

## *“Standing Up Against Hatred and Racism”*

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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August 8, 2020

### Scriptures

1 John 3:11-18

Leviticus 19:3-19, 32-33

### Insight for Worship

*True Christianity 43-45* by Emanuel Swedenborg

The first essential, *God’s loving others outside himself*, is recognizable in God’s love for the entire human race. God’s love goes out and extends not only to good people and good things but also to evil people and evil things. It goes not only to the people and things that are in Heaven but also to those that are in Hell—not only to Michael and Gabriel but also to the Devil and Satan, for God is the same everywhere from eternity to eternity.

Diabolical love is a love for oneself. This is called love, but seen in its own right it is really hatred. It does not love anyone outside itself. It does not want to form a partnership with others in order to bless them; it wants to bless only itself. From deep inside, it constantly strives to dominate all others and to own the good things they have.

This past week has been difficult and painful. It’s rare for me to preach with you about the subject of racism. So, it’s about time that I did. Within the Lord’s New Christianity one might say that for a minister to preach about the importance of standing up against hatred and racism is essentially “preaching to the choir.” However, the reality is that white-supremacist and other terrorist groups now number over 900 in America, and they are growing. So, it’s high time that we talk about this growing problem. The Lord taught us that we need to be “**wise as serpents and harmless as doves**,” rather than being ostrich-like, pretending these problems will magically go away. (Mtt. 10:16)

The only way for us to overcome our major problem of hatred and extremism is to talk about it, and then figure out our own strategy of overcoming it. I will start by underlining an eternal, bedrock truth that Swedenborg wrote about so well: **God hates no one**. In fact, he wrote that God is never angry nor wrathful ever toward anyone---at the same time, God will always work to protect Heaven from Hell and keep their forces of influence in balance. God also works hard for His people on Earth to want us to understand as best we can the reality and underpinnings of our problems, and to figure out ways of protecting people from the schemes and desires of those who are caught up in groups and

ideologies focused on hatred, black-and-white thinking, and views that one group is better than another.

Fascism, neo-Nazi-ism and white supremacy in general are based upon a belief that one group of people is much better than another. These groups create scapegoats out of non-white groups, such as Jews, blacks, Hispanics, you name it. They are not basing their philosophies on the foundation of the eternal reality of Life-Itself, which is God, an eternal Being of Goodness-Love-and-Wisdom, who fashions every human being out of Love-Truth-and-Peace. I saw evidence of God's creative goodness earlier this week at McDonald's, when a small group of both white and black boys were playing in the Playland, while I worked on my laptop doing research. There was no pretense, no prejudice, no hatred whatsoever. In fact, at two different times, both a little black boy and then a little white boy looked at me and smiled. And I easily felt and saw the light of God in both boys' eyes. It was beautiful!

As infants and young children, the Lord makes sure to keep us more vividly and experientially close to our angel-companions. But then as we get older and become teens and then as adults, two other currents of influence are allowed to have significant impact upon our minds: one, is our inherited affection for caring about ourselves alone; and the second is the effects and influences of childhood traumas, abuse and neglect.

This is where extremist and terrorist groups come into play. I read an article this week about a former white nationalist, a man named **Christian Picciolini**, who felt lost and alone as a young teenager. At that point, when he was vulnerable he was recruited by a white nationalist group. White supremacist groups have made massive use of the internet for many years, and they are actively hunting for the hearts and minds of our youngsters and others who are lacking a sense of identity, belonging or purpose in life. Christian Picciolini bought into their ideology, and then by the age of 16 he was the leader of the Chicago Area Skinheads. But then as a young man, after the birth of his first child, at the age of 22 he renounced his association with his extremist organization and helped form a group still functioning called "**Life After Hate**," whose mission is to inspire individuals to devote themselves to a life of compassion and forgiveness, for themselves and everyone on Earth.<sup>1</sup>

Picciolini understands very well the kind of anger that was displayed in Charlottesville, and why many of the racist demonstrators wore side-arms, carried rifles or clubs. He shared in an article online that these hate-filled and violence-pushing groups in the past were often seen demonstrating as the KKK, as Skinheads or as neo-Nazis. But now he states that they are "shape-shifting" into our neighborhood doctors, teachers and mechanics

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<sup>1</sup> Life After Hate online site: "<https://www.lifeafterhate.org/>"

down the street from us. He adds that some of the vulnerable adoptees to these extremist groups may suffer from childhood trauma and abuse, from mental illness, or some other unfortunate history, which makes them easy targets for online recruiters.

Picciolini adds that the Charlottesville horror is a vivid wake-up call for all America. Most of us have believed that after the Civil Rights Movement we've been living in a post-racist country. But the reality is that we've been sweeping the difficult, sad truth under the rug, which is that [our American culture is having a major problem still with racism and extremism](#), revealed openly this weekend by many of the demonstrators carrying the same Nazi swastika flags that Hitler and his Third Reich brandished throughout the Holocaust. Another highlight of this weekend's heartbreaking events in Virginia is that we have now realized that white extremism is yet another form of terrorism. Picciolini shared, "What people need to understand is that since Sept. 11, more Americans have been killed on U.S. soil by white supremacists than by any other foreign or domestic group combined by a factor of two."<sup>2</sup>

Violence, hatred and evil by any group or any one person are against God and Heaven. The Lord is Love-Wisdom-and-Life, and as His children we are called to love and care for all people. God taught the ancient Hebrews these life-giving truths in the Ten Commandments and in the great "compassion laws" in *Leviticus 19*. The Lord manifested His Divine Laws of mercy and justice during His ministry on the way to the cross, teaching us in the Beatitudes, "[Blessed are the merciful](#)" and "[blessed are the peacemakers.](#)" (Mtt. 5) And it was God who inspired His Apostle John to write, "[Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.](#)"<sup>10</sup> [Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.](#)" (1 John 2:9-10)

This year the Southern Poverty Law Center published a fine article titled, "*Ten Ways to Fight Hate.*" In it, they share ten great ways we can put love and truth into action as God calls us to do in *1 John* this morning. I will paraphrase seven of the ten on their list:

1. ACT. Do something proactive in opposition to an act of hatred, brutality or prejudice. Apathy will be interpreted by the perpetrators, the public and the victims as approval. Community members must be proactive, or hate persists.

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<sup>2</sup> (A Reformed White Nationalist Speaks Out On Charlottesville: NPR website, <http://www.npr.org/2017/08/13/543259499/a-reformed-white-nationalist-speaks-out-on-charlottesville>, Aug. 13, 2017)

2. JOIN FORCES. If we find that hatred is growing in our town, then we can join forces with other churches, schools, clubs and our government to create a diverse coalition of people determined to spread love, tolerance and forgiveness.
3. SUPPORT THE VICTIMS. If you're a victim or you know someone who is, then we must surround them with love, understanding and protection. Help them tell their full story to the police, and rally around them. Empower them to stand up against hatred and evil, which has hurt them.
4. SPEAK UP! Hatred must be uncovered; shed the light of truth on it and denounce it. "Help news organizations achieve balance and depth." Speak up in ways that draw attention away from hate and toward compassion and brotherly love.
5. EDUCATE YOURSELF.
6. TEACH ACCEPTANCE. Offer information at schools where kids can be vulnerable to hate group recruitment, propaganda and prejudice.
7. DIG DEEPER. Look inside yourself for the seeds of hate and prejudice, and after praying for support from the Lord, denounce it with the truth from God's Word and shun the evil and falsity from Hell, which works to pull us away from Heaven toward the affection of caring for self-alone and materialism. Oppose stereotyping at home. Fight against bigotry at work, at school and in your community.

I will add to their list that followers may be using hatred to avoid their own repressed pain from long ago, perhaps from their own traumatic childhood. And so, I encourage you to pray for their healing. I agree with some that for many who are lost in patterns of hate and racism, choosing to turn away from such evils and toward love and compassion may open them up to repressed hurts and sadness. If so, I pray their healing work will start as soon as possible. Also, we may want to have an additional web-page on our church's website that talks about the importance of standing up against hatred, violence and extremism, sharing our favorite ways of overcoming evil and hatred with God's Love. And lastly, it's up to us each week to pray to the Lord to continue flowing through our hearts and minds with His Spirit of goodness and grace, the very Essence of life itself! Aren't we blessed to worship a God of infinite Love and Goodness, who wants us to partner up freely with Him in God's eternity of love-in-action, forever. Amen

**Leviticus 19:15-19,32-33*****Laws of Compassion***

<sup>15</sup> “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

<sup>16</sup> “Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

<sup>18</sup> “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> “Keep my decrees.

<sup>32</sup> “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. <sup>34</sup> The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

**1 John 3:11-18*****More on Love and Hatred***

<sup>11</sup> For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. <sup>12</sup> Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. <sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. <sup>15</sup> Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.