

Roseville New Church Newsletter

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The Faith of the New Church is summarised 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.

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Racism: What Can I Do?

Like most of you, I have spent the last several weeks reflecting on the subject of racism. This has come to the fore for most of us because of the recent news of the killing of an unarmed, handcuffed and otherwise restrained black man at the hands of a white police officer in the United States. All caught on camera, this was a horrible thing to see and it seems to have been a real catalyst for change both in the US and abroad. But, I am also well aware of the fact that racism, where it exists, is both



deeply ingrained and generations in the making. As an American, I can tell you that I also feel we have been here before. We have seen incidents of the killing of black Americans by the police under similar situations many times in the last several decades. This reality leaves me feeling nearly powerless on the subject. I suspect that for someone holding blatantly racist views, my opinion on the matter will make no difference. But for those with “ears to hear” I hope my words will give you some encouragement that progress can be made against racism. So what can I do? What can we all do to weed out the evil of racism?

First, and I don't really think that I need to say this, racism is an evil. While the teachings for the New Church never mention the word “racism,” this certainly does not mean that they do not recognise racism as an evil. It does not take much to recognise that racism is, at its core, a manifestation of the love of self. Compare the following dictionary

definition of racism and the description of the mindset of a person immersed in self-love:

Racism: prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.

Arcana Coelestia 7370: The person immersed in self-love is one who despises his neighbour in comparison with himself, and who regards his neighbour as an enemy if he is not favourably disposed towards him and does not defer to him. Immersed more deeply in self-love is one who therefore hates and persecutes his neighbour; and immersed even more deeply than that is one who is therefore consumed with vengeance against him and longs to ruin him. People like this at length love to vent their rage on their neighbour; and if these people are also adulterers they become cruel.

In the New Church it is generally accepted that while we are not evil, we are, inclined to evils of all kinds from birth. In other words, without the Lord's leading and left to our own desires we would sink headlong into the worst and most vilest of evils. One place this is noted is in Divine Providence (281.4) where the Lord says; "We are all immersed in many kinds of evil from birth. They are in our volition, and we love whatever is in our volition. That is, we love all the intentions that come from within; and we intend whatever we love. This love of our volition flows into our discernment and makes itself felt there as pleasure. It moves from there into our thoughts and into our conscious intentions." That "we love whatever is in our volition" is why racism itself can flourish. In a study published in 2019 the Pew Research Center reported that 74% of Americans surveyed felt that racism was a "very big" or "moderately big" problem facing the nation. In fact only 4% of those polled felt racism was not a problem. Now Pew did not ask the participants of the poll 'are you a racist?' but I feel rather confident that had they done so, the vast majority of participants would have responded 'absolutely not.' And that there is how racism, like any evil, can flourish. It is easy to see it in others but very hard to find it within ourselves. But if racism is evil and I am inclined to evils of every kind from birth, then racism probably exists within me and the Lord calls me to root it out. But how? The key to banishing racism or any sin within



ourselves rests in the above quote from Divine Providence (281.4). The love of our volition makes its way into our “thoughts and into our conscious intentions.” And it is those thoughts in our conscious intentions that then allows us to fight against the evil of racism. I can better explain this with an example from my own life.

I was raised in a family very proud of its German heritage, not anti-semites mind you, but very proud of their heritage. I did, however, feel the pull and power that the imagery of the 1930-40’s era in Germany could have on a young and impressionable mind. I recall regularly perusing the books on WWII in our family library and I can even recall a certain appeal I felt towards the cultivated image of strength and ferocity of the German soldier. Of course, I understood the history of WWII; Nazis, Fascists and the Holocaust, but still some part deep inside of me felt a strange appeal. Or, as DP 281 notes, at some level I felt these thoughts “as pleasure.” Following high school I attended Muhlenberg College (a Lutheran college in Pennsylvania) and decided to satisfy my religion course requirement by taking a series of courses titled “The Holocaust and its Impact” taught by Rev. Dr. Darrell Jodock. This course of study, along with my childhood experience of feeling a certain draw towards the imagery of 1930-40’s Germany, caused more than a little bit of a spiritual crises similar in form to that described in Arcana Coelestia 5036:

In temptation a person is brought into a state in which the evil that possesses the person, that is, possesses their essential self, is dominant. Once the person enters this state evil and hellish spirits surround them, and when the spirits realise that inwardly the person is protected by angels those evil spirits reactivate the false ideas the person has previously contemplated and the evil deeds they have committed. But the angels defend the person from within. This conflict is what the person experiences as temptation, yet the experience is so vague that the person is aware of it as scarcely anything more than a feeling of anxiety.

The end result of this “anxiety” was a personal realisation and acknowledgement that at 16,17,18 and even 19 years old, had I been living in Germany in the 1930’s and 40’s, I feel that I would have happily just gone along. Part of me even feels shame sharing this with



whoever may read this piece. Traveling in Europe the summer after graduation from Muhlenberg, I felt the need to visit Dachau, the concentration camp just outside of Munich. At 22 years old I stood on those grounds and wept. Nearly 30 years later I returned with my family to Dachau. Our daughter had just graduated from Muhlenberg and our boys were 14 and 10 and I wanted them to stand on those grounds as well. I wanted them to stand in the gas chambers and see the ovens. Again I wept.

Racism, anti-semitism, the Holocaust, slavery, Jim Crow and lynchings are all too big for me to fight against. All too big for me to change. But these are all evils within us, so there must be something I can do.

One thing that I have realised is that I may not be able to affect the existence of racism in the world or in others but I should be able to see the racism in myself. In fact I think the Lord is calling us all to look within ourselves. First, we must acknowledge that we are, of ourselves, capable of nothing but evil. I saw this in myself and felt compelled to acknowledge it during my time at Muhlenberg. Second, we must actively repent. The evil of racism is ingrained in our DNA. None of us may espouse beliefs of racial superiority or use hate-filled racists language but most of us (and I include myself in this) are susceptible to the evil of racism. The person who claims not to be, likely, has not really engaged in self-reflection. The teachings for the New Church explain that “Active Repentance Is Examining Ourselves, Recognizing and Admitting Our Sins, Praying to the Lord, and Beginning a New Life.” It is the process of “examining ourselves” that holds the key to what each of us can do to end racism. You’ll recall that I had mentioned earlier the difficulty I would have in changing another’s racist views. It is interesting that the teachings for the New Church point out that it is also easier to point out evil in others than it is to recognise evil in ourselves (True Christianity 535).



It is easy for any of us to rebuke someone else who is intending to do something evil and say, "Don't do that - that's a sin!" And yet it is difficult for us to say the same thing to ourselves. The reason is that saying it to ourselves requires a movement of the will, but saying it to someone else requires only a low level of thought based on things we have heard.

On the subject of active repentance, True Christianity goes on to note that “active repentance is easy for people who have done it a few times;

those who have not done it, however, experience tremendous inner resistance to it” (561). This passage seems to be very applicable to this matter of racism. None of us want to admit that we are inclined to a racist will. None of us wants to acknowledge this because we all believe that we are good people and that racism is evil. I write this piece this month to say to you, the reader, that racism is evil and that each of us are inclined to evil from birth. If we can not shine a light on the evil within ourselves what chance do we have of weeding out evil in the world.

On this subject theologian and outspoken critic of Nazism, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noted; “Nothing that we despise in other men is inherently absent from ourselves.” Imprisoned by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis one month before the surrender of Germany.

Divine Providence 281.4 (referenced above) opens by noting that “the permission of evil is for the purpose of salvation.” If we fail to see any evil in ourselves then we fail to cooperate with the Lord in His efforts towards our salvation.



(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Rev. Howard Thompson

Post-script:

My choice to answer what I feel is a call to serve the Lord has lead me and my family to live on three seperate continents. Since ordination in 2011 we have served in the United States, the United Kingdom and now Australia. I wrote this piece from this perspective. I looked both at current events in the United States and at my own experience being raised and raising my family in the United States. But I have also witnessed blatant acts of racism in the United Kingdom, in other parts of Europe and in Australia. We humans, inclined to evils of all kinds from birth, seem to have no lack of reasons to hate another human being.



Memorial Sculpture, Dachau

Monthly News From The Swedenborg Centre

As the Covid situation is gradually thawing out, the Centre at Roseville is again open for business. And also we are as follows below making some minor adjustments to the online program of activities using Zoom, for which there has been much interest. All activities, dates and times are always published on the website at swedenborg.com.au

Online meeting will continue. Included below are the Zoom meeting ID numbers also (if you're ever asked for a **password**, it is always the Roseville postcode, namely **2069**). For any of the activities below you are welcome to join us from wherever you are with Zoom, or alternatively drop in at the Centre in person – either way we are able to include you.

The future activity schedule includes:

Swedenborg Saturdays (discussing topics from Swedenborg's life and writings): held on the **first and third Saturdays of each month**, (4th July and 18th July) from 10am until noon. Zoom meeting ID is 476 372 484 and a direct Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/476372484?pwd=WmNpdHRLdotwSmZDMENQRit3aE8zZz09>

Insights from Dr Groves (reading and discussing): held on **3rd July and 31st July** at 2pm and 7pm. Zoom meeting ID is **320 544 045** and a direct Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/320544045?pwd=QjZtbUxvVk81b2dweUtZZTE3ZE9lZz09>

Second Tuesday Discussion Day (discussing anything of spiritual interest relating to life): held on the **second Tuesday of each month** (14th July) at 2pm and 6pm. Zoom meeting ID is **124 469 612** and a direct Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/124469612?pwd=NjlOZ3RpU2NwV1g1a2Zmb29ZL3ZsQT09>

Tuesday Bible Study (with Rev Howard Thompson): held fortnightly on Tuesdays at 11am. July school holiday, however, means we will only meet once (28 July). Zoom meeting ID is **863 8811 9164** and a direct Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86388119164?pwd=ME9rSmdkdFp5QVFHdohIbDZmNXhRQT09>

Do call us to clarify or discuss anything, my number at the Centre is (02) 9416 28 12 and my email is joe@swedenborg.com.au

Best wishes and enjoy the month ahead.

Joe Vandermeer, Director
Swedenborg Centre

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Twists and Turns



Our experiences in life don't conform to a set pattern. They often twist and turn which can make them very interesting or a bit frustrating. My son said to me recently, "Dad, you can google anything!" (which we can and it kickstarted this article) and often some surprising things come from doing that. I see these twists and

turns as pretty good evidence that the Lord is in charge of our lives, leading and guiding us in ways we don't really understand but wanting us to get somewhere and come across things which will help our spiritual progress and regeneration.

As an example, I'll share my most recent experience of a twist and turn. Someone I know is currently working with the story of Creation in Genesis 1, and I remembered a book I used to have called "Genesis and The Beatitudes" which drew many comparisons between each of the days and each of the Beatitudes (Matthew 1) ... quite fascinating. So I googled the title and up came quite a few links. Several were headed "Morning Light: A New Church Weekly" so I clicked on the first one. Sure enough, Genesis and The Beatitudes got mentioned because it was being serialised in this British weekly New Church magazine of the 1860s. But I thought, "Hey, what else is there in this newsletter?" and I scrolled down and down and came across News of Churches. 1. London: Camden Road.

As a boy, I went to Camden Road every Sunday afternoon for a big Sunday School in this huge New Church directly opposite Holloway Women's Prison. Well, one of the items of its news was a report from Dr R Tafel (a celebrated Swedenborgian) that he had just received the catalogue of Swedenborg's library at the time of his death in London. Four different Hebrew Bibles and seven Latin ones. The only history book was a history of Sweden. Lots of books on botany but nothing on zoology, but about twenty books on anatomy, and four books on springs and spas, one on artillery practice and one on the art of steering. Very little poetry and no novels at all. Nothing on the occult and apart from a copy of The Book of Common Prayer, remarkably little on religion. Well, I found this riveting and it took me right back to that vast, dark, spooky-to-me church building full of green felt curtains and stairs going to places I could only dream of, but always going up!

But back to the Genesis/Beatitudes book. It mentioned that the author was a John Le Gay Brereton so I googled that (surely there can't be too many of them...) and I began to read. John Le Gay Brereton was born in Yorkshire and became a country doctor. On a visit to Ireland he saw a Turkish Bath and became convinced of its beneficial effects. A friendship with a Thomas Mort led to the Breretons coming to New South Wales and Sydney where he set up a Turkish Bath in Spring Street and later in Bligh Street and also practised homoeopathy and came into contact with the New Church of which he became a leader in time. His book Genesis and the Beatitudes was published the year after he died in 1886.

What's just as fascinating is that his son, another John Le Gay Brereton, became president of the Australian Literary Society and was a close friend of the poet and writer Henry Lawson (photo with Brereton sitting).



So my friend's interest in the Creation story led me via google to a childhood New Church memory in London and later to the New Church in Sydney where we were for twenty seven years. These are examples of the twists and turns of experience which I began with and while they are not proving anything, they seem to endorse our being gently guided by the One who is in control of our life.

Julian Duckworth

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Online Giving

Some people have asked if there is a way to continue to make offerings to the church in the absence of weekly church attendance. For some who may not be effected economically by the current situation we do have a "donor box" online:

<https://donorbox.org/roseville-new-church>

Pulpit Humour

(To complement this
month's main article)



Final Thought

The main article in this month's Newsletter touches on repentance. I have always appreciated the following passage as I believe that it points to us being "hard-wired" for repentance. We are, in other words, repentance machines:

"Implanted by the Lord is an ability and the power in people to mend their habits, under the direction of parents and teachers, and afterward **by themselves** when they come into their own right and judgment."
(*Conjugal Love* 202)



Minister's Contact Information and Office Hours

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