of the Church. With the Lord's help and guidance we will continue to go forward in our efforts to keep the Church vibrant, alive and expanding.

David Walker

### **SYDNEY (ROSEVILLE)**

Another member of the Sydney society withdrew into the spiritual world in early January. June Taylor's regular attendance at church had been missed for some months after an adverse cancer diagnosis early last year. A group of us made the long trek to Leppington in Sydney's deep south-west for her funeral at which our minister, Howard officiated. We always appreciated June's dedication in making the hour-long car trip to join us on a Sunday. She was truly one of those people who you could say no one had a bad word about.

A subcommittee looking at how we can attract more people to our Sunday services has found itself drifting into wider outreach questions. Should we try to get new people to services and then work on improving the chances of them returning repeatedly, or do we need to first foster a sense of community within them with attractive spiritually-based psychological services that could then result in worship participation. We have decided to keep things simple and are ready to try some ideas for the first option, But attraction for the second has prompted some of us to seriously consider doing some work to develop that one as well.

It is with pleasure that I can let you know that we have found a location for the next New Church in Australia family retreat. It will be held next January in a bushland setting at Winmalee in the scenic Blue

page 14

Mountains, west of Sydney. This will be the first live camp since that extraordinary bushfire-and-smoke summer just before Covid hit in 2020.

Wayne Kasmar

## VICTORIA

A small group from our Church participated in the annual Mount Waverley Chadstone InterChurch Council's Christmas Stall last December, raising almost \$1,400 for the 'Act for Peace Christmas Bowl' Appeal. On this occasion, its purpose was to provide meaningful gifts to communities affected by Covid. A group of dedicated singers, including Rev. David Moffat, entertained stall holders and passers-by with impromptu Christmas carols. (See photo at end of report).



There was also a Nativity scene which had been created by David, assisted by **Harry Francis, one of our young people**. Several people stopped to take photos through the course of the

day.

Regrettably, Rev. David Moffat contracted Covid in the days leading up to 25 December and a last-minute decision had to be made to cancel the Christmas morning service. It turned out to be quite a long recuperation period for David but thankfully he came through it with no longer term effects.

December saw David begin a series of reading through and discussing another of Swedenborg's smaller works, Doctrine of Life, on the second Sunday of each month with members and friends having the opportunity of participating either in person at the Church or via Zoom. Then in January, David introduced a series centring on Swedenborg's work True Christian Religion at the first Sunday

morning service of each month. The plan is to work through the whole book focussing on chapters consecutively. On this first occasion, we were delighted to welcome Rev. Ros Taylor from the USA who gave a testimony, reflecting upon the influence and meaning of Swedenborg's spiritual writings in her life.

The last Sunday in January (29<sup>th</sup>) was a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday and it was decided to meet for a social picnic at a reserve in Glen Waverley instead of an activity at Church. A group of members and friends enjoyed the occasion chatting over sandwiches or a barbecue.

Two members have had particularly long stays in hospital. Mrs **Rose Robinson**, now in respite care and expecting to be home in the not-too-distant future, and **Klaus Drevermann** continuing in rehab following a stroke. Klaus will also be returning home shortly once an electric wheelchair has been purchased for him to do so. Mrs **Mary Teed** has also had a fortnight in rehab having regular physio to help build-up strength and mobility. Unfortunately, a day or so after arriving in hospital, another person on the ward came down with covid meaning that visiting was not allowed for a while. It is expected that Mary will return home in Woodend quite soon. Members and friends also keep Rev. Ian Arnold in their prayers following the severe injuries he sustained as a result of being involved in a serious car accident for which he was not responsible. He remains in hospital receiving treatment, which slowly, but surely, is allowing him to do more each day.

After consultation with the membership and congregational members, it was agreed that the Church should adopt an 'Acknowledgement of Country'. Discussion took place over the most appropriate wording and when it should be used. On Sunday mornings, the Acknowledgement is included on the introductory slide prior to the commencement of the service or activity. It is also shown on a plaque adjacent to the front door into the Church and at the head of each Newsletter.

page 16

The Church Board held an annual review of our program with Rev. David Moffat at its last meeting in 2022. As a result, it was decided to meet again on Saturday in January, with a congregational invitation to participate, to consider plans and objectives for 2023. A working document resulted which will be regularly assessed. As part of the review, David presented statistics on views that had taken place on the various platforms currently used for including our activities and also for paid promotion. Certainly the results are encouraging showing that information on our teachings is reaching an audience far and wide. There was one statistic that was singularly interesting. A children's illustrated story on 'The Lost Coin' of approx. 3 minutes, loaded on YouTube last October, accumulated well over 900 views in a relatively short timeframe. What was the attraction of this video we wondered? The most likely explanation would have been viewers looking for information on 'Bit Coins'. Most views only lasted a few seconds but some watched the whole presentation, two becoming subscribers to our YouTube channel, so it may well have stimulated the right sort of interest in the end!



from the Christmas choir report at the start

Neville Jarvis



From the series "What happens in Vagus"

## **FROM THE HEART THE MOUTH SPEAKS**

Martin Pennington

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good treasure of his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil treasure of his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. (See Matthew 12:34),

These two well-known verses quoting Jesus tell us that from the heart the mouth speaks. Yet until the last century we had no idea how fascinatingly true they would turn out to be. This is when for the first time men began to do carefully recorded work on dissecting the human body. In the 18th century Swedenborg began to do his own research in this area and draw our attention to the wonderful ways the body reflected the heavens what he referred to as the grand man. But there is no mention in his works of the following profound structure in the body which occurs between the larynx or voice box and the heart and is a part of what we call the "Vagus (wandering) nerve" which allows a two-way connection between the organs of the torso of our body and our brain. This is the first in a series.

Have you ever wondered how our brain gets our mouth to speak? When you think about it our brain has a lot to manage. Speech actually starts in the stomach with the diaphragm. This muscle helps push air from the lungs up the trachea through the voice box or larynx and its vocal cords that vibrate to produce your voice. As if this were not enough, there are muscles in the lips, tongue and throat as well as our cheeks and jaw which must also be coordinated, It takes about 100 muscles to speak clearly. It requires our brain to move, tense or relax the muscles in our face at the right time these work together to form the sounds to make speech. The tip of the tongue touches just behind your top teeth to make a "d" sound. By moving the tongue, changing how much air comes out, and vibrating

page 18

or not vibrating the vocal cords, you can make over 40 distinct sounds. Sometimes even your nose joins in. Try putting your finger on your nose and say “mmm.” You will feel the vibration. Your brain coordinates it all.

Our Larynx enables the sounds we make by stretching and contracting the muscles attached to our vocal cords. When these vocal cords are stretched out we make high sounds and when they are loose we make lower sounds The Writings tell us that instruments that rely on stretched strings (harp) represent truth and instruments that rely on wind (trumpets) represent good. AC 8337

When we sing however we use both cords (strings) and wind working together just as they should be.

But how does our brain tell our larynx or voice box what to say or sing how high a sound we need to make and the many other effects that produce what has been called the sound of angels. All these commands must travel down two of the many nerve fibres that come out of the base of our brain this Vagus nerve travels down both sides of our neck and communicates with the diaphragm, lungs, as well as the face and Jaw.

The two branches from this Vagus conduit system are called the right and left laryngeal nerves they control the muscles of the Larynx acting to open close and adjust the tension of the vocal cords. On the right hand side a nerve fibre branches off the Vagus nerve in the neck and connects directly to the larynx simple enough however on the left side of our neck another fibre branches off but instead of connecting horizontally to the larynx from the left it travels downward to the heart then actually loops under the Aorta which is the main artery coming out of the top of the heart. The Aorta rises from the top of the heart, like a handle arches over and proceeds down to the rest of the lower body taking oxygenated blood from the lungs pressurized by the heart to all parts then descends to the lower abdomen and the legs. This left

nerve fibre which we call 'The recurrent laryngeal nerve' travels back up again to the Larynx and connects to it on the left side. Recurrent comes from the Latin word to reverse direction or turn back which is what this left fibre actually does after passing under the aorta.

Why does the left laryngeal nerve take this strange journey down to the heart then back up to larynx in the neck ? There is no discoverable reason for this although it occurs not only in humans but in all animals and this leads to a very peculiar phenomenon particularly in animals with long necks! In a giraffe for example the recurrent laryngeal nerve is about 4.6 meters (15 feet) long.

And in the longest-necked animals of all time, the now extinct Sauropod dinosaurs like the Brachiosaurus, (the ones in the movie Jurassic park that ate trees ) their necks were 14 meters long making the recurrent laryngeal nerve an estimated 28 meters in length.

Evolutionary biologists such as the famous atheist Richard Dawkins insists that this is an example of the random changes of a cobbled together evolution. He has an unpleasant video on 'You Tube' in which he dissects a Giraffes neck to show this strange anachronism in all its futility. He calls it unintelligent design.

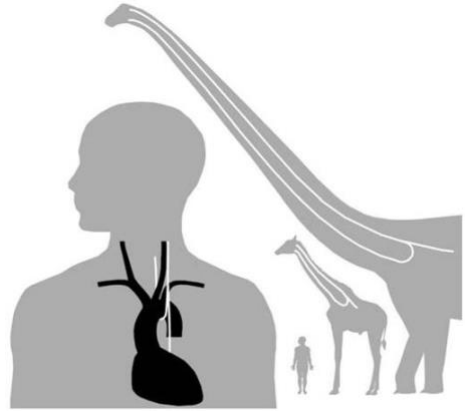
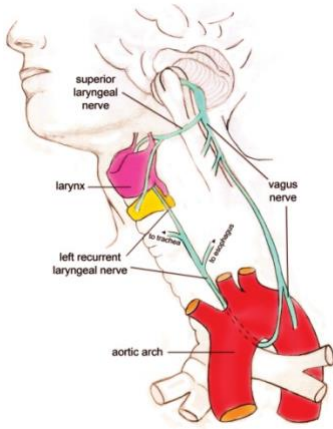
I have an alternative explanation. I believe that deeply and profoundly impressed upon the human body is a powerful truth that when we speak it must be from the heart. Not filtered through the brain not distorted via manipulation and lies denigrating others in order to gain power over them. The heart represents the will at its best or worst but it's through our voice that we express our heart.

Either hurting others with our words or loving them in word and song.

In the Arcana Coelestia Swedenborg writes  
When the inward level in a person makes one with the outward what resides in the heart lies also on the lips. Or what amounts to the same thing, what lies on the lips is then the heart speaking, and what lies in

page 20

action is then the will acting, without any disagreement between the inward and the outward. AC 9375



Martin Pennington

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### Euthanasia: Is there a New Church Answer?

It is a fairly normal experience, I think, to at some point or another to wish that our life would come to an end. Elijah wishes for it, Jonah and Job do as well, and while God grants none of these requests, with ever advancing medical technology of the modern world that can extend our life perhaps longer than was originally planned, we also gain more and more of an ability to grant the wish for ourselves by refusing further medical intervention, or by actively using modern medicine to finish the grim reaper's job for him.

Personally I can understand the desire to leave this life behind, even without being burdened with a terminal illness or condition. After all, heaven sounds like a great place, certainly better than here. Eat all the donuts you want, and never get fat! But there are some things you do get to experience here that you'll never experience there. For example, those achy knees you've got... well, you won't have those in heaven. Grey hair? No hair? Wrinkles? The inability to control bowel

movements... none of that will you have in heaven. I know that sounds like a good thing, but stay with me... maybe, just maybe, part of the gift of life here is getting to experience those things. I know it may sound crazy, but frailty is one of the unique aspects of physical existence. You only get to live in this body for a short time, then forever in the prime of your youth. So maybe in the next life you'll get a chance to sit around with your friends and compare your stories of bodily aches, pains and disease like military veterans swap war stories. The basic idea I'm putting forward here is to explore the pain with curiosity, knowing that after you leave this rock you won't ever experience it again.

What's that you're thinking? Not convinced of this plan? Well, let's further explore the question of euthanasia from a more doctrinal point of view. Religious people in particular find the dilemma around euthanasia, or "voluntary assisted dying" rather perplexing. On one hand, we do not want to take a person's life into our own hands and end it prematurely. On the other hand, we do not want to prolong the process of dying more than necessary—that is, we want to preserve life, but not prolong death. At what point do we simply allow a person to die and take no further action to extend his or her life?

What does the Lord teach us about this? The short answer is "nothing." While we do get the general command of not to kill or murder, when Moses was up on Mount Sinai nothing was given to him instructing us on how decide whether to keep a person with a painful, terminal, illness alive. The fact is that the answer wasn't given to us via Jesus or Swedenborg either, meaning that whatever I write here is really just my best understanding. The attempt here is to look at the principles taught by the Lord and come to a reasonable conclusion, but "reasonable" by the teachings and priorities of the Lord, not necessarily "reasonable" by humanity's or the medical establishment's standards. Let's get started.

We do get one clear example where the Bible does not condone taking someone's life even when the person is facing an imminent and

page 22

unavoidable death. When King Saul was mortally wounded in battle, he asked his attendant to help end his life (1 Samuel 31:3, 4). Saul's attendant refused. However, another man later falsely claimed to have fulfilled Saul's wish. This man, an Amalekite, came to David saying that he had killed Saul, hoping to be rewarded for vanquishing David's presumed enemy. Instead David says, "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" I think this is a question we have to ask ourselves when it comes to euthanasia: who are we to decide our time of death?

It is a humbling perspective for sure. When Job complains to God about the job He's doing, God gives Job a similar message: who are you to question my judgment? If you get right down to it, when we question God's plan, we are in effect saying that we are smarter than God, or at the very least that we know something that God doesn't. Which clearly isn't the case. When it comes to our time of death, believe it or not, the Lord does have a whole set of factors that He weighs out. You can find a listing of them in Swedenborg's diary, also known as Spiritual Experiences. Here's the whole quote:

#### 5002. CONCERNING THE DURATIONS OF THE LIFE OF MEN: WHY SOME LIVE LONG, AND SOME NOT LONG.

The life of every man is foreseen by the Lord, as to how long he will live, and in what manner; wherefore he is directed from earliest infancy with a regard to a life to eternity. The Providence of the Lord, therefore, commences from earliest infancy.

5003. The reasons why some die boys, some youths, some adults, some old men, are:

1. On account of use in the world to men;
2. On account of use, while he is in the world, to spirits and angels; for man, as to his interiors, is with spirits;

1. and he is there as long as he is in the world, in which all things in the spiritual world terminate;
2. On account of use to himself in the world, either that he may be regenerated, or that he may be let into his evils lest they lie dormant and afterwards break out, which would result in his eternal ruin;
3. Therefore, on account of use afterwards in the other life, after death, to eternity; for everyone who will be in heaven has his place in the Grand Man, or, on the other hand, he has his place in hell: wherever forces fail they are balanced, and, of the Providence of the Lord, men are brought thither. Thus also, the kingdom of the Lord is cared for, the welfare of which is universal Providence.

Personally I can see a few lessons from these passages that are relevant to the euthanasia question. I think the first one is pretty simple: the Lord really does have all of this well organized. If we're here suffering in our physical body, it isn't because we've slipped of His radar. The euthanized person doesn't arrive in the next world with the Lord saying, "Oh, so sorry about that suffering! I had forgotten all about you!" The fact is our situation isn't a surprise to Him, and in fact He's left us here for a reason, and these passages give us a few for us to mull over.

What I often encounter with people who are wrestling with the euthanasia question is that the person is not feeling like they are being useful. Instead they are feeling like a burden to their family, friends, and perhaps even to the whole health care system. What these passages show is that we may not be here to be useful to those around us, but our use may actually be to our own self.

If we look at Arcana Caelestia we're given some teachings that say bodily suffering can be a pathway to remove our minds from worldly concerns, and raising them to something higher. Specifically it says that we undergo

page 24

... other experiences, such as misfortune, grief, and anxiety which arise from natural or from bodily causes. There are also bodily illnesses and diseases, which to some extent weaken and break down the life of his pleasures and desires, and fix his thoughts on and raise them to higher and nobler things. (AC 762)

In a similar vein Arcana Caelestia teaches elsewhere that...

... old age is the final stage of life, when bodily things start to be cast aside together with the loves which belong to the preceding stage, and so when interior things start to be enlightened; for once bodily things have been removed interior things are enlightened. (AC 3492)

I think the message is clear: part of the purpose for illness and disease is to get us to rethink our priorities. We sometimes need some physical suffering in this world to serve the long term good of our spirit. The problem with this line of thinking is that the hells will take full advantage of it and try to burden us with guilt by putting thoughts in our head like, "The reason you're suffering and sick is because you're a terrible person!" Therefore we have to use these teachings responsibly, using them to do honest self examination, but at the same time not letting them crush our spirit to the point where no reformation can take place. The Lord's goal is our amendment, not our punishment, so if you look at your life and see areas where you could improve, forgive yourself, move on and give the self immolation a miss.

To my mind I think the single most important thing that can come out of physical illness and frailty is the destruction of the ego. It can be very humbling and embarrassing to need somebody else's help to do basic things like change our clothes, wash ourselves, or go to the toilet. I get it, nobody wants that! But at the same time, nothing will quite send the ego into a crushing retreat like asking somebody to wipe your bottom. Suddenly you see that you're not all that great and



powerful, and perhaps not as smart as you once thought you were. It also leads back to one of the other reasons for our continued life on this earth listed in Spiritual Experiences, which is that we may very well be providing an opportunity for others to be useful by allowing them to attend to us.

The overriding lesson in all of this is that God is in control, has our long term best interests in mind, and therefore euthanasia and assisted suicide are not good ideas. Now, that's not to say that we are obligated to extend our life here as long as possible. I do not see any evidence that we must pursue every medical intervention available. In fact, if we would like to exit this life, it seems that the best way to do it is to just let nature take its course. When disease hits, maybe you don't go to the doctor and have it checked out, or at the very least once you realize that a disease or condition you have is terminal, take the hospice option instead of the treatment option. There's nothing wrong with that.

I will also admit that there may in fact be nothing all that bad with euthanasia either, at least in the long term. After Judas betrays Jesus, he realizes the error of his ways and commits suicide. I make the comparison because isn't euthanasia really just suicide? Most Christians seem to assume Judas went to hell, but the Writings make us think otherwise. True Christian Religion states that after "this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach..." (TCR 791). Well, Judas was one of the twelve who followed Jesus while He was in the world, so maybe despite the betrayal and suicide Judas ended up in the good place after all. Even though things seemed to have worked out for Judas, actively working against God's plans is generally not a direction that I would recommend. In fact the whole Old Testament is really just a set of stories that teach us that very explicitly.

If you step outside the New Church canon, you can find plenty of stories of people who committed suicide, had a near death experience

page 26

(NDE), and came back to life with a story that is closer to that of a horror movie than one of a fairy tale. It seems to come good for them in the end, but in general what I had read is that the process isn't a fun or pleasant one, and while the person may have only been physically dead for a matter of minutes, sometimes their experience is that they were in a hellish environment for what felt like thousands of years. I think that is what happens when we step outside of God's plan for us. So perhaps when we are euthanized we are skipping out on physical pain, but then have to deal with some spiritual pain on the other side. Hard to say for sure as it isn't directly taught in any real revelation from the Lord, but I think it falls into the category of a "reasonable" conclusion. Maybe you don't, and that's okay too.

Wrapping this all up, I think the big take away is that euthanasia isn't a good idea even though I can understand why somebody would want to leave this world behind. If you or somebody you love does go down this path, things may very well turn out fine for them in the end. However, my perspective and bias is to err on the side of safety and attempt to limit the amount of pain, suffering and trauma, which includes limiting post death pain, suffering and trauma. God does have a plan for us. If we're here, we are likely more useful than we realize. Maybe our use is not to other Earthlings, but to ourselves and perhaps even to angels and spirits who are connected to us. Ultimately, I think we should adopt the attitude of the Psalmist: "Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God" (Psalm 31:5).

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