



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society June 2021

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by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Faith Check

by

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I think I'm an optimist. I think things generally turn out well, that good things come from bad, and that the good things gained from a bad situation are worth the price we've had to pay. I think most people mean well, and that in general the world is getting better and not worse. Some might say I'm wrong, but I've always thought that there's value in optimism. Like, if you have a choice – and you do – as to whether to be optimistic or pessimistic, it just makes more logical sense to be an optimist. I mean, really, why would you choose to feel bad over feeling good? Plus I think one of the great benefits to being an optimist is that you avoid the great pitfall of feeling like a victim. You avoid it because you can always see a better day, and you feel that you have at least some sense of control in your life. Or, in the case of a religious person, you feel that even if *you're* not in control of your life, at least God is.

But even optimists have bad days, or bad weeks where we look around and feel that things really aren't shaping up in the way that we would like. I've had a number of conversations lately where people are lamenting the lack of interest in the church by people of my generation. Darn kids these days! It's not just a Hurstville conversation, but one I've had with people all around Australia, and as well with some people in the US. So, as a person who thinks that church has a lot to offer, that's a bummer.

Lately I've noticed other things too working to pull my mood down a few pegs... now part of that is my fault, as I have spent more time than usual on a few different news sites, and we all know that they escalate issues from differences of opinion to that of an existential crisis. Yet there have been so many of these things in the past couple years that had even a bright eyed optimist like myself asking, "Am I wrong? Are there more evil people than good? Is the world actually getting worse and not better?"

This is where I find that it is useful to do a check on my faith. Do I still believe in God? Yes. There's plenty of evidence IMHO [in my humble opinion] for God. Do I believe in an afterlife? Yes. Do I still believe that organizing my life around the teachings of the New Church is the most sure fire way to happiness? Yes. The secular world and main stream beliefs certainly have no real appeal for me as a guide to happiness. So when I get down to it, when I'm feeling down, just what belief is it that is under attack? Providence.

That adds some clarity to the situation. Do I believe the Divine Providence exists? Yes. I have plenty of examples in my life where I can look back and clearly see the hand of God working for my benefit. I know plenty of stories of how it worked in the lives of others too. Ah, but then I look at the news and see that China is a worry on a number of levels, and it starts to get me worked up... but, wait a moment. Is Providence real or is it not? I just said I've got plenty of examples of it in my life, so I know it's real. Do I really think that God will care about the details of my life and not care about the way the world is going? Not really.

I find at this point it's useful to remind myself what the Lord promised. I think I get too focused on the promised victory and peace that I forget that the transition from one state to another isn't necessarily going to be smooth. You're probably familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel, the one where he sees this statue where the top is gold, middle is silver, legs are bronze and the feet are iron mixed with clay. What happens to that statue? It's pulverized by a rock, which then turns into a mountain that covers the Earth.

It's easy to set my sights on the whole rock that covers the Earth bit, because I like that message. The New Church is going to grow! But I conveniently ignore that there's also some destruction that has to happen first. Destruction isn't uplifting or comfortable, and you don't feel very optimistic about the future when your cool statue, i.e. everything you've created so far, is blasted into tiny pieces. You say, "Hey, things aren't good!" The rock doesn't seem like your friend. What it is though, is a symbol of the truth, and it turning to a mountain is moving from truth to love. Mountains typically are symbols of our ruling loves.

If you look at the book of Revelation, there's no escaping that things are going to change, and that change doesn't come about by magical unicorns prancing around sprinkling rainbow sparkles over everybody which causes us to join hands and sing "kumbaya." Instead the change manifests first from some letters telling us to get our act together, and when that doesn't work all sorts of things start falling from the sky and chaos ensues. When that doesn't finish the job, we get a dragon and a beast unleashed on us before we get a New Jerusalem.

So my friends, you see the transition from the "old" to "new" may be a bit... shall we say, "bumpy." It does feel like things are a bit bumpy at the moment. Yet, there are a lot of good things happening too. Believe it or not, some news outlets are even reporting them! Here's a quick look at just some of the examples from an article in Time magazine titled, "20 Ways the World Got Better in 2019." Basically that we're doing a better job than ever of protecting the environment, that over the past 27 years we've seen a decline every year in deaths from air pollution, more people than ever before have access to clean drinking water, and that we're only a generation away from having the whole world being able to read and write. There's plenty more, but you get the idea: things are getting better.

Oh, but racism, sexism, homophobia and such are plaguing the western world you say?! Well, the statistics say otherwise, that these things have been decreasing and continue to decrease every year. People at an individual level actually are getting better too. I know, not everybody is perfect, but neither am I and neither are you. Just because things are getting better, it doesn't mean things are perfect. It also doesn't mean that the world is going to end up the way I want it to either. But when I do this exercise, and check on my faith, I find that I come away reassured not so much that I'm right about everything, but that I can relax a bit because things will turn out well... eventually. I think that's the promise of the New Church and New Church Day.

New Church Day Celebrations

It's time for our annual New Church Day celebrations, and as you might expect, we're holding them on **Sunday June 20th** this year. As per our custom lately we'll be having a family style, all ages church service at 10am, followed by a slaying of the dragon piñata and capped off with a **pot luck lunch**. If you're interested in coming, particularly if you've got little children (we like to give New Church Day gifts to the younger ones), please RSVP to jenn@beiswenger.net by June 13th.

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Road Rally Scavenger Hunt

You might be wondering, "What is a road rally scavenger hunt?" If you've ever seen the show "Amazing Race," it's something like that. Teams drive around in cars following clues, completing tasks and challenges, and try to be the first team to the finish line. It's good fun, and there are things for kids to do along the way – for example, one point for each red car spotted – to keep everybody engaged.

Part of the fun is that we've generously been given funds for something *fun* from dear Martha and late Rev Kurt Asplundh, so we're going to end at a nice location where a free catered lunch will be provided. If you are interested please mark your calendar for **Sunday, October 17** and contact Owen Heldon on 0407 647 280 or oheldon@optusnet.com.au. In the meantime, get ready for some serious automobiling, scavenger-hunting fun.

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Centenary Celebration

The year 1921 was a big one for the Hurstville Society of the New Church! It was in that year that the Society went from having no permanent place of worship to purchasing a block of land and erecting a simple building. The cornerstone was laid in July 1921, on the 16th Anniversary of the Hurstville Society, and on November 27, 1921 the finished church building was dedicated. That was 100 years ago.... It's time to celebrate! We'll commemorate this momentous year with a weekend of centenary celebrations, **November 13th & 14th, 2021**. There will be an afternoon tea, open gardens and open tennis court on the Saturday, and a special worship service followed by a celebratory luncheon on the Sunday. More details to come..... but in the meantime, mark your calendars – we hope you'll join us!

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Things Heard & Seen Movie

So perhaps you've heard about this movie titled, "Things Heard and Seen." It's only on Netflix, but has been causing quite the stir throughout the church because the cover of "Heaven and Hell" is featured prominently in the trailer. Here's a brief description of the premise that I got from Rotten Tomatoes:

Catherine Clare (Academy Award®-nominee Amanda Seyfried) reluctantly trades life in 1980s Manhattan for a remote home in the tiny hamlet of Chosen, New York, after her husband George (James Norton) lands a job teaching art history at a small Hudson Valley college. Even as she does her best to transform the old dairy farm into a place where young daughter Franny will be happy, Catherine increasingly finds herself isolated and alone. She soon comes to sense a sinister darkness lurking both in the walls of the ramshackle property and in her marriage to George.

Not long after the release the movie became a popular topic on Cybercouncil among the clergy. Rev Mark Pendleton of the Glenview New Church in Chicago posted his review there, which he permitted me to reproduce here:

My wife Ellen and I were a little nervous going into the show, as we knew it would have some creepy/scary parts, but we turned off the lights and closed the shades in the living room anyway, and huddled close on the couch, bracing ourselves... :)

True enough, there were a couple or a few surprise moments, but it wasn't nearly as scary as it could be! There was also one killing scene near the end, one sexual liaison, and one physical, non-sexual liaison mixed in. The killing scene, although enough to make us turn away momentarily, wasn't as gruesome as it could have been. Likewise, the relationship stuff was quite tame relative to what can appear in movies these days and no nudity. It was as though the producers wanted to include it, but weren't interested in featuring it as a key part of the show.

Beyond these things, Ellen and I thought the other elements in the movie were intriguing. I'm fascinated to know who was behind the planning & making of this movie, as it shows (their version of) the front cover of *Heaven and Hell* a number of times—and not just in an off-handed way. In addition, the actors announce the name “Swedenborg” and “Emanuel Swedenborg” clearly, distinctly, and often enough in the first half of the show that it seems almost overly purposeful, as though the movie is really trying to get “Swedenborg” and “Emanuel Swedenborg” across to the public. In fact, the way and number of times his name was mentioned seemed almost unnatural—similar to Christian movies which, although good in their own right, can sometimes come across as a bit fundamentalist, “Christian-y,” or “preachy.”

It's also true that there is one seance in the movie, but seances are not a key part of the plot, and the one that takes place is insignificant enough to everything else in the movie as to seem backhanded.

After watching the movie, Ellen and I are wondering what the show will do to book sales of *Heaven and Hell*. It seems like an emphatic advertisement for both Swedenborg and the book. And Ellen, having been born and raised outside the NC organization, says that when the world gets a hold of this kind of stuff from Swedenborg and capitalizes on it in movies, they are going to produce stunning shows that do very well in the box office.

Aside from the apparent effort to announce Swedenborg's name to the public, three of the main points of emphasis in the movie seem to be the relationship of the spiritual world to the natural world, the interaction of spirits with our states of mind, and the presence of spirits in the evolution of madness.

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New Book in the Street Library

I've added a new book to our street library that was sent to us as a promotional copy from the Swedenborg Foundation. It's called, "**Overcoming Divisiveness**" which seems to me to be a very timely topic. Here's how they describe it:

This short, modern work contains a series of passages on division and conflict from the original writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Each passage is accompanied by a summary of key points and questions, written by Swedenborg Foundation publisher Morgan Beard, offering the opportunity for spiritual introspection and growth. This edition is an updated version of the book we published in 2018 that includes a new chapter called, "The Words We Use," which focused on how the things we say can reflect either the love of heaven or the harm of hell.

Right now you can get the book out of the Hurstville New Church street library, but as that library does seem to get some traffic there's no telling how long it will be there. Grab it now while you can, or order one for yourself from the Swedenborg Foundation. www.swedenborg.com

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Angela Caldwell** and **Michelle Heldon** (8th),
June Kirsten (9th), **Izaak Horner** (17th)

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