

"All religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good".

Swedenborg

The New Church In Victoria Newsletter

February / March 2020

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Aspirations into Reality

By the time you read this, Christmas and the New Year will no doubt seem a distant memory. Perhaps, mums and dads will be preparing for, or enjoying, the beginning of a new school year, and most will be back into regular employment or the routine of normal life. But as I sit and write, I am beginning a new chapter in my life: leaving 12 years of self-employment as a piano teacher in Canberra and resuming full-time ministry with the New Church in Victoria.

Over the New Year, preparing for the sale of our home and our move to Melbourne, Pam and I had the radio on to accompany our activities (ABC's Classic FM, if you must know). One of the announcers encouraged listeners to write in with their wishes for the new year, and I noticed common themes running through many: that everyone will treat others as friends or neighbours; that everyone will work towards the common good.



You will recognise, as I did, ideals we can all affirm and aspire to. Wouldn't the world be a wonderful place if everyone lived this way? I don't imagine there are many people who would disagree. But if that's the case, why does it seem so hard to turn those aspirations into reality?

The answer is really very simple, and Emanuel Swedenborg expresses it succinctly, in *Heaven and Hell*: "... it is not as hard to follow the path to heaven as many people believe. The only difficulty is finding the power to resist love for ourselves and love of the world and preventing those loves from taking control, since they are the source of all our evils." (paragraph 359)

Now, of course, he is writing about entering heaven after death, but is that really any different from living in a peaceful and harmonious society here and now? Where we run into trouble is that this love of self and love of worldly things can easily masquerade as neighbourly affection. Jesus taught: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full." (Luke 6:32-34)

When life is proceeding according to plan, the weather is fine, and everyone is cheerful, then being kind and courteous is easy. But it is truly remarkable how little needs to go wrong before we become grumpy and self-serving. This is because the love of self hides only just beneath the surface for most of us. We hardly notice it, neither do we pay it a second thought, until someone presses our buttons, and then our fury is unleashed!

If we're honest, there is always someone who will press those buttons! They may do it mischievously or more likely it's entirely unintentional, they may believe their actions are entirely honourable, or even that they're standing up for important principles. Whatever the case, those dreams of a better world quickly dissolve into nothing more than utopian platitudes.

Reading around the verses I've already quoted, Jesus' recommendation is, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. ... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:27-30, 35-36)

One of the authors I have frequently read and listened to, is fond of saying, "it's simple, but it isn't easy", and I think that perfectly describes the Christian life. There's nothing complicated about Jesus' teaching here, but don't we resist it! We explain it away, or divert the attention to "more pressing matters." It goes against the grain.

As we begin (and continue) this journey together - of 2020, of working towards a better world, of building a community which reflects and promotes the teachings of Christianity - it is beholden upon us all to recognise just how difficult the practice of that simple message really is. There really is nothing more important than this: without it our highest hopes and our best efforts will crumble.

So, when you have the time, I'd recommend reading, *Heaven and Hell*, paragraphs 555-565 (<https://newchristianbiblestudy.org/exposition/translation/heaven-and-hell-dole/contents/5550>). Then, perhaps, observe your own thoughts and behaviours as you move through your everyday activities. Do you notice that love of self emerging from time to time? When, and under what circumstances? Have you developed strategies to keep it in check? And if it does cause you trouble, are you able to acknowledge it, apologise sincerely, and learn from it?

With every blessing on this journey we walk together.

David

Rev. David Moffat, Spiritual Leader

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Rev. David Moffat ~ Our Spiritual Leader

The new era for The New Church in Victoria has begun with David spending considerable time, albeit in Canberra, planning his approach to ministry here so that on his arrival he will be able to 'hit the ground running', so to speak. His actual induction as Spiritual Leader will take place on Sunday morning, 2 February ~ see the Diary of Events. David will be installed by Rev. John Teed, a former Minister of the Church in Victoria, who has also served as President of The New Church in Australia.



The service will be followed by a catered morning tea during which David and his wife Pam will be officially welcomed among us. If you are intending to be at the service, you do need to advise Alexis Jarvis (phone (03) 8555 9116; email: aljarvis72@optusnet.com.au) as soon as possible. This is both for catering purposes and also accommodating numbers as the area available to us at Wadham House is limited.

The Board hopes that as many members and friends as possible will be able to be part of this celebratory occasion.

The Bushfires - Where was God in it all?

The extensive bushfires which have raged in large areas of most States and Territories of Australia have been a focus, and continue to be a focus, for all of us living in a ‘sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains . . . her beauty and her terror’ as Australian poet, Dorothea Mackellar, writes in her poem *My Country*. Along with us the world has been watching the devastation caused – the loss of human life, native and domesticated animals, property, livelihoods and the like. A recent assessment calculated that approx. half a billion native animals had died so far and 6 million hectares of habitat housing native animals and plants had been burned out with the future for 70 species now threatened. The horrific and graphic footage & pictures of the fires shown on television, in newspapers and on social media has been hard to take in, especially for those of us living away from affected areas. We can but sympathise but not really sense how those directly involved have and are coping. Of course, Australia is by no means the only region on the globe which regularly experiences disasters whether natural or man-made.



As well as questions being raised as to the extent that man-made climate change is to blame, an avenue which is one beyond the scope of this article and on which I do not have the expertise to comment, many involved or observing from a distance may well have been asking ‘*where was God while the fires were raging?*’ This is more likely with those who have a religious or spiritual acknowledgement of a divine creator. Some take the position that such tragedies are a direct result of God choosing to punish those involved, i.e. ‘God’s will’, just as we read in the Old Testament of God’s actions towards the Children of Israel when they disobeyed commandments. Thankfully, our New Church teachings clearly show us that what is recorded in the Old Testament when read literally is an appearance of the truth but not the reality. God is a God of total love and would never punish anyone. In *Secrets of Heaven* paragraph 245, Swedenborg writes:

“Jehovah God or the Lord never curses anyone. He is never angry with anyone, never leads anyone into temptation, never punishes anyone, and still less does He curse anyone. All this is done by the infernal crew, for such things can never proceed from the Fountain of mercy, peace, and goodness.”

It is humans who, when bent on following their own selfish desires, will in one way or another draw hellish influences towards themselves bringing its own punishment.

Another approach might be: ‘*Why didn’t God foresee that conditions in the external world were ripe for the bush fires and step in to stop them occurring?*’ We come back to the point that God is total love and as part of his goal in creation he desires only what is good and, particularly for human beings, what will ensure our greatest eternal happiness. As we know, we react negatively when circumstances are unjustifiably imposed on us, making us far from happy. For us humans, God has provided for us the gifts of being able to think rationally and to will what we choose. It is certainly the case that our misuse/abuse of this God-given freedom can result in tragedy, misfortune and illness.

“Freedom is what makes a human a human” – True Christianity paragraph 469

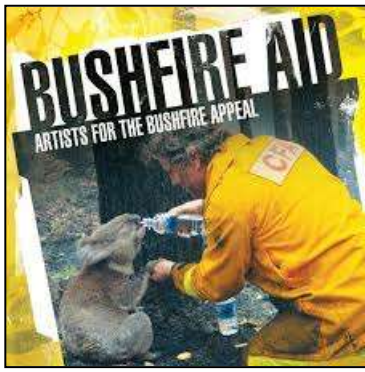
Yet God preserves this freedom as the ‘apple of his eye’ and will never allow it to be suspended. If God stepped in to stop bad things happen, our freedom to choose would be destroyed and we would be no more than puppets in suspended animation. As Swedenborg writes in *Divine Providence*, paragraph 16:

“It is a law of the Divine Providence that people should act from freedom according to reason.”

So God has to allow these harmful occurrences but this does not mean he desires that they should happen. We should appreciate that God does have foresight in all situations of our lives and while he cannot simply step in to avert harmful things from happening to us, he is constantly working with us through angelic influences coming into our minds in an endeavour to alert us to potential harm before us. At the same time, calling on our freedom and rationality, God leads us endeavouring to avert the worst affects.

Finally, Swedenborg tells us in the work *Secrets of Heaven*, paragraph 6574:

“In the entire spiritual world there reigns the end in view, emanating from the Lord, that nothing whatever should take place, not even the smallest thing, except in order that good may come out of it”.



So where was God when the bushfires were burning out of control? There is no doubt that the best of humanity immediately came to the fore drawing members of the local communities together with those whose homes remained intact opening them to those who had lost everything and also offering the basic necessities of life where needed; over time this will make those communities stronger. Fire-fighting volunteers from around the country and overseas descended on those regions needing help spending weeks away from families and freely endangering their own lives, with some paying the ultimate sacrifice. Then there was the huge outpouring of concern from the wider community donating food, clothes and money to the various appeals which were opened for the specific purpose of providing much needed assistance. Many clubs and other groups also carried out hastily arranged events to raise funds for the appeals. As the situation became more widely known, donations of money poured in from so many places around the globe.

Some may put these responses down to a simple heartfelt concern to an unfolding crisis. From my spiritual understanding, I believe there is far more to it than that with the angels working through the minds of individuals to support their fellow men and women, bringing communities closer together and looking to the future in terms of rebuilding people's lives and re-establishing the lost habitat of our native fauna and flora. Thanks to God's love and care, good can and has come from the disaster, the more so if the lessons learned are implemented moving forward.

Neville Jarvis

Note: For further reading on what God wills and what he permits, paragraphs 234 to 274 in the work *Divine Providence* are useful reading –

https://swedenborg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/NCE_DivineProvidence_portable.pdf

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The Swedenborg Tree



This tree is located in a park named Swedenborg Gardens in East London. Originally a Swedish Lutheran Church occupied the site and Emanuel Swedenborg was buried in the Church grounds in 1772 following his death in London. At the time, the square was called 'Prince's Square', the name being changed to 'Swedenborg Square' in 1938 and later to 'Swedenborg Gardens' after the Church was demolished. In 1910 the King of Sweden arranged for Swedenborg's remains to be exhumed and placed in the impressive granite sarcophagus in Uppsala Cathedral, an honour reserved for kings, archbishops, generals, and prominent intellectuals.

Today, two sides of the boarding around the tree carry a painted text. On one side, the text says '*Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) a Swedish theologian and polymath lodged nearby in Wellclose Sq. He was buried here*'. The other side carries the quote as shown from *Secrets of Heaven*, paragraph 3419 '*True Charity is the desire to be useful to others without thought of recompense*'. Emanuel Swedenborg. Interesting memorabilia and an interesting place to visit if in London. For more information regarding the history of the area, see <https://spitalfieldslife.com/2012/12/30/the-lost-squares-of-stepney/>

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Contributions to the Newsletter

Any contributions readers may wish to make to the Newsletter would be most welcome. They can be in the form of an article, favourite quote, reading, poem or even a useful illustration. Maybe something you have discovered regarding past recognitions of Swedenborg or The New Church such as 'The Swedenborg Tree' above. Please email them to Neville Jarvis or phone to arrange for them to be obtained (see front page for contact details).

News of Events and People

It was a delight to have the children present at the Family Service on 1st December last show us in words, costumes and pictures the story of the birth of our Lord into the world, a sort of Christmas pageant. With mother, Sina Carter, having recently given birth to daughter Ava, Emily and Alyssa were unable to be with us that day leaving Harry, Charlie and Lucy Francis to wear the costumes and act out the various parts. This required some quick changes but they coped very well with the help of their mother.



Alexis Jarvis organized the pageant, writing the script, making the costumes and organizing the pictures which the children placed on a backdrop at the appropriate time forming a collage of the events. It was all very well appreciated and at times provided some nice smiles from those watching.

Two members have reached nonagenarian status during December and January. Many congratulations are offered to Norma Whelan and Matthew Arnold on achieving such a significant milestone. Regrettably, Norma has not been in the best of health recently suffering from vertigo making it very difficult for her to get out and about and drive. Specialists are looking into the causes and we pray that with treatment, this can be positively addressed.

It is a delight to report a birth in two consecutive issues of this Newsletter. Cai & Vidura Jayaratne have been blessed with a girl, Hannah Vida, born on Australia Day Eve. Both mother and Hannah are doing very well as is the very proud father. We send them our sincere congratulations.

The recent severe hailstorm in Canberra caused much damage to Rev. David Moffat's car as he was out showing Rev. Jane Siebert, President of the Swedenborgian Church in North America, the sights when it hit. Both front and rear windscreens were smashed out and every panel damaged with hail marks. Thankfully, neither David or Jane were injured but they had to leave the car in an underground carpark and take a taxi. Despite great difficulties in getting on to the car insurance company and repairer, David's persistence resulted in agreement being achieved for the windscreen replacements, obtaining the stocks and an early fitting. David and Pam will be able to drive to Melbourne towards the end of January as arranged.

Bible Study Group ~ a new project by Rev. David Moffat

Are you interested in joining a small core of people wishing to participate in this project? It is open to all wishing to be involved.

It will be a geographically dispersed group, using social media, meeting face to face via skype or similar. While physical meetings will be offered from time to time, attendance at them would have to be optional given the time zones and locations that those who have already expressed interest are spread across. It is likely that meetings would be recorded for viewing later.

It is a "Back-to-basics Bible Study" - beginning with understanding the literal text, especially for those unfamiliar with the Bible. Correspondences may come later.

It will also rely upon participants taking the time and responsibility to do their own Bible reading.

If you are interested, and would like to be involved in negotiating the group at the outset, please get back in touch with me.

David (see contact details on the front page of this Newsletter)

Diary of Events in February & March 2020

All activities will take place at Wadham House, 52 Wadham Parade, Mt. Waverley
unless otherwise advised.

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| February | |
| Sunday 2 10.30am | Service of Induction of Rev. David Moffat conducted by Rev. John Teed . There will be no children's activity this Sunday Note: If you intend being at this service, please advise Alexis Jarvis (phone (03) 8555 9116; email: aljarvis72@optusnet.com.au) as soon as possible |
| Sunday 9 | No service |
| Sunday 16 10.30am | Service of Worship led by Rev. David Moffat |
| Sunday 23 | No Mt. Waverley service Ballarat – 318 Fussell Street. Devotional worship led by Judy Robinson commencing 3pm. For more information, phone (03) 53 315 638 |
| March | |
| Sunday 1 10.30am | Family Service led by Rev. David Moffat There will be Bible story time and related activities for the children |
| Sunday 8 | No service |
| Sunday 15 10.30am | Service of Worship led by Rev. David Moffat with a Harvest theme |
| Sunday 22 | No service |
| Sunday 29 | No Mt. Waverley service Ballarat – 318 Fussell Street. Devotional worship led by Rev. David Moffat commencing 3pm. For more information, phone (03) 53 315 638 |
| Following Month - April | |
| Sunday 5 2.00am | Clocks go back 1 hour |
| Sunday 5 10.30am | Palm Sunday Family Service led by Rev. David Moffat There will be Bible story time and related activities for the children |

Duty Roster – Mt. Waverley

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|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| <i>February 2020:</i> | Sunday 2 | Marika Sivak |
| | Sunday 16 | Rose & Karl Robinson |
| <i>March 2020:</i> | Sunday 1 | Alexis & Neville Jarvis |
| | Sunday 15 | Marika Sivak |
| <i>April 2020:</i> | Sunday 5 | Rose & Karl Robinson |

Note: If you are unavailable on the Sunday allocated, please contact another member of the Duty Roster to swap.

Everything good or true that the angels inspire in us is God's, so God is constantly talking to us. He talks very differently, though, to one person than to another."

Emanuel Swedenborg: *Secrets of Heaven*