



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2020

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The New Church Newsletter
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Perhaps you've noticed, but in our newsletter I like to write about and comment on things that are happening in the news and take the opportunity to view them from a New Church perspective. This month we have a couple of big stories – bush fires and Coronavirus – that are worth commenting on. As always, I hope you enjoy the read.

Corona Virus

Let's start with the Corona virus story. I was sent a video that was on Facebook by Dr. Eric Berg. What got me was his description of a virus in general. This is what he said:

“The first thing you need to know is that a virus is not necessarily a living thing. It cannot reproduce without hijacking your own cells. So it leaches or hijacks your DNA machinery from your cells and then it turns on a little copy machine and starts reproducing like crazy. That's what it does. The virus is like a parasite, and what I mean by “parasite” is that it takes something from you but it doesn't give anything back. So it's kind of like a criminal.

“Now with the good bacteria that lives in your digestive system you give them a home, you give them food, but they give you vitamins, they give you certain compounds that are beneficial to your immune system, they're exchanging good things with you, but these viruses just do not do that.”

What hit me was the similarity between how the virus works, and how evil works. The virus is potentially not even alive. So I ask, is evil alive? Take a look at this quote from Arcana Coelestia 2889

“Evil spirits are quite incapable of comprehending that they do not live independently of themselves and that they are merely organs of life. Still less can they comprehend that there is any life except that which comes from good and truth, and least of all that they do not start to live until the life of evil desires and false persuasions in which they are immersed is annihilated.”

Look at that last line... “they do not start to live until...” which indicates that they really aren't “alive” until they have turned to good. Sure, technically they are alive, but they're not “living” if you get what I mean.

Back to Dr. Berg, he then says that the virus cannot reproduce without hijacking your own cells. Likewise with evil, isn't that what it is trying to do? To hijack our body and mind? Think about the stories in the New Testament where Jesus heals a man possessed... that's what evil does, it tries to possess us. Evil, like a virus, is hard to get rid of, and if we don't get rid of it, it will kill us. The virus copies itself, and isn't that just like us obsessing over evil thoughts? The infection starts off easily enough... a thought jumps into our mind, but

then, as we dwell on it, the thought multiplies again and again and again until either we put it out of our mind, or until it takes us over.

Then Dr. Berg says the virus takes and gives nothing back... how about evil? Evil definitely takes, and my first inclination was that it does give nothing back, but I don't think that's accurate. It gives us some sort of pleasure; otherwise it wouldn't be so alluring. The pleasure can be physical pleasure, or it can be something more mental, like the pleasure of feeling superior to somebody. But while I do think evil does give us something, these pleasures are hollow and in reality are usually just some form of delusion or fantasy. The result is evil is taking something valuable, and so is the virus, which is why Dr. Berg calling the virus a criminal makes a lot of sense.

Finally then you contrast that with the good bacteria in our digestive system... we give it a home and food, and they boost our health and immune system. I've never quite thought of the angels with us in that way, that we give them a home and food, but it does make sense that they do boost our spiritual health and immune system.

In the end I find this kind of analysis useful because when I feel myself "coming down" with some sort of evil thought or desire, it is helpful for me to think of evil in these terms... it isn't really alive or real, it's a criminal, it's trying to take without giving, and most powerfully for me is that it is trying to use my own brain to take over my life. That's pretty horrifying when you think about it. But that is, I'm afraid, reality.

If you're interested, you can watch the whole Dr. Berg video here:

<https://www.facebook.com/drericberg/videos/195404241541850/?vh=e&d=n>

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Biblical Symbolism & Bush Fires

Regular readers of the newsletter are aware of my on-going efforts to create short videos explaining a New Church understanding of the Bible. In a recent video called, "Mountain Moving Faith, The Meaning of Mountains in the Bible," I got into the teaching that everything in the Bible has a meaning and its opposite. Quite honestly I was a bit concerned that this wasn't going to be something easily accepted by people and that I'd get a fair bit of harsh criticism for appearing to be wishy-washy, but so far that fear has not borne out. In fact, that video has been one of the most well received videos I've done. The reality is that it is easy to show examples in the Bible where mountains are good – Mt Sinai – and where mountains are bad – Jesus saying we can cast mountains into the sea.

Recently though I've been thinking how easy it is to demonstrate this "everything has a meaning and its opposite" with the bush fires. Fire is very useful! Think of all the things we use fire for. Cooking and home heating are examples that come quick to mind, but there are countless other ways in which it is utilized. We were on a steamboat recently, and of course that steam is created from fire. Fire is used for generating light, for decoration, and for forging metal.

As for the opposite side of fire we similarly don't have to think too hard. For centuries fire has been used as a weapon of war. Throwing flaming objects at an enemy is at one level of destruction, modern flame throwers are at another level, but napalm bombs are at another, and fires that are a result of nuclear bombs have got to be at the most destructive level. It isn't hard to see that fire has some very useful attributes, but can also be very destructive. Along the same lines, it really isn't hard to then see why fire corresponds to love, and also unrestrained lust and desire that is so destructive in our lives.

Despite all the heroic work by fire fighters from around Australia and the world, what ultimately brought them to an end was rain. We can likewise do the same exercise and see just how in our lives water is literally essential for life, and yet it is also deadly. It was also easy to see that as much as we wanted the rain to put out the fires and fill up the dams, those rains were also incredibly damaging as well.

So what's the point of all this? To me there are two main take-aways from this. The first is that in my mind, what this exercise does is makes it easier to talk to people about Biblical symbolism. You can pick something – the sun – and just talk about in terms of where you can think of it appearing in the Bible. The sun of creation, the sun standing still, the sun darkened in Revelation... You don't really have to even start with a knowledge of what it means, but think it terms of what uses it is providing.

The other thing I want to leave you with is that we don't have to think it's weird that there's a meaning – and its opposite – because we can see it in our daily life. Now maybe it was only me who thought it would be a difficult concept for people to accept, but it seems that this basic idea of how to understand the Bible is one that people are willing and able to accept after all. As a result this is one area where I would suggest there is some fertile ground for spreading a New Church understanding of the Bible.

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March Women's Weekend

Women from as far away as Port Macquarie and Canberra and as close as Loftus and Peshurst - and places in-between - will be gathering for fun, inspiration and sisterhood over the weekend of **March 6-8**. While registration for full-time attendees has closed, day visitors are welcome to join us at our get-away location in Peshurst (*not on church grounds, but not too far from it!*). We'll have introductions, icebreakers and opening worship on Friday evening; Saturday will include morning worship, instruction/discussion about regeneration and Zentangle (not simultaneously ;)), assembly of birthing kits and a closing meditation; Sunday morning will consist of worship & discussion about the woman at the well (John 4) and lunch out at a restaurant. If you're local and wish to join us for any of this, please contact

Jenn (0411 719 754 or jenn@beiswenger.net) for details!

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Harvest Festival

Autumn is traditionally a time of reaping what was sown earlier in the year, a time of harvest and celebration of that harvest. Join us on **Sunday, March 22** for our annual harvest festival for a pot luck lunch after church and share the wealth **by bringing a non-perishable food or toiletry donation to the service for folks in need via Kogarah Storehouse**. This is a time of gratitude - please come and let's share our thanksgiving amongst friends!

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March 1 is Clean Up Australia Day

Do you ever walk up Hillcrest Ave on your way between the church and train station? Have you noticed all the rubbish along the way?? As part of Clean Up Australia Day, you are invited to participate in our <unofficial> clean-up project! Beginning at **8:30am on Sunday March 1st** and wrapping up in time for our 10am worship service, pair up with a buddy (or two or three), grab yourselves two bags from the church porch - one for garbage and one for recycling - then walk on down to Hillcrest Ave, turn left, keep on going while collecting rubbish to your heart's content! *A few pairs of gardening gloves will be available for loan, but if you have gloves, it is recommended that you bring & wear them.* The difference we make won't be huge, but every little bit helps!

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Gathering Leaves 2020 – International Women’s Retreat

Registration is now open for the international retreat for Swedenborgian/New Church women will be held in the UK this year from August 28th-31st. The theme is “Fruits of the Spirit,” and it will include worship, plenary sessions, workshops, sister circles, a day trip out, and opportunities to make and renew friendships in the charming and historic setting of Purley Chase. Register now to avail yourself of the generous donations that cover Purley Chase "early bird" costs during the event. Details about the retreat, and about booking in, are available on the Purley Chase Centre website. If you have a proposal for a workshop, or for further information, contact alison.southcombe@purleychasecentre.org.uk

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Street Library

Sometime last year the idea was proposed at an Hurstville New Church Society Meeting that we install a box near the footpath to serve as a street library -- a place where we can offer books on loan, where anyone can 'Take a book, Give a book, Share a book'. The purpose would be to provide the service of books on loan - we would put some books in, and neighbourhood individuals could borrow and also add their own books - as a community builder and possible evangelisation tool (only a few books would be New Church). The idea was well received, and now the kit has been acquired and the library box will be assembled! In the interest of cheap labour ;) and especially as a group activity and hands-on project, the plan is for the kids to chip away at its assembly every week

during their usual Sunday School time slot, beginning in March. Once it is built, the kids will also be involved - front & centre (with adult supervision!) - in the decoration of it; the idea is for them to really get to own this project. We look forward to sharing news of its progress with you!

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Does Your Pastor Preach Too Long?

Rev Glenn Alden recently shared an article in the Washington Post that was analyzing a new report by the Pew Research center. The study was looking at nearly 50,000 sermons to find out how long Christian clergy preach and what words they use that distinguish themselves from one another. According to their research, the average length of a sermon is 37 minutes, but there are some “striking” differences between traditions. Here’s how it broke down:

- 14 minutes for Catholics
- 25 minutes for mainline Protestants
- 39 minutes for evangelicals
- 54 minutes for historically black Protestants.

If you take a quick look through my sermons that are archived on YouTube you’ll notice that adult talk is usually around 20 minutes, so I’m coming in on the shorter side of things. You’re welcome. =) I haven’t spent any time looking around at what other GC pastors are doing these days, but my sense is that these days ministers are preaching for 20-25 minutes.

What this article doesn’t get into is how long the service runs for, but I suppose there wasn’t an easy way to figure that out whereas finding sermons online is pretty simple. Anyway, I thought it interesting that somebody went to the trouble to figure out how long sermons are. They’re likely only going to get shorter as attention spans get shorter.

If you want to read the whole article you can find it here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/12/17/does-your-pastor-preach-too-long-new-survey-shows-dramatic-differences-sermons/>

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Don Macfarlane** (7th), **Debbie Walsh** (7th), **Graham Horner** (12th), **Edward Horner** (18th)

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