

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

Swedenborg

# The New Church in Victoria Newsletter

October / November 2020

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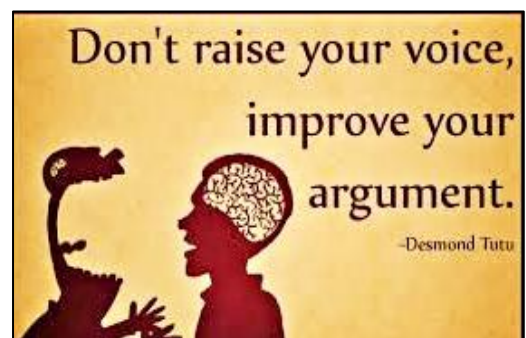
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## *Critical Thinking, Constructive Debate*

Two years ago, Pam and I spent six weeks in the UK and Europe. It was a trip we had planned - and looked forward to - for a number of years. We spent three weeks in the UK, reconnecting with old friends we had not seen in almost 20 years, followed by three weeks exploring the new territory (for us) of Germany, Belgium, and France.

We organised the trip almost entirely on Facebook - accommodation, sightseeing recommendations, route planning - and in so many ways that demonstrates the way I chose to interact with social media. For me, it is about keeping in touch with friends and family. Some of my friends insist that social media is only of value if we spend time debating, sharing our political ideologies, religious philosophies, etc. and while I occasionally dip a toe in those waters, those experiences have rarely been beneficial or constructive. I have friends on both sides of most debates: I'd rather just remain friends and leave the debates to other occasions and opportunities.

Modern debate is highly polarised and acrimonious, although I have to say that I cannot remember a time when Australian politics was really any different. We just seem to have raised the stakes in recent years. Part of that problem is the very nature of our news media, which condenses the "interesting bits" to fit into our five-minute attention spans. Occasionally you do see photos of political opponents engaging in friendly conversation (I saw one this morning), but these are the exception precisely because "getting along with one another" is neither interesting nor newsworthy. So, the only side of politics we usually see is opponents locked in debate or voicing their disdain for one another.



Given the state of the debate, how do we tidy up the mess of public discourse? And perhaps more importantly, how do we get to the truth? Let me share two recent experiences with you.

Shortly after we moved into our new home, a friend of mine visited us for morning tea. During the course of conversation she expressed an interest in our Bible study group which was due to be held that evening. My friend attended that evening, following which we exchanged a number of messages, concluding with her writing that, "It's probably best if I don't participate as some of the thoughts being promoted would be considered heretical by the church and I love and wish to remain faithful to [my] Church."

At a recent meeting of the Inter-Church Council, prior to the beginning of formal proceedings, one of its members commented that solar panels take more energy to manufacture than they generate in their lifetime. We had to begin the meeting, of course, so there wasn't time to go into that issue more deeply, but the conversation was shut down by someone who supported the use of solar panels, stating she simply didn't wish to think about such ideas.

For me, these encounters contrast sharply with the rational freedom and active, intellectual exploration recommended by the teachings of the New Church. How do we reach the truth while remaining friends? Should we blacklist certain thoughts or ideas? Accepting the edicts of any outside authority, and the refusal to investigate challenging ideas will never be useful to establish the truth of anything.

Swedenborg writes, "... it is a goal of Divine providence that a person act in freedom in accordance with his reason." (Divine Providence, paragraph 97) Elsewhere, in recording a vision of a church building (which he says represents the new church), he recounts, "*Later, when I got closer, I saw there was an inscription over the door: NOW IT IS PERMITTED. This meant that now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith. ... FROM NOW ON ENTER INTO THE MYSTERIES OF THE WORD WHICH HAVE SO FAR BEEN HIDDEN: FOR EACH ONE OF ITS TRUTHS IS A MIRROR IN WHICH WE SEE THE LORD*" (True Christian Religion, paragraph 508, sections 3 & 6).



Those teachings found expression in my training for ministry, which only encouraged me to test, challenge, and explore. This taught me that truth stands up to scrutiny. Truth has nothing to fear from falsity, rather falsity has everything to fear from truth. In John's gospel, we read:

*"And this is the condemnation [literally, judgement], that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."* (John 3:19-21)

Then, I think about the conversations we have been enjoying together in recent months. We have shared ideas such as: recognising the need for open and honest discussions; anyone is welcome to say anything they like about any matter; any idea or opinion should be open for discussion. We've also talked about the charity that underpins such discussions, recognising when a debate gets out of hand and spills over into personal conflict.

All this leads me to wonder: Is this the New Church's unique contribution to the life of our community? Can we teach people to think? It expresses one of the fundamental values of our community. It's not about teaching people WHAT to think, rather HOW to think. Equipping people to engage with these debates in a constructive manner will help bring some peace to our fractured world. That is a real and positive contribution to society at large. But one of the positive side effects for our organisation will be that some of those thinkers will inevitably come into contact with the teachings of the church and have the opportunity to examine them for themselves.

With every blessing to you all.

*David*

Rev. David Moffat, Spiritual Leader



## Church Giving

Even during the pandemic lockdown, the Church has to continue to meet ongoing expenses in its work. Should you wish to donate a freewill offering towards this, there are two ways in which you may do so:

- Via the Internet by simply clicking on the link - <https://donorbox.org/new-church-victoria> - and following the straightforward instructions;
- By sending a cheque payable to 'The New Church in Victoria' mailed to the same name at PO Box 2224, Mt. Waverley, Vic 3149.

All contributions are greatly appreciated, and the Church Board extends grateful thanks for those received while activities have been curtailed.

## ***Meditations on the inner vs outer meaning of Scripture***

from **Vidura Jayaratne**

The following is a summarised articulation of an aspect of a discussion I had with Rev. David Moffat. It concerns the problem of the inner vs outer meaning of the Scripture. David thought that we should share this with you.

I take the view that inner meaning (real meaning) of scripture is not alien to the outer (apparent, literal) meaning.

I understand why it is tempting for many to deny the outer meaning. It avoids having to deal with those difficult passages of the scriptures, especially those with cruel and punitive political consequences. But here, we must first deal with the Truth, pure and naked. Then we can decide what to do with the political corollaries.

Now let us try to visualise my point via an example. Suppose I (Vidura) am who I am. [If you don't know me, imagine you know me, please]. I am using me as my example, merely because it is convenient. No peculiar personal importance is suggested.

You have seen me. It is not as though the I who appear to you is not the inner me (real me), and the inner me (the real me) is hiding behind/deep beneath the apparent (outer) me. Rather, you see the whole me – inner and outer, together - albeit as I appear to you.

The Lord in Flesh is no longer before us to behold and touch, as the embodied Apostle Thomas could, and as you could see me and touch me. But we do have His Word with us! And so, we can experience the Lord via His appearance in the Text of the Bible. It is important to remember that it is not as though there is the Text (the Outer Lord) and hiding behind/deep beneath the Text is the Inner Lord. No! It is the whole Lord Himself – inner & outer – that appears to you in and through His Text (like I, all of me – inner & outer – appear to you through my text, or photo, etc).

One might object, saying that surely the picture is not the real person, but only his representation. This is correct, as you can see by seeing this apple on your dinner table [imagine] and a photo of the same apple [imagine]. But my question is one step further. What about the apple itself when you see it? Do you see an outer apple only, and hiding behind it/deep beneath, the inner (real) apple; or do you see the real apple – inner and outer together - as it appears to you? (In this metaphor, I don't mean that you see the flesh of the apple; just like you do not see my liver or spleen. Rather, I mean that there is no other inner apple inside the outer apple).

Let us now explore the inner meaning of myself in some more detail. This "me" is very complex, no doubt. There is so much to me that I myself may never understand about myself. Then, there are many photos of me. There are many sayings, and doings (cf. Acts) of myself. Each time you look at me, you glimpse at something (some part thereof; or the whole in low resolution) of this huge complexity that is me. You may experience thoughts about me, and gut feelings, in addition to what I wrote, or how I personally appear to you (cf. Epiphany). So, as you see, your experience of me goes even beyond the physical me that appears to you. But you can never experience me – exhaustively. Yet, it is not necessary for you to experience me exhaustively. Just some part thereof (or whole in low resolution) is enough for you to see me.

Likewise, it is not necessary that you see exhaustively everything that is to be seen and said about the Lord. In fact, He is infinite, and there is no way you can experience infinitude with your own finitude. Yet as I said, it is not necessary for you to perceive the infinitude. When you see some manifestation thereof, part or whole (in low resolution), you see Him.

In saying all that, what I am also trying to warn you about is the following. There is this view out there, motivated by the reasons I mentioned at the beginning, that "if some meaning is the literal meaning of the Bible, then it must be the false meaning"! This view is false (as I explained above)!

The warning also applies to the habit of always looking for another meaning. Why not the literal meaning – be the intended meaning? Suppose I wrote an e-mail to you, would you always try to read it as something that I am not telling you? So then, why should you read this mail from the Lord differently?



One might object that the scriptures are humanly & historically mediated. Hence it is possible that one may be seeing an impure presentation. Even so, this is analogous to receiving a message from me via a friend of mine. Perhaps he misunderstood or forgot some aspect, or even added some aspects to it, and yet there is a significant extent to which the message can be understood by you with adequate purity.

This is a meditation in progress. These are not necessarily original thoughts. I am indebted to too many sources, such that I am unable to give you an exact short bibliography. Also, I give no guarantee that these views are either traditional orthodox or Swedenborgian orthodox. Also, you might have felt that the text was somewhat repetitive and even trivial. In a sense, this can be true for you. Once you see this, it is trivial. Yet, I have seen so many people, included myself (well into my adult life), who have been unable to experience this. So that is why I felt I should share this with you, in the style and level of detail I have presented here.

Responses to Vidura's insightful meditation are invited. Please forward them to the Newsletter Editor (see first page for details).



## *To Zoom: to move or travel very quickly*

It is quite an understatement to say the past six months have significantly changed the lives for us living in Victoria, just as it has for so many around the world. At the time of writing, we remain on level 4 restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne whereas regional areas now have greater freedoms. Who would have thought at the beginning of 2020 all our Church activities would have been taking place via live-streaming and other means? As in many locations, our Spiritual Leader, Rev. David Moffat, has 'moved very quickly', using his skills to ensure that these options are available to us, for which we are very thankful. While video conferencing etc. has been available to businesses for years, it has now become part of everyday life for a majority of individuals. It is fascinating to appreciate the opportunities which have been opened up. For the New Church here in Victoria, the ability for those living at a distance to participate in services and programs, not only watching but reading lessons, playing music, providing images, etc. has been wonderful.



Round the New Church and Swedenborgian world, congregations and organisations have experienced similar opportunities. In other parts of Australia, Church groups have likewise maintained contact with members and friends electronically although in New South Wales and Queensland, physical gatherings can take place providing certain restrictions are adhered to.

In Britain, where most New Churches are now back in complete lockdown, services are being zoomed to members across the country every fortnight on Sunday afternoons with different Ministers and Leaders taking part providing much variety. Many who have not been able to participate in services of worship for a very long time have been doing so online. It was necessary to hold their annual meeting via Zoom, the first time it has not taken place face-to-face since 1815, even including the two world wars. Called 'Together Online', there were more in attendance this year than for a good number of years. It even included the induction of their new Spiritual Leader (formerly President), Rev. Jack Dunion, by Revs. Mary Duckworth and Bruce Jarvis.

A good number of New Church congregations in North America have continued to meet face-to-face in church buildings with social distancing etc. during the pandemic. Some have elected to do so in member's homes, others have hired larger premises such as the Royal Oak Society, Michigan; the New Church group in Silver City, New Mexico, has arranged to meet in a coffee shop for their morning service creating a makeshift worship space. There are a few congregations in Canada offering the option of either participating via live-streaming or booking a seat on a 'first come, first served' basis. The annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America titled *2020 ~ Spiritual-Vision-Transcending-Time and Space* took place on Zoom with the Keynote Address delivered by Rev. George F. Dole. Two young people's retreats have likewise been held online. The Swedenborg Foundation Annual General Meeting on 19 September was also via Zoom. Sadly, the major world Retreat intended to draw New Church people from around the world to Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, USA, in June had to be cancelled by the General Church of the New Jerusalem because of the inability of many to travel there. A lot of work had gone into its preparation.

Most New Church groups in Africa have had to close their doors for the time being, one exception being at Westville in South Africa where stage 3 restrictions apply. Face-to-face services continue but those wishing to attend are required to submit a '*Health Screening Questionnaire*' beforehand; the questionnaire includes advice on the health of all household members.

In other countries where there are New Church Societies and groups, a variety of similar situations pertain. One result of the use of the technologies is the benefit of being able to participate in activities in other places around the globe, time zones permitting. Another is its use to readily engage with the wider public in outreach work allowing those with a developing interest in the heavenly teachings of the New Jerusalem to 'travel very quickly' to take part in various online programs offered. All this brings to mind our Church teaching that *"All motion in the spiritual world is the effect of changes of inner states, to the point that motion is nothing but change of state"* (Swedenborg: from *Heaven and Hell*, paragraph 192). Further, *"Whenever people [in the spiritual world] move from one place to another, whether it is within their own town, in their courtyards, in their gardens, or to people outside their own community, they get there more quickly if they are eager to and more slowly if they are not. The path itself is lengthened or shortened depending on their desire, even though it is the same path. I have often seen this much to my surprise"* (Swedenborg: from *Heaven and Hell*, paragraph 194).

Neville Jarvis



## Spiritual Vitamins



**Vitamin A:** Adoration. This produces looking to the Lord, as the God of heaven and earth, and should be taken first each day on awakening.

**Vitamin B:** Benevolence. This stimulates the will to do good. Its source is Divine Love. Use liberally.

**Vitamin C:** Charity. Charity is the use of life, directed by the Lord in the service of the best good of others. Increases activity of the soul.

**Vitamin D:** Discipline. Steadies spiritual nerves. Guidance and control of one's lower self by the higher self is effected by the use. Use daily. Its source is Divine Wisdom.

**Vitamin E:** Enlightenment. Improves the eyesight of the soul. Helps one to see through clouds and darkness. Its best source is the Word and the Doctrines of the New Church, drawn from the Word.

**Vitamin P:** Praise. Reduces fatigue of the soul. Found in looking around to see how deeply we are indebted to God the Lord and our fellowmen for the good things we have. Liberal doses in smiles, songs and joy.

By William Gilbert Marshall. Found in the February 1946 issue of "The New Age" by Alexis Jarvis.

## NEWS OF PEOPLE

Congratulations to Alexis & Neville Jarvis on the arrival of another grandson, Joshua Clive Holst ~ Joshie. Daughter Marian gave birth on 6 August 2020. Mum, Dad, Shane, and Isabel (2 years) are delighted with the addition to their family.



## ITEMS FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Contributions for the next Newsletter would be greatly appreciated. Please think NOW about working on an item to share with other readers which demonstrates to you something of God's creative love at work. Just send it to Neville Jarvis (*contact details on front page*). The earlier it arrives, the better.



## Diary of Events in October & November 2020

**While Coronavirus Restrictions are current, all activities will take place on YouTube and/or Zoom until further notice.**

Refer to details provided weekly by our Spiritual Leader

October		School holidays until 9th
Sunday 4	2.00am 10.30am	<b>Clocks go forward 1 hour</b> <b>Family Service of Worship</b> led by Rev. David Moffat Topic: <i>The commands of Jesus (17): BELIEVE</i> Children's theme: <i>Water from the Rock</i> – Exodus 17: 1 - 7
Monday 5	8.00pm	<b>Bible Study</b>
Sunday 11	10.30am	<b>Doctrine of the Lord</b> – Consideration of Chapter 4: <i>The Lord did not take away our sins by His suffering on the Cross, but He did carry them</i>
Sunday 18	10.30am	<b>Service of Worship</b> led by Rev. David Moffat Topic: <i>Imperatives in Swedenborg's writings</i>
Monday 19	8.00pm	<b>Bible Study</b>
Sunday 25	10.30am	<i>Exploring the Bible</i>
November		
Sunday 1	10.30am	<b>Family Service of Worship</b> led by Rev. David Moffat Topic: <i>The Ten Commandments: Ethics and spirituality</i> Children's Theme: <i>Giving of the Ten Commandments</i> - Exodus 19: 16 – 25 and 20: 1 - 21
Monday 2	8.00pm	<b>Bible Study</b>
Sunday 8	10.30am	<b>Doctrine of the Lord</b> – Consideration of Chapter 5 <i>The Imputation of the Lord's Merit is nothing more nor less than the forgiveness of sins that follows upon repentance</i>
Monday 9 to Tuesday 17		<b>Spiritual Leader on leave</b>
Sunday 15	10.30am	<b>Service of Worship</b> led by Rev. David Moffat Topic: <i>Community vs independence - do I need other people?</i>
Monday 16	8.00pm	<b>No Bible Study.</b> Spiritual Leader on leave
Sunday 22	10.30am	<i>Exploring the Bible</i>
Sunday 29		<b>Family Picnic.</b> Details to be advised
Monday 30	8.00pm	<b>Bible Study</b>

### Question Time Sessions

Other than 12 November when our Spiritual Leader will be on leave, every Thursday at 10am and 8pm on Zoom.