

Roseville New Church Newsletter

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

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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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“Responsibilities of Citizenship”

Am I my brother's keeper?

~ Genesis 4:9 ~

Even for those of us living 12,000 kilometres from the continental United States, there was no escaping the news of the last several months coming out of “The States.” Whether it was the tragic pace at which American citizens were dying from COVID-19 or the frightening scenes of what appeared to be an insurrection in the American capital, a person could be excused for believing the “A” in ABC stood for “American.” Of course, as an American myself I looked on with an added sense of worry and concern for family, friends and the nation as a whole.

Of course, while I am an American, I have had the opportunity to serve the church outside of the U.S. for nearly 10 years now. I served in the UK during the tumultuous times surrounding the BREXIT debate and watched from afar as America elected a populist and isolationist president. Within 18 months of coming to Australia I experienced and observed the Australian peoples’ response to a devastating bushfire season and shortly after the world was plunged into a battle against a deadly pandemic.



Through these various challenges, some unique to place and time and some common to all communities and nations, it strikes me that differences have emerged that point to certain “collective” attitudes around the responsibilities of citizenship. Now each of us, in whatever nation we live in, can read the constitutions and laws that apply and decide for ourselves what our legal responsibilities are, but it strikes me that the Lord is calling us to service beyond our legal responsibilities. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” was the question Cain asked the Lord when confronted with his own guilt. Of course, when the least you can do is NOT kill your brother, the answer to this question is a resounding YES!

In its internal sense the story of Cain and Abel is an excellent one to reflect on when considering our understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship. It is an excellent example because at its core the story is about separating faith from charity. Separating faith from charity is the spiritual equivalent of seeing the responsibilities of citizenship as merely fulfilling one’s legal responsibilities.

Our lives in this world (the natural kingdom) are, for all intents and purposes, preparation for life in the Lord’s Kingdom. But life in the Lord’s Kingdom requires more of us than simple compliance with the laws. This point Swedenborg makes in his work Divine Providence (#322):

There is hardly a nation so barbaric that it does not have laws forbidding murder, promiscuity with other people's spouses, theft, perjury, and violation of others' rights. Civic and moral individuals keep these laws in order to be or to seem to be good citizens; but if they do not regard them as divine laws as well, they are civic and moral individuals only on the earthly level. On the other hand, if they do regard them as divine laws, they become civic and moral spiritual individuals.

The difference is that in the latter instance they are not just good citizens of their earthly kingdom, they are good citizens of the kingdom of heaven as well; in the former instance they are good citizens of their earthly kingdom but not of the kingdom of heaven. It is the good they do that makes the difference. The good that worldly civic and moral individuals do is not intrinsically good because they themselves and the world are at its heart. The good that civic and moral spiritual individuals do is intrinsically good because the Lord and heaven are at its heart.

Reflecting on this passage, the challenges we faced in 2020 and those we will face in 2021, I invite each of us to reflect on the duty of care we owe the neighbour. What duty we owe, not from some legal requirement but

from a love of the Lord and our desire to be a good and useful citizen in His Kingdom.

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

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Swedenborg Centre News **(New Year News)**

Welcome to a brand new year. It wasn't hard to avoid the crowds at this year's change-over. Change is inevitable if we admit growth into our lives and into the world, and no doubt this year will bring us plenty more new reasons to change and adapt to life as it unfolds in and around us. I hope there was something refreshing in it for you over the break.



The beginning of our calendar is listed below. Feel free to stop by in person at the Centre (yes, we have been given a "Covid-safe" QR code by NSW Health), or attend events via Zoom. Check the website at swedenborg.com.au for Zoom links or further event details and updates. Due to tighter Covid restrictions than when we first planned the new Art Classes and Correspondences event we have decided to postpone it by about 6 months at least. Something to look forward to later this year.



Swedenborg meets Fourth Way Reading Group, every Monday, 11am. Zoom (Meeting ID 702 567 371):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/702567371?pwd=MFYraoFnZmhXSHZXYlJ3VE5GMGkwZz09>

Dr Groves Reading, Fridays 22nd January, 7pm. Zoom (Meeting ID 320 544 045):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/320544045?pwd=QjZtbUxvVk81b2dweUtZZTE3ZE9lZz09>



Swedenborg Saturday, Saturdays 16th January and 6th February, 10am. Zoom (Meeting ID 476 372 484):
[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/476372484?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/476372484?pwd=WmNpdHRLdotwSmZDMENQRit3aE8zZz09)
[pwd=WmNpdHRLdotwSmZDMENQRit3aE8zZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/476372484?pwd=WmNpdHRLdotwSmZDMENQRit3aE8zZz09)

Second Tuesday Open Discussion on Tuesday 9th February, 2pm and 6pm. Zoom (Meeting ID 124 469 612):
[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/124469612?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/124469612?pwd=NjlOZ3RpU2NWV1g1a2Zmb29ZL3ZsQT09)
[pwd=NjlOZ3RpU2NWV1g1a2Zmb29ZL3ZsQT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/124469612?pwd=NjlOZ3RpU2NWV1g1a2Zmb29ZL3ZsQT09)

Contact me on (02) 9416 2812 or joe@swedenborg.com.au if you need to know more.

Enjoy the month ahead.

Joe

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Roseville New Church **COVID Safe Plan**

As our readers know, the Northern Beaches region of Greater Sydney experienced a cluster of COVID cases in the week before Christmas. This resulted in a lock-down of some 200,000+ residents of the Northern Beaches for much of the holiday period. While Roseville is not in the effected are we are close and several of our regular attenders live in the affected area. Therefore, demonstrating an excess of caution, we decided to cancel services through the remainder of the year, switching back to the offer of a weekly “Spiritual Shorts video from our minister. During this period the NSW government issued new guidance concerning places of worship and our church officer has been hard at work documenting our compliance with this guidance so that we may be prepared to reopen after the end of the summer break. Fortunately, many of the COVID safe practices we implemented in early 2020 were already in compliance.



There are, however, three changes that are required. First, we have formalised our COVID Safe Plan, meaning that all that we are doing from the standpoint of occupancy, social distancing, cleaning and COVID safe practices is now documented in one written plan. Second, All those attending service will be required to wear a mask (NSW does exempt the minister from this requirement, evidently believing that it is important for people to hear what the minister has to say). Third, all those attending will be required to sign in via the NSW COVID Safe App (provisions will be made for those without a smartphone).



Staying COVID-safe seems to be a clear expression of love towards the neighbour. Swedenborg notes that only evil people restrict their exercise of charity to their own friends and family (TCR 430).

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Aha and Aha

I suppose we would all be aware of how something can be used for either good or evil. We often meet this idea in its spiritual setting because a lot of teaching about heaven and about hell centres on the use or misuse of what the Lord has given us. Take my sense of being “me”: I can think I am wonderful, always right, the centre of the universe etc., which sounds a lot like hell, or I can feel blessed by what the Lord has given me to use, and set out to help other people in good ways, which sounds a lot like heaven. Both are about me.



I’m mentioning this hell and heaven coming from the same thing because in the last few days I have come across the lovely word ‘aha!’ I’ve known about those ‘aha!’ moments for a long time and I hope you know what they mean and even more, I hope you have had several of them. They’re sudden moments when the penny drops, when you join up the dots, when

something drops into your mind that makes a huge amount of sense, after perhaps scrabbling around for months wondering what something is about or whether it matters or not. This is an ‘aha’ moment (for obvious reasons...) and sometimes it’s called an epiphany. And in it, I believe the Lord is at work with perfect timing.

But there’s another meaning to this same word ‘aha’ and it is simply terrible. In the Bible, mostly in the Psalms (which so many people love to hear, sing and read) there are a good number of references to those who seek my destruction, who wait in my path, and who say ‘Aha! aha!’ Take

a look at this example, from Psalm 35 verse 19-21, “Let them not wink with the eye who hate me without a cause. They devise deceitful matters against the quiet ones in the land. They opened their mouth wide against me, and said, “Aha, aha!” Our eyes have seen it.”

I found this so compelling I looked up the original in a Hebrew Bible and found it was ‘he-ach’. We’re used to people saying or texting ‘hehehe’ conveying laughter, and ‘ach’ seems like a contemptuous throwaway sound of derision. And there you’ve got it. This ‘aha’ is about malicious joy, the merriment of evil, grinning and cackling that someone can be fooled, taken in, put down, or whatever takes your fancy.



One of the deeper aspects to the Psalms is the teaching that they describe the Lord’s experiences of being deeply tempted. But we should balance that with those magnificent Psalms words about the Lord ‘Lifting me up and setting my feet upon the rock’, or ‘Send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me’ which give us an insight to the Lord’s trust, strength and determination.

So, with this idea of the Lord, we should not be surprised to find an ‘Aha’ in the Gospels, at the Crucifixion, at the scene which seemed to be the end of everything promised. “And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” (Mark 15:29-30)

I think one thing we can personally get from all this is that we can have both kinds of ‘aha’s there inside us and we’re really meant to shut down the one and bring on the other. It’s really called regeneration. So, near the start of another year, may you find more and more of the good aha and may you meet less and less of the awful aha.

Julian

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Note of Gratitude

One of the Roseville New Church’s past ministers and friend to many in our society, Rev. John Teed, recently celebrated his 90th Birthday. Many in our society reached out to John and he has, in response, sent this note of gratitude:

I did so appreciate, and was delighted to receive, the good wishes for my 90th birthday, both in the card and sent by email, from so many of my friends in Sydney. Would you be able to pass on my

thanks to all through the next edition of the "Newsletter"? Their messages brought back many happy memories, as did the photo of our home in Penkivil Street.

With thanks to all once again, and with regards and very best wishes.

John

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March 2021 Virtual Women's Weekend



We're doing it again! Back by popular demand, we'll be having another - virtual - women's weekend next month, March 12th-14th; depending on covid distancing restrictions at the time, ladies are encouraged to get together with others in their area, as well. There will be a mix of spiritual discussion, crafty instruction and good old-fashioned chatting. For more

information or to join the fray, please contact Jenn Beiswenger (jenn@beiswenger.net).

Jennifer Beiswenger

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Marriage Moats **"Helpful"**

A cancer survivor presented to my Stephen Ministry group. He wanted to both affirm our efforts to be compassionate listeners, and to offer insights into what is helpful to someone experiencing a medical crisis.

Some of his suggestions were not surprising. Providing meals, doing laundry, and offering childcare made a difference, especially if they did not involve decision making for the ones receiving it. Even that deceptively small step can be draining for an already overloaded brain. He personally felt a wave of support from his community and extended family throughout his many months of treatment which included practically every test yet devised. He taught us the notion of "scanxiety," which is the discomfort that builds up after a series of invasive procedures.

He also spelled out things that are unhelpful. Comments that minimise the trauma, or pull attention from the patient to the speaker's own history do more harm than good. As do efforts to give empty reassurance.

“You will be okay.”

“Let me tell you about what I went through.”

“Don’t be scared.”

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

“There is an alternative treatment you really have to try.”



I was moved to hear that he strove to hear the well meaning intentions within their words.

And yet it might serve all of us better to screen such advice giving before we speak.

He described the deep sadness that was his companion. Love for his wife and children had come under fire with the possibility of not living a full life with them. Amazingly, anger did not make a strong appearance. This is not true of everyone fighting cancer.

But in the absence of certainty, or time travel into his own future, he held tight to something else. Hope.

Lori

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Divine Love

Because of your unfailing love, I can enter your house;
I will worship at your Temple with deepest awe.

~ Psalm 5:7 ~

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of
my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

~ Psalm 23:6 ~

If you love only those who love you,
what reward is there for that?
Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.

~ Matthew 5:46 ~

For the law was given through Moses,
but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness
came through Jesus Christ.

~ John 1:17 ~

“Quoteworthy”

One of the books I read over my summer break was Desmond Tutu’s “The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path to Healing Ourselves and the World.” I offer for your reflection the following quotes that stood out to me.

- “There is a certain kind of dignity we admire, and to which we aspire, in the person who refuses to meet anger with anger, violence with violence, or hatred with hatred.”
- “To treat anyone as if they were less than human, less than a brother or a sister, no matter what they have done, is to contravene the very laws of our humanity.”
- “In our own ways, we are all broken. Out of that brokenness, we hurt others. Forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing the broken parts. It is how we become whole again.”
- “People are not born hating each other and wishing to cause harm. It is a learned condition.”
- “This is what healing demands. Behaviour that is hurtful, shameful, abusive, or demeaning must be brought into the fierce light of truth, and truth can be brutal.”
- “It is a remarkable feat to be able to see past the inhumanity of the behaviour and recognise the humanity of the person committing the atrocious acts. This is not weakness. This is heroic strength, the noblest strength of the human spirit.”

Howard



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