



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society August 2016

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Weird, Strange, but True

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

One of the things that I like most about New Church teachings is the way that it provides a theology and understanding of the world that accounts for and explains more than any other religion. You can go to any church and be told that God loves you, be kind to your neighbours and trust that if you're a good person heaven awaits you. One of the special and more interesting teachings the New Church offers is about the existence and nature of the spiritual world ... and just how closely we are connected to it. I really believe in this connection, and think the New Church teachings are spot on, so every now and again when I find somebody not connected to the New Church in any way who validates what the New Church teaches, I want to take the time to share these stories with you.

This particular story came my way through a friend who sent along an article from the Washington Post titled, "As a psychiatrist, I diagnose mental illness. Also, I help spot demonic possession." Now that's a catchy title! It's written by Richard Gallagher, who is a board-certified psychiatrist and a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College. But his work started going down an interesting path when a Catholic priest came to him looking for an evaluation of a person's mental health.

The patient in question had declared that she was a witch, said that she worshipped Satan, and apparently even dressed the part with long flowing, dark clothes and an abundance of eye shadow. Mr Gallagher was a trained Yale psychiatrist, and became a psychoanalyst trained at Columbia, so he had the credentials and experience that the Catholic priest was looking for. He wanted to know if the woman was suffering from a mental disorder. Since Mr Gallagher was a sceptic of the supernatural the priest thought he would be a good person to consult on the matter, and this is what he wrote:

But my subject's behaviour exceeded what I could explain with my training. She could tell some people their secret weaknesses, such as undue pride. She knew how individuals she'd never known had died, including my mother and her fatal case of ovarian cancer. Six people later vouched to me that, during her exorcisms, they heard her speaking multiple languages, including Latin, completely unfamiliar to her outside of her trances. This was not psychosis; It was what I can only describe as paranormal ability. I concluded that she was possessed.

This was back in the 1980s, and in the years since then he's been assisting clergy of various denominations in determining what is a standard mental disorder and what is the work of the devil. Personally I really appreciate his open mindedness to seeing that there are some things that just aren't classified in the diagnostic manual for psychiatrists. He says, "...careful observation of the evidence presented to me in my career has led me to believe that certain extremely uncommon cases can be explained no other way."

Then he poses this question: Is it possible to be a sophisticated psychiatrist and believe that evil spirits are, however seldom, assailing humans? "Yes" is the answer he provides, citing more of the strange things he's seen, but what bothers me is that he uses the phrase, "however seldom." He's admitting that we are assailed by evil spirits, just not very often.

Which, to me, is like a bloodhound who has lost the scent. He doesn't ask the question, "What happens when evil spirits assail us, but fall short of possession?" He's basically saying that they either possess us and take us over, or they have no effect on us at all. Frankly, that just doesn't make sense.

What does make sense is that people have greater or lesser immunity to it, and some allow it to happen while others actively work to prevent it from happening. The result would be that the evil spirits have various effects on the human psyche. In fact, Heaven and Hell states that evil spirits – and good spirits – influence all of our thoughts.

I have talked with angels about the union of heaven with the human race and have told them that church people actually do say that everything good is from the Lord and that there are angels with us, but few people really believe that angels are so close to us, much less that they are in our thought and affection. ... They said that the reason for this ignorance was that people believe they live on their own, without any connection with the Ultimate Reality of life, and do not know that there is this connection through the heavens. Yet if that connection were severed, we would instantly drop down dead. If we believed the way things really are, that everything good comes from God and everything evil from hell, then we would not take credit for the good within us or blame for the evil. Whenever we thought or did anything good, we would focus on the Lord, and any evil that flowed in we would throw back into the hell it came from. (Heaven and Hell 302)

Interestingly, Mr Gallagher mentions that there are some clergy out there who do attribute everything they see to the devil. He takes exception to this, mostly in part because these clergy are typically in developing countries and as such use barbaric techniques to attempt to cure the patient. However, I'm not just trying to make a theological point. My concern is for the patients because the doctors entrusted to their care do not believe that the patient is seeing what they are claiming to see. Mr Gallagher says:

Anyone even faintly familiar with mental illnesses knows that individuals who think they are being attacked by malign spirits are generally experiencing nothing of the sort. Practitioners see psychotic patients all the time who claim to see or hear demons.

Why is it that we do not believe? Why does it take a person speaking in Latin, or telling us our secrets to believe that there is a connection to the spiritual world? Why can't we see that there are lesser attacks on us as well? This is not to say that there's not room for natural disorders too, but by limiting our willingness to believe all possible options, we are limiting our ability to actually cure the patient. In the meantime, I'm grateful to Mr Gallagher and others like him who are at least willing to believe what they do see, even if they're not ready to believe in what they don't.

Enjoying Our Blessings

by Bill Hall

“Enjoy the blessings the Lord is giving you!” Number 101 from *101 Ways 5to Strengthen your64 Relationships*.

Truly when we are enjoying the blessings the Lord is giving us, our lives take on a much happier and healthier dimension. No longer do we feel caught up in the irritations and delays we experience during our lives. Instead, we are completely focused on enjoying the blessings we are continually receiving from the Lord. When we experience the blessings we are receiving from the Lord our minds and hearts are in a state of peace and joy. So our lives become an expression of this enlightened state.

In all the circumstances of our lives we have the freedom to enjoy the blessings the Lord is giving us. Instead of concentrating upon negative states of impatience or despair, our lives become expressions of peace and goodwill toward the people we encounter in our daily lives. So, as Dr Hugo Lj. Odhner says, we experience the truth of “The Lord alone is the Master of our lives. We, one and all, belong unto Him.” So we no longer feel isolated or cut off from our neighbours.

We may not be completely associated with our neighbours but we do experience a dynamic sense that we, one and all, are forever linked to the Lord. As we go about our daily lives with their duties, responsibilities, and enjoyments, let us always rejoice that the Lord has provided us with the truly liberating truth. And may we always enjoy the blessings the Lord is giving us, now and evermore.

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Stanwell Tops Summer Camp

Would you like to have a good time? I've got something that will make you feel real good. A lot of other people are doing it. It's cool. That's right, they're going to Stanwell Tops Summer Camp. At the risk of over-selling it, you'll create memories that will last a lifetime. We've got a bunch of kids coming, and they really are a nice bunch of kids. The adults are pretty good too. Remember, there's no cooking or cleaning for a week! We've got beautiful scenery too! Plus, you might actually learn something along the way. As a bonus, Bishop Brian Keith will be joining us as well. If you haven't met him, even more reason to come. He's a very down to earth, normal guy who is easy to get on with as long as you kiss his ring. Just kidding about that last part. Seriously, come out and join us, you won't regret it. **Deposits and bookings are due by September 1**, which is coming quickly! Go to www.newchurch.net.au/camp-thetops-2017 to book your spot!

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Thanks from David Baissac

I just wanted to leave a little message following my departure. I spent 9 months in Australia and that was an amazing experience. A lot happened, good and bad and so much will stick for life. I wanted to express a special recognition and gratitude to Todd and Jenn who have provided a lot of support, advice, help and friendship along the way only

making the experience even better. I also wanted to thank and wish the best to the congregation. I have felt warmly welcomed and looked after during my stay. Being from Mauritius, I am not used to so much generosity and this has touched my heart. I wish you all the best in your future and am looking forward to meeting you again someday!

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Census Reminder

Just a reminder that when your census arrives please state your religion as “**New Church in Australia.**” Other permutations, including “New Church” are not actually registered and recognized names.

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Changes at the Swedenborg Centre

Joe Vandermeer became the Director of the Swedenborg Centre from July 1st this year. He takes over from **Michael Chester** who has been the Director for six and a half years. It is a full time appointment of five days a week.

Michael recommended this changeover to the Sydney Society Church Committee two months ago and after discussion and consideration it has been agreed and happily endorsed. Michael will be available to assist at the Centre in any way that is needed.

We have much to thank Michael for during his time at the Swedenborg Centre. He has worked hard on the kind of changes in today’s world that are needed. This has been in regular upgrading of the websites, in placing advertisements and dealing with subsequent enquiries, in arranging for a much appreciated Swedenborg presence in two Afterlife Conferences, in arranging the talks that are presented at the Centre, in creating several specific projects such as making the Swedenborg Radio Talks available online, in the running of the Centre during a period of considerable changes and its physical improvements, and of course with the bread and butter day by day work.

Joe brings his skills in modern technology, business management, his experience in counselling and his own personal passion to bring the teachings given through Swedenborg to other people for their awareness and benefit. He has a wide range of interests and also contacts with others and is very keen to develop initiatives.

Joe, his wife Ellie and their son Damian live in Berowra. He has been the President of the Swedenborg Association of Australia for a term of five years and has been a regular contributor to its quarterly journal, Candela.

We look forward to new things with the Swedenborg Centre and we give Joe and Michael our support and encouragement in this important work of sharing what we have the privilege of having been given.

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[Free Money for Doing Good Things](#)

Hurstville locals will remember that it was one year ago that we had Alex Hyatt and Luke David out here visiting and helping out for a month. While Hurstville funded some of their expenses, they were also sponsored by a Bryn Athyn based organization, "Charity Works." Recently I received a phone call from them, and I was encouraged to get people to submit applications for grants. It would seem that many New Church congregations are unaware of the funding available to them from Charity Works, and they've got more money than applicants.

Essentially they are looking to fund people who are interested in doing charitable projects in their local communities. For example, Luke and Alex replaced the wood panelling in the church here, as well as prepared the outdoor worship space. Perhaps you have an idea of some way you'd like to improve the life of the local community ... the requirement is that "your life has been influenced by the teachings for the New Church, and you want to share this through a service project." Part of accepting the grant will include ongoing communication, i.e. blogging, slideshow, photos, etc, throughout the service and into the finishing stage. If you're interested please contact Clayton Walsh at claytoncwalsh@gmail.com.

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[Birthdays](#)

Happy Birthday to **Norman Heldon** (1st), **Emily Kermond** (7th), **Rhonda Hall** (12th), **Rebekah Horner** (17th), **Larah Walsh** (21st), **Graeme McLeay** (22nd), **Ralph Horner** (30th)

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