

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2023



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The Sydney Eruv and the Nature of God

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

Did you know that Sydney has an eruv? It does. It was constructed in 2002. Do you know what eruv, pronounced “a-roove” is? Let me explain.

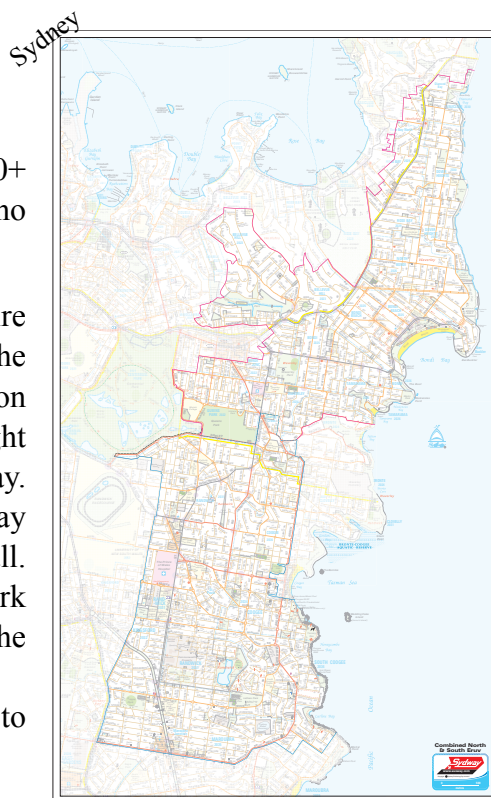
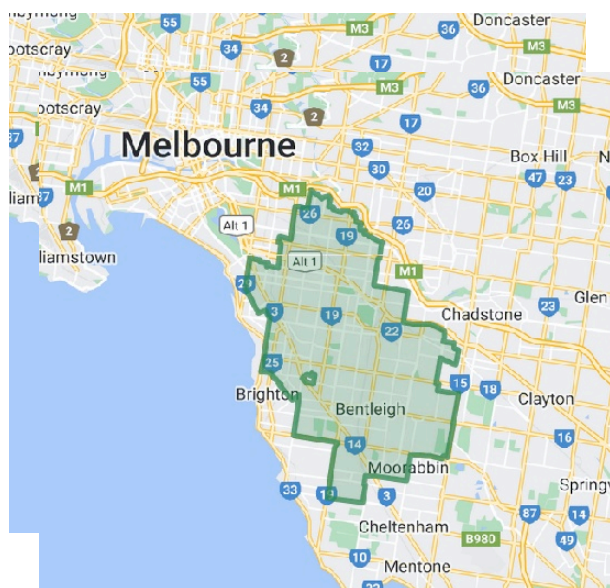
“The Sydney eruv is created from a combination of natural walls (the South Head Peninsula cliff faces), existing telegraph poles and cables, golf course and park perimeter fencing, and fencing around Bondi and Tamarama Beaches that creates a boundary or perimeter in the Eastern Suburbs. It’s not just Sydney that has one. Melbourne and Perth do too.

In fact, as I’ve recently learned, most major cities in the western world have them.

Like last month’s newsletter, this article was inspired by a video from “The Why Files” channel on YouTube. They did a video titled, “The Hidden Wire Around New York City” where they tell us that there’s an 80 mile long wire that circles almost the entire island of Manhattan. The presenter is a New Yorker himself, and states that it’s been there for 20+ years, and most New Yorkers, including , had no idea that it even existed.

To understand why there’s an 80 mile long wire going around New York City, Sydney, and all the other cities in the west, we need a quick lesson on Judaism. The sabbath begins every Friday night at sunset and goes all the way through Saturday. Jewish people who observe the Sabbath, Saturday is a day of rest. You don’t work. At all. However, work doesn’t just mean your job. Work is defined as any activity that is necessary in the building of the tabernacle.

At first you might think, “Sure, I’m not going to



be

building an Ark of the Covenant anytime soon.” But think about all of the other activities that go into building of the tabernacle.

All of the tapestry has to be made, so no sewing. The table of showbread needs bread, so you can’t do any baking either. The altar needs fire, so you can’t start one of those. As you can see, it doesn’t take long before the rules start to get a bit difficult. Not to mention no tying, no tearing, and the real tricky one: no carrying. You can’t carry anything. Now, you can carry things within your home, and I think your home includes your entire property. So yes, you can carry your lunch to the picnic table out back. But what if you want to go out?

Imagine this: you leave your home to go to the local park. You’re not going to do any work. You’re going to rest. However, you want to lock the door to your house behind you. Guess what? Now you’re carrying keys! That’s a big no-no! You decide to leave the door unlocked instead, because your child really needs to get out and run around. But on the way back, they run out of energy and collapse on the ground. Can’t carry them home! No pushing them in a pram either.

Many years ago rabbis realized that if you were going to fully enjoy the Sabbath, you sometimes needed to carry things. This is where the wire around New York comes in. It’s called an “eruv.” It is an unbroken continuous string or wire that circles a large public area. As mentioned in the opening paragraph, Sydney’s eruv is a combination of wires, fencing, natural walls and other boundaries. Originally eruv were actual walls, but now they’re symbolic walls. Anything within the border of the eruv is now considered part of the domestic domain. If you want to carry on Saturday, as long as you’re within the eruv you’re good to go.

To me, I find the idea of an eruv rather amusing, because on one hand the people who would use the eruv are clearly taking their religion very literally, but somehow when it’s convenient, symbolic walls will do the job. You’d think they’d have to be literal walls! Not to mention that the eruv comes across as a way to cheat the system. Do they really think that God doesn’t realize that they’ve artificially expanded the boundary of their property?

That aside, what an eruv really does is inform me about their idea of God. What do they think are God’s priorities? “Strict adherence to the rules” would have to be at the top of the list. It may seem silly to us, but if you believe that what made Abraham so special was his unwavering obedience – so much that he was willing to kill his only son – then you start to get a deeper appreciation of why obedience is at the core of what it means to be Abraham’s people. The problem is that even if you understand why obedience is so important to Judaism, they’re still operating with a false idea of God.

Many New Church people may think this isn’t a big deal, because after all, the angels only care about our intentions, right? Well, yes, and... our idea of God is REALLY important. Our eternity depends on it.

... a correct idea of God is to the congregation like the sanctuary and altar in a church, or like a crown on the head and a sceptre in the hand of a king, as he sits upon his throne. From this hangs the whole body of theology, like a chain from its anchor-point. If you are prepared to believe me, the idea everyone has of God determines his place in the heavens. (TCR 163)

The Lord knows that this is a difficult teaching for us to believe. “If you are prepared to believe me...” is a clear indication that He knows this teaching runs contrary to our current line of thinking. If you were to make a list of “New Church Fundamentals” you probably wouldn’t list the teaching that “the idea everyone has of God determines his place in the heavens,” yet what is more important than our eternal destination? When I see or hear about religious people doing something I think is strange, this teaching helps me understand them, because the strange thing they are doing is a reflection of who they think God is.

I think what the Jews have done with the eruv is make their religion a natural practice instead of a spiritual one. This trap, or temptation, exists not just for Jews though, but for so many people across all religions. Think about it: why do Islamic extremists carry out acts of terrorism? Because they think God is a conqueror. Conquering is a very worldly or “natural” thing. Why do so many Protestant Christians fail to actually walk the talk? Because they think God cares more about what you believe than what you do. This is a faith where the lower self is separated from the higher self, and as a result the faith is natural (See AR 651, 654).

Why is this so bad? Well, if you take a look at some of the accounts in “*True Christian Religion*,” in particular numbers 110-113, you’ll see that people enter heaven with their false ideas of God, and then are thrown out. Why? Because they’re now in the spiritual world, and their worldly understanding of God is to the angels “like an irritant in their nostrils, or an awl perforating their ears, causing them great pain” (TCR 110). The new spirit declared he believed what the angels told him, but it didn’t take long for the angels to see through the person’s façade. The angels called him out for seeing nature as God, which of course is a “natural” way of seeing things and actually a belief in no God at all (see TCR 113). That spirit was a Christian in the world, but like eruv using Jews, had made his faith more natural than spiritual.

However, the point of this article isn’t to cast stones in glass houses, but rather the eruv serves as a good opportunity to remind ourselves just how important it is to have the right idea of God. Perhaps we can’t get our friends and family to show up to as many church events as we’d like, but maybe we can at least help them with getting a right idea of God in their minds. If you’re willing to believe it, it doesn’t just change their life here, but their life forever!

Trying Not to be a Grumpy Old Man

I used to be cool. At least somewhat cool. I had more cars than I needed, and two of them were two seat, stick shift convertibles. Once – and this is a true story – I was waiting at the traffic light with the top down and a young woman yelled over, “Are you married?” I held up my hand with the ring on the finger in reply.

These days I feel like I’m moving further and further away from being cool with each passing day. I see new technology and instead of thinking “Oh, that’s amazing, I’ve got to have that!” I think, “Who needs that? What a waste of money! I’ve lived 47 years without that!” Among the technologies that I have shunned, social media has topped my list of things that I really want no part of. I begrudgingly signed up for Facebook years ago, figuring it was a useful tool for ministry. I’ve found it to be useful for other things too, but have not even been the slightest bit tempted to dive into Snapchat, Instagram, Tiktok, or anything else.

However, Rev David Moffat has been telling stories about his experiments on social media, and with it gently encouraging others of us to give it a go to. As a result I found my grumpy-old-man self in a debate with the part of me that would actually like to do my job and spread the teachings of the New Church. The grumpy old man was doing a good job of winning for quite a while. He made some good points, like kids these days should do it like we did in the old days! He also said back when I was a kid, we had attention spans that lasted more than a minute, and it isn’t my fault if they don’t appreciate the great videos that are already out there.

But then, as if riding in a black Corvette convertible while wearing a leather jacket, the cool me showed up and said, “Heyyyyyy. Don’t be stupid. If you actually want to do your job, you’ve got to stop being a grumpy old man. You’ve got to talk to them where they are.” And they’re on Instagram. And Tiktok. Ugh. Cool me was right. I hadn’t talked to him in a while, but he made sense. So I signed up for Instagram and Tiktok.

The plan was simple: create 1 minute videos that are a recap of the previous Sunday’s service. By keeping them to less than a minute I could use them on Facebook and Instagram as a “reel” and on YouTube as a “short,” as well as on Tiktok. These short form videos are all the rage these days as users are craving more bite-sized content, as social media attention spans continue to decrease. Within TikTok’s first year, it reportedly reached 500 million monthly active users. As of January 2022, TikTok has over 1 billion monthly active users and 3 billion installations.

So far I’ve only released three of these videos, so there isn’t any conclusion yet. But so far, they are getting some views, and some views are better than no views. I’m going to stick with it for a while and see what happens. So while I may still take the opportunity to complain about kids on my lawn, it looks like I’m going to have to put off being a grumpy old man for a while.

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Minister Question Time

Rev David Moffat has been running “Minister Question Time” down in Melbourne for a while now, and as you would expect by the name it is an opportunity to ask ministers questions. Want to ask about the meaning of the Creation story? Confused about why rock, water and wine all correspond to truth? Or what is going on with kids these days! Ask a minister!

As NCIA President, David has decided that this really needs to be more of a national effort than just a local one. Part of the idea is to help the NCIA be a more national organization, and foster community among the congregations, which does make sense since we are small in number around the country. It’s good to have a chance to interact with other New Church people. To this end, the Council of Ministers is offering “Minister Question Time” on the following dates at 10am and 8pm:

- 2/3/23 - Todd & Julian
- 4/5/23 - Darren & Howard
- 6/7/23 - Julian & D Moffat
- 7/9/23 – D Millar & Sarah [am only]
- 2/11/23 - Todd & Howard

I’ll be sending out a Zoom link to the sessions with myself and Julian to the NCIA email list. If you wish to join in though, probably not a bad idea to email me for the link just to be sure you get it. Hope to see you there.

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Pulpit Swap

It feels like we haven’t done one of these in a while, but Howard and I have planned to do one the first Sunday in March, which is the 5th. This will be Week 5 of our Shift program, and Howard has agreed to stick to that program. I’m doing likewise for him, as he’s going to be in Week 5 of the Path of Integrity program. Though it might have been an interesting experiment in the universality of spiritual teachings if he just preached Week 5 Path of Integrity here and see how that worked. You may recall, Path of Integrity follows the Joseph story, vs Shift follows his father, Jacob. So maybe we’ll have to look at that, and just compare how the two men and programs are in Week 5 of their journeys. are in Week 5 of their journeys.

Birthdays

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

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