



The New Church

Roseville

DECEMBER 2018

Newsletter

Directory

Society Minister
Officers

Rev. Howard Thompson

Secretary
Treasurer
Church Officer

Graham Hall
Graham St. Quintin
Debra Barratt Thompson

Sunday School classes are held at the same time as the **10 am service** each Sunday (children meet in the church to begin with).

After every service we have **tea and coffee** in the hall and the opportunity to meet socially, sometimes more formally.

The **Friendship Group** meets on the first Wednesday of February, April, June, August, October and December. The Secretary is Mrs. Glen Hart.

The **Angel Service** is held on the 2nd and 4th Saturday at 5 p.m. and is an unstructured service of readings, discussion, meditation, music and healing.

Different **classes on New Church teachings** are held midweek. These are generally fortnightly but vary. Consult the coloured accompanying calendar inside the Newsletter.

The **Swedenborg Centre** can be visited at 4 Shirley Road, Roseville NSW 2069. You are welcome to drop in and look around. The Centre is generously supported by the Sydney Society of the New Church and provides an independent and relaxing place to meet and discuss a personal approach to finding spiritual meaning. The Centre has a wide range of study materials, Swedenborg's works, and books by supporting authors. The Centre and its director Joe Vandermeer can be reached on phone (02)9416 2812 or email

info@swedenborg.com.au Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at www.swedenborg.com.au

The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.

Sydney Society Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875

4 Shirley Road, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069

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Minister: Rev Howard Thompson - revhathompson@gmail.com

On Facebook – Sydney Society of the New Church - Roseville

December 2018 to January 2019

The Faith of the New Church is summarized as follows:

There is one God in whom is the Divine Trinity. He is the Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Saving faith is to believe in Him. Evil actions are not to be done because they are from hell and of hell. Good actions are to be done because they are from God and of God. These are to be done by a person as though they are done by himself, while believing that they are from the Lord working in him and through him.



*“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?
For we have seen his star in the East and have come
to worship him. Matthew 2:2*

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Our Christmas services and events are in the Newsletter & Calendar
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The Minister of the Sydney Society is Rev. Howard Thompson and from now on he can be contacted at any time by phoning the church office (02) 9416 7026 or by a personal visit to 4 Shirley Road, Roseville, for any pastoral help or guidance. Please let Howard know in good time about pastoral concerns with people, including yourself too, so that he can give help where and when it is needed.

FROM THE MINISTER

A NEW YEAR'S REFLECTION TO "CHEW ON"

Well it is that time again. The turning of the calendar from the year that has been to the year that is to come. It is also a time that many people choose to make New Year's resolutions. Of course, not all of us do this, but still many do. Even when we do not make specific, written resolutions I would say that the vast majority of us use the turning of the calendar, often that week between Christmas and January 1st, to take stock and reflect on the year that has passed and turn our thoughts to what lies before us.

In a January 2017 poll of those who made New Year's resolutions the top three most frequently reported resolutions were exercise more, lose weight and eat more healthily. In fact, of the top five resolutions reported, four of them were directly related to physical health. This got me to thinking about the McDonald's McGriddle breakfast sandwich. Right now I'm sure that you are scratching your head as to why eating healthily has me thinking about McDonald's. Stay with me, it should all make sense in the end.

If you are not familiar with the McDonald's McGriddle breakfast sandwich, allow me to describe it to you. The McGriddle consists of a sausage patty, a perfectly formed (to fit the sandwich) scrambled egg disk, bright orange American cheese served between two small pancakes that have been infused with maple-like syrup so that they taste extremely sweet and yet aren't sticky to hold. The top McGriddle pancake is embossed with the McDonald's logo. Of this sandwich one person noted "If the human tongue has a secret password, then this sweet, salty and fatty breakfast sandwich is the code." The problem of

course, is that all the deliciousness comes with a steep caloric cost: every McGriddle has 550 calories, 53% of the sodium a person should consume in an entire day and 49% of the fat.

Of course, no one eats the McGriddle, or many of the other items on the McD's menu for its health benefits. They eat the McGriddle because it tastes good. More than tasting good eating many of the items on the menu actually make you feel good, really good and really quickly. Many people report experiencing a type of euphoric rush after eating at fast food restaurants. It is as if the menu items have been specifically formulated to generate an addictive response in the human body.

Now that I have you either salivating for a McGriddle sandwich or disgusted at the thought of even entering a fast food chain let me shift the subject to the topic of spiritual food. Spiritual foods are the thoughts and ideas we take into our minds, the ones we smell, taste and chew on before swallowing them and fully taking them in. Like the McGriddle, some spiritual food smells appealing, tastes appealing and even makes us feel good, really good, and really quickly. It is as if some spiritual food has been specifically formulated to generate an addictive response in the human mind. I say "as if" but the reality is that some spiritual food (spiritual junk food) is specifically formulated to generate an addictive response in your mind.

Any time we revel in an uncharitable thought about another we have taken in a little more spiritual junk food. Every time we hear something uncharitable about another person, something that makes us feel "better than them," we have taken in spiritual junk food. There are spirits who love to divert your thinking from spiritual food that is good, "our daily bread," to spiritual food that is bad. Of course these spirits won't tell you that what they want you to eat is bad, so they make it smell good, taste good and feel good as soon as you eat it, take it on and think it.

Beyond exercise and diet I invite you to reflect on the spiritual food you will be taking on in 2019. Consider a daily diet of reading from the Word. Maybe subscribe to a weekly podcast on spiritual matters. Set yourself a goal for church attendance this year. Engage your friends in conversations on matters of faith and how each of your faiths have

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helped you over the years. What aspects of faith have you found comfort in?

Finally, on the subject of just how important, powerful and even dangerous our spiritual diet can be, I found this passage concerning a person's senses in heaven:

A spirit, or human being after death, has all the sensory powers he had while living in the world, namely sight, hearing, smell, and touch, but not taste. Instead of taste he has something analogous to it, linked to the sense of smell. The reason he does not have taste is so that he can be prevented from entering man's taste, thereby taking control of him interiorly. Another reason is to prevent him from being diverted by this sense from the desire to acquire knowledge and wisdom, and so from spiritual appetite. ~ Arcana Caelestia 4794

The sense of taste is so powerful that in the spiritual world it is the one sense we are not afforded.

Our Father, who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth.
Give us this day our daily bread...

Our best Christmas and New Year greetings to you,
Howard

INNOCENCE: ESCAPING THE SKINNER BOX

With the Christmas Season often comes the thought of innocence. By this I am thinking of the common wish many of us experience of desiring to return to that state of mind that existed when we were children, when we looked forward to Christmas for all of the magic and mystery that it would bring. I am also referring to innocence as it is presented to us when we experience the wonder of Christmas through the eyes of our own children or grandchildren. Christmas is special in the way that it gives us ready access to states of innocence.

Of course, like most states we can experience, innocence has levels. The level of innocence that Christmas often calls to mind is a childlike innocence and a very natural innocence. There is, of course, a deeper or spiritual innocence which comes to many of us as we age and mature. That innocence is spoken of in the teachings for the New Church as “a willingness to be led by the Lord” (Heaven and Hell #281). While there are clues to this more spiritual type of innocence within the Christmas experience, for many of us the spiritual is blocked by the natural experience of Christmas. While as children we come to understand the idea of Christmas from the gift-giving rituals around Christmas, as adults the Lord calls us to look beyond natural thought processes that inevitably attach themselves to gift-giving.

This is where the somewhat odd title of this piece comes in. In experimental psychology researchers often make use of an operant conditioning chamber (commonly referred to as a Skinner Box) to study animal behaviour. The operant conditioning chamber allows the researcher to completely control a test subject’s environment (usually that of a mouse, rat or pigeon). When manipulating the environment the researchers observe and sometimes elicit responses to controlled stimuli. A great deal of work with subjects in an operant conditioning chamber has been done that has provided researchers insight into human behaviour. Some people have even used this research to support the belief that the human mind is no different from that of an animal. These people believe that everything a person does he or she does either for a reward or to avoid a punishment.

At a certain level this belief, that humans are no different from animals, is not only true but is supported by the doctrine of the New Church. I say that it is true at a certain level while acknowledging that every person has the capacity to grow beyond their purely natural and base instincts. In other words, a person who completely rejects the truth that he or she has both an internal spiritual reality and an external natural reality will ultimately have an existence no more than that of an animal (Arcana Caelestia #7821). Such a person wakes every day, focused on the next meal and is vigilant to threats from predators.

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Right about now you may be asking ‘What could this possibly have to do with Christmas?’ Well, it’s about the gift giving. How many of us calculate and strategise about our gift giving? Thoughts like ‘I’ve been sending my niece money for several years now and she has yet to even send me a thank you card’ can be reflective of our doing something with an expectation of reward. We may do things with other thoughts in mind such as; ‘If I don’t get my boss something for Christmas that may somehow be reflected in a negative performance review.’ This later thought may be indicative of our desire to avoid a punishment. Of course these are overly simplified examples of our thoughts around gift-giving but I am certain each of you can see some aspect of these thought processes in the workings of your own mind. Importantly, this type of thinking doesn’t necessarily make any of us bad, it simply means that we are human. This is how our minds work. We are, at a certain level, nothing more than animals and the Lord knows this. The Lord knows this and He uses this to move us from a childlike innocence to a more mature/spiritual innocence. Key to this movement from one to the other is an acknowledgement that we have and what we give is not ours to have and not ours to give, but all of the good that we do and the love that we have for others is only ours because it comes from the Lord.

We see something similar to this in the way each of us first begins to do good and follow the teachings of the Ten Commandments because we want to “earn heaven” or avoid hell. This works as a framework for us to move into higher thinking but if we never come to understand that we are to do good for the sake of the Lord or the neighbour and that we are to follow the Commandments, not to avoid punishment from God, but for the sake of the Lord or the neighbour, then we can never move beyond the merely natural experience of an animal.

All that we do surrounding the idea of showing kindness and expressing our love for others around Christmas, if we are to be moving towards a spiritual innocence, is to be done for higher reasons than those of the animals. The Lord is calling us to escape the Skinner Box and Christmas gives us a wonderful opportunity to reflect on our very natural ideas of innocence and, building on them, begin to move in our spiritual lives

toward a more pure innocence as manifested by our willingness to be led by the Lord.

May each of us experience anew the spirit of wonder and innocence that comes with Christmas this year.

Merry Christmas!

NOTICE ANYTHING DIFFERENT?

With the recent move into smaller headquarters in the two front rooms of the Sydney Society of the New Church (SSNC) manse on Shirley Road, the Swedenborg Centre no longer has a place to hold its larger gatherings and programs. Recognising the need to continue to have access to such a facility the Swedenborg Centre partnered with the SSNC to upgrade the audio, video and lighting in the SSNC sanctuary. The next time you visit you should notice improved audio for both voice amplification and recorded music as well as lighting on the chancel and large screen that will permit, with greater ease, the inclusion of graphics and text in both programs and services. We may even be able to have the occasional movie night in the sanctuary, making the most of both the screen and the improved sound system, affording another opportunity for the SSNC and greater neighbourhood community to gather.

Come and see what's new at any of our Christmas services.

SNIPPETS FROM THE SCRAPBOOK

On Christmas morning before ever we could open our presents, we would go to this stranger's house with presents and some food. My father believed that this was Christmas.

- George Clooney

For about 360 days a year we concentrate on the shortcomings of others, but for a few days before the year turns we look at our own. I think that is a good habit.

- Arthur Sulzberger

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Once something is a passion, the motivation is there.

- Michael Schumacher

The purpose of all art isn't a shot of adrenaline but a construction of wonder and serenity.

- Glenn Gould (pianist)

Tradition wears a snowy beard, romance is always young.

- John Greenleaf Whittier

A leader is someone who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.

- Scott Maxwell.

ROSEVILLE CHRISTMAS SERVICES 2018 schedule



Please note the December Christmas services and their dates/times

Sunday December 2nd (1st Sunday in Advent)

Service includes the Holy Supper

Sunday December 9th Telling of the Nativity Story
followed by Church Christmas Party
Gifts Collection for Salvation Army

Monday December 10th Ashley House Carols and Presents

Sunday December 16th

3rd Sunday in Advent

Sunday December 23rd

Lessons and Carols – 7 p.m.

Tuesday December 25th

Christmas Day Service

Sunday December 30th

New Year Service

From the Swedenborg Centre's desk

One of the recent discussions around the table at the Centre pivoted around the purpose of the Lord's coming to earth. To aid our thinking, we referred to the following section headings out of two of Swedenborg books, the *Sacred Scripture* and *The Lord*.

The Lord came into the world to fulfil everything in the Word and so to become Divine Truth or the Word even on the outermost level. The entire sacred scripture is about the Lord, and the Lord is the Word. The Lord came into the world to subdue the hells and to glorify His human nature: the suffering on the cross was the last battle by which He completely defeated the hells and completely glorify His human nature. The Lord did not take away our sins by His suffering on the cross, but He did carry them.

The beauty of the historical Jesus story is that it is a pivotal point in world history where the historical and the mythology meet. We are permitted to remain free in our thoughts, our wishing and beliefs, and in our deeds to craft a world view or interpretation of our life which leaves out the spiritual, which omits God, which casts out God's revealed advice on how to live a life which can reach a state of eternal happiness. All so that we can cherry-pick the rules and beliefs which we prefer.

But to gain a spiritually useful and joyful life requires commitment. The danger of remaining purely philosophical, like Ivan Karamazov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Karamazov Brothers*, lead only to confusion and delusion, since the rudder steered by absolutes has been withdrawn. In conversations with Ivan's devout brother Alyosha it becomes clear that Ivan can run rings around any argument he wishes from almost any point of view, while never committing to any of them with his heart. Ivan remains aloof from the action. Forever sitting on the fence while arguing over what is good and truth, evil and falsity postpones plunging oneself into the action to rebuild our inner life. In Ivan's final delusional state, he threatens to kill the devil who appears to Ivan in a vision. The devil's responds...

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"You'll kill me? ... I maintain that nothing need be destroyed, that we only need to destroy the idea of God in man, that's how we have to set to work... As soon as men have all of them denied God... Men will unite to take from life all it can give, but only for joy and happiness in the present world. Man will be lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride and the man-god will appear. From hour to hour extending his conquest of nature infinitely by his will and his science, man will feel such lofty joy from hour to hour in doing it that it will make up for all his old dreams of the joys of heaven."

We cannot take unreformed the outer things in us into heaven. To put it in the words of C S Lewis in his preface to *The Great Divorce*:

"Blake wrote the Marriage of Heaven and Hell... But in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable "either-or"; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain.

"This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys... We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a pool but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.

"I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can

be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on. Evil can be undone, but it cannot "develop" into good. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound, bit by bit, "with backward mutters of dissevering power"-or else not. It is still "either-or." If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven: if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell."

J R R Tolkien swayed Lewis from his initial atheism with this:

"Myths are not lies. In fact, they are the very opposite of a lie. Myths convey the essential truth, the primal reality of life itself. We have been duped into using the word 'myth' as being synonymous with a lie, because we have been duped into accepting the first real lie of materialism, the hideous claim that there is no supernatural order to the universe. The materialists have imprisoned us in a world of mere matter, of physical facts divorced from – and devoid of – metaphysical truth. Well, I say that they are lying. I say that they are the ones who have come up with a false myth. Their world doesn't exist, it's merely a figment of their imagination. The problem is they have convinced us that it is true. They have made us believe that this is all there is: three dimensions, five senses, four walls. Yet the four walls of materialism are the four walls of a prison, and the materialists are our jailers. They've put us in a prison, a prison of four walls. They don't want us to see what's beyond those walls. They don't want us to discover what lies outside their narrow philosophy. Worse than that... They think that any attempt to escape from the prison is an act of treason. But how can it be wrong for a prisoner to think of things that exist other than walls and jailers? Doesn't the fact that the prisoner is able to think of things outside the walls suggest that perhaps things DO exist outside the walls? After all, if the prison really is all there is, how are we able to picture things that exists beyond the prison? And this is where myths come in. Myths exist outside the prison. Myths allow us to escape from the prison, or if we are not able to escape, at the very least, they allow us to catch a fleeting – but oh so powerful – glimpse

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of the beauty that lies beyond the walls. Myths show us a fleeting glimpse of truth itself.

“Myths are not mere arbitrary inventions of fiction, as if we pull them out of thin air. We make things by the law in which we are made. We create, because we are created. Creativity, imagination, is God's image within us. We tell stories because God is a storyteller. In fact, he is THE storyteller. We tell our stories with words, he tells his story with history. The facts of history are his words, and providence is his storyline. All of history, everything around us, is all part of divine myth. We are all part of his story. Christianity is not just one myth among many. It's the true myth. Christianity really happened. Jesus really existed, so did Pilate, and yet, it is this true story that makes sense of all the other stories. It is the archetype. It is the story in which all the other stories have their source. And the story to which all the other stories point This story has the inner consistency of reality. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted is true, on its own merits. This story has the supremely convincing tone of primary art, not fiction, but of creation. And to reject this, leads either to darkness or to wrath. And in my own life, it has led me from darkness to light.”

Lewis finally warmed to an alternative way of thinking:

I was offered what now appears to be a moment of wholly free choice. Without words, and almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay. I felt myself being given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut. I chose to open... I had always wanted, above all things, not to be interfered with. I had wanted — mad wish — to call my soul my own. I had been far more anxious to avoid suffering than to achieve delight. Total surrender, the absolute leap in the dark, were demanded. I gave in, and admitted that God was God...