



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society April 2020

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Coronavirus and God's Forbidden Foods

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Have you ever noticed the theme of forbidden foods in the Bible? There's the tree in the garden of Eden and its forbidden fruit, and in the first book of Kings a "man of God" is eaten by a lion after failing to follow God's instructions not to eat bread with anybody on his journey. The disciples are told not to eat "the leaven of the Pharisees," and generally speaking, leaven is something the Israelites are told not to have as every holy feast uses unleavened bread. Then we have Leviticus chapter 11, and there we get a whole set of instructions as to what they are allowed to eat, and what they aren't. Some animals are "clean" and allowable for consumption, and some are designated "unclean."

Well, I've been thinking about this "clean" and "unclean" animal thing in regards to coronavirus. You see, it was probably two or three weeks ago, back when the world was mostly normal, a friend was showing me an article online that theorized that the COVID 19 disease originated in bats, and then was transferred to the pangolin which then transferred it to humans. They figured it likely began in a "wet market" in Wuhan, China. If you're not familiar with them, "wet markets" are places where people can buy a variety of live animals for consumption. Many different species can be found stacked on top of one another in such environments, which are conducive to cross-species disease transfer. While it is still just a theory, apparently the Chinese eat a wide variety of exotic animals, so it seems that the debate is more along the lines of *which* animal it came from as opposed to *if* it came from an animal.

However, for the sake of this article and discussion, let's just assume that the disease came from bats and/or pangolins. What I find interesting about that is that both of those would be considered "unclean" animals by the Bible. The pangolin would be unclean because it does not chew the cud or have cloven hooves (Leviticus 11:4). Regarding bats, Leviticus 11 specifically calls them out as "an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination."

The next question becomes, "Why does God say some animals are clean and others not?" Here's an answer from an article I found online*:

Although God did not reveal the specific reasons some animals may be eaten and others must be avoided, we can make generalized conclusions based on the animals included in the two categories. In listing the animals that should not be eaten, God forbids the consumption of scavengers and carrion eaters, which devour other animals for their food.

Animals such as pigs, bears, vultures and raptors can eat (and thrive) on decaying flesh. Predatory animals such as wolves, lions, leopards and cheetahs most often prey on the weakest (and at times the diseased) in animal herds.

When it comes to sea creatures, bottom dwellers such as lobsters and crabs scavenge for dead animals on the sea floor. Shellfish such as oysters, clams and mussels similarly consume decaying organic matter that sinks to the sea floor, including sewage.

A common denominator of many of the animals God designates as unclean is that they routinely eat flesh that would sicken or kill human beings. When we eat such animals we partake of a food chain that includes things harmful to people.

Here's what I take away from that: unclean animals consume dead and decaying things, and these things are more likely to have a disease or virus that affects us. I know that in the New Church we tend to dismiss these literal rules about "clean" and "unclean" animals, but it seems like there may be something real and true about these dietary restrictions, something more than a symbolic meaning. Now hold that thought for a moment if you will, because at this point let's take a look at what Arcana Coelestia says about clean and unclean animals: "The clean ones are so called because they are gentle, good, and useful. Those that are not clean are the opposite - savage, evil, and useless - of which there are genera and species" (AC 719).

I don't know about you, but when I think about where "savage, evil and useless" things come from, I think of hell. (Yes, even hell has its use, but it is regarded as a low use, because for the most part it is just keeping other devils in check.) Hell is also described as being outside the "Grand Man" of heaven. Basically it is excrement. Dung. Poop. You know, the kind of thing that unclean animals consume.

Let's take this one step further... we know that the natural world exists because of the spiritual. It's true on every level and for everything, including diseases. In fact the Arcana specifically states that all diseases come from hell and correspond "with the forms of uncleanness there; for essentially sicknesses are forms of uncleanness" (AC 5712). That same number also says:

The reason sicknesses have a correspondence with those in hell is that sicknesses correspond to the evil desires and cravings of the lower mind, and these desires and cravings are the origins of those sicknesses, the origins of sicknesses in general being various kinds of intemperance and self-gratification, wholly physical pleasures, as well as feelings of envy, hatred, revenge, lust, and the like, which destroy a person's interiors. Once these are destroyed his exteriors suffer and subject him to sickness and so to death.

Sickness and disease come from hell, and what I'm driving at is that we're taught the unclean animals listed in the Bible are also manifestations or effects of hell. See if you follow my logic here, but if bats and pangolins are "unclean," it means that they correspond to something hellish. It also means that by their very nature they will carry diseases that will be harmful to us. In fact, they eat other disease carrying insects which are undoubtedly unclean, corresponding-to-hell insects. It should be no surprise that they carry diseases that are harmful to humans. In essence, if we eat a bat or pangolin, are we

taking a bite out of hell? We don't even need to eat them, because evils are contagious, hence why the Bible says even touching an unclean animal renders us unclean.

I know that in the New Church we don't see the Bible as a science book, yet sometimes I think that there is more to it on the literal level than Swedenborgians often give it credit for. Goodness knows I don't want to give up bacon, but perhaps we need to pay more attention to just what it is that we are consuming. For example, pigs correspond to avarice, which is extreme greed, so does consuming pigs incline us more to that evil? We're commanded to not eat creatures from the sea without "fins and scales" because to not have fins and scales means that we do not cultivate spiritual teachings with a view towards progressing in our regeneration... so if we're heavy on lobster consumption does it make it harder for us to move forward spiritually? I admit it feels like a stretch to make these claims, but at the same time I can't get the thought out of my mind that those forbidden foods in the Bible, foods that seem to come from a hellish source... well, maybe they're forbidden for a reason.

*Paste the following web address into your browser.

<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-clean-and-unclean-meats>

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The Greatest Miracle

In church a few weeks ago I was talking about a story where God promises to feed all the Israelites in the desert. Moses tells God that what He's promising is impossible! Then we get one of my favorite lines in all of Scripture when God replies: "Is the Lord's arm too short?"

That just sums up so many conversations between people and God. What God promises seems impossible to us. But is there anything He can't do? This was the great miracle of **Easter**, He can lay His life down, and He can raise it up. Likewise, one of the lessons we are to take out of Easter is to raise our thinking up, don't just hope for God's promises to happen, believe in the victory. In these crazy times that we're in, don't just hope for a good outcome, believe in a good outcome. Know it will happen.

The Easter story does warn us that the new reality may not be what we had envisioned it would be, but God does promise that He can feed us in the desert, he can heal us when we're sick, and that even if we try to kill Him, He can do the greatest miracle of them all and raise Himself from the dead. The Lord's arm is not too short, and whatever it is you are going through, He'll get you through it.

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Guest Speaker – Dr Joel Brown on the Most Ancient Church

Joel Brown grew up in Bryn Athyn, just down the street from me. He got a PhD from Berkley in California in Bible Studies, and for the last couple of years has been a teacher in Beijing. As fate would have it, he came to Australia in January for a holiday, but by the time he was supposed to leave the coronavirus was going rampant in China. The school where he was teaching went to online only, and as a result it seemed wiser to stay in Baringa for a couple weeks while this all blew over. Well, here we are nearly two months later, and since we've got him here, we might as well make use of him.

The result is that he's going to give us a class on the Most Ancient Church. It's an area he's studied extensively, and something he loves to talk about. I've thought for quite some time that we should do a class series on the five churches, so maybe this will be a kick-start to it. **This class will be at 6.45pm on April 6th.** Of course, this class will be online only due to current restrictions, but see below for instructions as to how you can join in.

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Church & Classes Online in April

I think we were all hoping it wouldn't come to this, but it seems that churches and many other places will be closed for the next few weeks. The plan is that church services will still be offered by our livestream on YouTube. If you're on our weekly email list, I've been adding the link to the service in the email. Send me an email if you'd like to be added to that. Otherwise you can find the channel at www.youtube.com/toddbewiswenger. There you'll find all of the videos, and if you hop on during a live broadcast you'll see one video marked with a little box in red that says "LIVE." That's the one you want.

For classes I'm going to use Zoom. Like with the church services, I'll email this link around, but here it is in case you're not on the list and want to join in: <https://zoom.us/j/433881443> If you've never used Zoom before, if you use this link it will take you there, and then a window will pop up asking you to save a file. You'll need to do that, then run the file once it has been saved. Afterwards it should open, and you'll get a question like "Enter meeting with computer audio" and you click on that, and then you'll get another "Enter meeting with computer video." Again, click on that and you should be in the meeting.

Alternatively, if computers aren't your thing, or you just want to join in while in your pajamas, you can phone in to one of these three numbers and put in the meeting ID:

+61 3 7018 2005 Australia

+61 8 7150 1149 Australia

+61 2 8015 6011 Australia

Meeting ID: 433 881 443

Please note that for this experiment class times will be at 6.45pm, and we have to be done by 8pm sharp.

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Delayed Gratification

Here's a quick update on events planned for the next few months...

New Church in Australia Assembly: Originally scheduled for May 15-17 in Brisbane, the NCIA Board announced a couple weeks ago that they were postponing the event for six 6 months. Refunds have been issued to those who booked in through the NCIA, so if you haven't received yours please let them know. No new dates have been scheduled at this point.

GC Assembly/Retreat in Bryn Athyn: Bishop Peter Buss Jr. sent out an email last week announcing the cancellation of the GC Retreat and clergy meetings that were to happen June 18-24. While I think the world is hoping that things will be returning to normal by then, they know the event won't be able to be what they wanted it to be. They were expecting a large international turnout, and even if commerce resumes, the large cloud of uncertainty over international travel was going to prevent the event from being a true representation of GC membership from around the world. No new dates announced yet. Clergy meetings will likely just be smaller regional meetings.

Gathering Leaves Purley Chase UK – STILL ON, for now.

As the collective Gathering Leaves Committee, we have decided to make a final decision and announcement about whether to proceed with Gathering Leaves at the end of May. This may be somewhat optimistic, but we should be better able to see how measures have worked to impact the situation at that time with a fervent hope that we may be able to proceed with our Gathering Leaves event at the end of August as planned.

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Activities While In Isolation

Testimonial Videos, Laurel Walsh: YOUR INPUT/THOUGHTS WANTED: I am planning to collect videos of friends' testimonies of their faith, and how it is supporting them through this crisis. If you would like to make a 30 to 90 second video and send it to me by Messenger, I will be compiling them and hope to put out the link on Sunday to lift people up. Mark #mycomfortfromGod Please help. Thanks!

Memorizing Bible Verses, Julian Duckworth: Here's an idea I came across and used several years ago. It links with Bible exploration but not directly. It's Memory Learning Bible passages ... the Psalms would be perfect of course. You do it accumulatively - start with a half verse, say it until you've got it there for sure, then add the second half of the verse and run them through a few times. Then add v2 part 1, then v2 part 2. Keep this going and aim to have a whole section in your memory. Feel the achievement and thank the Lord. Say it again the next day etc. Costs zero. Benefit enormous. Take the Word inside you! It will pay you back well.

Free Online Course on the Afterlife, Bryn Athyn College: The Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College is excited to announce the launch of a brand new, free online course. *The Afterlife* provides a detailed exploration of the vision of the afterlife presented by Emanuel Swedenborg, examined in tandem with the phenomenon of near-death experiences. The course is divided into eight sessions which you can take at your

own pace, while also interacting with others enrolled in the course if you so choose. The course opens on Monday, April 13th, but you can reserve a place in it by registering now at www.brynathyn.edu/afterlife.

More Activities on New Church Google Group: Within the last year the NCIA created an email list for greater communication and interaction among NCIA members, and with people in isolation now the group is starting to get more activity. Some are just sharing what they're reading, some are offering up some interesting videos they've found. Darren Brunne has started a series of 5 minute podcasts... and it seems that there's a new something nearly every day. If you'd like to join the fun, just send David Moffat an email at d_a_moffat@yahoo.com.au and he'll get you on the list.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Todd Beiswenger** (3rd), **Donna Heldon** (5th) **Dylan Johnson** (7th), **Riley Evans** (11th), **Aneira Robson** (14th) **Huiling Sun** (20th), **Kerry Horner** (22nd), **David Horner** (25th), **Lucy Evans** (27th), **April Hams** (28th)

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