

NEW CHURCH *Life*

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.

JULY/AUGUST 2015



The Beauty of Imperfection

The great beauty of art lies not in its perfection but its imperfection, writes the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein. How does that relate to the “work of art” each of us is producing with our own lives? (Page 362). For information about the illustration, see page 319.

Note: There is no extra cost for the use of color on the front page.

NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180)

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY BY

THE GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

Bruce Henderson, Editor

Rev. Walter Orthwein, Spiritual Editor

SUBSCRIPTION: \$30 TO ANY ADDRESS. To order: 267-502-4990 or susan.wright@anc-gc.org.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: New Church Life, PO Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

e-mail: datacenter@anc-gc.org

New Church Life

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they relate to life.

- 317 In this Issue
- 320 Editorials: *Why New Church Education?* • *Organized Religion*
- 325 Letters to the Editors
- 328 The Pass-Fail Test the Lord has Presented to Every Church Down Through the Ages – *The Rev. Willard L. D. Heinrichs*
- 335 Reflections on Suicide – *The Rev. John L. Odhner*
- 345 The Earth Helped the Woman – *The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden*
- 348 Laying Down Our Lives for Our Friends – *A Sermon by the Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger*
- 355 States Preceding Repentance – *A Sermon by the Rev. Scott I. Frazier*
- 362 The Beauty of Imperfection – *The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein*
- 376 Bryn Athyn College Commencement Address: The Keys to a Purpose-Driven Life – *Brian Blair*
- 381 Farewell to the Graduating Class – *President Kristin King*
- 384 Academy Secondary Schools Commencement: A Totally Unique Tool Box – *The Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner*
- 388 Introducing Our Ministers: Becoming a Minister . . . Because I Had No Other Choice – *The Rev. Alan M. Cowley*
- 391 Church and the Human Form – *A Sermon by the Rev. Alan M. Cowley*
- 397 It's Gettin' Real: Small Group Systems Retreat 2015 – *Sasha Silverman*
- 402 Declarations of Faith and Purpose
- 406 Church News
- 422 Life Lines
- 433 Announcements

New Church Life online: *New Church Life* is online at www.newchurchlife.org with issues archived back to 2006. All issues can be searched back to 1881 at www.heavenlydoctrines.org



Listen online or download:

Arcana Coelestia – Audiobook (Volumes 1-5)

Divine Providence – Audiobook

The Four Doctrines – Audiobook

Postmodernism and the New Church

Permissions

The Spiritual Soul of Civil Order

Modern Idolatry

Thinking in a Human Way

Leadership Styles

Hope for Marriage

Quantum Physics and Spirituality

Why We Should Read the Word

www.newchurchaudio.org

More recordings will be added to our website thanks to private donations. To support this effort please contact us.

PO Box 277-C, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

267-502-4981

Email: newchurchaudio@newchurch.org

In This Issue

The Rev. Willard L. D. Heinrichs writes about “The Pass-Fail Test the Lord Has Presented to Every Church Down Through the Ages” – including the New Church. Throughout history, he says, every church has been destroyed by the same evil: people not believing in the Lord or His Word but in themselves and their own senses. Are we in the General Church sufficiently aware of this challenge – both internal and external? If we resist and then embrace the legacy, he says, the Church will be richly blessed as the means for the Lord to communicate with all who hunger and thirst after heavenly doctrine. (Page 328)

Suicide is always tragic, on many levels, and no one is immune – including those in the New Church. The Rev. John L. Odhner offers thoughtful “Reflections on Suicide,” emphasizing the Lord’s mercy and cautioning that we cannot judge those who take their own lives. He offers a wealth of teachings from the Writings that “will not take away all the pain, but may bring a little clarity and comfort to people who have been faced with suicide.” (Page 335)

The news is discouraging. Polls suggest that Christianity is in steep decline and that cherished religious principles are under attack in an aggressively secular culture. The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden finds comfort in the Word, particularly in *Revelation* where the Woman Clothed With the Sun – representing the New Church – is threatened by the dragon and a flood. But “the earth helped the woman,” swallowing up that flood. No matter how helpless, threatened and persecuted we may feel, the Lord is always there with His protection. (Page 345)

In a sermon for ANZAC Day in Australia – commemorating the first major military action by Australian and New Zealand forces in World War I – the Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger, pastor in Hurstville, Australia, talks about the power of “Laying Down Our Lives for Our Friends.” It relates not only to wartime sacrifice but to our own willingness to lay down our old self – our old will – for the sake of a new will and following the Lord. (Page 348)

In a sermon about “States Preceding Repentance,” the Rev. Scott I. Frazier uses the biblical story of the “scape goat,” burdened with our sins, to illustrate what we must do of ourselves. Regeneration is something we must do voluntarily, he says, while recognizing that the Lord asks us to participate in a process that is really accomplished by Him. (Page 355)

The great beauty of art, writes the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein, lies not in its perfection

but in “The Beauty of Imperfection.” The best art, he says, “conveys a subtle impression of imperfection” that adds a special beauty, mystery and even holiness to it. “Technical ability and cleverness are not enough to make great art,” he contends. “The artist needs humility and an attitude of reverence as well.” (Page 362)

Brian Blair, speaking as the incoming President of Bryn Athyn College, offered a commencement address about “The Keys to a Purpose-Driven Life.” He told the 50 students receiving degrees – the largest graduating class in the history of the College – that they were equipped for sound decision-making and problem-solving by the sound moral compass of their education. He promised they would find that “enthusiasm for good uses is contagious and will mark you as a positive thinker and leader.” (Page 376)

Dr. Kristin King, outgoing President of the College, offered a gracious “Farewell” as she returns to the classroom, noting that “farewell” is not just an expression of goodbye but a wish that others will “fare well” in their lives. She encouraged the graduates to think of education not as something completed but as “a precious part of you that grows and evolves with you.” (Page 381)

The Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner offered a tandem commencement address for the Academy Secondary Schools that combined humor and wisdom. They noted that many things had changed at the Academy since they graduated as high-school sweethearts 37 years ago, but not the underlying principles that make the schools unique in the world. All students get a toolbox to help them cope with life, they said, but it is dwarfed by the spiritual toolbox offered by the Academy to guide them in this world and the next. (Page 384)

In “Introducing Our Ministers,” the Rev. Alan M. Cowley, pastor of the Michael Church in London, England, says he became a minister because he finally had no other choice. He remembers being counseled as a Boys School junior by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith, then Dean of the Theological School, not to become a minister unless there was no other choice. It is like marriage, he said – a total life commitment. Alan resisted for a few years until he realized that this was his only choice – and he has never regretted it. (Page 388)

In a sermon, “Church and the Human Form,” Alan Cowley describes how even the most minute parts of the human body contribute to the whole, and how this is also an image of the Grand Man in heaven. He cites a description in the *Spiritual Diary*, for instance, of a man in the other world who was part of the earlobe of the Grand Man – seemingly insignificant but still with a role that relates to the perfect functioning of the Grand Man. (Page 391)

Sasha Silverman reports on the Small Group Systems Retreat in Bryn Athyn in April which gathered more than 40 people from around the United States, plus England, to learn more about using small groups to make the Church healthier and more dynamic. “This is not about making churches

bigger,” said the Rev. David L. Lindrooth, Director of Outreach for the General Church. “This is about meeting people’s needs. This is about taking what God has given us, and ministering to people in the best way possible.” (Page 397)

Church News includes: complete reports on the Bryn Athyn College and Academy Secondary Schools commencements, with pages of bright photographs; a report on a first-ever Book Expo in Bryn Athyn, involving six New Church authors; a preview of Charter Day; a hearty welcome to the newly revived *Theta Alpha Journal*; and another new outlet for women’s voices in the Church. (Page 406)

Cover: The illustration on the cover is the Easter Angel from the Glencairn Museum. Joralyn Echols Glenn, Outreach and Public Relations Coordinator, notes: “This stained glass window is a depiction of the angel greeting the women at the Lord’s tomb on Easter morning. It was designed by Winfred Hyatt for the chapel in Glencairn, and was made in the glass factory and studio in Bryn Athyn using hand-blown glass. It is installed in the chapel, with two other medallions depicting Easter scenes. It is an example of a 20th century piece emulating medieval stained glass – including variations in the glass due to being hand-blown – and endeavoring to inspire the viewer to think of higher things (like his/her relationship with the Lord) when looking at it.”

Editorials

WHY NEW CHURCH EDUCATION?

One of the most momentous decisions in the history of the Church occurred around a lunch table in a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, restaurant on January 14, 1874. There was mounting concern that the New Church (Convention) was becoming “more liberal and ecumenically minded.” So William Henry Benade, Frank Ballou, Walter Childs and John Pitcairn sat down to lunch and began formalizing plans to reform the church. Two of their guiding principles were the authority of the Writings and a commitment to New Church education.

Out of this meeting – celebrated for years afterwards as “Founders Day” – grew the Academy movement. And out of the guiding vision of the Academy movement came the split with Convention that created the General Church.

This was a courageous stand by these forefathers of the Academy. There was strong opposition in Convention to the very idea of New Church education. The Rev. Thomas Worchester, a charismatic leader, claimed it was not only contrary to the teachings of the Writings, but that “the church, being an ecclesiastic organization, has no more right to invade the strictly lay field of education than it would have to go into the business of making shoes.”

Thanks to the vision of those four men in Pittsburgh, and such emerging leaders as Richard de Charms, New Church education has become an essential use of the Church – and an essential use in the world. It is about so much more than “making shoes.”

“The Principles of the Academy” enunciated in 1899 by the Rt. Rev. W. F. Pendleton still guide the commitment of New Church education. Principle number 12 is unequivocal: “The true field of evangelization is with the children of New Church parents.” This was revolutionary – not that the children of each generation should be raised in the faith of their parents but that there should be an organized education system devoted to internal evangelization. New Church education is still the most important building block of the growth and stability of the Church.

Why was it then – and why is it now – considered so important that we raise our children with the distinctive principles of New Church education, and that we extend that education to anyone attracted to it?

Our church still is statistically insignificant in the world. Our schools are small and compete with many excellent schools, colleges and universities. So why New Church schools?

Because they do what no other schools in the world can do. They teach the spiritual as well as the natural mind – recognizing that the spiritual mind is for eternity. They focus on developing spiritual as well as moral conscience. They prepare our young people for lives of use – in this world and the next. They develop a worldview that helps students evaluate everything in a spiritual context. They teach about heaven and hell, Divine providence, that our lives and our choices have eternal consequences, and that everything good and true comes from the Lord.

This matters enormously in a world and a culture increasingly adrift, reveling in self-indulgence, moral relativism and crass materialism. The world badly needs what New Church education teaches. Little by little, in the Lord's providence, people raised with New Church education are making a difference, just by the way they live their lives.

In his seminal book on New Church education – *Education for Use* – Bishop Willard D. Pendleton notes that the state of the world and modern education “emphasizes the need for an educational system which recognizes that the ultimate welfare of society is dependent upon the cultivation of a moral and spiritual conscience in the individual.” This, he says, “is the work of New Church education” and is “why New Church schools are needed.”

We have just celebrated another year of New Church education in North America, with commencement exercises in Bryn Athyn College, the Academy Secondary Schools, and General Church schools. Now they are all preparing for another school year. It is a vital continuum.

In his commencement address for Bryn Athyn College (page 376), incoming President Brian Blair noted that the College's mission statement includes: “This education challenges students to develop spiritual purpose, to think broadly and critically from a variety of perspectives, and to build intellectual and practical skills. The ultimate purpose is to enhance students' civil, moral and spiritual lives, and to contribute to human spiritual welfare.”

He told the graduates: “You will be able to perform sound decision-making with the help of your education while embracing the sound moral compass that has been introduced to you through your Bryn Athyn College education.”

In their tandem commencement address for the Academy Secondary Schools (page 384), the Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner noted that much has changed in the Academy since they graduated 37 years ago, but not the guiding

principles that matter. They acknowledged the kind of toolbox for dealing with life issues that graduates can get from any school. But they showed how it is dwarfed by the spiritual tool box provided by the Academy – “a spiritual GPS to guide you through this life and the next.”

Looking at the teachings of the Church – and New Church education – as the antidote for so much that ails the world, it is easy to get discouraged that our mark and our influence still seem so small. But the Lord is leading the establishment of His Church on earth through His love and providence. Our task is to serve that vision with trust, faith and a commitment to do whatever we can. These schools may be small, and some even struggling for survival, but they are absolutely unique in the world and so are invaluable.

So why New Church education? Because it is not about making shoes. It is about making angels.

(BMH)

ORGANIZED RELIGION

Many people view “organized religion” negatively, but still value “spirituality.” Given the much-discussed defects of churches and their leaders, this is quite understandable. Organized religion does indeed have its problems. And it is relatively easy for an ideal like spirituality to keep its good reputation; it’s when people get together and form an organization to make the ideal more of a presence in the world that things tend to get messy.

But the fact remains that spiritual love and wisdom, the essentials of spiritual living, seek expression in uses; and uses need organization to give them form and effectiveness.

Spirituality needs organized religion for the same reason a person’s spirit needs a body. Spirituality without an organized body to give it form is likely to be as elusive and short-lived as a will-o’-the-wisp. Individual spirituality needs to be supported, stimulated and augmented by association with others. Just as physical training is aided by gym membership, so spiritual training is aided by church membership.

This is why, throughout human history, people have formed religious organizations to represent and nurture their spirituality. Thomas Merton, for example, one of the 20th century’s greatest writers on spirituality, practiced his spirituality (including Zen meditation) while living as a monk in a monastery run by the Catholic Church.

The Dalai Lama is another example. He is revered as a paragon of spirituality, but he did not leave his monastery in Tibet, the organizational center of Hinduism in Tibet, voluntarily. And his spiritual work ever since being driven out of Tibet has certainly been *organized*.

When people speak of being “spiritual but not religious,” what does that really mean? The truth is that increasing numbers of people in our society are neither religious nor spiritual. The “spirituality” people speak of is often more of a vague aspiration than a reality in their lives.

Spirituality needs a quiet mind, and in a world full of distractions, organized religion is needed to preserve holy spaces – sanctuaries set apart from the hubbub of the world, in which spirituality can grow and blossom. Church teachings create a quiet place in the mind, and church buildings create quiet spaces in the world which are conducive to spiritual thought and inspiration.

We don’t have to choose between spirituality and organized religion—we can have spirituality *within* organized religion. This is the New Jerusalem: a “city” (emblematic of organization) which is “holy” because the Tree of Life grows in the midst of it. (*Revelation 21:2; 22:2*) It is a good picture of the complexity of modern life, but without its confusion, because it is organized by and around love of the Lord, knowledge of His Word, and trust in His providence.

Our own, inner spirituality is primary, but in addition, church organizations are needed for there to be an outward, visible presence of the Divine in earthly societies. Individual spirituality finds fulfillment by joining with others in a community of religious practice and shared uses.

Being spiritual without organized religion is possible, of course, but it is like trying to be civic-minded while all alone on a desert island. It is like education without schools, medicine without hospitals, drama without theaters, sports without arenas, music without orchestras. A church is the natural development of spirituality as an orchestra is of music.

All perception, all knowledge, all belief—spiritual and natural—has inherent in it a need to be shared with others and expressed in forms of use. Those who love and see the presence of the Divine in their lives and in the world naturally want to find and join (or if necessary, form) a community of like-minded persons with whom to share their faith.

This is why there are so many publications, classes and retreat centers designed to facilitate spiritual community. These things, whether they’re labeled “spiritual” or “religious,” or are associated with an ashram or a church, require organization.

It is sad for “spirituality” and “religion” to be seen as opposed, and even sadder when they actually are opposed—which happens when spirituality turns away from the world and becomes just mystical, or when religion loses its spirituality and becomes just external religiosity.

Human beings are social creatures, and just as individuals need to be fed and stimulated and delighted spiritually, so does a society as a whole. A

soulless society would be just as inhuman as a soulless person. And the chance that a society without organized religion will retain its soul, or its spirituality, is slight.

Just as each human soul weaves around it a human body to serve it in the world, so the Spirit of truth that formed the New Church in heaven works to form a body for itself in the world also—an organization that can serve the Lord in His work of reorganizing the whole world around Himself.

(WEO)

Letters to the Editors

Poetic License and Doctrine

To The Editors:

Since I was asked about the wife-husband = earth-moon relationship described in “Love in the Celestial Spheres: Seeing Our Relationships in Earth, Moon and Sun,” (E. Kent Rogers, January/February 2015 *New Church Life* pp. 43-48) I did a little research which I’d like to share.

First let me say that I found the imaginative, sometimes poetic description of the monogamous love relationship between the earth and moon to be both delightful and thought provoking. Mr. Rogers reflected playfully on both common knowledge and scientific theory in ways that were at times romantic and touching.

Turning to the married relationship between the earth and the moon, my use of the NewSearch search engine did not discover any place in revelation in which either the sun, earth or moon represents or is compared to either spouse. Thus I found no marriage relationships illustrated by any pair of those bodies. With parental relationships, I had more success.

The one place I found in which the moon is compared to a parent was in Joseph’s dream where the sun, moon and stars bow down to him. There, Jacob interprets the sun to represent himself as father, and the moon to represent Leah as stepmother. (See *Genesis* 37:9,10, *Arcana Coelestia* 4696, 4701)

More common is the treatment of the earth as a mother to all vegetables and minerals. (See *Conjugial Love* 397) In that case, seeds are received into the ground, carried as in a womb, and brought forth. (See *Ibid.* 206, 397; *Canons* 22; *Coronis* 27:2; *True Christian Religion* 308, 585) Although it could be implied that seed-bearing plants are the “father” in this case (see, especially, *Ibid.* 585), the one passage that specifically mentions a father gives that role to the sun.

It also puts the representation of the sun as father and the moon as mother in the context of a universal Divine-heavenly sphere of love flowing down from the Lord. (See *Ibid.* 308) Further, the Heavenly Doctrine supports the earth’s

being a common mother by the fact that in the Word the earth represents the church, which is a common mother. (See *Ibid.* 585:4)

From what is provided in revelation, then, it appears that for purposes of better understanding what is represented by the relationships of the sun, moon and earth in the Word, we are guided to think of the sun as a common father, and the earth (and possibly including the moon) as a common mother. The absence of a married relationship being represented by any pair of these bodies in the Word suggests that we avoid drawing doctrine from such relationships, no matter how illustrative they may be in a poetic sense.

Lastly, in response to Mr. Rogers' footnote explaining "true love" as an alternative to "conjugal love" as a translation, it must be observed that it misses the point of translation at issue, and offers no improvement.

In Latin the word traditionally transliterated as "conjugal" is used to describe common love in marriage and even the mating relationship of animals. When "true love" is meant, the Latin equivalent of "true" is added to "conjugal." Nor is "true love," as claimed, understood by all to mean "exclusive, eternally devoted love between a man and a woman," as witnessed by this sentence taken from a current magazine: "My relationship to marijuana is true love,' says Hines." (Bruce Barcott & Michael Scherer, "The Great Pot Experiment," *Time*, vol. 185, no. 19 (May 25, 2015), p. 45)

Rev. Kenneth J. Alden
Lake Worth, Florida

Saving the Lost Generation

To The Editors:

Young people are looking for something to believe in. This is why we see so much unrest in our culture right now. When I look at protests and unrest in our young people, and the anger that I see in a lot of them, I see people who are hurting inside and are reaching for something to believe in. They look at the civil rights movement in the '60s and they see something powerful in which people joined together to make the world a better place. It gave their lives meaning, and young people today are reaching for that.

But today all people are being given to stand up for are movements that really won't lead to happiness and are ignoring the real spiritual problems that

are plaguing our young people.

One of the biggest reasons I see for why this is happening is that whenever someone wants to take on the real enemy, and stands up for a spiritual principle, he or she gets beaten up by baby-boomers who seem to think they have a monopoly on true compassion.

This happens inside and outside the Church. A judge who stands for real marriage gets marginalized; celebrities who express their faith in God and traditional morality get demonized; people who speak against disorder on social media lose their jobs for speaking the truth. And in the Church we continue to try to cater to all these false movements instead of rallying around the strong spiritual ideals we find in our religion.

A lot of the folks in my generation who I know would stand up and inspire the young people have been taught that it is through catering to those who are leaving that we will grow the Church, and so they weaken their message again and again. Right now it can seem you are a bigger commodity to this church as an atheist than as someone who believes in the message. And any time someone stands on real principle, he or she gets marginalized.

If we want this lost generation back, I think those in leadership really need to stop focusing on the ones leaving and start focusing on the ones who are struggling to stay, the ones who still believe in the vision. These folks are part of the answer and could be incredible tools for the Church if their spirit was harnessed.

Many are standing on the sidelines waiting for a strong spiritual vision to rise up and take the lead. Some are even waiting for this to join the ministry. I hope to see this soon, because the longer we wait, the less young energy we will have to rejuvenate the Church.

The Rev. Ron Schnarr
Caryndale, Ontario, Canada

The Pass-Fail Test the Lord Has Presented To Every Church Down Through the Ages

The Rev. Willard L. D. Heinrichs

Here is the legacy that I and others of my generation received from the previous generation and that we hope we can pass on to the next generation:

It is solely a universal affirmation with which man is imbued as to truths by the Lord, as **that the Word is the Word, that the Lord is the Lord, that Providence is in the most singular things**. When one is in the principle, although he is but obscurely aware of its existence, innumerable affirmatives are insinuated by the Lord. (*Spiritual Diary/Spiritual Experiences* 4533) [Emphasis mine; see the rest of the series.]

Note what comes first!

Without Divine revelation through the Word as an all-important means we cannot know the Lord. And ultimately – from an awareness of the character of His love, wisdom and operation, and of His Divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence – we cannot have confidence in the operation of His Divine Providence. (See passages such as *Arcana Coelestia* 10452: 2-1 and *Apocalypse Revealed* 161.)

Yet the love of self and worldly things, arising out of the sensual man in every church, has, in the progress of time, undermined confidence in and the authority of the Word. In every church the Word as the means of communication and conjunction with the Lord, sooner or later has been made of no effect by finite human tendencies and traditions.

Note how only a chapter-and-a-half into the text that was drawn by Moses from the Ancient Word, following hard on the heels of the story of the rise and best state of the Most Ancient Church, we have the Lord's warning and command relating to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It is at this point in the *Arcana Coelestia* exposition that the Lord, as it were, takes us aside and presents us with a little doctrinal treatise relating to what happens when people choose to investigate the mysteries of faith by things of sense and the memory. (*Arcana Coelestia* 126-30) He comes right out and says we are not to do this, “for in this case the celestial [that which is of love and charity, what is heavenly] of faith is destroyed.” (*Ibid.* 126) Why this doctrinal aside so soon in the exposition? The Lord, in giving us this seeming bad news right from the outset, knows so well the common tendency of man.

Following immediately after this Scriptural – and, for the New Church, doctrinal warning – we start into the second half of *Genesis* chapter two where the Lord tells about a significant decline in the Most Ancient Church. The members of this church were no longer “content to be led by the Lord, but desired to be led by self and the world.” (*Ibid.* 138)

We might wonder why the Lord did not have Moses bring over from the Ancient Word a lot more beautiful symbolic stories before bringing us to earth, so to speak, with this sad account of this church’s sad decline. There has got to be an important message here! And there is the *Arcana Coelestia* exposition of this decline of that first church.

Having introduced us to the decline of the Most Ancients in chapter two of *Genesis*, in chapter three we have the even sadder account of the fall of that church. Halfway through this explanation, the Lord again takes us aside and confronts us with that powerful series in *Arcana Coelestia* 229-233 where He tells us how every church down to the present day has perished because the people did not “believe the Lord or the Word, but in themselves and their own senses.” (*Ibid.* 231)

It is only evidence that in this first published work of the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord is seeking right from the beginning to bring a cardinal issue to our attention.

Through four more chapters in *Genesis* the account of the progressive devastation and final destruction of the Most Ancient Church continues. Again no good news, only bad news, until in chapter eight we see the establishment of a new church, a spiritual church, the Ancient Church.

This is a church, as we know, having a natural will that is totally corrupted, no longer possessing any reliable perceptive faculty. Instead, it is wholly dependent for its awareness of what is good and true on the text of a written-down, objective revelation, and on recurring manifestations out of heaven of the “Angel of Jehovah.”

In chapter nine, the Lord continues with an account of the establishment of the Ancient Church. But before it is concluded, already there is the representation of a big problem. “Noah” becomes drunk and uncovered in his tent. Again Divine revelation is under assault from puny, finite men. The

Lord says: “This church through the desire to investigate from itself [self-intelligence] the truths of faith, and by reasonings, first lapsed into errors and perversions.” (*Ibid.* 975) Here again we find the people of the church questioning and doubting the integrity and authority of the Word.

Happily there is a recovery in this church, and we might wish that we had available more of the symbolic stories from the Ancient Word of the good states of this Ancient Church. However, in chapter 10, here comes the account of Nimrod, “mighty in hunting,” and we are told that the beginning of his kingdom was Babel.

Represented here are “those who form new kinds of worship out of memory-knowledges by means of reasonings.” (*Ibid.* 1134) Again the teaching of the Word is being set aside and eclipsed by corrupted natural/sensual loves and the kinds of false thinking that proceeds from them.

“ ‘Hunting’ signifies in general persuading, specifically captivating the minds of men by favoring their sensual inclinations, pleasures and cupidities, by using doctrines which they explain at their own pleasure in accordance with their temper and that of the other, and with a view of their own exaltation and enrichment – thus by persuading.” (*Ibid.* 1178)

Does that sound familiar? I think of some of the religious television channels.

We come to *Genesis* 11, and now we have the account of the Tower of Babel. The opening verses treat of good and healthy states in the Ancient Church, but almost immediately the Lord chooses to turn our attention to the decline and vastation of this church. They went back from true charity and their worship became unclean and profane. Then “they said a man to his fellow, Come, let us make bricks, and let us burn them to a burning. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen they had for mortar.” (*Genesis* 11:3)

Instead of holding to their Divine revelation as the guide for thought and life, they began to fashion falsities for themselves from love of themselves, and instead of truths they had falsities, and instead of good they had the evil of cupidity.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1294) In the passage that follows, the Lord distinguishes between the falsity of ignorance and the falsity of cupidities. Of particular concern here is the falsity of cupidities:

... “the falsity of cupidities” exists when the origin of the falsity is the cupidity of love of self and the world; as when one seizes upon some point of doctrine and professes it in order to captivate the minds and lead them, and explains or perverts the doctrine in favor of self, and confirms it both by reasonings and from memory-knowledges, and by the literal sense of the Word. The worship derived from this is profane, however holy it may outwardly appear; for inwardly it is not the worship of the Lord, but the worship of self. Nor does such a man acknowledge anything as true except in so far as he can explain it so far as to favor himself. Such worship is that which is signified by Babel. (*Ibid.* 1295)

And so with the truths and goods of the Word with them falsified and adulterated, they ultimately “lost” their Word, the Ancient Word, and the church with them eventually came to consummation and a final judgment at the time of the Lord’s first advent.

In the meantime, as we know, the Lord set about raising up a church with the sons of Israel. No sooner have they been rescued from their captivity in Egypt than they repeatedly failed to trust in Moses as the spokesman for Jehovah, but to trust in Jehovah Himself.

Before Moses even was able to bring down the Ten Commandments from Jehovah on Mount Sinai, what was to be the “first fruits” of the Word with them, they had turned from Jehovah and His commands to the worship of the golden calf. This was a worship that perverts the externals of the Word to the service of “natural and sensual delight, which is the delight of pleasures, of cupidities, and of the loves of self and the world.” (*Ibid.* 10407)

Their stubborn resistance to the Word of God from the outset, and their chronic falsifications and adulterations of its truths and goods throughout their history, meant that they could only be in pious externals without any genuine spiritual internals – that they could serve as no more than a “representative of a church.”

If one reads through the major and minor prophets in the light of the summary exposition of their general internal contents, it is one horrific account of continual falsification of the truths of the Word and adulteration of its goods. It should come as no surprise that the Lord, while in the world, would say to this church: “You have made My Word of none effect by your traditions.” (*Matthew* 15:6, *Mark* 7:13)

We come then to the Christian Church. This church is barely 300 years into its history when there is the Council of Nice. Instead of seeking to and holding to the Scriptures – in seeking to meet perceived practical and political threats to the church – in the equivalent of smoke-filled rooms, they hatch out false doctrine from their own supposed intelligence. Again, it is the Word that thenceforward in their history is taken from the people and maltreated because the leadership did not really believe or trust in the Lord or in the Word, but in themselves and their own senses.

That the Council of Nice was a critical turning point in the spiritual history of the Christian Church is confirmed in numerous passages in the Heavenly Doctrine. Rather than being led by the testimony of the Word concerning the Lord, “the Council of Nice . . . introduced three Divine persons from eternity, and thereby the church into a theater.” (*True Christian Religion* 137:3)

Then the Lord gave Swedenborg to report (*Ibid.* 176) that: “It is said in heaven that when the Nicene Council had finished its work, that had come to pass which the Lord foretold to His disciples: ‘The sun shall be darkened,

The point is that truly every church down through history has been destroyed by the same evil. The people of the church, eventually, did not believe in the Lord or His Word but in themselves and their own senses.

and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”
(*Matthew 24:29*)

Again, in another passage, the spiritual fall that took place in the Christian Church with the Council of Nice is likened to the symbolic account in the third chapter of *Genesis* in which the man and his wife, contrary to the command of the Lord, did eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, leading to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. (*True Christian Religion* 638)

Finally we arrive at the New Church. There is an exciting and glorious beginning! However, from the outset the assault on the Word commences again.

There is, for example, Tulkism. In clever and persuasive reasoning, the Divine creation account in *Divine Love and Wisdom* is bypassed and replaced by what is sometimes called “Idealism.” The Lord’s glorification becomes a mere image representative of man’s regeneration, rather than the other way around. Indeed, ultimately in this perversion of doctrine, the Lord’s advent – His incarnation – is deemed not to have actually taken place. Any sort of “Christianity” is gone.

In America, the New Church is hardly in existence for 100 years, and then with one major group the Divine revelation effected by means of Emanuel Swedenborg progressively is regarded and treated as “Swedenborg’s perspective.” We are, as it were, invited to go out into a spiritual desert – a barren wilderness – if we are to find our Lord.

Then there is a new approach to the Word, and specifically to the Heavenly Doctrine. This time we are invited to seek the Lord in the “closets” – in inner or secret chambers. The Heavenly Doctrine is presented as a “letter” to be approached and regarded in much the same way as we might approach and regard the Old and New Testaments.

Rather than believing and trusting in what can be seen by all to be written in the text of the doctrine from the internal sense that has been given to us out of heaven, the Heavenly Doctrine, we are asked to rely for the real or inner truth on the enlightenment of finite men who supposedly are being, or are, regenerated.

The point, of course, is that truly every church down through history has been destroyed by the same evil. The people of the church, eventually, did not believe in the Lord or His Word but in themselves and their own senses.

At this day, however, it is much worse than in former times, because men can now confirm the incredulity of the senses by memory-knowledges unknown to the ancients, and this has given birth to an indescribable darkness. If men knew how great is the darkness from this cause they would be astounded.

(*Arcana Coelestia* 232)

The questions are:

- Are we who are associated with the General Church sufficiently aware of this “Pass-Fail” challenge surging up from our self-serving and world-serving sensual will, and also pressing in upon us from the culture that surrounds us?
- Are we willing to study and observe from Scripture and the Heavenly Doctrine how each church, in the past, in its turn, failed?
- Are we going to learn from this Divinely revealed history, or are we going to ignore it and be condemned to suffer from the same tragic mistakes that these churches made?
- Are we going to hold with the Lord as He reveals Himself in the Divine text of the Heavenly Doctrine, “come hell or high water,” symbolically speaking, or are we going to bend and go with the flow of the incredulity of our five senses, and with the “uncertainties” of today’s scientific and societal certainties?
- Do we really believe that for all ages and everywhere all of the important spiritual and moral questions can be answered from Divine revelation, or are we wondering, for example, if some of the things asserted in the Heavenly Doctrine are too heavily influenced, perhaps, by the science and culture of Swedenborg’s era and maybe are just not so anymore?

Other like questions might be posed, but in the final analysis are we open

The question is:
Are we who are associated with the General Church sufficiently aware of this “Pass-Fail” challenge surging up from our self-serving and world-serving sensual will, and also pressing in upon us from the culture that surrounds us?

Should we decide that this is the legacy we should embrace, the General Church will, in time to come, be richly blessed and will be able to serve as a nucleus and axis from which the Lord will be able to communicate the Heavenly Doctrine to those who truly hunger and thirst after the righteousness that it reveals.

to and responsive to the universal affirmative, which contains within itself and embraces all the most particular and singular goods and truths now revealed to us: “**That the Word IS the Word, that the Lord IS the Lord, and Providence IS IN the most singular things.**”

Should we decide that this is the legacy we should embrace, the General Church will, in time to come, be richly blessed and will be able to serve as a nucleus and axis from which the Lord will be able to communicate the Heavenly Doctrine to those who truly hunger and thirst after the righteousness that it reveals.

The New Church will spread from the few on this earth to the many and achieve its Divinely intended state as the crown of all the churches that have preceded it – a church in which there will be “true faith and true charity.”

This New Church, truly Christian, which at this day is being established by the Lord, will endure to eternity, as it is proved from the Word of both Testaments; also it was foreseen from the creation of the world; and it will be the crown of the four preceding churches, because it will have true faith and true charity. (*Coronis*, Summary LII; see also *Coronis* 24e, 59:5e; *Invitation* 392, 34e; and *True Christian Religion* 762, 764)



The Rev. Willard L. D. Heinrichs is retired and lives with his wife, Vanessa (van Rij), in Longmont, Colorado. During his active ministry he served in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada; as Superintendent of the South African Mission; and as a teacher of Religion in Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and its Theological School. This paper was originally presented to the Western United States Clergy meetings.

Contact: willard.heinrichs@gmail.com

Reflections on Suicide

The Rev. John L. Odhner

What Should We Think About Suicide?

Suicide brings up a lot of pain and grief for those affected by it. There is usually anger, guilt and depression surrounding it, and the process of working through these feelings can take time. Unfortunately, these feelings are often compounded by expressions of criticism, judgment and blame. We think: “If only this person had behaved differently,” or, “That person should have done something sooner.” We may pass judgment on the person who commits suicide, or we may place the blame on family or friends. Either way, it puts an additional, unnecessary burden on people who are already burdened.

Some people say those who commit suicide cannot go to heaven, or will suffer terribly after death because of their crime. Perhaps this idea is intended as a deterrent to suicide. I think it actually is not an effective way to prevent suicide, since it can make a suicidal person feel even more unloved and distant from God.

I also believe it causes extra pain for the family and friends, who then have to deal with the thought that someone they love is headed for hell or suffering horrible punishments. They are already in a very painful situation, dealing with real hurts, and don't need imaginary and hypothetical ones added. Furthermore, I believe it is wrong to pass such judgments on people, living or dead.

Suicide Does Not End Our Problems

Emanuel Swedenborg had the ability to be conscious in both the spiritual world and the natural world at the same time.

Some people say those who commit suicide cannot go to heaven, or will suffer terribly after death because of their crime. Perhaps this idea is intended as a deterrent to suicide. I think it actually is not an effective way to prevent suicide, since it can make a suicidal person feel even more unloved and distant from God.

Because of this he was able to tell us what happened to people after their death, and also to see how people who have gone on to the spiritual world influence people who are still on earth. In Swedenborg's unpublished diary we read what happened to a person who committed suicide:

A certain one in the life of the body had committed suicide by stabbing himself with a knife, having been driven to desperation through depression, to which he had been driven by diabolical spirits. He came to me complaining that he was being miserably treated by evil spirits, and said that he was among the furies who were continually provoking him. The place where he was, was in the lower earth, a little to the left. He also seemed to me to have a knife in his hand which he wanted to drive into his breast. He labored hard with that knife, wanting to throw it away from himself but without success. For whatever happens in the last hour of death remains for a long time before it disappears, as I was told. (*Spiritual Diary 1336, 1337*)

This shows us that whatever inner problems we have in this life we will generally have to face in the next life. If we look at this passage negatively, we might conclude that people who commit suicide will after death be tormented by evil spirits and will continue to have suicidal experiences. But before we make such generalizations, we should note that this passage is describing a particular person's experience, and with other people suicide may have different effects.

We should also note that this person's difficult time was temporary. He had to go through painful experiences in order to come into a better state. By struggling with the evil spirits who were attacking him, he could eventually overcome his depression and suicidal tendencies. What happens at the time of death is likely to have a big impact on a person's subsequent thoughts and actions (compare *Heaven and Hell 449*), but this does not mean that all who commit suicide will respond in the same way. In fact, the next two passages indicate that this does *not* happen with every suicide.

The truth is that the Lord may allow people to commit suicide when He sees that it is the only way they can come into heaven.

Are People Punished After Death for Suicide?

The fact is that no one is punished in the next life for deeds committed in this life. When people are drawn to suicide through evil that they have deliberately chosen, that evil will probably stay with them, and they will suffer as a result. But when the suicide is from pressures beyond their control (such as insanity), they will not suffer for it at all in the next life. The following passages do not

speak specifically of suicide, but the connection is clear:

No one in the other world suffers punishment on account of the evils that he had done in this world, but only on account of the evils that he then does; although it amounts to the same . . . , since everyone after death returns into his own life and thus into like evils and the person continues the same as he had been in the life of the body. . . . **But good spirits, although they had done evils in the world, are never punished, because their evils do not return.** Moreover, I have learned that the evils they did were of a different kind or nature, not being done purposely in opposition to the truth, or from any other badness of heart than that which they received by inheritance from their parents, and that they were carried into this by a blind delight when they were in externals separate from internals. (*Heaven and Hell* 509; emphasis added)

But as regards good spirits, if perchance they speak or do evil, they are not punished, but pardoned, and also excused. For their end is not to speak or do evil, and they know that such things are excited in them by hell, so that they have not come to pass by their fault; and the same is also observed from their resistance, and afterward from their grief. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6559)

From this we can see that a person who is basically good who commits suicide will not be punished at all for this in the other life, because his or her intention in committing suicide is not to hurt other people.

Suicide Permitted to Protect a Person's Soul

Another passage in Swedenborg's private diary speaks of evil spirits who attempt to kill the people they are with:

It was told me they were such as had formerly [in their lifetime] slaughtered whole armies, as is recorded in the Scripture histories, having induced insanities upon them, for they rushed into the chambers of their brain, and then inspired such terror that one slew another. That they were able to strike such terror I was assured, but it is seldom done at the present day. It is extremely rare that the bonds are loosened to any of them at this day, and only takes place in the case of some one who is of such a quality that it were better that he should be permitted to perish as to his body than as to his soul, and in regard to whom, unless he perished bodily in this manner, by means of insanity and suicide, he could not well be prevented from perishing to eternity. (*Spiritual Diary* 1783; compare *Arcana Coelestia* 5717)

This passage also may not apply to every suicide, but like the first passage, it shows us that suicide can result from insanity induced by evil spirits. Perhaps more important here is the teaching that suicide is permitted *in order to keep a person from perishing eternally*. This is quite different from the teaching of some other religions: that people who commit suicide go to hell. The truth is that the Lord may allow people to commit suicide when He sees that it is the only way they can come into heaven.

As a confirmation of the fact that people who commit suicide can go to heaven, note that the Writings imply that Judas, who committed suicide, is now in heaven. (*True Christian Religion* 791, *Matthew* 27:5)

Swedenborg's Suicidal Urges

Swedenborg himself had suicidal urges. He wrote: "I wanted to kill myself with a knife. This desire grew so strong that I hid the knife in my desk." (*Spiritual Diary* 4530) This feeling was the result of a woman who had hated Swedenborg during her life in this world. She carried that hatred into the spiritual world and there she tried to get revenge by inspiring him to kill himself. Swedenborg also mentions spirits who apparently tried to make him step in front of a moving vehicle or jump off a bridge. (*Spiritual Diary* 253, 1043) This reminds me of the demon-possessed person who would throw himself into the fire or try to drown himself. (*Matthew 17:15*)

From this we can see how useless and even hurtful it can be to blame suicide on the individual who kills himself, or on the person's family or friends. It's possible that we are at fault for harboring evil desires that draw such evil spirits to us, but it could also be something that is completely out of our control and not at all our fault.

Better to Die Than to Be Drawn Away From the Lord

I suspect that some people may commit suicide because they see their life headed in a bad direction and feel it would be better to die than to be drawn further along the path to hell. Consider this experience that Swedenborg relates:

When any wish to lead astray the spirits of that earth, and draw them away from faith in the Lord, or from humility toward Him, and from uprightness of life, they say that they wish to die. Then little knives are seen in their hands, by which they seem to wish to pierce their breasts. When they are asked why they do so, they say that they would rather die than be led away from the Lord. Sometimes the spirits of our earth laugh at these things, and infest them with questionings why they do so. But they answer that they know very well that they are not going to kill themselves, and that this is only an appearance proceeding from the will of their mind, showing that they would rather die than be drawn away from the worship of the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8950)

These spirits knew they would not kill themselves because they were already in the spiritual world, so they could not die. If they had been alive in the natural world, might they have possibly killed themselves? I don't know, but I suspect a similar kind of motivation enters into some suicides in this world.

Giving Up Your Life to Find Life

All of us, in order to come into heaven, must in some sense be willing to voluntarily give up our lives. We must be willing to give up the life of selfishness and materialism, which is the death of our selfish and worldly desires.

He who loves his life shall lose it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to eternal life. (*John 12:25*)

Whoever will save his life shall lose it: and whoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. (*Matthew 16:25, 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33*)

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own soul also, he cannot be My disciple. (*Luke 14:26*)

And they loved not their soul unto death. (Revelation 12:11) This means they did not love themselves more than the Lord. "Loving their soul" means to love themselves and the world, for the soul means the person's own life, which everyone has by birth, which is to love himself and the world above all things. Therefore "not loving his soul" means not to love himself and the world more than the Lord and the things which are the Lord's. "Unto death," means to be willing to die instead. Consequently it is to love the Lord above all things, and the neighbor as one's self (*Matthew 22:35-39*); and to be willing to die rather than recede from those two loves. (*Apocalypse Revealed 556*)

Happy are the dead who die in the Lord ... "the dead" mean those who afflicted their soul, crucified their flesh, and suffered temptations; . . . "and that they may rest from their labors," means that those who are tempted will have peace in the Lord, . . . "Temptations" here mean spiritual temptations, which take place with those who have faith in the Lord and live according to His commandments, when they drive away the evil spirits that are with them, who act as one with their lusts. . . . The reason why they are meant by "the dead" who have afflicted their soul, crucified their flesh, and suffered temptations, is, because thereby they have caused their former life to die, and therefore are become as it were dead before the world. (*Apocalypse Revealed 639*)

I believe that sometimes suicide may involve letting go of and giving up our excessive interest in ourselves and in worldly things.

The Lord Gave Up His Life Voluntarily

Jesus said: "No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (*John 10:18*) The Writings say that it was through this the Human was united to the Divine:

It was not in respect to His Divine but in respect to His Human that the Lord suffered, and by this an inmost – thus complete – union was brought about. This may also be illustrated by the fact that when a person suffers physically his soul does not suffer, but only grieves; and after the victory God takes away this grief and wipes it away as one wipes away tears from the eyes. (*True Christian Religion 126*)

Biblical People Who Desired Death

Besides Judas and Jesus, there are a number of other people in the Bible who expressed a desire to give up their lives. Saul saw that the Philistines were

Every act has its quality from the motivation. Suicide can be a very selfish act which shows complete disregard for other people. Yet giving up one's own life is a heroic act if the purpose is to protect others. It is the ultimate expression of unselfish love.

about to capture and kill him:

Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. (*1 Samuel 31:4*)

The Writings say of this that the "uncircumcised" Philistines represent filthy, selfish, materialistic loves. (*Arcana Coelestia 1197, 4462*) Is it possible that a motive in suicide might be to avoid being captured by such desires?

Just before Samson brought the whole building down, killing the crowd of Philistines who held him captive, he

said: "Let my life die with the Philistines." (*Judges 16:30*) When Jesus spoke of His own coming death, Peter said: "I will lay down my life for You." (*John 13:37*) Jonah also expressed a desire to die:

"Therefore now, O Lord, I beseech You, take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live . . ." "And it came to pass, when the sun rose, that God prepared a strong east wind. And the sun beat on the head of Jonah, so that he fainted, and wished in himself to die. And he said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (*Jonah 4:3, 8*, explained somewhat in *Apocalypse Explained 401:36*)

Elijah also wished to die when he was despairing about Israel's rejection of the Lord:

Elijah requested for himself that he might die; and said, "It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (*1 Kings 19:4*)

Samson, Peter, Jonah and Elijah may have had rather selfish motives for wanting to die. For Samson it may have been revenge; for Peter, glory; for Jonah, self-centeredness. But on a deeper level these stories are all about the fact that temptation is a kind of spiritual death, and the selfishness in us must die in order for us to progress spiritually.

The Heroism of Giving Up One's Life

Every act has its quality from the motivation. Suicide can be a very selfish act which shows complete disregard for other people. Yet giving up one's own life

is a heroic act if the purpose is to protect others. It is the ultimate expression of unselfish love.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (*John 15:13*)

If the country is threatened with ruin from an enemy or any other source, it is noble to die for it, and glorious for a soldier to shed his blood for it. (*True Christian Religion 710*)

In the other life all goods are immeasurably increased, and the life in the body is such that people can go no further than loving the neighbor as themselves, because they are in the things of the body, but when these are removed, the love becomes purer, and at last angelic, which consists in loving the neighbor more than themselves. The possibility of such love is evident from the married love that exists with some people, who would suffer death rather than let their married partner be injured. It is also evident from the love of parents for their children, in that a mother will endure starvation rather than see her infant hunger, and this is true even among birds and animals. It is likewise evident from true friendship, in that we will undergo perils for our friends. (*Arcana Coelestia 548*)

Suicide and Heroism

When a person commits suicide as an escape, or worse, as a way of causing suffering to others, it is a selfish and cowardly act – just the opposite of heroism. Yet at times the line between heroism and suicide becomes blurred. It is the *motive* more than the action that makes the difference, and looking at others we see only the *apparent* motive. We may not know the real reason a person takes his or her own life.

If a person dies in battle, we assume the motives were noble, although the person could have been suicidal. For example, in the opening scene of *Dances With Wolves*, the soldier is depressed because he is about to have his leg amputated. He recklessly charges into the crossfire hoping to be killed, but other soldiers think he is bravely leading a charge. They follow him, and so his attempted suicide accidentally leads a charge which turns the tide of the battle. He gets decorated as a hero although he had no heroic intentions. In this case, what looked like heroism was actually an attempt at suicide.

It can also happen that a person may have heroic motives when all we see outwardly is an attempt at suicide. When a person commits suicide, we do not know what kind of battles he is going through, and what good reasons he may have for giving up his life. Perhaps what seems to us a selfish act is actually a heroic effort to give up selfishness. We cannot judge.

Broader Teachings About Death and Evil

Some of Swedenborg's teachings can help us understand suicide better even

though they are not directed specifically at suicide. Rather than going into detail, I will very briefly mention a few specific examples:

Every evil is permitted for the sake of salvation. (*Divine Providence* 275)

Only that which is done from freedom according to the individual's reason remains with the person. (*Divine Providence* 78)

The Divine Providence is in the smallest details of a person's thoughts and affections, even if the person is evil. (*Divine Providence* 287)

There are evils we do that are not our fault, and ones that are our fault. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4171, 4172)

The Lord's providence governs the time of a person's death. (*Spiritual Diary* 5002, 5003)

Everyone is protected by angels during the process of death. (*Heaven and Hell* 449)

Swedenborg wrote so much about life and death that we will find many other teachings that may be helpful and comforting when we face death in any form. Here are just a few:

- The Lord is infinitely loving, merciful and forgiving.
- All our thoughts and feelings flow in from the spiritual world, and only the ones we come to love and approve of become a permanent part of our character.
- Death is not the end of life, but a continuation of life, and we live in the spiritual world a life similar to the life we live here, with the difference that in heaven things are much closer to perfection.
- The Lord wants everyone to go to heaven, and He always protects our freedom to choose heaven. Only people who genuinely prefer hell will go there.
- Bad things we do out of ignorance or when we are overpowered by strong emotions are relatively easy to overcome, as long as we recognize that they are wrong.
- People who are mentally ill are not free and rational, so they are not spiritually responsible for their behavior.
- Everyone who dies before becoming an adult is taken directly to heaven to be raised by angels.

Each of these ideas could fill a chapter in a book, so there is much more that you can explore, question and grow from if you wish.

Summary

Suicide can leave us feeling that life is extremely confusing, complex and painful. It will often seem to make absolutely no sense at all. The teachings

here will not take away all the pain, but they may bring a little clarity and comfort to people who have been faced with suicide. To summarize:

- A person may take his or her own life for good reasons, bad reasons, or a mixture of both. We cannot judge the inner motivations involved in suicide, only the outward appearances. Sometimes what looks like suicide may have a heroic motive hidden inside.
- The act of suicide is always wrong and painful. It is an evil which comes from hell, just like war and disease. But this does not mean that a person who commits suicide is evil. The person who commits suicide may be a victim of forces entirely beyond his or her control.
- Suicide is caused by the influence of evil spirits who love to harm people. These spirits can cause suicidal compulsions and temporary insanity. The individuals involved may or may not be at fault in opening themselves up to evil spirits.
- Suicide is permitted for the sake of eternal good that can come to those who are affected by it. Committing suicide does not prevent a person from entering heaven, and may in fact help keep a person out of hell. Good can also come from it to loved ones left behind.
- The quality of our life after death is based more on how we live our life in this world than on how we die. A moment of death-bed repentance will not make an angel of someone who has enjoyed a life of evil. And one act of evil at the end of a person's life, even committed deliberately, will not destroy all a person's good loves and intentions.

The Lord is infinitely loving and merciful, both to those who feel that love and to those who feel isolated from it. All the evil that the Lord permits, and all the blessings He provides, come from that infinite mercy which is constantly seeking to lead each one of us to heaven as far as we are willing to go, each on the unique path that is best for us.

Suicide can leave us feeling that life is extremely confusing, complex and painful. It will often seem to make absolutely no sense at all. The teachings here will not take away all the pain, but they may bring a little clarity and comfort to people who have been faced with suicide.



The Rev. John L. Odhner has served as a pastor in Florida and California, and was a key person in revising the General Church *Liturgy*. He is assistant to the pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, teaches in the Bryn Athyn Church School, works on the Office of Outreach Internet Project, and is one of the directors of the Stephen Ministry Program. He lives in Bryn Athyn with his wife, Lori (Soneson), and their family. This paper is also on the weblink: <http://newchurch teachings.org/nct/suicide>
Contact: John.Odhner@newchurch.org

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

CORRESPONDENCE

As this term covers a fundamental doctrine which is found only in the Writings, its meaning should be clearly understood. The basic idea can be expressed very simply. Correspondence is both a causal and a functional relation between the Divine and the spiritual or between a spiritual and a natural thing.

When a natural object, activity or phenomenon is the effect of which a spiritual thing is the cause, and when the two perform analogous uses to the body and the mind, respectively, they are said to be in correspondence; and the natural thing is said to correspond to the spiritual, or to be a correspondent.

Correspondence is therefore also the law or mode of influx. In another usage, the term means agreement that makes influx possible, as where it is said that man's external mind must be reduced to correspondence with the internal mind. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3225; *Apocalypse Explained* 1080; *Heaven and Hell* 89, 107.)

As the terms, representative and significative, are related, it may be useful to note them here and observe the distinctions involved. When a natural thing re-presents its cause on another plane and in another form, it is said to be a representative. Note, however, that a representative is, by definition, not the thing that is represented. In general, things have a correspondence; persons and their actions, in the Word, represent; and the actual words of the Scripture which are the symbols for things, persons and actions, signify. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3225, 2988.)

The Earth Helped the Woman

The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

The news has provided plenty in the past few months to make us feel that the values and order we cherish are dwindling helplessly and unprotected. Recent polls suggest that Christianity is in steep decline in our country while the proportion of those with no particular religion is growing.

The fight to protect people's right to exercise their conscience in the workplace and marketplace seems to be losing. What hope does the New Church have when it seems that holding to our understanding of the Lord's law will risk a media or legal storm that we could not survive?

Feelings of discouragement and hopelessness are familiar themes in the Word, for arousing such feelings is a key strategy of the hells in times of trial or temptation. So we have the story of Elijah pouring out his heart to the Lord: "I alone am left, and they seek to take my life." (1 Kings 19:14) Then there's the story of Elisha's servant, seeing that the two of them were surrounded by horses, chariots and a very great army, despairing: "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15)

We are also familiar with the terrifying picture of the seven-headed dragon standing before a woman in labor, ready to devour her child as soon as it is born. Later, after the child was caught up to God and the woman fled, that same dragon spewed a flood of water out of its mouth after her, to carry her away. (See Revelation 12:1-4, 15)

The Lord, however, does not leave us alone. He is more closely present in times of temptation than at other times. He encourages us to be ready and not to lose heart. "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the

What hope does the New Church have when it seems that holding to our understanding of the Lord's law will risk a media or legal storm that we could not survive?

world, therefore the world hates you.” (*John* 15:18-19)

Recently I read an article in *Imprimis* magazine: “The Battle of Indiana and the Promise of Battles to Come.” It described how a small, private establishment in Indiana, *Memories Pizza*, drew media attention and was mercilessly attacked for acknowledging to a reporter that it would not cater a marriage of homosexuals because it was against their conscience.

What struck me was the grass-roots support they received in defense. It seems that, through GoFundMe, supporters raised \$800,000 in a matter of days. According to the article: “The message was clear: Cultural conservatives are not, in fact, culturally isolated but rather have the support of millions of Americans who oppose leftist bullying.”

This show of support surprised many people as the flood of bad press was about to crush the unsuspecting owners of the pizza place. But the Word actually tells a similar tale that is more hopeful still, because it is revealed by the Lord as a matter of spiritual order.

Elijah was not alone. The Lord had reserved seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed to the idol Baal. (See *1 Kings* 19:18) Elisha assured his servant, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them,” and in answer to Elisha’s prayer, the Lord opened the servant’s spiritual eyes to see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire to protect them. (See *2 Kings* 6:16-17)

Also, as mentioned, the Lord was there with the woman in labor, catching up her newborn son. Later, with a surge of water after her, “The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.” (*Revelation* 12:16)

We may easily forget that the Lord is nearby, protecting whatever is good and true in our possession, and that those are many who share in His love. The Heavenly Doctrine says that the woman clothed with the sun who fled from the dragon into the wilderness means the New Church, while “the earth” means “those who are of the church that is not in truths.”

Even though they are not in truths, they still give assistance to the New Church, as-it-were swallowing up the flood by not receiving the crafty reasonings of her spiritual enemies. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 765)

The Lord has foretold help from the earth when the woman is persecuted. We can count on it. As a church, we do need to act prudently and not unnecessarily expose the church to legal and other risks that would potentially strip her of her liberties and assets through criminal charges, lawsuits and bad press. But even with the best circumspection and liability insurance, a “perfect storm” of accidents or malice could wipe away all the church’s assets.

In the end, the Lord is the One who protects the Church. If we hold true to

the doctrines and, more importantly, hold true to living by them from the heart, we will have the best “insurance” we can get. When we live by the teachings of the Word in integrity, the Lord’s goodness and truth will be among us – He will be among us.

We can be sure that the world will hate us because it hates the Lord, but we can also be sure the Lord protects what is good and true, including using “the earth” to do so. “The earth” will be able to recognize that goodness and truth, and see something innocent to protect.

If we are two-faced and merely talk about supporting the Lord’s law in some areas while we are lax about the ways in which we actually obey his laws in other areas, that innocence won’t appear clearly and “the earth” probably won’t rally to our assistance. Thus, living by the doctrine we have from the Word is essential, and it is implied where the Lord foretells that the earth will help the woman. (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 564)

When we feel alone and helpless, scared and persecuted, we should know that we can count on the Lord when our hearts are with the Lord, and our effort is to live by the teachings of His revelation. He will rally many to our cause when His cause is our cause.

In the end, the Lord is the One who protects the Church. If we hold true to the doctrines and, more importantly, hold true to living by them from the heart, we will have the best “insurance” we can get.



The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden is pastor of the Boynton Beach New Church in Florida and visiting pastor to Bonita Springs, Florida. He has served also in Mitchellville, Maryland, the Carmel Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, and the Colchester New Church in England. He and his wife, Kim (Truax), live in Lake Worth, Florida, with their family.
Contact: pastor@newchurchboyntonbeach.org

Laying Down Our Lives for Our Friends

A Sermon by the Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger

Note: This sermon was delivered on April 26, 2015, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of ANZAC Day in Australia. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, and ANZAC Day is one of Australia's most important commemorative occasions. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during World War I.

In 1915 Australian and New Zealand soldiers formed part of the expedition that set out to capture the Gallipoli peninsula in order to open the Dardanelles to the allied navies. The ultimate objective was to capture Constantinople (now Istanbul), the capital of the Ottoman Empire, and an ally of Germany.

The Australian and New Zealand forces landed on Gallipoli on April 25, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman Turkish defenders. What had been planned as a bold stroke to knock Turkey out of the war quickly became a stalemate, and the campaign dragged on for eight months.

At the end of 1915 the allied forces were evacuated from the peninsula, with both sides having suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships. More than 8,000 Australian soldiers had been killed. The Gallipoli campaign had a profound impact on Australians at home, and April 25 soon became the day on which Australians remembered the sacrifice of those who died in the war.

A great deal of credit for this sermon goes to the **Rev. Thomas H. Rose**, whose 2010 Memorial Day sermon in the United States provides much of the content.

We have a long-established tradition of honoring the lives of the men and women who have died in the service of their country. It is right and fitting that we do this. At this time of year we turn our thoughts to those who died in battle. Over the years we tend to take a day like this as an opportunity to mourn for those who have died, but U.S. General George Patton said we should think differently: "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived."

Patton was a man who saw a lot of war and knew first hand that war is a terrible thing. Great horrors are seen, often never spoken of again. When I

was a child my second-grade teacher was horrified when I wrote that one of the things I looked forward to was World War III. I drew a picture of myself manning a machine gun. I thought it was so cool that my grandfather had fought in World War II and that he was a soldier in the Pacific. I had asked him about his war experience, and he said, “I went over there, got shot and came back.”

Listening to that made it sound like a small experience. I had assumed that he had only been there for a month or so, but years later I found out that he was in combat for the better part of four years. It’s a miracle he lived. He never talked about it, and many of the wounds – physical and mental – never healed. Many other men never made it back. They went out and did their duty, forging strong bonds of friendship with their mates in combat, and leaving us to go on with life without them.

Each of these people was somebody’s son or daughter, somebody’s love, somebody’s friend, and the loss of life is felt deeply when the senselessness of the circumstances of war is brought to mind. Those feelings are expressed by David in the book of *Samuel* when Saul, king of Israel, and Jonathan – David’s closest friend – died at the hands of the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David spoke these words to the people in what is known as the *Psalms of Gilboa*:

David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the *Book of Jashar*): A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel. How the mighty have fallen!

Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.

Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, may no showers fall on your terraced fields. For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul – no longer rubbed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan – in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.

How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished! (*2 Samuel 1:17-27*)

We are not honoring
the fact that he died. We
are not honoring war.
We are honoring the
person's spirit of service,
duty and self-sacrifice
for the sake of others.

Jonathan was Saul's son, and David's best friend. The stories of their friendship and camaraderie are unique in the Bible, so when Jonathan dies it is more than just the mourning of a leader who has passed. We read the raw emotion of somebody who has lost a friend whom he literally went through wars with.

When he says there should be no joy in Gath or Ashkelon, that's because those are Philistine cities. He is commanding his enemies to not celebrate the death of his friend, and then he curses Mt. Gilboa, where they died, after which a period of mourning commenced.

In a similar way we have an annual period of mourning to thank the Lord that these good soldiers lived, lest we forget their contributions and lessons learned from war. It is good and right to honor those who have died in service for our country. Love of country is of paramount importance. Our country is our homeland, which nurtures and protects us, and in the next life love of country is transferred into a greater love – a love for the Lord's heavenly kingdom.

Real love for the Lord's kingdom is really love for all people. It is noble and brave to die for one's country because it is an expression of love to the neighbor and a grand gesture of protecting the innocent. What we are honoring, however, when we remember a person who has died in this way, is the person's willingness to do so for the sake of others. We are not honoring the fact that he died. We are not honoring war. We are honoring the person's spirit of service, duty and self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

However, all of us who truly serve the Lord and love the neighbor are sacrificing something of our ego-selves for the sake of others. In regeneration we are giving up our lives for our friends. When a person acts with kindness, especially when it is inconvenient to do so, there is a bit of laying off the life of self-service that comes so naturally to us all. When a person struggles to give up something within that is wrong, and self-gratifying because the Lord has said it is wrong, there is a laying down of one's life for the Lord Himself. Giving up something because the Lord says it is wrong is a laying down of one's life for the Lord.

In *Matthew*, the Lord says: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." (*Matthew* 10:39) This gives us something to think about: losing our life for the Lord's sake, and laying down our life

for our friends. Those are the two great commandments. The Lord is asking us to give up our life for the sake of the two great commandments. There is no greater sacrifice. Listen to this:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked Him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask Him any more questions.

(Mark 12: 28-34)

We are not far from the kingdom of God if we have a full understanding and practice of what it is to lay down the life of our old self, our old will, for the sake of the new self or the new will. It is the most difficult thing a person can possibly do. And no one can do it without the Lord.

The Bible is a story of a people who need their God to survive, and it is a story of each of us, so this can be applied to circumstances of life other than war between nations. We extend expressions of honor and gratitude to anyone who suffered loss or sacrifice, particularly when it is seen for our own benefit. But we can also picture someone dear to us who has given up something in order to be a better person.

We may have someone in our life who has struggled grievously through troubled times and come out the other side a more spiritual person, not only for personal benefit, but for the benefit of all around him or her. Like the war veteran who lost his earthly life, this person too has fought a great battle and

When a person struggles to give up something within that is wrong, and self-gratifying because the Lord has said it is wrong, there is a laying down of one's life for the Lord Himself.

We are not far from the kingdom of God if we have a full understanding and practice of what it is to lay down the life of our old self, our old will, for the sake of the new self or the new will. It is the most difficult thing a person can possibly do. And no one can do it without the Lord.

something within him or her has had to die that the good and true may emerge. And how often does this take place in life? We honor and respect those who have suffered temptations. We suffer through them ourselves. And we see that this is the only true and noble way to attain the life of heaven – spiritual sacrifice, as it were.

Very often we are instructed and reminded in the Lord's heavenly doctrine that the only way to spiritual life is through spiritual combat against the hells. Evil aspects of life are twisted and perverse and in the light of heaven they must actually die. This is the old self – the old will. If the birth of the new self, the new will is to take place, the old must be sacrificed. As the Lord says in *John 12:24*: "I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if dies it

produces much grain."

The evils and falsities of our natural mind, before we are made new by the Lord, are like a family to us. They are familiar. We love them. The Lord gives remarkable teaching about them in the gospel of *Luke 14:26, 27*:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.

Some might say this is a direct contradiction of the fourth commandment of loving our father and mother, but that is why we have to look at the deeper meaning. Hereditary tendencies toward evil and falsity are like a negative, or even a hellish, father and mother. Self-serving, harmful and false ideas – things that we actually make our own and do – these are our children in the negative sense in the Word.

That thing that dominates us in a negative way – that which we hold dear to our lives – is our spouse in the Word. These are things of the old of self that we must reject in favor of the Lord and the neighbor – the positive family. These are the things we must come to recognize as our enemy – the negative family that the Lord talks about leaving. There must be war, a great spiritual

combat against evil and falsity in our own minds.

The casualties of this kind of war will be those terrible influences of the hells which have occupied the territory of our unregenerate, natural mind, and which as a family or enemy of negative persuasion have shaped our former self. From the willingness to follow the Lord and establish His heavenly kingdom within us there comes a willingness to lay down His life even as a soldier lays down his bodily life in an earthly war.

There will always be war in this world. The Lord teaches us about our personal battles, His own combats and victories over the hells for the salvation of the human race, and laying down of His own life. The lesson is about spiritual combat and the Prince of Peace is called “A warrior – a commander of battle.”

When Joshua, the commander, was about to face war, the Lord appeared to him at Jericho in the form of a great angel. And it came to pass that Joshua lifted his eyes and behold, a man stood opposite him, with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said:

“Are you for us or for our adversaries?” So he said, “No, but as commander of the army of Jehovah I have now come.”

Joshua fell on his face to the Earth and worshipped and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” And the commander of Jehovah’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot for the place where you stand is holy.”

To give up our life or to lay it down for our friends is to turn away from the evils and falsities that are present in our natural mind, to do combat against them from the power of the Lord’s Word. This is taking the sandals off our feet in the holy presence of our Savior and our Deliverer.

To be quiet represents the feeling of this being a selfless act of courage. We are keenly aware that our gratitude focuses on our willingness to serve God, country and neighbor in such a way as to make this sacrifice.

We are grateful to all veterans for their willingness to do this, and remember with love and respect those who have fallen in war for the sake of our own peace. At the same time, we are grateful for their reminding us that there is no peace in our own territories of the mind without our making a similar kind of sacrifice – losing our former life for attainment of true heavenly peace for the sake of others.

Everyone who has endured the suffering of spiritual combat has the honor of self-sacrifice and the advancement of the Lord’s heavenly kingdom and its true peace.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (*Psalm* 46:1) Be still and know that I am God. (*Ibid.* 10) Greater love has no one than

this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (*John 15:13*)



The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger is pastor of the Hurstville Society in New South Wales, Australia, where he lives with his wife, Jenn (Jorgenson), and son, Zach. Prior to leaving for Australia he served with the Rev. Thomas H. Rose in Ivyland, Pennsylvania. Contact: todd@beiswenger.net or todd@hurstvillenewchurch.com

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

DELIGHTS

Those exterior goods which are in the natural, and which are felt as delightful when interior goods flow into that degree of the mind, are called "delights." This is done to distinguish them from the interior goods of love and affection which inflow and produce them. In the singular, however, this term refers to that which is the all of life both with those who are in heaven and with those who are in hell.

With the former, this is good and truth; with the latter, it is evil and falsity. What is meant by the all of life may be seen if we consider that in the performance of every necessary action there is a delight, without which the action might be left undone or would be done lifelessly. It is for this reason also that delights are described as means, that is, means by which, though not from which, uses are performed. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 7356; *True Christian Religion* 570; *Arcana Coelestia* 4063.)

States Preceding Repentance

A Sermon by the Rev. Scott I. Frazier

Lessons: Leviticus 16 (portions); John 13:3-10; Arcana Coelestia 10208

Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for Jehovah and the other lot for Azazel. (*Leviticus 16:8*)

There are three states that precede yearly repentance:

1. Humility through external truth
2. A strong desire to replace our love with the Lord's love
3. Behavior based on our understanding of the Lord's Word

By intentionally seeking these states, we can participate in the repentance, reformation and regeneration that the Lord is constantly endeavoring to bring to us.

The Lord describes this progression of states in the ritual given to Moses called the Day of Atonement. Our reading from *Leviticus* is a description of this process: we dress in the simple linens of servitude; we fill the Holy of Holies with incense; and then we paint the altar of burnt offering with the blood of sacrifice. After this the Lord will help us banish the goat that symbolizes the evils from which we are trying to flee.

This ritual serves as the most holy and powerful description of repentance in the Old Testament, presages the power of the Divine Human of the Lord, and offers us a model of how we cooperate with the Lord to join Him in His heavenly kingdom.

Because the Israelitish church was a representation of a church, a kind of Divine reenactment of a true church, all of their rituals are symbols and pictures of the spiritual processes that are vital for the church. (*Arcana Coelestia 3147*)

The Day of Atonement was the time of the year when the Israelites, in the person of the high priest, cleansed the Tabernacle of all the residual sin of the Children of Israel, much as we might periodically clean out our closet or have a weekend of spring cleaning once a year. Our spiritual life operates the same way – things build up, and a larger examination and cleaning is sometimes in order.

The Day of Atonement is also, in the internal sense, a picture of the subordination of our external selves to our internal selves, (*Ibid.* 1947), a state of self-compulsion described by the Heavenly Doctrines as the greatest state of freedom. (*Divine Providence* 145) We should remember that all of this must be done voluntarily, and that it represents only our part in the process; regeneration is something accomplished by the Lord, and He asks us to participate.

This ritual was the only time of the year the high priest could safely enter the Holy of Holies. He would take off his official high-priest garb of breastplate, crown and ephod and instead wear a simple linen smock with linen breeches. He would then choose two goats, one for the Lord, one for evil.

He would then mix embers from a burnt offering of a bull with a handful of incense in a firepan. Then, carefully, he would place the smoking firepan past the veil of the Tabernacle into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The smoke would fill the chamber and thus protect the high priest from clearly seeing the Ark and therefore being struck dead when he entered the chamber again.

He would then go back, collect the blood of the sacrifice, and ritually cleanse the entire Tabernacle with the blood, sprinkling it by hand on the Ark and the interior of the tabernacle. Then he would take the remaining blood and paint it on the corner posts or “horns” of the altar of burnt offering, thus finishing the purification.

Having cleansed the Tabernacle, the high priest could then transfer the sins of the entire people to the goat chosen for evil. This goat would then be driven into the desert, carrying with it the sins of the Israelites.

We should remember that all of this must be done voluntarily, and that it represents only our part in the process; regeneration is something accomplished by the Lord, and He asks us to participate.

We, too, must first put on simple linen, the clothes a servant would wear, symbolizing the simple, external truths of humility we should adopt. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9599) We realize that we have no power and need help. We practice the thought that we are not masters of our fate, that we are not the authors of our own happiness, and that left to ourselves we would be incapable of use, thought or life.

These are not thoughts in which to spend all our time. We normally try to shape our lives to be useful to those around us, but this is when we contemplate how powerless we are as

we prepare to approach the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, in our story from the New Testament, is likewise clothed in simple linen when He teaches the disciples the value of repentance. As He washes Peter's feet, he is clothed much as a high priest would be on the Day of Atonement.

We ourselves can imagine taking off our normal thoughts and identity like clothing. Take off your bank account and job description, take off your memory and intelligence and worries, take off your hobbies and your disposition and your habits, and put on the thought that you are simply to be obedient to the Lord's truth.

Once he is clothed in the simple linens, the high priest then mixes holy fire from sacrifice with incense to fill the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle with smoke. This is our second step. We must adopt the state of wanting to replace our loves – our identities – with the Lord's love.

We are not accustomed to imagining the Lord as dangerous. As a God of love He wishes for us our eternal happiness with Him in heaven. Normally there is nothing scary or risky about us being with the Divine – all that we are is from Him already. Every now and then, however, having achieved a state of humility, we can imagine, if obscurely, what it would be like to want what the Lord wants.

This can be a frightening mental process, demanding more than simply identifying how we might love the neighbor or find peace in following His commandments. The high priest reaching past the veil into the Holy of Holies is us reaching for the true notion that there is nothing lovable about ourselves that is not the Lord's – and we should, ideally, love this notion.

We only rarely approach the celestial state represented by the Holy of Holies. Angels of the celestial heaven not only recognize that they are nothing, but also can sense – can feel – the influx from the Lord into their affections. (*Divine Providence* 44) They desire to lose their proprium, their sense of self, yet retain it to obey the Lord. They know that all they are apart from the Lord is their evils, which are essentially imaginary and insane.

Who on earth can adopt, even for an hour, the desire to lose their own

We realize that we have no power and need help. We practice the thought that we are not masters of our fate, that we are not the authors of our own happiness, and that left to ourselves we would be incapable of use, thought or life.

goals, desires and delights? Who among us is comfortable faced with the undeniable truth that we are, considered by ourselves, nothing but evil, and that evil isn't real?

The Lord does not wish for us to see this reality without protection; the smoke of incense is our protection. By the time the high priest has left and come back with the blood, the Holy of Holies is full of sweet smoke. The Heavenly Doctrines explain that the infinite conjoins to the finite, the eternal with the temporal, through appearances. (*Ibid.* 220) For example, we perceive the Divine as something far off like the sun, and like the sun we value the appearance of distance between ourselves and the Divine even if we know that distance isn't real; the Divine is with us here and now.

Filling the Holy of Holies with the smoke of incense is to approach the celestial state through what the Heavenly Doctrines call "the acceptable perceptions of worship." These are our prayers, the adoration of the Lord we can summon, ideas and goals the Lord can work with despite being obscure. From our perception of reality, clouded as it is with the appearance or "smoke" of our own real-ness, we can worship and adore the Lord and ask to be transformed into heavenly loves without immediately experiencing what that transformation would feel like. This is like dimly perceiving the Ark of the Covenant in that curtained room through the sweet-smelling smoke of the

incense. We perceive it is there, but are protected from the full implications of what we are perceiving.

We ourselves can spend some time picturing our day, re-evaluating how we live our life, and see it, dimly, through the eyes of heaven: What would your schedule look like if it was planned by an angel? What should excite you or bring you peace? What if you cared only for the Lord's truth? A fearless attempt to see this may make us uncomfortable.

We should not linger long in the Holy of Holies. The high priest comes out and uses the holy blood next to cleanse the Tabernacle, ending with the altar upon which the sacrifice was originally made. He then paints the blood on its horns, the most external part of the altar which is itself the most external item within the whole Tabernacle site.

Who on earth can adopt, even for an hour, the desire to lose their own goals, desires and delights? Who among us is comfortable faced with the undeniable truth that we are . . . nothing but evil, and that evil isn't real? The Lord does not wish for us to see this reality without protection.

Blood corresponds to the Divine Human, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to change who we are. Blood symbolizes the basic but profound realization that all truth comes from good, that all wisdom is merely the shape of love, and that the Ten Commandments are the shape of the love the Lord Jesus Christ has for us.

This is the same blood offered by the Lord during Easter Week. He says to His disciples: “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*” (Luke 22:20) It was a new covenant because He was giving to humanity the new idea of a human God. The Israelites could not have a concept of the Divine as a person, but the Day of Atonement reveals how we approach Jesus Christ for help.

The priest physically walking from the Holy of Holies to the altar of burnt offering symbolizes the descent of our thought from the contemplation of heavenly life to an examination of our earthly behaviors. He moves, geographically, from the Ten Commandments as they are in themselves to the rest of his duties and life.

Putting blood on the horns of the altar is the third state preceding repentance. We reconsider our life in its most external facets: our physical behavior in our daily lives. This is also why the Lord on earth washed merely the feet, the lowest parts, of His disciples, not their heads and hands; it is about external matters. This step could look like us reading His Word, thinking over our day, comparing it to the testimony of the Ten Commandments, and seeing how our life would be cleaner, brighter, happier if it were more like the Ten Commandments.

Unlike the previous, potentially profound state, this third state is lower, more pedestrian. From the light of the Word, we should decide on a change to something detectable to the senses. This is the state of power where we see something both changeable and manageable; we can live life differently in some small way to be closer to the Lord. The blood is painted on the horns, the truth descends into action.

When we progress through these steps in order, we prepare ourselves to banish the goat of Azazel. This is the second of two goats; the first goat was sacrificed earlier as the goat for the Lord. This second goat represents the faith of repentance. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9937) The

The Lord in His Second Coming has made clear to us that neither good nor evil “belong” to us, and the closer we come to believing and living as if this is true, the happier and more at peace we will become.

high priest would place his hands on the goat for Azazel and pronounce all the sins of Israel upon it. Since the goat now, ritually speaking, contained within it the rest of the residual sins of Israel, it was driven off.

The name Azazel is confusing, but is from the Hebrew word “azal,” meaning “go away” or even vastation. It seems to depict a place separated from the Lord, a place of evil spirits. By sending away the goat for Azazel, the Children of Israel acknowledged that sin and evil were not intrinsically theirs.

We must do the same thing. The Lord in His Second Coming has made clear to us that neither good nor evil “belong” to us, and the closer we come to believing and living as if this is true, the happier and more at peace we will become. We are not the source of good or evil, none of our thoughts or affections come from ourselves, and nothing makes these things “us” unless we let them. We read:

To believe and think, as is the truth, that all goodness and truth originate from the Lord, and all evil and falsity from hell, seems to be an impossibility, when in fact it is something truly human and thus angelic. This is impossible for people who do not acknowledge the Lord’s Divinity, and that evils are sins, but it is possible for people who do. Insofar as they refrain from evils as sins, they simply reflect on the evils in themselves and cast them away from themselves back to hell from where they came. (*Divine Providence* 320)

This truth can clean our lives. Just as the high priest lays his hands on the goat for Azazel, we direct our own borrowed power to driving evil out of our life. Please notice that they do not kill the goat; they remove it from camp. It is not our job to kill evil, nor can we. Instead, we flee from evil, we shun it, we remove ourselves from it.

This might mean changing behaviors that are not evil in themselves but that we now perceive to feed evil: we watch what we say at the Tuesday meeting or spend less time away from home on Saturday. Prepared with humility, freshly aware of the celestial state the Lord wishes for us, and armed with a perception of what we should change in our bodily lives in the light of the Word, we change.

And that is how we undergo yearly examination and repentance, something the Heavenly Doctrines encourage us to do. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 224, *True Christian Religion* 567) The Day of Atonement does not describe the daily repentance with which we are familiar but a yearly repentance, a more thorough cleaning. It is a process, as we have said, wholly managed and performed by the Lord, but He asks that we participate.

The process described is universal; the Atonement ritual describes individual repentance, spiritual vastation, how a church undergoes investigation and correction, it even describes how we can clean our worship of our own proprium and worldly concerns. The process of approaching the Divine is eternal.

This ritual is also the closest the Children of Israel came to their God. In the Easter season as our thoughts turn to the last events of the Lord's life on earth, we should give some thought as to how we will approach Him. Perhaps this is a time for us to approach Him in a state of repentance: We start in simple linen, a state of humility before our God. We then approach carefully with incense, our mind perceiving what it can of celestial life. We then return to our life, painting our behavior with the blood of Divine Truth. Finally, we can be prepared to drive evil from our life and draw closer to our living God.

Jehovah, I cry unto you: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto you. Let my prayer be set forth before you as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. (Psalm 142:1-2)

Amen.



The Rev. Scott I. Frazier is Assistant Professor of Religion and Latin, plus Chair of the Religion Department, in Bryn Athyn College of the New Church. He and his wife, Nicole (Hill), live in Bryn Athyn with their family.

Contact: scott.frazier@brynathyn.edu

The Beauty of Imperfection

The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

"All works of art are more beautiful when they suggest something beyond themselves than when they end up being merely what they are."¹

This bit of wisdom was gleaned from a book about classical Japanese and Korean pottery, but the principle has much wider application, including theological.

The idea is that the best art conveys a subtle impression of imperfection or incompleteness, but that its apparent flaws actually imbue it with a special power and beauty. There is an element of mystery about it, perhaps even a sense of holiness. It has a spirit that transcends and transfigures its physical form.

In pottery, a vessel which is too perfect, too symmetrical, is seen as lacking a certain essential *something*, while one that is less polished or bears some imperfection may be more interesting. A slight crack or rough spot in the finish of a bowl is thus seen as adding to its aesthetic appeal. This testifies to the truth that whatever beauty an object conveys is bestowed upon it from a more essential, more perfect beauty that cannot be fully expressed in paint or clay or any natural medium, but only hinted at.

If a work of art is executed with such precision and refinement as to appear flawless, then its very "perfection" becomes its imperfection. It is what it is and nothing more. It may be fascinating on the surface, but lacks depth; it is beautiful in form, but deficient in soul.

But I don't want to overstate the point; roughness in itself does not equal beauty, and is certainly not the only measure of it. Nor can "the imperfection that perfects" (as we might call it) be contrived; it is accidental, unselfconscious and "innocent," like the imperfections of a child's drawing. New pieces of furniture are sometimes "distressed" in an attempt to give them more character, which is deliberate and artificial, but it does demonstrate the beauty of imperfection.

There is an element of serendipity in the production of art. It takes on

1 *The Unknown Craftsman, A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, by Soetsu Yanagi, page 150, Kodansha International

a life of its own, a life no power of the artist or craftsman could give it, no matter how skillfully and carefully he may work. This is part of the thrill and mystery involved in making art. There is a potential for the finished piece to have more in it than the artist put into it. It can be a revelation even to the one who created it.

Howard Pyle, a New Church author, artist and teacher of some famous painters, wrote: “Make people feel there is a great deal left unsaid and that you have much more to express . . . That will excite their imaginations and they will see in your work more than you ever knew it contained.” (*Diversity In Depth*, Wilmington, Delaware, Society of the Fine Arts, 1973, p. 17)

Wabi-Sabi

Things made by machine, uniform and perfect, are generally less prized, at least aesthetically, than ones made by human hands. Well-worn antiques are viewed as more beautiful than shiny new things. We are drawn to things that are old and worn or rustic.

The Japanese have a term (a combination of two terms, really) for this: *wabi-sabi*. *Wabi* means harmonious, quiet, humble, simple, in tune with nature. *Sabi* means old, faded, rusty, weathered, not polished or sophisticated. These qualities have an aesthetic appeal and are highly prized in Japanese arts and crafts. (They are not the *only* elements of Japanese style, by any means; highly finished lacquered boxes, for instance, are also greatly valued.)

There is a hint of melancholy or pang of nostalgia about *wabi-sabi* because, in this world of time, beauty does not last. And yet, our awareness of how fleeting it is actually makes it all the more affecting. An essential aspect of the beauty of cherry blossoms in the spring, which are so revered in Japan, is that they don't last long.

The very evidence of beauty's impermanence – the marks of wear and old age that remind us of the transitory nature of earthly things – at the same time gives rise to thoughts of an eternal realm in which it is permanent. A receding tide draws the eye to the same ocean from which the rising tide came and will come again. A fresh young tree blooming in the spring is beautiful; but an ancient, twisted, weather-beaten, half-dead bristlecone pine also has a poignant kind of beauty about it.

What would “new” mean to us if we had no idea of “old”? What meaning would there be to the Lord's words, “Behold, I make all things new,” if things did not grow old? (*Revelation 21:5*) The New Jerusalem implies the existence of an old Jerusalem. When the “earth” – the “clay” of our natural being – is formed into a vessel receptive of spiritual life, then it becomes a new work of Divine art that fairly sings. “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.” (*Psalms 96:1; cf. Revelation 14:3*)

For “*wabi*” (simple), we might substitute *innocent*; and for “*sabi*” (old and weathered), we might substitute *wise*. For those who regenerate, years of exposure to the afflictions of natural life culminate in the wisdom of old age, the heart of which is a childlike trust in the Lord and a willingness to follow Him. We must humble ourselves like little children in order to enter heaven, or have it enter into us. (*Matthew 18:3-4*)

The distinction between the external quality of an artwork and the spirit that forms its internal, and how they are related, is especially evident in the art of little children. Outwardly it is crudely made, but it is beautiful (especially in the eyes of their parents, of course) because of the innocence manifested in it. The more we become again as little children – innocent – the more beautiful our works will be in the eyes of our Heavenly Father.

As people age they become physically more imperfect, but at the same time – assuming they are regenerating spiritually, which is the proper order of things – they are becoming more perfect inwardly. The beauty of their souls increases even as the beauty of their bodies fades.

The same passage of time that takes a toll on physical beauty also provides the opportunity for spiritual reflection upon our experiences in this world of space and time, and encourages us to look beyond its temporary, external delights, so that we might grow in wisdom, and thus acquire an inner beauty which is permanent. It is within the rough ordinary stone of earthly life that spiritual life is formed, “like a gem in its matrix,” as the Writings say of conjugal love. (*Conjugal Love 97*)

The entropy or tendency to fall into disorder and decay which we see in the universe makes us especially aware of the perpetual renewal of life which is also manifest. All created things, from stars to people, eventually wear out and die, and yet, from the influx of life perpetually radiating from the Lord, all things are also made new. It is a basic truth of revelation, referred to often in the Writings, that “subsistence is perpetual creation.”

Nature as a whole is a finite, temporary, imperfect covering that both obscures and reveals the Divine and spiritual – and thus *human* – realities it represents. Nature is thus charged with supernatural meaning. In itself it is dead, and if separated from the life constantly flowing into it from the Divine it would cease to exist. But the natural world is encompassed by life, and the beauty of life flowing into it from its Divine Creator. Although entropy never ceases, it is overruled by the perpetual influx of life that restores order.

Everything in nature changes, wears out, and eventually dies. And yet, this very feature of nature causes us to look past this world to the eternal beauty of heaven, which is glimpsed, “as through a glass, darkly,” in the evanescent beauty of natural life forms. Human life, also, for all its imperfection, is encompassed by goodness and truth from above that inspires us to look beyond our natural

problems with hope.

Much as we are at home in nature and cling to it, we are never completely at home in it, and nature itself is designed to raise our thoughts to the spiritual world. Our spirits grow and are nourished in nature's nest, but it is a nest that we are destined to outgrow and leave. In one of the prayers in our Liturgy we ask "that we may stay our souls on Thee...and that with the passing away of these earthly things we may come unto Thee, and receive the life of Thy heavenly kingdom." The ever-changing world of nature presents us with a perpetual challenge to take that prayer seriously.

Beyond the Natural

In limited ways human art and science can "improve upon nature," but nature is basic; without it we would have nothing to work with, nothing to improve upon. It is the same with our own natural character; imperfect as it is, it is what we have to work with. But both nature generally, and our own human nature, have within them a potential for something higher, which can only be achieved by working from spiritual principles within the bounds of natural order.

Clay is clay, but it can still be molded into forms of grace and beauty. Our humanity will always be finite and imperfect, but it can be molded into forms which bear the stamp of the Divine Potter Himself and reflect something of His infinite and perfect Humanity.

Our natural lives are imperfect and incomplete so that we, with the Lord's help, can complete and perfect them. This requires that we acknowledge our imperfection and also the Divine Humanity of the Lord, in whose image we are to be remolded. The defects in our character will have served their purpose when we see them and turn to the Lord for help in overcoming them. Then they will fade from view as the Lord's Spirit transforms our lives so that more of the light and beauty of His Divine Humanity can shine through our words and deeds.

The relative incompleteness and helplessness of human beings at birth, compared to other creatures, is actually a sign of our greater perfectibility, that is, our

This world is not perfect and never will be. But the very fact that we can perceive its imperfection is an indication that there is a more perfect world, that in the deeper levels of our being we are aware of it, and that it is where our destiny lies.

potential for becoming more perfectly what we were created to become, *human*, by a willingness to conform our lives to the infinite perfection of the Lord's Divine Human as revealed in His Word. We have to choose and strive to come into the true order of human life, which we could not do if we were born into the order of our lives as the animals are.

This world is not perfect and never will be. But the very fact that we can perceive its imperfection is an indication that there is a more perfect world, that in the deeper levels of our being we are aware of it, and that it is where our destiny lies. The fact that we can perceive the imperfection of our own human nature, and that it can be improved through the process of regeneration, is testimony both to the reality and influence of the Lord's Divine Human and to the potential we have for receiving the image of it more fully in ourselves. We can prove this to ourselves by the only really convincing proof there is: our own regeneration.

The imperfection and incompleteness of nature, and of our lives in it, and of all our natural works, invites us to look beyond the natural to the spiritual. The human mind, with its rational faculty partaking of both worlds, has this capability; through its use the imperfection of nature becomes, in us, its perfection.

The Humble Beauty of the Lord

The supreme example of the beauty of imperfection is the natural humanity the Lord took upon Himself and glorified during His life on earth. It bore the marks of the accumulated disorders into which we mortals had sunk our human nature through the ages. Though destined to become the King of kings, the Lord was "meek and lowly at heart." He was born, not in a palace, but in a stable, and laid in a rough feeding box for horses and cattle. He appeared to be a man like others, having "no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, no beauty that we should desire Him." (*Isaiah 53:2*)

And yet, in the Lord there was a "suggestion of something beyond." "No one comes to the Father except through Me. . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (*John 14:6, 9*) The Divinity within Him occasionally shone through the natural humanity with which He covered it in the world – most clearly when three of His disciples saw Him transfigured on the mountain, and His face shone as the sun. (*Matthew 17:1-2*)

In the Lord, the Word is "made flesh." (*John 1:14*) Infinite Divine Goodness and Truth are revealed in a form accommodated to human understanding that we can relate to. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has brought Him forth to view." (*John 1:18*) The "Father" is Divine Love, the "Son" is Divine Wisdom, that is, the spiritual light by which the spiritual heat of Divine Love is revealed and communicated.

The Lord in His Divine Human is that Wisdom (Light) from Love (Heat).

As He said: “I am the Light of the world.” (*John 8:12*) It is only in the light of Divine truth that we can see natural things, and our own human nature, truly; that is, perceive their spiritual origin and significance.

The human nature the Lord took upon Himself by incarnation in this world could be made Divine because it was conceived by the Divine as its Father. It was glorified by being united with the Divine from which it came. (We can be conjoined with the Divine, but never so completely united with it as the Lord could be because of His Divine conception.)

We can see a somewhat similar pattern – but on a distinctly different level, of course – in the way art is created. It is conceived when the artist is inspired by the life, order, harmony and beauty of creation itself (which encompasses the spiritual and natural worlds). These spiritual qualities are from the presence of the Divine in creation. The artist strives to express and communicate something of this spiritual reality in an external, physical form. Thus a work of art is born; it is something essentially spiritual but clothed in a form composed of natural material.

The viewers who are affected by the work of art are then, by means of it, made aware in some degree, of the spiritual or heavenly spirit that inspired it. In fact, the viewer may see more in the art of the “something beyond” from which it came, or by which it was conceived and to which it refers, than the artist himself was aware of.

In so far as those who view the art are affected by it with something of the glory of God and a sense of Divine beauty, it is “glorified” in their minds. The natural object exists in space and time, but the essence or soul of it is from a higher realm, and it is that spiritual life in it that touches our life.

No work of art inspired by the artist’s love of self and his own ability could serve to communicate heavenly qualities in this way. “Innocence” is not a word normally associated with art, but the greatest art, or most spiritually useful, must have that quality in it as its very soul. Only then can art serve its highest use, to further our development as truly human beings by strengthening our connection with the only source of humanity, the Lord in His Divine Human.

The Rustic Beauty of the Word

The Word in its letter is primitive, crude, paradoxical – less perfect than the elegant writing of various philosophers, poets and other authors. Pseudo-scriptures (such as *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran) may appear at first more profound, more poetic, more “spiritual,” than the Bible does. But the perfection of these faux sacred texts is on the surface (like the “distressing” on a counterfeit antique), while the holiness of the genuine Word of God – its perfection – is mostly hidden beneath its rough exterior.

It is similar regarding the Word revealed for the New Church. Some spirits once told Swedenborg that his words were so “rude and gross” that there couldn’t possibly be any spiritual wisdom in them. Swedenborg perceived that it was so, that his words, like those of the prophets of old, were indeed “roughly framed.” But “it was given me to reply that my words are only vessels in which purer, better and interior things can be infused . . .” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2185)

Like all the best art, the books of revelation “suggest something beyond themselves,” and it is that something that gives them their inner beauty.

The 137th *Psalm* is a good example. It begins with a beautiful, poetic expression of human sadness and longing for home: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.” But then at the end, referring to their enemy, the Babylonians who conquered them and sent them away into exile, it says: “Happy shall he be who repays you as you have served us! Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock.” Outwardly, it is an ugly cry of hatred and desire for cruel vengeance. Inwardly, though, in the spiritual sense, there is a noble truth.

“Babylon” represents evil, especially the selfish desire to dominate others and make them submit to your will. The terrible image of killing the “little ones” of Babylon by dashing them against a rock represents the necessity of resisting and getting rid of that evil love of dominating others when we first see it in ourselves, before it has a chance to grow and captivate our whole mind. It is this vital spiritual principle, this “something beyond” the roughness of the words in which it is couched, that gives the *Psalm* its beauty and nobility.

“It is the Spirit that gives life. . . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (*John* 6:63)

The Meaning of Meaning

When we say something has a deeper or higher meaning, we are referring to a spiritual quality which is beyond the thing itself but which is subtly suggested by it or reflected in it. This mysterious quality shines through but cannot be fully revealed by natural language or objects – just as the soul appears in a person’s face, but is still veiled.

The soul is prior to and distinct from the body. It dwells in the physical body of a person for a time, but it does not belong to the body; the body belongs to it. The body cannot live without the soul, but the soul can and does continue to live after the physical body dies – still in a body, similar to the one it had in this world, only composed of spiritual substances, and freed from the limitations and imperfections imposed by nature.

The soul gives the body “meaning,” that is, a significance beyond the body’s material existence. The body exists to serve the soul, but the soul is eternal

and transcends the body's mortal limits. It is similar regarding the soul and body of a work of art.

Too much attention to the body and bodily things is stultifying to the spirit. Recall the first words the angel of the Lord spoke to Swedenborg when he was called to his revelatory mission: "eat not so much." Materialism generally overshadows and stunts the spiritual aspects of life. In a like manner, fixating on the physical form of a work of art dulls our appreciation of its inner content, the spirit that gives it its meaning, deeper beauty and enduring worth. (Andrew Wyeth hated the fact that his marvelous technical ability drew so much attention; it was useful, but he didn't want it to eclipse the spirit of his paintings.)

To take a human example, the homely visage of Abraham Lincoln (which he himself joked about) is completely transformed by the profoundly human soul within. If we think of Lincoln as a "work of art," we can see how apparent surface imperfection can sometimes actually enhance our awareness of the true, spiritual value of art. A somewhat rough exterior leads us to redirect our attention to its abstract and intangible inner qualities, which are actually more substantial than its physical form. On the other hand, a smooth, beguiling exterior may mask an inner void, disorder, inhumanity and spiritual ugliness.

But again, this is a subtle point; lack of outer beauty doesn't necessarily indicate the presence of inner beauty. As with people, there is art which is beautiful inwardly and outwardly, and art which is ugly inwardly as well as outwardly.

Art in Heaven

We often hear references to an "important" work of art. Whatever else that may mean, the importance of any art depends upon what it imports or brings into this world from heaven.

Speaking of the architecture of heaven, the Writings say, somewhat mysteriously, that "art there is in its art." (*Heaven and Hell* 185) This doesn't mean it has no outer form; even in heaven, even when we have entered into the realm of the "something more" that earthly art hints at, an outward form is still necessary to contain and express it. There can be no substance, natural or

We often hear references to an "important" work of art. Whatever else that may mean, the importance of any art depends upon what it imports or brings into this world from heaven.

spiritual, without a form. But in heaven the essential quality that gives life to a work of art is not merely *suggested* by the object that expresses it, but is more fully and perfectly united with it.

On earth, we sense the presence of a transcendent quality in the best art; in heaven, the art is *in* that quality. That is, in heaven the spiritual reality that even on earth makes a work of art *art*, entirely pervades and surrounds the art objects by which it is made manifest. This is why the art there is so supremely beautiful and uplifting. So here is something artists in this world should strive for; in heaven they'll succeed.

Works of art in heaven are inexpressibly beautiful for the same reason the bodies of people in heaven are; they are composed of spiritual substance, which perfectly represents the soul within. In this world, spiritual things are clothed with material substances which are subject to the limitations of nature and the ravages of time. Beauty which in this world is fleeting is permanent in heaven.

This gives rise to the encouraging thought that even when prized works of art become lost or destroyed in this world, the spiritual content that gave them their worth survives in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." And perhaps, in providence, that eternal "something beyond" will one day inspire new works of art on earth which rival or even surpass the beauty of great works from the past which were lost. Then, I suppose, New Church art will come into its own, and will be an aspect of the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God.

The Utopian Heresy

One of the reasons people doubt the existence of God is that the world seems so imperfect. Van Gogh believed in God and saw Him as the supreme Artist, but said the world was like "a study that didn't quite come off." The idea that the imperfection of the world, and especially human beings, represents a failure on God's part is perennial. But there is no failure. This world is not meant to be perfect, and its very imperfections cause us to look beyond the things of this world to the perfection of heaven.

This world may be a "study," populated by imperfect people, but it is a study that succeeds in the only way a study can, by leading to the finished work. That work is heaven, for the sake of which this world exists. Heaven itself is never really *finished*, however, but is always growing, which is part of what makes it perfect.

Utopian reformers dream of correcting the world's imperfections and creating a better world, but somehow the efforts of those who manage to seize the power to enforce their vision on society always end up making things worse. The flaw in all utopian schemes is the assumption that man can save

himself from himself.

The key to improving a society and its institutions is for the individuals and families that constitute it to become better spiritually, and this is the work of religion: repentance, reformation and regeneration. Spiritual improvement comes from within, from the Lord, not from human prudence and planning.

The earth will never be heaven, but the life of heaven can become ever more present on earth in so far as the Lord is present in the hearts and minds of people. Trying to transform the earth from without or below by building towers of Babel is a vain exercise, but receiving the New Jerusalem from above is a real possibility. Hubris leads to disappointment and ruin; humility to success. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." (*Matthew 5:5*) "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly." (*Luke 1:52*)

Repentance is the first stage of regeneration. Acknowledging our imperfection is the first step in becoming more perfect. It was when Naaman finally acknowledged his lack of power to cure himself of his leprosy and did what the prophet of the Lord told him that he was made whole. (*II Kings 5:1-19*) It was when the woman who had sinned washed the Lord's feet with her tears that she was forgiven. (*Luke 7:44-48*)

When we turn away from evil and toward the Lord, His beauty can then be reflected in us. It is only Beauty itself that can make the world a more beautiful place, and it can only be received by those who acknowledge that they have no beauty of their own.

The Breath of Life

Creation, the Writings explain, is not out of nothing, but is a process of Divine life and energy taking form in lower, simpler substances previously derived from the Divine. This is speaking of the creation of the spiritual and natural worlds and all their many recipient forms, but that Divine creative process is mirrored in human creativity when an artist's ideas and feelings are given form in some natural medium.

We talk about the *artist's* ideas and feelings, but where do they come from? All human thoughts and affections come from the spiritual world, and ultimately from the Lord, who is Life Itself. They are *inspired* -- "breathed into" -- the human recipients by the same Creator who in the beginning "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." (*Genesis 2:7*) Whatever life human art has in it is from the Divine source of all life.

It must be remembered, though, that although all life is from the Divine, it comes to us through the spiritual world, which encompasses both heaven and hell. We are subject to influences from both realms, and this is reflected

Technical ability
and cleverness
are not enough to
make great art;
the artist needs
humility and
an attitude of
reverence as well.

in human art. The life of heaven, which is love, is infinitely various and beautiful and good. That well of inspiration will never run dry. The loves that come from hell, the loves of self and the world, lead nowhere good, and artists need to be careful not to be seduced by those loves. They must avoid being beguiled by pride in their own genius or attempts by others to idolize them.

Not all art needs to be “pretty” or identifiably “religious,” but there is no merit in art that is ugly or shocking merely for the sake of offending or profaning what is holy, as some contemporary art is. Technical ability and cleverness are not enough to make great

art; the artist needs humility and an attitude of reverence as well.

As received, the goodness and truth that breathe forth from the Divine are limited by our own finite human imperfection. In our lives, though – as in a work of art – that very imperfection, when humbly acknowledged, can actually add to the beauty and interest of our regenerative work. Clouds have no light of their own, and often shroud the sun, yet the sun’s light is displayed with even greater glory than usual when it shines through them. It’s the same regarding art: it can either obscure the spiritual source of beauty or enhance our sight of it.

It was prophesied of the Lord’s advent that “the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” (*Malachi 4:2*) And of His second advent: “Behold, He cometh with clouds.” (*Revelation 1:7*) It is a beautiful picture of how we see the Lord. We can no more see the Divine as it is in itself than we can look at the sun, but we can see it in the Lord’s Divine Human.

In Him, the “clouds” of imperfection in our finite human nature, which He took upon Himself when He came into the world, are gloriously illuminated from within by the Divinity with which He united the Human in Himself. The rays of Divinity shining through the Lord’s glorified Humanity are like the rays of the sun beaming through the clouds, which sometimes appear like “wings” that reach from the sky to the earth. It is those wings that give flight to an artist’s imagination.

Beyond Self-Expression

Part of the use of art is self-expression by the artist, and there is a use in that; but there is more to art than self-expression, and the tendency in modern times to make that the chief end of art is deadly. Strictly speaking, we have no

“self” of our own: our selfhood, our individual personality, is derived from the infinite Humanity of the Lord – who, in an absolute sense, is the One and Only Human Being there is. (*cf. Divine Love and Wisdom 4, 11, 28, 45 etc.*)

The Divine can be reflected in art generated by a humble desire to serve God and man and add to the world’s beauty, but art whose only purpose is to display the artist’s own talent is like a mirror lying on the ground face-down, reflecting nothing of the sun of heaven.

Life, love, wisdom, beauty – these things originate with God. Remembering that we were created by God to be recipients of life from Him, we see that the key to human creativity and originality is to be receptive to the Divine. Acknowledgment and love of God is the “tree of life.” Among the fruits of that tree is human art.

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,” the Lord said, “for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (*Matthew 11:29*) The creative spirit of an artist who is lowly in heart will find rest in the art he produces. The Lord Himself was “imperfect,” and there is more chance of finding a reflection of His beauty in a simple, humble, unpretentious work of art or craftsmanship than in some egotistical, melodramatic effort at self-glorification.

J.S. Bach wrote the initials S.D.G. – for *Soli Deo gloria*, “Glory to God alone” – at the end of all his church compositions and some of his secular works. Handel sometimes did the same. When we look to the Divine Self from which our finite self is derived, then work done as a means of self-expression can at the same time be done for the glory of God.

Human Perfectibility

The most important “work of art” each of us is engaged in producing is the form we impose upon our own life. Throughout our lives we are fashioning a natural vessel into which spiritual life will flow, its quality to be determined by that of the receiving vessel. Really, though, we are just assistants working in the Master’s studio. If we let Him, He will add the finishing touches that will redeem our humble efforts and endow our imperfect work

The Divine can be reflected in art generated by a humble desire to serve God and man and add to the world’s beauty, but art whose only purpose is to display the artist’s own talent is like a mirror lying on the ground face-down, reflecting nothing of the sun of heaven.

The most important “work of art” each of us is engaged in producing is the form we impose upon our own life.

with a beautiful spirit. Then our most ordinary bowl of clay will have somehow become worthy of being classified as “in the style of” the Supreme Artist.

Human beings “suggest something beyond themselves” by having the image of God impressed upon their mortal clay. And just as the flaws in a work of art recede from view when its spiritual quality is perceived, so the flaws in a person’s character are “pushed to the circumference” by the process of regeneration.

No one is perfect, even the greatest of human beings have feet of clay, but we tend, rightly, to overlook the flaws of those in whom we perceive some fine quality. In our view their flaws become peripheral. We make them into angels in our minds. In this way we are imitating what the Lord does in actuality when He removes a person’s evils “to the side” permanently and makes them angels.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect,” the Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount. (*Matthew 5:48*) The Lord’s infinite perfection consists in the absolute union of love and wisdom in Him. Our finite perfection comes with the joining together of the love and wisdom we receive from the Lord in our lives. This is the work of regeneration. How much love and wisdom each person is capable of receiving varies, and they will never be as purely One with us as they are in the Lord, but the important thing is the degree to which they are “married” in us and bear fruit.

We cannot, of course, ever become perfect in the same degree as God; and any thought that we can would be the height of human *imperfection*. It was the serpent, remember, who said “you shall be like God.” (*Genesis 3.5*) Even the angels need to be reminded occasionally that they are not perfect.

There is no definite period of time within which man’s regeneration is completed, so that he can say, “I am now perfect;” for there are illimitable states of evil and falsity with every man . . . which must be so far shaken off as no longer to appear. In some states the man may be said to be more perfect, but in very many others not so.

Those who have been regenerated in the life of the body and have lived in faith in the Lord and in charity toward the neighbor, are continually being perfected in the other life. (*Arcana Coelestia 894*)

“They’re All Perfect”

The angels of heaven are beautiful beyond words; their beauty comes from within, from the spirit of love and wisdom that shines forth from their outer form. But each of their infinitely various faces is unique, so no one can be said

to be *perfectly* beautiful. Each one is a part of a larger picture only the Lord can see in its entirety, the *Maximus Homo* of heaven.

Heaven is the most perfect representation of the human form, and since the population of heaven is always growing, its perfection is always increasing. The more angels there are, the more uses take form from the Divine love and wisdom emanating from the Lord, and the more heaven's beauty grows. In a sense, then, heaven's perfection is its imperfection, or the fact that it can always be improved. Each new "imperfect" person who enters it adds to its overall perfection, which only the Lord can fully comprehend.

I remember a scene from a movie, *The Last Samurai*, in which one of the main characters, a Japanese warrior, is standing beside a large cherry tree in full flower in a beautiful Japanese garden. "A perfect flower is a rare thing to find," he says. "You could spend your whole life looking for one and it would not be a wasted life."

Later in the movie, near the end, on another spring day after a great and terrible battle, as that man lies mortally wounded on the battlefield he looks up and at the edge of the field sees a rain of pink blossoms drifting down from flowering trees, and with his dying breath says: "They're all perfect."



The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein is retired and works part time as Spiritual Editor of *New Church Life*. In his active ministry he served in Detroit and Oak Arbor, Michigan, and as a visiting minister, and also taught in Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and its Theological School. He and his wife, Kathy (Williams), live in Bryn Athyn.

Contact: walter.orthwein@verizon.net

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT:

The Keys to a Purpose-Driven Life

Brian Blair

Incoming President of Bryn Athyn College

I am honored to speak to you today. Bryn Athyn College is a special institution that has meant so much to me as an alumnus. I say this because one of the joys of growing older is to gain the perspective of what experiences and education provided the most meaningful guidance to one's life.

I can say without hesitancy that Bryn Athyn College provided me with an experience of starting my young adult life with a college education that challenged me to think for myself while introducing the meaning of spiritual life versus a natural life. When one's mind can look at life from both a natural as well as spiritual perspective, then the concept of a purpose-driven life becomes much easier to understand.

To understand how we are to make the most of what God has given us is so important in determining what career should I pursue? What uses do I love? What other people do I wish to share my enthusiasm for life with? There are many choices for you to make and some you will be pleased with while others you will regret. The key point to note is the word "decisions."

With a college education, you will be expected to become a sound decision-maker in your professional life, your community life and personal life. The concept of "critical thinking" is one of the most important attributes one can master. People with sound critical-thinking skills are able to determine the best outcomes from decisions they are required to make. You will be able to perform sound decision-making with the help of your education while embracing the sound moral compass that has been introduced to you through your Bryn Athyn College education.

The second paragraph of the Bryn Athyn College Mission Statement states: "This education challenges students to develop *spiritual purpose*, to think broadly and critically from a variety of perspectives, and to build intellectual and practical skills. The ultimate purpose is to enhance students' civil, moral and spiritual lives, and to contribute to human spiritual welfare."

This morning I would like to share with you how receiving the experience

of this mission will become more relevant to you as you progress through your life's journey. Life is filled with a series of major milestones such as the day you got accepted into college, the day you graduated from college, the day you started your first job after college.

These events will mark significant changes in your life. And you will continue to experience an onslaught of life changes as you experience your first raise, your first promotion and hopefully many more to follow. However, you like everyone else, will also experience failure or setbacks which will discourage you at times.

Experiences of success and failure are really part of life's lessons which will make you a better, stronger person. Given that today is your graduation day, I would like to talk about how the success of achieving a college education is cause for a day of celebration. I also want to speak to you about other types of days that will follow a day of celebration that are so important to future success and development.

Let me start by saying congratulations to all of the graduates! It is a day of celebration! You made it! This is a day you have longed for, your parents have longed for, and other friends and family have longed for. Today is filled with so many words to describe how you must feel, such as joy, happiness, elation and perhaps a little sadness as you say goodbye to classmates, friends, teachers, coaches. All these people have been part of making your time at BAC a wonderful experience. Celebration today is the opportunity for both you and your classmates to honor your achievement and pass another important milestone in your life.

Celebration is very important. You are all achievers; you have met your goal of obtaining a college education. An important lesson today is to learn that acknowledging achievement and celebrating is a good thing. You will find that setting time aside for life's celebrations is useful and a form of love between you and those who have helped you to obtain a college education.

Celebration also allows one to demonstrate enthusiasm for an accomplishment. Too often many people think celebration is unnecessary or a self-centered attention on one's achievement. Celebration that is conducted with grace, thankfulness and sincere love is worth sharing with others who can

You will be able to perform sound decision-making with the help of your education while embracing the sound moral compass that has been introduced to you through your Bryn Athyn College education.

share in your joy, and also perhaps share in similar goals for themselves.

It is also important to thank all those who helped you get here. You can never personally say thank-you enough, share a few hugs, send a few thank-you notes or make a few thank-you calls to those who can't be here with you today. Successful people celebrate with joy, humility, appreciation and recognition that through the Lord's Divine Providence, they were able to achieve a goal, and celebrating should be a form of thankfulness.

After the celebration is over, consider what has just happened. Ask yourself in an honest way what did I do well? What could I have done better? Did I help others along the way to this achievement? You will be proud of what you accomplished. But you should also look for some areas where you fell short, where you could have done a better job, and recognize a weakness that could be improved on.

Remember, you can always do better and reflection with self-examination is an important step to take. Think how you will apply what you learned both to your professional and personal life. You are ready to pursue your life's use. Write down a few notes on what has been most important to you, inspired you and made you useful. Stay humble, stay hungry and stay focused. You will be challenged but you must also remain confident.

Professional life is a competition. Our modern society constantly introduces new technology, new operating methods, new practices and increasing levels of expectations. You may become disheartened at times with the speed and level of change that will face you. But change for the better good should be embraced and preparing for change is an absolute requirement. So taking time to reflect is a necessary step for you to evaluate what you have achieved and what you must next prepare for in pursuit of your life's use.

The next logical step is to begin days of planning for what you want to accomplish next. This planning will involve using the problem-solving skills that you started to learn in college. Remember, nothing can get accomplished without a good plan.

Many people can become discouraged or have a pessimistic outlook on life if there are problems or obstacles to be dealt with. But an enlightened leader looks at problems as points of opportunity. This is the Lord doing His work of leading us to learn how to master adversity and serve our neighbor.

Solving problems is not easy and will seem overwhelming at times. You will make mistakes and I assure you that you will experience humbling failure. But remember, failure teaches you how to be successful. All successful people will admit they had to experience failure at times before realizing true success.

Now I would like to introduce to you another approach as future planners and problem solvers.

Many years ago a dear friend of mine, whom I knew only as a wonderful

mother and volunteer at a school my daughter attended, pulled me aside when she saw I was discouraged about recent setbacks I had with my job. She had been in education and had dealt with many situations of stifling bureaucracy, uninspired leadership, limited resources and passive teaching staff. She told me never to accept what may look like insurmountable obstacles, unattainable solutions or poor results. Instead, she challenged me to think in terms of entrepreneurial spirit. I asked, “What are you talking about? I work in an oppressive corporate environment where optimism is hard to come by.”

She kindly responded, “Nonsense, you can take control of your career, your programs and leadership if you take an entrepreneurial approach. Even though you work in what appears to be a negative situation, you can turn it around for yourself and those who you work with.”

My friend had been trained as a teacher but was not able to find a teaching job after graduation. She did not lament her failure to obtain employment in her chosen field of work but rather decided to apply entrepreneurial principles to her career plan. She listed a few examples of entrepreneurial thinking:

- You don't have to run your own business to think and act like an entrepreneur
- Entrepreneurs are driven to produce measureable results
- They hold themselves accountable
- They don't spend time protesting, it takes too much time, they just work around it
- They are able to see the big picture while giving attention to detail
- They love the people around them, they encourage their teams to constantly improve
- They collaborate on problems and seek diverse opinions
- They are convinced problems are opportunities with solutions to be discovered and they don't give up until they find a good solution

She was right. Everything she did was successful, she built great teams, had happy clients, and retained a never-ending positive

I would like to summarize by encouraging you to embrace problem-solving, lead by example and show unbridled enthusiasm in everything you do. You will find enthusiasm for good uses is contagious and will mark you as a positive thinker and leader.

Remember, one of the most important assets you have is your network of friends, faculty and supporters from Bryn Athyn College. Take advantage of it and support the College as a friend and ally.

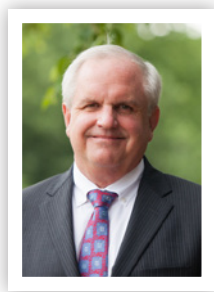
attitude. In short she figured out problems, turned them into opportunities and was never afraid of change or adversity.

I would like to summarize by encouraging you to embrace problem-solving, lead by example and show unbridled enthusiasm in everything you do. You will find enthusiasm for good uses is contagious and will mark you as a positive thinker and leader.

Also recognize that successful leaders in the 21st century will need to continue to educate themselves while relying on their network of friends, alumni and mentors for help. It is predicted that the rate of change in the 21st century will be larger than all of the previous centuries combined. That can be viewed as overwhelming. But remember, your education at Bryn Athyn College taught you how to think with critical insight and how to find solutions to problems.

Embrace continuing education, strive to be ahead of the game. And remember, one of the most important assets you have is your network of friends, faculty and supporters from Bryn Athyn College. Take advantage of it and support the College as a friend and ally.

So fellow entrepreneurs, I wish you the very best on this first day of your new chapter in life. Stay strong in what you believe, acknowledge that all truth and good comes from the Lord, and make every day count. I promise you will have a wonderful and satisfying life.



Brian Blair grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, graduated from the Academy Boys School in 1971, and attended Bryn Athyn College 1971-73. He received his bachelor's degree from Duquesne University and did graduate work at the University of Southern California. His career in business leadership included educational technology and risk management in the financial and banking industry. He has lived and worked in San Diego, San Francisco, Detroit, New York City and London, England.

He has been a member of the Academy Board of Trustees and other non-profit boards, focusing on budget oversight and fund raising. He and his wife, Nancy (Gebhardt) – also a graduate of Duquesne – have two children and live in Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Contact: brian.blair@brynathyn.edu

Farewell to the Graduating Class 2015

President Kristin King

You've heard parting words and wisdom today. Words about letting your light shine, while also being the humble salt of the earth and helping others shine.

You heard about sound decision-making, critical thinking, entrepreneurial skills and a moral compass. About the importance of celebration, but also reflection and constant improvement.

You heard about the importance of asking the spiritual *Why* and seeking answers. What makes worthwhile communities, and how do we reach out to others to build them?

You heard about the MARS program as an energy center for scholarship – a watering hole or life-giving pool that attracts people from all over the world. What does it mean (for each of us) to drink from living wells?

You heard about the experience of working long and hard for a goal or degree, and when it *finally* arrives, finding it not quite what we thought. Blessedly, a Divine architect has laid the foundations for outcomes *further-reaching* and far *better* than we could have imagined.

You heard from five speakers this morning. I have the privilege of making the final farewell.

Now “Farewell” may *seem* like a mere noun. But it actually implies action. I especially like that it is a two-syllable sentence that commands you to do something positive. Therefore I bid you, no... I urge you, to *fare* well.

Education is not something you did in the past and now hang on a wall. Rather, it is a precious part of you that grows and evolves with you, if you are willing to keep learning and growing.

Swedenborg describes evil spirits as people who have stopped learning and developing. Angels, on the other hand, learn continually.

The greater their humility, the deeper their wisdom.

To *fare* means to travel, or to journey, to experience something. We are all *wayfarers* on this earth, seeking truth, setting out to make a difference, building communities, giving back, finding watering holes, and relying as much as possible on a moral compass and Divine guidance to bring us safely home to heavenly community.

To journey well, to fare well, you need provisions. Your Bryn Athyn College education is a powerful provision. Whether you are going to be a pastor, professor, psychologist, choreographer, engineer, teacher, web designer, marketer, scientist, social worker, entrepreneur, homemaker, publisher, or any number of professions and jobs – some that haven't been invented yet – you will return to the well of your education over and over. It is a living pool to sustain you.

True, not all your memories of college life are good. And you will forget many things, especially the facts you memorized at 3 a.m. for a 9 a.m. exam. But the training of your mind remains, preparing you for ongoing growth. And the strengthening of your heart remains – the moments when you rose to higher ground, or at least saw that there *was* higher ground. Education is not something you did in the past and now hang on a wall. Rather, it is a precious part of you that grows and evolves with you, if you are willing to keep learning and growing.

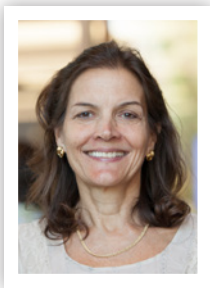
Swedenborg describes evil spirits as people who have stopped learning and developing. Angels, on the other hand, learn continually. The greater their humility, the deeper their wisdom. And the wiser they become the better able they are to bless others through the myriad workplaces of heaven.

You graduates (and all of us) are angels-in-the-making. How do we fare well? How do we move through this magnificently beautiful and strikingly flawed world? One approach is to be grateful, generous, and steadfast:

- **Grateful** for all the things we have learned and the life God pours into each of us every day
- **Generous** with giving back our talents and resources to whatever workplaces, causes, or initiatives are bringing heaven and earth closer together
- **Steadfast** in living and supporting moral, civil and spiritual values

- I'm not speaking in abstractions. I'm talking about doing your daily work honestly and faithfully, about volunteering on a Saturday when you would much rather sleep in, and about acting with integrity when no one is even looking. You will find countless opportunities to be grateful, generous and steadfast.

On behalf of Bryn Athyn College (the faculty, administration, staff, Board and Corporation) I wish you well and thank you for spending precious years with us. We are proud of you. We will miss you more than you know. And we are eager to see the influence and life force of the College spreading out into the world through the reach of your own lives.



Dr. Kristin King, with this “Farewell,” also said goodbye to the presidency of the College, in which role she has served for the past five years. In the fall she will return to her beloved classroom as an associate professor of English. She lives in Bryn Athyn with her husband, the Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Rose.
Contact: kristin.king@brynathyn.edu

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS

COMMENCEMENT:

A Totally Unique Tool Box

The Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner

Calvin:

We are excited to be here, not only because this is the Academy's 139th class to graduate . . . but because we've paid our last tuition payment!

You know, the first class to graduate in 1876 had only eight graduates. Look at us now! Can I have all the graduates stand up? Look at these beautiful people. Let's give them a round of applause. They've earned it!

Maggie:

It's true. Things have changed since Calvin and I were high school sweethearts, graduating from the Academy in 1978. (They embrace.) I've always wanted to do that. (Calvin: What?) Maggie: To be on campus and kiss you!

We used to have the JD where we would sit in a booth, eat soft pretzels that cost a dime, and chat – face to face. Now you have Facebook. We had KOB's. Remember the slot in the door that separated the Boys School from the Girls School?

Now you have Instant Messaging and Snapchat. Even the "mystery meat" in Bean Hall has been replaced with a gourmet buffet. But what haven't changed are the principles which started this school: that we worship and love the Lord together, and to love the Lord is to love the neighbor. It's a place where shunning evils never goes out of style.

What haven't changed are the principles which started this school: that we worship and love the Lord together, and to love the Lord is to love the neighbor.

Thirty-seven years ago I was sitting in the same chairs you are – without air conditioning. It’s those principles that the Academy taught me, that gave me the tools that have carried me in my life.

Here is a tool box, full of the tools any 18-year-old graduating senior would get:

1. Connect with others
2. Stay positive
3. Get physically active

Just to name a few. They are good advice. But the Academy gives us more.

One of my favorite tools that I got from the Academy and that I live from now is found in *Arcana Coelestia*: “Peace has within it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.”

What does that mean? If I can remember that the Lord is in charge and taking care of everything – and I mean everything – I can feel peace. Who doesn’t want peace?

Kelsie, our daughter, was driving into Kutztown a couple of weeks ago. It was the weekend that Kutztown University was closing down and things were chaotic as all the students were packing up their cars and leaving. One student wasn’t watching when he pulled out in front of Kelsie, causing an accident. Kelsie slammed on her brakes but couldn’t avoid a crumpled fender. She was furious.

All she could think of were dollar signs – dollars she didn’t have, and she needed that car to get to Wyoming, where she was headed to take a \$1,100 course.

The bill for the course came. She still didn’t have the money. She swiped her credit card and thought, I’ll get this paid somehow, eventually. The day before she left for Wyoming the settlement for the accident came in the mail. It was a check for \$1,100.

“Peace has within it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things and provides all things.”

The Lord took that accident and made it lead to a good end.

When I’m not feeling peaceful I know I am not trusting. I’m not loving the neighbor. I’m out of sorts.

So it boils down to: when I am not feeling peaceful, I reach out to the Lord and I reach out to my neighbor. It works. That’s my tool. It’s from the Lord, written in the Writings, taught in this school. Living my life like the Lord tells me to . . . works!

Calvin:

So, Maggie described some of the tools your average high school student gets.

Through all those worships and chapels, somehow you got a little connection with your Creator. Our wish for you is that you make that grow. Bring Him into your life and let Him transform you.

But when you go to the Academy, let me show you the spiritual toolbox you actually get. (Two young men bring forward a huge, oversized tool box and place it on the stage.) Look at the size of that thing!

So what makes today's Academy toolbox different?

Once you've been through the Academy, believe it or not, you are different from when you arrived.

You've learned about heaven and hell. You know this life is preparation for the next. You have tools you may not even be aware of.

When I was a young theologian, I was working with an elderly woman who was preparing to die. She was just hours away from death actually, but we didn't know it. As I was spending time with her, I asked: "Well, are you going to heaven or hell?"

She said, "We can't talk about that!" I waited. She said, "I don't know." She didn't

know the tools she had learned and used her whole life. So I got out my checklist. Let's see:

1. Have you loved the Lord? (Yes – check.)
2. Do you find the good in everyone you meet? (Yes – check.)
3. Have you lived a useful life and shunned adultery, theft and lying? (Yes – check.)

Well, it's difficult to say, I said, but I think you might have a slim shot at going to heaven.

Love the Lord and your neighbor, shun adultery, follow the Ten Commandments. Your Academy tools are like a GPS. They keep giving you direction – whether you are going off to college, going to work for a while, or even if you're going to be bums in Europe.

And you're going to be surprised. Through all those worships and chapels, somehow you got a little connection with your Creator.

Our wish for you is that you make that grow. Bring Him into your life and let Him transform you. And you don't have to do it alone.

Raise your hand if you are going to help nurture and love these graduates. Check that out, graduates! Take that in. Just like the Rev. Barry Halterman said yesterday: The Lord says, "I have chosen you."

Congratulations!



Calvin and Maggie Odhner graduated together from the Academy Secondary Schools in 1978. Calvin received an associate degree from Bryn Athyn College, a bachelor's degree from The Pennsylvania State University, then a master's in Clinical and Counseling Psychology from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. He founded Balance Point

Family Therapy while serving as an adjunct professor at Bryn Athyn College. He received his master's in Divinity from Bryn Athyn College Theological School and was ordained in 2012. He served in Toronto before being called as pastor of the Morning Star New Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He and Maggie have five children and have been married for 33 years.

Margaret (Maggie) van Zyverden Odhner received a bachelor's degree in nursing from Carlow University. She is a 30-year veteran of intensive care nursing. She is supervising nurse manager of Intervention Radiology at Piedmont Mountainside Hospital in Jasper, Georgia. She admits to being addicted to people, starting with her family, and finds the Lord's miracles and blessings in all her life. Their youngest son, Asher, was a member of the graduating class. Contacts: codhner@gmail.com and maggieodhner@gmail.com

☞ *Introducing Our Ministers* ☞



The Rev. Alan M. Cowley

*Becoming a Minister . . .
Because I Had No Other Choice*

As it seems with many of our clergy, the call to the ministry was lingering somewhere in the back of Alan Cowley's mind, ready to be heard when the time was right. When the call came, he was ready.

Alan was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the fifth of six children born to David and Yvonne (Bonnie) Alden Cowley. He grew up in Riverdale, Maryland, and attended the Washington New Church School grades 1-10. He graduated from the Academy Boys School in 2000 and enrolled in Bryn Athyn College with a double major in History and Secondary Education. He completed his degree in History but says that "after nearly five years I was too exhausted to finish my degree in Education." He graduated in 2005.

After a few years working as a landscaper and substitute teacher he moved to Athens, Georgia. Struggling to find work there he decided to become a truck driver for the next two years. "I really enjoyed driving," he says, "or at least the freedom of getting paid to travel all over the United States. However, being a very social person, I felt a need to work closer to home to develop

deeper friendships.”

He found a job as the operations manager for an up-and-coming landscaping company. “Again, I loved my work, I felt useful, and I really learned a lot from my boss whose main goal in business was to employ as many people as he could at a livable wage. During my three years there we grew from 30 employees to about 65.”

More importantly, he says, it was during these years that he met Susan, his future wife. They had moved to Georgia from out of state for different reasons and were neighbors in the same condo complex. “As our relationship developed,” he says, “I felt more and more called to the ministry, and now felt I had the support I needed for the process.”

He had always felt drawn to the ministry, which was strengthened by friends at the Academy. But it was the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith, then Dean of the Theological School, who talked to the Junior boys and “said something very powerful to us.”

That was: “Don’t become a minister unless you have no other choice but to become a minister.” This sounded like the worst pitch ever for the Theological School. But, he had added, “Think of it like marriage. Don’t get married unless you have no other choice but to be married to that one person, meaning that your whole heart is engaged in it. The choice to be a minister needs to have that kind of dedication. It is more than just a career; it is your life.”

So despite always feeling a tug toward the ministry, Alan says, “I used the excuse for a while that I don’t have to do it! Eventually I got to the point where I no longer had a choice, I felt like I had to do it, and the excuse was no longer true.”

“I vividly remember the moment when this shifted in me. I was at the dog park after work, part of my daily routine. Normally there were several other people with their dogs, but today it was just me, my dogs, and my thoughts. And while I was there contemplating my life, I suddenly felt warm, comfortable and peaceful – and in that peace I felt the time had come: I have to become a minister. So here I am now about six years later doing what I have to do. Luckily I love to do it as well.”

He credits his wife, Susan, as one of the biggest influences in making the choice. “I think she saw that passion in me very early in our relationship and gently moved me to pursue it. On the way home from one of our first dates, I struck up a conversation with a ‘street preacher’ who was warning people about the end of the world, using prophecies from the



Alan with his wife Susan

book of *Revelation*. I argued with him, trying to show how there is a spiritual meaning to the text he was using. Well, instead of being bothered that I was interrupting our date this way, on the drive back Susan said to me, ‘You know, if you ever wanted to be a minister I’d be supportive.’ And with that the idea was replanted.”

Alan says his mother also was always been a big influence with her general love for the Church, and “has done a great job of instilling a similar love in her children.”

He graduated from Bryn Athyn College Theological School in 2013, and moved to London a couple of months later with Susan – by then his wife – to take over as Pastor for the Michael Church Society.

He also provides services and support to groups in Sussex and Surrey in the United Kingdom, and in the Netherlands. And he is the co-headmaster of the British Academy Summer School with the Rev. Howard Thompson.

Highlights so far “have been the times when I am invited to be a part of a family’s life, especially for special services like memorial services and baptisms. It is always fulfilling to be there for a group of people when they need it the most, or when they are celebrating a joyous occasion. Being involved in people’s spiritual journeys is an honor, a blessing, and at times very challenging, but always fulfilling.”

Among his personal interests, he loves playing music – guitar, bass, and especially singing. He also enjoys golfing – “my Monday ritual to start my weekend” – and carpentry, especially building furniture.

His favorite passage from the Writings:

“Because the Lord is salvation and eternal life, it follows that He is also everything that enables us to gain salvation and eternal life. Therefore he is every part of reforming, regenerating, renewing, bringing to life, sanctifying, justifying, purifying from evils, and finally saving. The Lord is carrying out these processes in all of us, meaning that He is trying to have these effects on us; and when we adapt and modify ourselves to receive them, He actually carries them out in us. (Even the acts of adapting and modifying ourselves are actually from the Lord.) If we do not accept the Lord’s processes with a willing spirit, He cannot carry them out in us, but His desire to do so remains constant.” (*True Christianity* 150. Rose translation.)

To contact the Rev. Alan Cowley: amcowley@icloud.com

Church and the Human Form

A Sermon by the Rev. Alan M. Cowley

*Lessons: Luke 11:33-36; Psalm 139:13-16;
Heaven and Hell 59, 63, 64; Arcana Coelestia 4528*

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.
(*Luke 11:34*)

There is a reason we are all here this morning. If everything in our lives made sense; if the entire world was perfectly clear; if we already understood everything there is to know; we would not need to be here, would we? We all come here with circumstances, prejudices, pains, fears, hopes, opinions and curiosities. None of us has life all figured out; none of us knows exactly how we should act, or exactly what we should be doing, given all of the events and sights and sounds which we have preceded this moment in time.

In the children's talk this morning, and in our lessons, we were looking at some of the things the Lord tells us about the eye. Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the eye is the lamp of the body. And that if our eye is good, then our whole body will be full of light, yet if our eye is bad that our body will be full of darkness.

When we think about this on the natural level, it can be hard to understand why Jesus would have made such a basic comment. Of course our eyes need to be good in order to see the world in front of us with clarity! But there is a very interesting natural element to our sight which might be able to help us understand how profound this statement from the Lord really is on the rational and spiritual levels – the levels on which we might be trying to figure out our lives, wishes and actions.

When our eyes take in light and through the optic nerve transmit the data to our brains, an interesting phenomena takes place. When the information originally transmits, it is upside down. It is not until the brain interprets the information that it is flipped right side up so that we can understand what we

see in a way that makes sense. In other words our eyes rely on the brain to make sense of what is seen, and only a correct understanding of what we see could possibly be useful to us.

In a way, we all have come here this morning having used our mind's eye to see the life we have lived so far, and the circumstances we have to work from, and not everything that we have seen makes sense. In fact, if left to our own understanding of life, the image we have taken in would stay upside down and inverted from a correct understanding of the life the Lord wants us to live.

So we have come here this morning in the hope that turning to the Lord in His Word will bring us some clarity, and help us to understand our lives from a view that is right side up. We cannot see life right side up on our own, just as our eyes cannot see anything without our minds to receive and interpret.

There is an interdependence between our eyes and our brain, and between our spiritual sight and the Lord's Word. Psalm 119 reminds us of this: "Your Word [the Lord's Word] is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

The eye and the brain are not the only parts of our bodies which rely on other parts for proper functioning. In fact, every part of our body serves some use to the whole, and the whole cannot perform well or with health without the individual functioning of each part.

The Lord in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that this is not only true of our individual bodies, but is also true of the Church, as well as being true for every heavenly community, and on the broadest level is true for heaven as a whole.

Heaven as a whole is in the human form, and when we speak about the entire complex of heaven we use the term the "Grand Man of Heaven." What this means is that heaven has different parts, and organs, and that each part or organ serves a specific use to the whole, just like the eye serves the specific use of filling the body with light.

There is a great passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 in which Paul is pleading with the church in Corinth to function better together. We can imagine the circumstances they might have been dealing with: the people of that church were struggling with all of the cultural influences infiltrating their lives and worship from the surrounding pagan society in Greece. Because of those circumstances, the people were at odds with each other, probably arguing over how the church should be, and what practices were most important, and what influences were harmful. When a church is faced with these issues it is very easy for one group to think that the church would be better off without the voice of their opposition! But in chapter 12 Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are all a part of one body, and that they cannot succeed without one another:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

The church in Corinth is not the only church susceptible to such divisions. All churches have these kinds of struggles, as I’m sure we all in this church, both specifically in London and in the New Church as a whole, can feel. We struggle with what the Word says, we struggle with cultural influences, we struggle with different personalities, and we struggle with the different church uses which at times may seem incompatible. But these struggles don’t mean that an individual in the church should abandon the body when it is struggling, just as these struggles don’t mean that the body should abandon any individual who might not agree with the body’s direction.

Now, this is very clear to us when we think about the essential functions of a church. We know that if we abandon the Lord’s love for every individual’s salvation the Church would no longer have a purpose. We know that if we abandon the Lord’s Word the Church would no longer have a means to salvation. We know these things just as we know that our bodies must have a heart and lungs. But the further we get away from those central uses, the more difficult it becomes to see the necessity of each organ, part, or use.

To move slightly out from the essential heart and lungs, let’s think about the kidney as an example. The Heavenly Doctrine explains that in the Grand Man the angels who make up the kidneys are those who are in interior truth with a love to explore, examine, separate and correct. (Cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 10032; *Heaven and Hell* 96-97)

I chose to look now at the kidneys first because we know they are essential to the health of the body since they are a filter for our blood. They separate out toxins, regulate electrolytes, and help to stabilise our blood pressure. When our kidneys fail our bodies cannot go on living.

The second reason why I want to look at kidneys is because in the functioning of the Church, they would represent some of the least popular people and uses. No one enjoys being criticized, yet we must be critical in determining what is true and what is false. No one likes to have his or her life examined by another person or group, and yet without those who care about the purity of the truth our church teaches, we would spiral downward into a false sense of morality which would lead us to harm others, not help them. We must have people in the Church who love to examine the way our church functions, making sure that the collective life we lead together adheres to the Lord's Word.

There has to be a balance to the critical processes of the kidneys in our church body. If all we heard were criticisms of the way we live and love, few people would be happy, and few people would act in useful ways because they would be too depressed about their current state to do so.

The balance in the body comes from hormones excreted from the hypothalamus and pituitary gland in the brain. The primary hormone which brings this balance to critical examination is oxytocin. Oxytocin, as well as dopamine, increase our sense of happiness and empathy.

So we can imagine that the people in a church body associated with the hypothalamus would be the people who pay attention to the needs and loves of other people. They notice who is hurting, who is depressed, and who is in need of inspiration. They work to balance the harsh feelings brought on by honest self-examination by showing the happiness and benefits to come in the future.

Now we could spend all day looking at the various parts of the human body and the uses they serve to the whole, and how each part is interdependently necessary to the whole. But let just one more example help to round out our understanding, and inspire a sense of unity among all of us brothers and sisters in the Church.

In a rather obscure passage from the Spiritual Diary Swedenborg relates a story about meeting someone he had known in his lifetime who had since passed into the other world. He described this man as someone who would get very angry when he would pray for something and not get it. And yet he says that when this man came out of his state of anger he would return to a simple state of obedience to the Lord. Swedenborg tells us that this man in heaven was a part of the Grand Man's earlobe.

Think about this. The earlobe seems relatively useless, doesn't it? What does it do? Maybe it is just a place to put a beautiful earring. But it is a part of

the body! It is a part of the Grand Man! And as such, what would happen in our body if we were to get an infection or abscess on our earlobe? Our immune system would do everything it could to fight the infection, and everything it could do to heal.

We are all a part of one body. And though in this world that body is bound to be imperfect, bound to have sickness, and bound to struggle within itself, we must work together to bring peace within struggle, to heal sickness, and to grow toward perfection. And here is the most important part of all of this: We are all here for a reason. That reason is not just to answer our own individual questions. The reason is not just to bring our church into a healthy state within itself. The reason why we are all here, in this church, is to come together as one body to work for the happiness and salvation of those within our influence.

We are told that the Lord's ruling love is for the salvation of the human race. He demonstrated that most notably through taking on a human body and fighting in temptation to restore order and freedom in the world and in our lives. The Heavenly Doctrine also tells us that heaven as a whole, the Grand Man, works together for that same purpose.

The sphere of the Grand Man is the sphere of divine truth conjoined with divine love, expressed in the use of leading people to heaven. And since the Lord's Church in this world is meant to reflect heaven, the purpose of church is also to lead people to heaven.

We cannot do that as individual members. A hand can help a person up, but it cannot perceive that someone is down. A heart can express love, but it will only be true love if it is filled with wisdom as the lungs fill blood with oxygen. It is also true that the heart and lungs can become unhealthy, and the only way to keep that from happening is through regular exercise in the rest of the body, and a healthy diet, so our muscles and digestive system must get involved.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray that His kingdom will come, "as in heaven, so upon the earth." As a church we hope to grow into the reflection of heaven and work in conjunction with heaven and the Lord to teach and lead people to the blessed state of salvation. We can only do that together, and we can only do that with the Lord.

We all came here this morning hoping for direction, inspiration, comfort and fellowship. May we depart with the knowledge that all of these things will be more immediate and more perfect the more that we work in conjunction with each other, interdependently focused on the uses we love to do for the Church, for our loved ones, and for society.

We came to church for a reason this morning. And though we may mostly think about church as an individual act, an act which hopefully helps us individually grow toward heaven, it is also very important to remember the

individual contribution we all make to our body as a whole. And also that we, as a church, must work together, not only for ourselves and our own salvation, but for everyone else around us and within our influence.

To close I would like to revisit one of our lessons from Heaven and Hell, and instead of hearing this as if it were only about heaven, or the human body, let us think about it from the perspective of a church. How do the different people and uses in this church fit together into the “inclusive body”?

The reason why so many varied elements act as one in an individual is that there is nothing whatever there that does not contribute something to the common good and do something useful. The inclusive body serves its parts and the parts serve the inclusive body, because the inclusive body is made up of parts and the parts make up the inclusive body. So they provide for each other respectively, they focus on each other mutually, and they are united in the kind of form that gives every single component a relationship to the inclusive entity and its well-being. This is what enables them to act as a single unit. (Heaven and Hell 64)

Amen.

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

DESIRES

Here we have another term that is used to make a distinction. The derivations of infernal love are affections of evil and falsity, and these are properly called “concupiscences.” To set them apart from these, the derivations of heavenly love, which are affections of good and truth, are called “desires.” In ordinary speech, desire often has an evil connotation, but in theological discussion at least the term should be used as it is in the Writings. (See *Divine Providence* 106.)

It's Gettin' Real:

Report on the Small Group Systems Retreat 2015

Sasha Silverman

Imagine people in communities across the globe, united in mutual charity, living out the teachings of love, wisdom and useful service that are central to the New Church. Phenomenal right? Like any dream, it will start with small steps.

One of those steps occurred this spring, April 21-22, during the 2015 Small Group Systems Retreat. More than 40 people came together to discuss how to share the New Church in a broader way, specifically through small groups. This committed group of ministers, staff and lay people arrived from around the country (and even from England), and from 11 different New Church congregations.

While flower blossoms, bursts of sunshine and wild gusts of wind surrounded us outside, we sat tucked away in the Council Chamber of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral sharing dreams, voicing concerns and forming action plans. What follows is a report on what happened at the gathering, as well as some background about why “small groups” were the primary focus of the event.

One could define a “small group” as a handful of people gathered for a common purpose. In a religious setting small groups offer a powerful way for people to gather for worship, connection, learning and service. Since these gatherings tend to be much smaller than a typical church congregation, group members have a chance to hear each other and be heard. As author Ben Reed wrote of his small group experience:

It was incredibly freeing and life-giving. At no other point in my spiritual life had my opinion been truly valued like with that group. At no other point had I been listened to rather than preached at. At no other point had I felt so closely connected to people headed in the same direction as I was. If it hadn't been for that small group, I would in no way be who I am today.

For years, the Rev. David Lindrooth, Director of Outreach, has championed the value of small groups for the New Church. He notes: “The only churches

that actually grow and thrive are those based on the small group model. The older model, where the minister provides all the teaching and support for the entire congregation, is not sustainable. Small groups take the burden off ministers, and empower church members to truly “be the church.”

He explained: “This is not about making churches bigger. This is about meeting people’s needs. This is about us taking what God has given us, and ministering to people in the best way possible. We do our best, and then we let God take care of the rest.”

To this end, many New Church congregations have come on board with the vision and have been working hard to develop stronger small group systems. Going through this process has brought exciting results in many cases, and has also raised some concerns and questions.

The 2015 Small Group Systems Retreat was designed to offer congregations personalized and applicable training to help tackle barriers and encourage small steps forward.

Steve Gladen, one of the nation’s leading experts on small groups, was the featured speaker for the conference, as he was for the 2014 Outreach Conference. With more than 20 years of experience focusing on developing small groups, and overseeing more than 5,000 small groups on multiple campuses (including Saddleback Church in southern California), he was well equipped to offer support.

Over the course of the two days, Steve dedicated himself to helping the participants in any way they needed, offering tools, tips and suggestions, as well as one-on-one consultations. He led the groups through processes to share their successes and challenges, clarify their missions, and create action items – with timelines – to support those central missions.

The Outreach staff, led by Bronwen Henry, Program Manager, and Michelle Chapin, Assistant Program Manager, ran the conference. In addition to hiring Steve, they made sure participants had what they needed to feel supported and nurtured, carving out time for worship, song, meals, social time and prayer.

Content developers, the Rev. John Odhner and Sasha Silverman, offered a preview of the new *Living Gratefully* small group Journey Program. (For more information or to order this new program please visit www.newchurchjourney.org.)

This is not about making churches bigger. This is about meeting people’s needs. This is about us taking what God has given us, and ministering to people in the best way possible.

Many of those who participated said they felt a sense of hope and excitement, as well as a clearer awareness of the challenges ahead. As Art Watson from Sunrise Chapel put it: “I feel just as overwhelmed as exhilarated at revisiting the vision. It gave me a sense of excitement that something *can* be done.”

Martha Heilman from the Glenview New Church said: “Focusing on small groups is exciting to me because in the past we have not had a lot of places for new people to plug in. With small groups in place, community and service become frontrunners, and the teachings support those things. Our church becomes one where we practice what we preach.”

The Rev. Mac Frazier from New Way Church in Austin, Texas, explained that after last year’s outreach event, he and his team had a chance to reevaluate their direction as a church. He said his church stopped being all about the people who came to church, but instead about those with whom they could reach out to and connect.

He explained: “Each week we ask ourselves, ‘Are we connecting people to each other, and thus, to the Lord?’ If so, we know we are achieving our goal.”

This new approach opened up their field of influence, helping them reach out and connect positively with many people who otherwise likely never would come to church.

Other ministers came to the conference feeling burdened with the challenges and frustration of trying to meet the many different needs of people in their congregations. For them, the message of centering on one thing they feel called to do, and celebrating small steps and the smallest victories was comforting.

Steve reminded us: “Don’t let problem-solving stop the decision that you feel called to do. You can’t analyze every move and have all the problems fixed. You have to just dream it and then figure it out as you go. Dream the dreams. Pray. Ask God, ‘What did you put me on this planet for?’ Because when we are doing what we’re gifted to do, we’re excited about it.”

He challenged the group to get creative

Focusing on small groups is exciting to me because in the past we have not had a lot of places for new people to plug in. With small groups in place, community and service become frontrunners, and the teachings support those things. Our church becomes one where we practice what we preach.

about overcoming their barriers. For example, one participant said, “A lot of the timeline depends on the pastor, and we see that as a constraint.” Steve responded: “If you go off that premise, you’ll get nothing done. Think about engaging the people in your congregation. If there are ‘ideas’ people in your church, file their ideas. First, ask what’s critical to our mission? If it fits with your mission, then mobilize people to do it.”

Another person said: “It’s a morale crusher when there are only 30 people in your congregation.” Steve answered: “It depends on how you frame it. Thirty people in a group is a party. Give people an experience. Maybe do a service in a park, for example.”

Overall, despite the many questions and concerns, the feeling of so many people gathered for a common cause sparked a palpable sense of camaraderie and encouragement. As Theological School student Elmo Acton remarked: “It’s exciting to hear what the ministers here are doing. This is something I may be facing in a couple years. It’s nice to see that there’s excitement and hope in our communities – that they see hope and see a future.”

Trish Lindsay from Sower’s Chapel in Sarver, Pennsylvania, said: “I’ve always wanted marching orders from our church to tell us how to implement our church’s teachings. This is in accord with everything I believe and love. It will be a challenge to implement this, but it is welcome. It is not just about ideas but about connecting *people*.”

Conference attendees are now back with their communities, beginning to implement what they learned. Many churches are opening new avenues of communication between the leadership and lay people, seeking ways to share ideas, tasks, hopes and concerns. Some churches will focus on identifying, training and supporting new small group leaders. Others plan to streamline their efforts to connect better with their surrounding communities.

Along with their various goals, each church has established a partnership with at least one other church. These partnered churches plan to stay in touch on a regular basis to provide each other with encouragement and accountability.

As members of the broader congregation, let us all find our own ways to support our church family. When we work together, each doing the things we feel personally excited about, great things are bound to happen.



Sasha Silverman is Content Editor for General Church Outreach, developing yearly Journey Programs with the Rev. John Odhner. She lives in Bryn Athyn.
Contact: sasha.silverman@newchurch.org



Groups Attending the 2015 Retreat

New Way Church,
Austin, Texas

New Church of Boulder
Valley, Colorado

Morning Star Chapel,
Alpharetta, Georgia

Michael Church,
London, England

Glenview New Church,
Glenview, Illinois

Sower's Chapel,
Sarver, Pennsylvania

Bryn Athyn Church

Pittsburgh New
Church, Pennsylvania

Light for Life,
Seattle, Washington

Sunroom Groups,
Bryn Athyn

NewChurch LIVE,
Bryn Athyn

Bryn Athyn College
Theological School

Sunrise Chapel,
Tucson, Arizona

Declarations of Faith and Purpose

THE REV. BRETT D. BUICK

New Tripoli, Pennsylvania

I believe that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages. (*True Christian Religion* 791)

I believe that the Heavenly Doctrine revealed by the Lord through Emanuel Swedenborg is the Second Advent of the Lord and the internal sense of the Sacred Scripture. (See *Ecclesiastic History of the New Church* 7-8; *True Christian Religion* 776, 779)

I believe that the Lord's purpose for creation is a heaven from the human race. (*Divine Providence* 27)

I believe that the Lord leaves us in freedom to choose good or evil according to reason and that we are responsible for our free choices (*Ibid.* 78), and that if on earth, we repent for the evil we do choose, the Lord will save us from hell and we will live to eternity in heaven. (See *True Christian Religion* 522)

I believe that the marriage of one man and one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of the Christian religion. (*Conjugal Love* 457)

I believe that if a priest is in the good of the priesthood, which is to care for the salvation of souls, to teach the way to heaven, and to lead those whom he teaches, then in proportion as he is in this good he acquires the truths which he may teach, and by means of which he may lead. (*Life* 39)

I believe that the Lord has called me to be a priest in the priesthood of the New Church.

Lord, help me be firm and be very courageous, help me to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses Thy servant commanded. Help me turn not aside from it to the right hand or to the left. (*Joshua* 1:7)

THE REV. JARED J. BUSS

Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one God of heaven and earth, who shall reign forever and ever. (*cf. Revelation 11:15*). I believe that He is our Heavenly Father, and that we are asked to willingly become His children – to *hear* Him saying to us, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God.” (*Luke 18:16*).

I believe that He loves us with an unimaginable love – an everlasting love (*cf. Jeremiah 31:3*) – and that He has given us His Threefold Word, which is His voice speaking to us, so that we can understand how to receive that love.

I believe that this is the greatest commandment we have been given (*Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27*), and I believe that we obey this commandment by living a life of repentance, by listening to what He teaches (*John 14:15*), and by loving one another as He has loved us. (*John 13:34, 15:12,17*)

I believe that He calls each of us to serve a use in His kingdom, and that the use He calls us to serve is something greater than ourselves, something much, much bigger than the here and now. I believe we are asked to take up our cross in order to follow Him (*Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34, 10:21; Luke 9:23*), and I believe that when we do this we are able, in the measure that is given to us, to bring His kingdom to earth, to help establish the New Jerusalem, which is His holy church.

I believe that His special gift to this church is the blessed state of marriage, in which He joins two into one flesh (*Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:8*), working through that union to bring healing and *life* into the world.

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me. . . . If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” (*Psalms 139:1,8*) I pray that in my work to serve You I will remember that You are always there with me, and that it is *You* whom I serve.

I pray for the humility to receive Your gifts, the gifts that make it possible to show real integrity, real compassion. May I become Your servant and the servant of Your Church, heart, soul and body. (*cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27*)

THE REV. THOMAS X. FLOYD

Norway

I believe that Divinity is one, and that this one Divine Being is our Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ.

I believe that the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit exists as the Divine soul, Divine body and Divine proceeding of the one Divine Being, our Lord.

I believe that our Lord is love itself and wisdom itself, which is good itself and truth itself. I believe that this Divine Being, our Lord, came into time and space, into our physical world as Divine truth, which is the Word, because of His love for us.

I believe that without liberation from damnation, deliverance from eternal death, rescuing from hell, and release from the hand of the devil, no man could be saved. I believe that the Lord therefore redeemed mankind by subjugating the hells, restoring the heavens to order, glorifying His Human and establishing His Church on earth.

I believe that the Lord's Second Coming has already taken place, not in person but in the Word. I believe that this Second Coming happened in order to separate the evil from the good, to save those past and present who believe in the Lord, and to form them into a new angelic heaven and a new church on earth.

I believe that this Second Coming took place by means of the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, to whom the Lord manifested Himself in person and whom He filled with His spirit so that Swedenborg could present the teachings of the New Church to the world.

I hereby dedicate the remainder of my life to the ministry of the New Church. A heavenly life consists of uses from the good of charity. By teaching and living by the doctrine of uses I hope to inspire my surroundings to a life that leads to heaven.

Dear Lord: I ask for Your help to live a life filled with love for You, so that I can always love You with all my heart, soul and mind, and so that I can always love my neighbor as myself. Amen.

THE REV. JOEL C. GLENN

Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

I believe that "The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, came into the world to subjugate the hells and to glorify His Human; and without this no mortal could have been saved; and those are saved who believe in Him."

I believe that “God is one in essence and in person, in whom is a Divine trinity, and that He is the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ.”

I believe that “no mortal could have been saved unless the Lord had come into the world.”

I believe that “He came into the world to remove hell from man, and that He did remove it by means of contests with it and victories over it, and thereby He subdued it and reduced it to order and made it obedient to Himself.”

I believe that “He came into the world to glorify His Human which He took on in the world, that is, to unite it with the Divine from which [are all things], and thereby He eternally holds hell in order and under obedience to Himself. As this could be accomplished only by means of temptations admitted into His Human, even to the last of them, which was the passion of the cross, He endured even that.”

I believe that we are to “believe in the Lord; for by believing in Him [we have] conjunction with Him and so salvation. To believe in the Lord is to have confidence that He saves; and as only those who live rightly can have this confidence, this, too, is meant by believing in Him.” (*True Christian Religion* 2)

I believe in the Word of the Old and the New Testaments and in the Second Coming of the Lord through the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church.

As a priest I am called by the Lord to care for the salvation of souls, to teach the way to heaven, and to lead those who are taught, not by what is my own but only by the truths of the Lord’s Word. (*Life* 39)

Lord, I pray for the humility to seek truth for the sake of truth and for the sake of serving Your people.

I pray for enlightenment in understanding Your Word so that I might see how I am to teach and to lead those whom You will put in my care.

I pray for the conviction and trust in You to shun evils as sins and follow You in all the paths of my life.

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

(*Luke* 2:29-32)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT

Bryn Athyn College of the New Church conferred three Master of Divinity degrees, and two Master of Arts in Religious Studies degrees, as well as 49 Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees – the largest graduating class ever – at its 138th commencement May 30, 2015. Graduates represented eight countries – Canada, France, Ivory Coast, South Africa, South Korea and United States, plus eight states: Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia.

See the Commencement Address by incoming **President Brian Blair** (page 376), and a last touching “Farewell” from **President Kristin King** (page 381). Dr. King will return to the classroom in the fall.

(See photos from the graduation dinner and commencement on pages 413-415, taken by **Serena Sutton** and **Holly Adams**, with assistance from **Holly Feerrar**. Many more photos also are posted on Facebook and at www.brynathyn.edu.)

Master of Divinity degree recipients were:

- **Brett D. Buick**, New Tripoli, Pennsylvania
- **Jared J. Buss**, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania (*Valedictorian*)
- **Joel C. Glenn**, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

All three were ordained into the first degree in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral the following day, along with **Thomas Floyd** of Norway, who completed his theological training remotely. As of July 1, Mr. Buick is assistant to the pastor in Kempton, Pennsylvania, and will do some teaching at Bryn Athyn College. Mr. Buss is assistant to the pastor of the Olivet Society in Toronto, Canada. Mr. Floyd is assistant to the pastor in Stockholm, serving also in Norway and Denmark. Mr. Glenn is assistant to the pastor of the Oak Arbor Society in Rochester, Michigan. (See their Declarations of Faith and Purpose on page 402.)

Recipients of the **Master of Arts** degree were:

- **Caira Bevan Bongers**, Huntingdon Valley
- **Sarah Ann Bruell Odhner**, Huntingdon Valley (*Valedictorian*)

Each of the MARS recipients also was awarded a Theta Alpha medal.

Bachelor of Arts: (* Indicates *cum laude*)

Christopher B. Alt , Pennsauken, New Jersey	Jamera S. McNeil , Brooklyn, New York
Francis P. Angelone , Philadelphia	Alexandria G. McNickle , Southampton, PA
Aidan E. Asplundh ,* Bryn Athyn	Raymond A. Norfo , Delran, New Jersey
Marijke K. Bau-Madsen ,* Bryn Athyn	Medge L. Parcily ,* Cannes, France
Rachel A. Buss ,* Bryn Athyn	Yekaterina Partem , Philadelphia
Steward A. Chapin , Philadelphia	Abanoub S. Rezk, Bronx , New York
Tiffany N. Cooper , Philadelphia	Charles P. Ritchie, Houston , Delaware
Kirsten S. Cranch ,* Bryn Athyn	Demi Salinas , Irving, Texas
Ivy Daum ,* Bryn Athyn	Matthew T. Shockley , Whaleyville, MD
Bethany A. Flowers , Southampton, PA	Benjamin K. Silvers , Chantilly, Virginia
Annalisa M. Gatti , Toronto, Canada	Dustin B. Synnestvedt , Bryn Athyn
Chelsea S. Goodwin , Philadelphia	Gregory R. Synnestvedt ,* Bryn Athyn
Rebecca K. Gyllenhaal ,* Bryn Athyn	Jasmine T. Taylor , Philadelphia
Todd H. Hirsch , Keymar, Maryland	Rebecca L. Uber ,* Pittsburgh, PA
Minghui Jiang , Philadelphia	Ryan W. Watkins , Huntingdon Valley
Terrence M. Johnson , Baltimore, Maryland	Kyle L. Watters , Ontario, Canada
Joseph V. Kehoe , Philadelphia	Hyun-Jin Yang , South Korea
Thu-Ha Thi Le , Adelphi, Maryland	Eden M. Zecher , Bryn Athyn

Bachelor of Science: (* Indicates *cum laude*)

Elizabeth J. Bandura , Philadelphia	Angela Koudou , Abidjan, Ivory Coast
Philip B. Brandt ,* East Greenville, PA	Katherine M. Kurtz , Philadelphia
Kaitlyn E. Brock ,* Bryn Athyn	Patrick F. Linehan , Conifer, Colorado
Brianne G. Good ,*Bryn Athyn	Jordan T. Roth , Philadelphia
Tori R. Hallstrom , Clearfield, Pennsylvania	Kevin W. Roth , Cinnaminson, New Jersey
Katrina T. Hughes ,* Alburtis, Pennsylvania	Diana J. Triguba , Jenkintown, PA
Erika L. Hyatt ,* Mitchellville, Maryland	

Gregory Synnestvedt was the valedictorian.

Awards and Honors

Academic Awards (with the statements read about each by a faculty member)

Ivy Daum

Ivy Daum has been the exemplar of what students can give and receive from a New Church education. Not only has Ivy succeeded academically in all her coursework, she has done so while engaged in many useful pursuits. She has worked for the Admissions Department, served as the Chaplain's assistant, presided over the student government, poured her heart into the dance program on campus, and taught dance at the Academy Secondary Schools. Her final dance project on the five churches is unforgettable.

Rebecca Gyllenhaal

Rebecca Gyllenhaal's contributions to the intellectual life and distinctive purpose of the College are many. From her exemplary performances in her courses, to her guidance as a writing tutor, to her founding of the College's new online journal, Pythia, to her 100+ pages of original prose for her Senior Project, Rebecca's accomplishments have never seemed to ebb, and with her drive and passion, I doubt they ever will.

Gregory Synnestvedt

Greg Synnestvedt has been an exceptional student in his two ID areas, Biology and Psychology, and in all aspects of his course work. The Science faculty are ecstatic that Greg will be serving as an assistant lab instructor in our department next year. In addition to his academic excellence, Greg's commitment to the life of the College is beyond comparison. If you have been to an event on campus over the past four years, there is a good chance that Greg was involved or in attendance.

Scholar Athletes of the Year

Josh Alden and Alexis Kolb



Left to right: Jesse King,
Josh Alden, and Matt Kennedy



Left to right: Courtney Kozar,
Alexis Kolb, and Matt Kennedy



Male Athlete of the Year
Terrence Johnson



Female Athlete of the Year
Kaitlyn Brock

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS COMMENCEMENT

The Academy Secondary Schools graduated 58 students on June 6 in Bryn Athyn, including 24 from the Girls School (12 with honors) and 34 from the Boys School (nine with honors). This was the 139th Academy commencement. At that first graduation in 1876 there were just eight graduates. This year's graduating class represented 10 states (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee), plus three from Canada and two from South Korea.

The commencement address was presented jointly by the **Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner** (Boys School 1978 and Girls School 1978). It appears on page 386.

Many photographs, in addition to those on page 416-417, have been posted on the Academy Secondary School's Facebook page and at *www.ancss.org*, courtesy of **Serena Sutton** and **Holly Adams**, with assistance from **Joy Feerrar**.

Graduates of the Girls School: (* Indicates With Honors)

- Hayley Alrutz, Washington, Michigan
- Marley Asplundh,* Bryn Athyn
- Rachel Bostock, Treasure Island, Florida
- Caroline Brock,* Huntingdon Valley, PA
- Heather Cha, Southampton, Pennsylvania
- Julia Cooper,* Bryn Athyn
- Marie Daum,* Huntingdon Valley
- Rosemary Fuller,* Huntingdon Valley
- Sarah Jackson,* Bryn Athyn

- Ariel Grace Martin,* Bryn Athyn
- Charlotte Mitchell, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Sarah Orchard, Perrysburg, Ohio
- Sierra Phillippi, Bryn Athyn
- Avery Phillips, Bryn Athyn
- Monica Rose, Bryn Athyn
- Heather Schauder, Bryn Athyn
- Amanda Scott, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
- Ashley Smith,* Huntingdon Valley

Erica Smith,* Bryn Athyn

Natalie Smith, Germantown, Tennessee

Sarah Smith, Bowie, Maryland

Jennie Sprinkle,* Columbia, Maryland

Ashley Walsh,* Phoenix, Arizona

Madison Wille,* Huntingdon Valley

The valedictorian for the Girls School graduates was **Caroline Brock**.

Theta Alpha Gold Medals were awarded to:

Marley Asplundh, Caroline Brock, Rosemary Fuller and Madison Wille

Honorary Girls School diplomas were awarded to:

Deborah Ann Alrutz

Doreen Horigan

Janet Krettek

Graduates of the Boys School: (* Indicates With Honors)

Caelen Allen,* Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania

Angus Austin, Bryn Athyn

Jordan Boatman, Hatboro, Pennsylvania

Andreas Buss, Bryn Athyn

Shaun Buss,* Huntingdon Valley

Cameron Elliott, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

Spencer Fields-Cowley,* Bowie, Maryland

Jesse Frazier, Huntingdon Valley

Victor Friesen, Silver Valley, Alberta, Canada

Carnel Harley Jr., Philadelphia

Jake Horigan, Huntingdon Valley

Vincent Jackson Jr., Cherry Hill, NJ

Sung Hoon Jung, South Korea

David Kendig Jr., Newtown, Pennsylvania

Jake Cheol Kim,* South Korea

Drayton Mapp, Bradenton, Florida

Ian McCullum, New Hope, Pennsylvania

Brennen McCurdy, Bryn Athyn

Shane McCurdy,* Bryn Athyn

Marcus Moore, Glenn Dale, Maryland

Zahir Murray, Philadelphia

Antonio Nakos, Huntingdon Valley

Asher Odhner, Alpharetta, Georgia

Isaac Radcliffe, Mitchellville, Maryland

Malcolm Riepert,* Kitchener, Ontario

Samuel Rogers-Petro, Abington, Pennsylvania

Isaac Sellner, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dustin Smith, Glenview, Illinois

Bryan Sweeney, Bowie, Maryland

Liam Tayler,* Hatboro, PA

Cameron Weiss,* Huntingdon Valley

Derek Weiss,* Huntingdon Valley

John Weston III, Maple Glen, PA

Keir Williams, Huntingdon Valley

Other awards and honors;

The valedictorian for the Boys School graduates was **Derek Weiss**.

Academic Excellence (four or more department awards)

Girls School: **Marley Asplundh**

Boys School: **Declan Durand**

Wesley Wedell

Emilie K. Asplundh Grant for the Performing Arts:

Brielle Williams



Left to right: Ashley Smith, Jesse Frazier, Carnel Harley Jr., Kyla Rogers, and Marie Daum

Girls School Athletic Awards:

Sportsmanship:

Marie Daum

Ashley Smith

Outstanding Female Athlete:

Kyla Rogers

Boys School Athletic Awards:

Payson W. Lyman Award:

Jesse Frazier

Stanley F. Ebert Award:

Carnel Harley Jr.

BOOK EXPO IN BRYN ATHYN

Lisa A. Childs

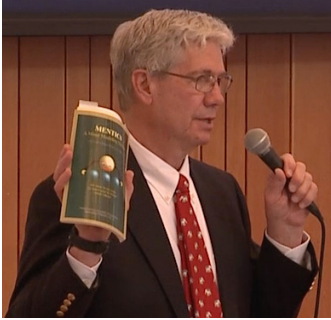
On April 11 Bryn Athyn College hosted, in their beautiful facilities, a public Book Expo to celebrate and explore: *Science, Spirituality and Swedenborgian Theory Throughout History*. Hundreds of books of vast variety were available and speakers engaged attendees throughout the day.

The theme of the Expo, via books and talks, was to follow spirituality weaving through ancient history, sciences, philosophy, medicine, naturalism, abolition of slavery, child labor rights, covering new spiritual paradigms, envisioning the afterlife, Swedenborg's works (scientific and theological), and much more. Of course, one day is only the beginning of reviewing this vast amount of history, intellect and philosophy.

The Book Expo was made possible by Bryn Athyn College (www.brynathyn.edu),



Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell



Dr. Stephen Smith

which hosted and supported the event; the Cole Foundation (www.ColeFoundation.org), Swedenborg Scientific Association (www.Swedenborg-philosophy.org) and the Swedenborg Foundation (www.Swedenborg.com) which provided funding.

Publishers, books and resources were provided by: **Brian Mann** of the Swedenborg Foundation; **Dr. Ian Thompson** of www.EaglePearlPress.com; **Steve David** of www.NewChristianBibleStudy.com; **Jon and Karin Childs** of www.FountainPublishing.com; **Joanna Hill** of www.RockpointPress.com; James Wilson of the Swedenborg Society; **Doug Webber** of www.dream-prophecy.blogspot.com; and **Lisa Childs** of NCAP (Swedenborg Scientific Association Press, Bryn Athyn College Press and the General Church of the New Jerusalem Publications).

The talks were rich in content, generating a high level of interest and excitement. Networking added another important dimension to the event. The vast array of books was well appreciated. Each hour began with a new talk, followed by question-and-answer session.

We are grateful for those who shared their energy, expertise and thought: **Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell, Dr. David Fuller, Bruce Henderson, Dr. Stephen Smith, Dr. Ian Thompson, Dr. Dan Synnestvedt and Michael Hogan.** We were especially grateful to Dr. Thompson (*Starting Science From God: Rational Scientific Theories from Theism*) for traveling from California to join us. Talk videos are available on www.youtube.com, by searching on “NCAP Swedenborg”. The talks included:

Swedenborg’s scientific works and the Swedenborg Scientific Association (SSA) – Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell, Doctor of Osteopathy, Associate Professor of Family Medicine and Director of Medical Humanities at the University of New England; President of Swedenborg Scientific Association (SSA)

Swedenborg’s Influence on the Development of Osteopathy – Dr. David Fuller, Doctor of Osteopathy, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Author: *Osteopathy and Swedenborg*

The Gift: The gift of revelation about life after death, how providence works, and the inner meanings of the Word and how they relate directly to our lives – Bruce Henderson, 40 years editorial page editor for daily newspaper; Director of Development and Communication for the General Church and Academy of the New Church; editor of *New Church Life*. Author: *Window to Eternity, Why Does God Let it Happen?*, and (due out next year) *The Seventh Seal* (the internal sense of the Word).

NEW CHURCH ORDINATION CEREMONY



Bishop Brian Keith speaks at the ceremony



Left to right: Jared Buss, Brett Buick, Joel Glenn, and Thomas Floyd



Bryn Athyn Pastor Eric Carswell welcomes the newly ordained ministers



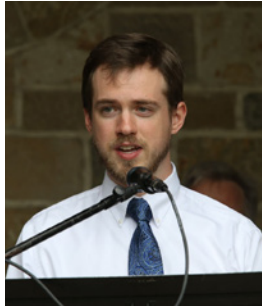
Brett Buick with wife, Karla (Cole), left, and family behind



Jared Buss with his wife Justine (Brannon) and daughter Rosalie



Thomas Floyd



Joel Glenn



The Cathedral chancel prepared for the ordinations

PHOTOS: RUNE LJOSTADT



Jamera McNeil



Academic Award Recipients Rebecca Gyllenhaal, Greg Synnsvedt, and Ivy Daum



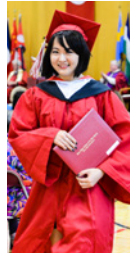
Soni Werner and Medge Parcily



Dustin Synnsvedt with his parents Shawn and Aileen



Theological School Graduate Joel Glenn, with parents Hilary and Michael



Minghui Jiang



Ryan Watkins and Figge Bryntesson



Graduates begin the procession to the Asplundh Field House



Tovah and Dale Smith, Crystal Smith, Eden Zecher, Leanna Smith, and Brendan and Erika Pitcairn

PHOTOS: SERENA SUTTON, HOLLY ADAMS, AND HOLLY FEERRAR



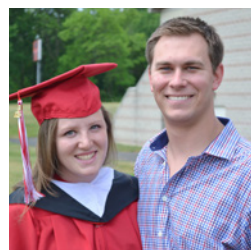
The Class of 2015



MARS Graduates Caira Bongers and Sarah Odhner



Marijke Bau-Madsen with her parents Halfdan and Nicole



Kaitlyn Brock and Blake McCurdy



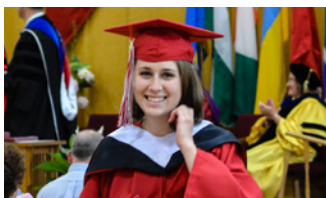
Rachel (Buss) and David Steen at the graduation dinner



Becca Uber



Left to right: Kurt Asplundh, Aidan Asplundh, Josh Cole, and Jenn Asplundh



Erika Hyatt



Terrence Johnson and Cathleen Curran



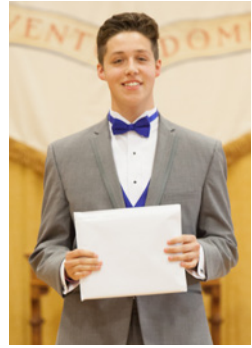
Theological School Valedictorian Jared Buss, with wife Justine, daughter Rosalie, father-in-law Deno Brannon, and mother-in-law Carol Brannon

ACADEMY OF THE NEW CHURCH SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION

To see the full collection of commencement photos go to www.ancss.org/



A seniors' "selfie" moment



Spencer Cowley-Fields



Antonio Nakos, Carnel Harley, and Cameron Elliott



Boys School Valedictorian
Derek Weiss



Caroline Brock, Bonnie Hodgell, and Marley Asplundh



Andreas Buss and Heather Cha



Avery Phillips



Sarah Orchard



Jake Horigan with his sister Elisabeth



ANC Girls School Class of 2015

PHOTOS: SERENA SUTTON, HOLLY ADAMS, AND JOY FEERRAR



The seniors present their class song



Isaac Sellner, Vincent Jackson Jr., and Marcus Moore



Charlotte Mitchell, Michaela Boyesen, and Hayley Alrutz



Girls School Valedictorian Caroline Brock



Shane McCurdy with his Mom Linda, brother Travis, and sister Nicole



Julia Cooper with her sister Emily



Asher Odhner and his Mom Maggie



Eddie Jung and Liam Taylor



Ashley Walsh and Ariel Martin



ANC Boys School Class of 2015



In the middle of its street, and of the river, on this side and on that, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.



And behold, in the midst...stood a Lamb as though it had been slain... Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.



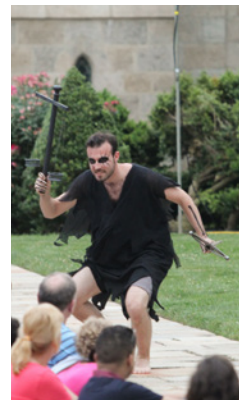
And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.



She bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.



But He laid His right hand on me, (John), saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.'



I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

PHOTOS: HOLLY ADAMS

Mentics, A Mind Modeling Method – Dr. Stephen Smith, on the book by Rachel and the late Oliver Odhner.

Starting Science from God – Ian Thompson, Ph.D., Theoretical Nuclear Physicist, Author: *Starting Science from God, Philosophy of Nature and Quantum Reality, Nuclear Reactions for Astrophysics, Compound Nuclear Reactions and Related Topics* (www.EaglePearlPress.com).

Unmasking Naturalism: The “science wars” and freeing the spirit – Dan Synnestvedt, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy, Bryn Athyn College, Editor, *Faith and Learning*; Editor and contributing author, *The World Transformed*.

The World Transformed 1700s and Beyond – Michael Hogan, Conference Chair and contributing author: *The World Transformed*.

We regret that time did not allow Steve David to give a presentation on this comprehensive New Church Website of resource and Writings. Please visit the website to be enriched: www.NewChurchBibleStudy.com

Materials are available on the mentioned websites, www.Amazon.com and/or the Bryn Athyn Cathedral Bookstore (www.newchurchbooks.com). NCAP book catalogs can be obtained at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral bookstore or by emailing ncapbooks@gmail.com. The Swedenborg Foundation’s catalog is available at www.Swedenborg.com. Plans are being evaluated for another Book Expo in 2016.

CHARTER DAY 2015

The Charter Day weekend in Bryn Athyn begins Thursday, October 8, with a Reunion Artists reception in the Fine Arts Building and a Girls School field hockey game under the lights. The weekend concludes Monday, October 12, with the annual Student Scholarship Golf Outing at Philmont Country Club.

For up-to-date information about all activities please go to www.ancss.org/charterday or www.brynathyn.edu/charterday.

The Charter Day service in the Cathedral on Friday morning will be presented by the **Rev. David C. Roth**, pastor of the New Church of Boulder Valley in Colorado.

The banquet program on Saturday evening will be presented by Bryn Athyn College, under the leadership of **President Brian Blair**. He promises “an exciting presentation about new programs at the College.

Holding reunions this year are the classes of 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2005.

Among other highlights of the weekend will be:

- A Theta Alpha luncheon after the Cathedral service on Friday
- Bryn Athyn College Kite Day, Friday afternoon

- A College Alumni Open House
- The Charter Day Dance Friday in the Secondary Schools Dining Hall
- The annual Bob Eidse Run-Walk
- A Chili Cook-off and Carnival before the football game on Saturday
- Mix and Mingle at Cairnwood Estate after the banquet
- Dekka Tea on Sunday in Glenn Hall
- Guided Tours throughout the weekend at Glencairn Museum, Cairnwood
- Estate and the Secondary Schools

Theta Alpha Journal



May 2015

WELCOME BACK

After a hiatus of a few years the *Theta Alpha Journal* has sprung back into renewed life, with **Helen Kennedy** as editor, assisted by **Gillian S. Mayer**.

In the May 2015 issue Helen writes: “For many decades past, women have poured their vitality and energy into *Theta Alpha Journal*, sharing insights, crafting poems, and pondering difficulties. In recent years, online social media have opened new avenues for personal connection, including various forms of written discussion, but nothing quite like the experience of the worldwide network of *Journal* readers (men as well as women) receiving the latest issue in their mailboxes.”

Indeed, since 1904 the *Journal* has been a vital publication in the Church. We enthusiastically welcome it back and wish the editors success. May it thrive again in attracting and sharing its special brand of perspective, support and scholarship.

AND ANOTHER OUTLET

Eden King Lumsden, wife of the **Rev. Derrick Lumsden**, pastor of The Sowers Chapel in Sarver, Pennsylvania, is working with a team of General Church women from around the world to create a new blog: newchristianwoman.com.

She says, “The blog is essentially trying to create a space where there are positive interactions between General Church women and positive discussions about women’s issues, both great and small.”

The site has been up and running since June and several articles have already been posted, including: *What Could New Church Education Look Like?*, by **Taryn Frazier**, and *Call for a New Christian Women’s Ministry* by Eden

Lumsden. On the website readers can contribute to a discussion by adding their own thoughts.

In her article Eden says: “New Christian Women's Ministry is an attempt to regain some forward motion in the General Church's women's ministry. This blog is run by a collection of General Church women from around the world. We each may have our personal soapboxes we like to stand on from time to time, but all of us desire community. We want to kindle friendships, share ideas, and offer and receive support from other women who are trying to live their lives with the Lord God Jesus Christ as their guide.

“New Christian Woman strives to celebrate all things feminine (in the Heavenly Doctrines definition of the term). Here we are endeavoring to provide a positive, safe and inspiring outlet for General Church women to nurture and support each other in all aspects of their lives, whether weighty matters of religion or the trivia of the daily drudge.”

These and other articles posted also may be reprinted from time to time by *New Church Life* or the *Theta Alpha Journal*.

Welcome to another important voice for women in the Church.

GENERATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

From Michael Lockhart

Every year the New Church in Hurstville, New South Wales, Australia, has its annual Easter Egg Hunt after our Easter service. This year we had a great turnout for church and lots of kids enjoyed going after the eggs.



This picture was taken by **Jenn Beiswenger**, wife of our great pastor, the **Rev. Todd Beiswenger**. The ladies in the picture are, left to right: My wife, **Kerry**, our granddaughter, **Riley Kathrine Forbes Evans**, and our daughter (and Riley's mother), **Karen**. As you can see, Riley was taken by the colored eggs and had a great time.

We must always remind New Church members that Australia is a long way from Bryn Athyn, but our commitment to the Church is very strong in the land down under.

Life Lines

‘FAREWELL GOES OUT SIGHING’

There was a special poignancy to Dr. Kristin King’s “Farewell” (page 381) to the graduates of Bryn Athyn College at their May 30th commencement.

Not only was she bidding farewell to the students – calling on them to take what they have received from the College and to *fare well* in lives of service – but this was also her farewell as President of the College.

We who also bid farewell to her in this noble use could not have done so nearly as graciously or eloquently, but with every bit as much affection and appreciation.

Kristin stepped out of the classrooms she loves five years ago to guide the College through a challenging transition of growth and expansion. Her leadership has been extraordinary. She brought a gracious spirit, a calm sense of wisdom and assurance, and a commitment that was always guided by the Lord and the College’s unique spiritual mission.

Incoming President Brian Blair is blessed to inherit a College with a sense of stability and sure direction. Challenges will only intensify but there is hope for its future, thanks to the gift of Kristin’s leadership.

There is no doubt she will “fare well” back in the classroom as a gifted professor of English literature. And who but William Shakespeare to put the words to our bittersweet emotions: “Welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing.” (*Troilus and Cressida*)

(BMH)

WORLDVIEW

In addition to the various academic subjects taught in our church schools, instilling a New Church worldview in our students is basic. The view they gain of “The Big Picture” will provide a context and perspective in which the various facts they acquire, in school and throughout their lives, can be seen in a true light.

A New Church worldview begins with acknowledgment of the Lord, of course. “For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light we shall see light.” (*Psalms* 36:9) Other aspects of it follow from the main teachings of the

Writings, and an attitude toward them as having Divine authority. Exposure to a distinctly New Church culture in one of our communities also helps form their worldview.

There are two main worldviews competing for disciples today (and in every age): materialism and theism. These categories are often mislabeled and misrepresented as a choice between “science and religion,” as if those were mutually exclusive alternatives, but the real choice is between materialism and theism.

In the secular culture around us, and especially in the universities, the materialist view is very widespread and is promulgated with evangelistic fervor.

As a church, and as parents and educators, we need to be very aware of what we are up against and meet it head on. The contrast between what the Lord teaches in His Word and the attitudes and beliefs that prevail in the world around us should be pointed out and clearly explained to our young people. It is our responsibility to give them the truth they need to choose wisely, to choose life.

(WEO)

TWO VIEWS

In the **materialist view** nature is everything. The only source of truth is human reason aided by science. Belief in God and the spiritual world is the product of ignorance and superstition. The human “species” is essentially no different from other animals; the modern habit of constantly calling us a “species” helps drive this point home.

In this view, life after death is a “myth.” Morals are human constructs unrelated to any absolute or universal good and truth. Marriage is just a social convention and legal category. People still speak of “soul mates,” but it’s often just an empty romantic expression, as many don’t believe in the soul.

Religion is viewed as relatively harmless nonsense that offers comfort to the stupid, or, more and more these days, as a downright wicked cause of wars and crimes against humanity. This view of it is encouraged by pointing to crimes committed by some in the name of “religion” as representing religion generally. This makes as much sense as using the fact that Darwinism was the justification for eugenics experiments to discredit all science.

In the **theistic worldview**, creation is from God and encompasses both a spiritual and a natural world, which are as distinct and yet as closely connected as the soul and body of a person. In fact, even during our lives in this world we exist in both worlds – the mind in the spiritual world, the body in the natural world.

There is a Divine purpose to our lives, which is to regenerate and prepare

for eternal life in heaven – a process governed by Divine providence.

There is a distinct difference between people and animals; animals lack the two higher planes of life humans possess which give us the faculties of free will and reason.

And we have knowledge of all this, and many other essential truths, from Divine revelation (the Word).

So here we have two quite distinct and opposite worldviews. The materialist or atheist view is on the march, and is especially making gains among young people. In the Heavenly Doctrine we have what we need to lead them out of the spiritual wasteland which is otherwise very likely to claim them.

(WEO)

THE ROAD TO CHARACTER

Some years ago an anxious executive in a downsizing atmosphere recommended writing your own obituary as stress therapy. “If you are like most people,” he said, “you will tear up the first draft because it will be about your accomplishments, successes and positions in organizations. You’ll realize you want it to be about character – doing useful things, being a good partner, an exceptional friend.”

This is what *New York Times* columnist David Brooks calls the difference between résumé virtues and eulogy virtues in his new book, *The Road to Character*.

Brooks is concerned that too many people today live unbalanced lives – more in pursuit of achievement than character. This is a culture of “selfies” and the often suffocating narcissism of Facebook. Surveys track a depressing decline in Christianity and of lives guided by faith. Young people who used to say it was more important to be “nice” than “successful” have reversed their priorities. Too often, he says, they lack even a moral vocabulary to evaluate their world.

In this issue of *New Church Life*, in which we celebrate another milestone of New Church education in the Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College, we can be grateful that their mission is unique: to educate young people for useful lives in this world and the next. Would that it were not so unique, although there are still many students, schools and colleges committed to developing character, as well as “success.”

Brooks says: “We live in the culture of the Big Me. The meritocracy wants you to promote yourself. Social media wants you to broadcast a highlight reel of your life. Your parents and teachers were always telling you how wonderful you were.” Missing, he feels, is a noble sense of humility. Especially, we might add, humility before God.

Commencement speakers, he states, “are always telling people to follow your passions. Be true to yourself. This is a vision of life that begins with self and ends with self. But people on the road to inner light do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world’s deep needs?”

Such people, he says, “often follow a pattern of defeat, recognition, redemption.” They don’t build their lives by being better than others but by striving always to better themselves. We call that regeneration.

“People on the road to character,” he says, “understand that no person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. Individual will, reason and compassion are not strong enough to consistently defeat selfishness, pride and self-deception. We all need redemptive assistance from outside.”

Well, not from someplace vaguely “outside,” but from God.

But Brooks is on to something – that “a person of character has achieved a settled philosophy about fundamental things,” and from that a sense of peace.

That is what New Church education is all about – developing character based in spiritual principles from the Lord. That is the work and crowning achievement of a lifetime. Because when you get right down to it, character is the only thing we take with us into the other world. And it is the only thing we leave behind.

(BMH)

DOING GOD’S WORK: ‘NO LITTLE PLANS’

Daniel Burnham was one of the most influential and accomplished men in New Church history. What enriches his legacy is that he was not only the preeminent architect in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, but also was known and admired as a devoted Swedenborgian. He deserves to be remembered.

Burnham was honored in 2009 in his native Chicago, which he transformed during the World’s Fair of 1893 into “The White City.” Now plans have been announced for enriching another of his landmarks, the venerable Union Station in Washington, DC.

Burnham operated from a bold philosophy: “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood.”

He launched a career of “stirring men’s blood” with that revolutionary and comprehensive urban planning model for Chicago. He envisioned it as “Paris on the Prairie.” Grand boulevards, lush gardens and classic buildings transformed a dreary landscape into today’s famous lakefront.

His legacy also extends from the Flatiron Building in New York City and the Field Museum in Chicago to Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Cleveland and the

Philippines.

Chicago honored him six years ago with The Burnham Plan Centennial: *Bold Plans and Big Dreams*. It included a work commissioned in his honor, performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; a documentary of his life – *Make No Little Plans: Daniel Burnham and the American City*; and recognition of his Swedenborgian commitment to “being of service.”

Kathy Coffin-Piepgas, who graduated from the Academy Girls School in 1961, worked on that event. She quoted the woman who made the documentary as saying: “One of the tenets of Swedenborgianism is to be useful. Burnham’s parents were leaders in the church. He was steeped in this belief of being useful, and of God as a positive force in the universe.”

The transformative plan for Union Station in Washington also honors a man of grand vision with “no little plans.” The 14-acre, \$8.5 billion project – Burnham Place – will include offices, residential units, shops, a hotel, parks and plazas, and will be years in the making.

One of the chief developers says: “It’s a big deal. This is analogous to what Vanderbilt did in Grand Central. It changed the trajectory of New York City. In a similar fashion, this will do the same here.”

It is fitting that the noble work of this great New Churchman is being honored and remembered – not because it reflects personally on him but for what it says about his guiding faith.

Patrick Reardon wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* during the tribute there: “My guess is that the source of Burnham’s confidence and leadership was his religious faith. If you believe that your role is to be useful and do good – to make the world a better place – you’re able to throw yourself into the task of bringing order and beauty to the cityscape. You’re not just doing your own work. You’re doing God’s work.”

(BMH)

PROTECT YOUR IDENTITY

Our true identity is deeper and even more important than the name we were given by our parents, and the numbers by which the government and other agencies identify us. It is given to us by the Lord, our Maker. It is the image and likeness of God, which is stamped upon our very soul and lasts to eternity.

In the absolute sense, the Lord alone has *proprium*. He alone is self-existent. We derive our being, our humanity, our sense of self, from our relationship with Him. This is our true identity. “We are because God is.” (*Divine Providence* 46)

The hells work constantly to distort, destroy and deprive us of the Divine image which the Lord has put upon us; to steal our identity. The Lord in His

providence, and by means of His Word, works constantly to keep it from being stolen; and to enhance and deepen it.

Then, when we come into the next world, the angels will be able to identify us clearly, and the hells will have no hold on us.

(WEO)

LEARNING TO SEE

In a book about the brain (*Incognito* by David Eagleman) there is an account of a man who had lost his vision in early childhood and then had it restored by an operation in middle age. A photographer was present to record the dramatic scene when the bandages were removed and he saw his children's faces for the first time, but the moment turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment. His surgically repaired eyes worked fine, but he couldn't actually *see* his children. Instead of faces, he just saw lines and planes of light and color. It took a couple of weeks before he learned to recognize things for what they were, including faces.

The point was that it isn't the eye that sees, but the brain. How do we see light, for instance? It's dark inside your skull; the light that enters your eye does not flow into the brain as light flows through a window into a room. Rather, it is converted into electrical signals which are communicated by the optic nerve to the brain, which interprets them to create the images we see.

The inverted images of the natural objects received by the eye's retina are turned right side up by the brain, and assembled into forms we can see and comprehend. An animal's eye is similar to a human's, but the human rational mind enables us to see a world of meaning in things which are virtually invisible to the animal, because, although their existence is seen, their significance is not.

The way natural vision works illustrates the further lesson that all natural knowledge must be interpreted in the mind for us to discern its spiritual significance – that is, how it relates to God and the spiritual realities of human life. The facts of nature, and the knowledges we gain from the letter of the Word, that enter into the natural degree of the mind, must be ordered and illuminated by the life and light of heaven flowing in through the higher, spiritual level of the mind. Only then can the spiritual reality they represent be seen.

As the optic nerve carries the electronic signals produced by natural light entering the eye from without to the brain, so the rational mind (when fully functional) connects knowledge that comes into the memory from the natural world with the spiritual mind's "interpretive program" (as we might call it).

Then, little by little, as the formerly blind man gradually came to see his

children's faces, we will see the face and hands of God appearing before us in the letter of the Word and in nature.

(WEO)

COPING WITH SUICIDE

Suicide is always tragic – not only for the life abandoned but for all those left with searing pain and haunting questions.

The Rev. John Odhner has written a comprehensive and compassionate study, *Reflections on Suicide* (page 335), which offers the Lord's enveloping mercy, plus the caution that we can never judge those who take their lives. It is brimming with the comfort of the Lord's teachings.

"Suicide," John says, "can leave us feeling that life is extremely confusing, complex and painful. It will often seem to make absolutely no sense at all. The teachings [which he lists] will not take away all the pain, but they may bring a little clarity and comfort to people who have been faced with suicide."

Would that we could share these teachings more broadly, for suicide is a pervasive nightmare. No community or culture is immune – including the New Church.

Saddest of all are the young people who feel they cannot live up to expectations and just give up, leaving behind devastated families.

In Palo Alto, California, volunteers stand watch at railroad crossings, where too many bright young people have been stepping in front of speeding trains. This is in the shadow of Stanford University, where high school students grow up in "the epicenter of overachievement." Too many of them are under enormous pressure, with a beguiling but false and tragic idea of what constitutes real success in life.

A recent survey by the Centers for Disease Control found that 17% of high school students in America had considered suicide in the previous year and that 8 percent actually made an attempt.

When a child commits suicide parents feel the pangs of guilt most acutely, and must deal with that. But too many children, especially in affluent areas, surrender lives of "just being kids" for the insidious stress of imposed and impossible goals. Reflecting on the pressures and expectations we may place on others is a humbling challenge. As one perceptive father in Palo Alto puts it, a "Koala Dad" is far better for a child than a "Tiger Mom."

The great tragedy of suicide is that the lingering questions never go away. But neither do the Lord's love and mercy.

As John Odhner concludes his reflections: "The Lord is infinitely loving and merciful, both to those who feel that love and to those who feel isolated

from it. All the evil that the Lord permits, and all the blessings He provides, come from that infinite mercy which is constantly seeking to lead each one of us to heaven as far as we are willing to go, each on the unique path that is best for us.”

(BMH)

‘ONE FLESH’

The key distinction between a marriage and all other human relationships is how exclusive and inclusive it is. It is exclusive because limited just to two people, the husband and wife; no one else is included. Two people of the same sex can love each other and be very close friends, but their friendship is not necessarily limited just to the two of them. But for them, their marriage is all-inclusive – a union not just of their spirits, but also their bodies. As the Lord said, they become “one flesh.”

Their bodily union is an outermost expression of the hoped-for oneness of their souls, and is also clearly for the purpose of conceiving children. In this way they are capable of accomplishing a use that no person alone, or any other combination of persons, can accomplish: creating a new human being, and thus contributing to the perpetuation of the human race on earth and in heaven. And, as many studies have shown (not to mention common sense), a family with a married father and mother is the best setting for providing the care children need. Society, therefore, has a stake in marriage and would be wise to preserve the genuine definition of it.

The fact that a man and a woman who are not married can also conceive children, or that not every married couple is able to or chooses to do so, does not negate the truth that the potential for procreation is the essential use that defines what marriage is; and that the marriage of a man and woman is the Divinely intended context and order of human life within which that use of procreation is meant to be carried out.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” (*Matthew 19:5*)

(WEO)

‘THE CASE IS THIS . . . ’

In reading for my *Arcana* class I began to notice how often I encountered this phrase, “the case is this,” and a similar one, “how the case is.” A quick check on NewSearch revealed that “the case is this” appears 179 times in the Writings, 163 of them in the *Arcana*. “How the case is” appears 314 times; again, most of them in the *Arcana*.

For example: “In regard to influx from the internal celestial into spiritual good and into the truths of the church in the natural according to the quality of the good of innocence, the case is this.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6701) Then follows the explanation.

The point is, that the things revealed in these books are not presented as speculation, or as ideas Swedenborg arrived at by his own reasoning, but as *facts*. We’re not dealing with “perhaps,” or “probably,” or “it must be that,” or “most who have studied these things have concluded.” No, again and again what we have is a simple assertion that *this is the way it is*.

Some readers have found this off-putting. Even during his lifetime a friend advised Swedenborg that if he simply published his books as his own theology, instead of Divine revelation, they would be hailed as brilliant. But this was not an option for Swedenborg, because *the case is* that the books really *aren’t his*.

For those seeking Divine truth, and who believe they have found it in these books, the definiteness and authority with which the truth is presented in them is very satisfying. If these books really are the second coming of the Lord, as claimed, then we would expect them to contain solid truth, stated absolutely, with no “maybe,” “might” or “could be” about it.

In fact, when we consider the kinds of things described and explained in the Writings – the nature of God, the inner meaning of Scripture, Divine providence, the deep workings of the human mind, the spiritual world, and so on – it is clear that these things *could only* have been revealed by the Lord.

Those who truly desire spiritual knowledge and wish they could find a reliable source of it – a source that offers the certainty they wish for, but which they doubt exists – should know that *the case is this*: such a source does exist. As the Lord said in His first coming: “Come and see.”

(WEO)

‘OF THE LORD’S DIVINE MERCY’

Here we have the reason and context for the new revelation: it is “of the Lord’s Divine mercy.” That phrase, promising further light on a subject later on, occurs 285 times in the *Arcana*. For example: “Concerning the spiritual ideas which belong to the internal man, of the Lord’s Divine mercy more will be said when heaven is described . . . “ (n. 10237.3)

“Mercy is love grieving.” This beautiful definition is from the explanation of the Joseph story in *Genesis*. Joseph’s brothers, who had sold him into slavery, had come to Egypt to find food. There was a famine in the land, but Egypt, under the wise leadership of Joseph, was well prepared with storehouses full of grain. His brothers didn’t recognize him, but Joseph knew who they were “and wept.” He loved them despite their treatment of him.

“That weeping is expressive of grief and love, is well known, and

consequently it is expressive of mercy or pity, for mercy is love grieving. The Divine love is therefore called mercy, because the human race is of itself in hell; and when man perceives this in himself, he implores mercy." (*Arcana Coelestia* 5480)

The Lord has revealed His Word out of Divine love and sorrow and compassion toward us in our suffering. That truth is the heart of all the truths of faith; the truth within the truth. It is expressed again, in the New Testament, in the words: "Jesus wept." (*John 11:35*) That simple statement contains the seed of love out of which the whole tree of life grows, whose leaves heal the soul, and whose fruit is every kind of good.

Our ability to understand is limited. We argue over what this or that truth means. The truth suffers, the world suffers, we all suffer. And the Lord grieves.

As far as written revelation of the Word goes, we have it all – from the Old Testament commands for obedience, to the spiritual vision that appeals so strongly to the moral imagination in the New Testament, to the plain statements addressed to the highest level of the natural mind, the rational, in the Heavenly Doctrine. It is up to us now to hear the love speaking through every word the Lord, in His mercy, has spoken – and respond.

(WEO)

A COMPUTER – OR A LITTLE CHILD – SHALL LEAD US?

Would you extend your life indefinitely if science made it possible? Yes, we might all wish for a few more years to watch grandchildren grow. Wouldn't you be curious to see where the Church will be in another 50 or 100 years? And for some it might be as mundane as: whatever it takes to see the Eagles win a Super Bowl in my lifetime! But with a solid trust in providence, an unshakable belief in life after death, and the sure knowledge that life in heaven will be infinitely better than life on earth, most of us in the New Church are content to leave it all in God's hands.

Woody Allen once said he wasn't afraid of death – he just didn't want to be around when it happened.

But most people do live with a fear of death. Many claim to believe in heaven, perhaps more with hope than sure faith, but still worry about the unknown.

Since the beginning of time people have fantasized about cheating death and living forever in this world. Herodotus was writing about it in the fifth century BC. Ponce de Leon famously searched for the Fountain of Youth in Florida in the early 1500s. And the mission of many a scientist is not only to keep extending life – which medicine is doing better and better – but eventually avoiding death altogether.

The Rev. Todd Beiswenger, pastor of the Hurstville Society outside of

Sydney, Australia, has written a three-part series for New Church Perspective (www.newchurchperspective.com), on *The Future*. In one he focuses on futurist Raymond Kurzweil, who “believes computer intelligence is advancing so rapidly that in a couple of decades machines will be as intelligent as humans.”

Eventually the machines will be the masters and we will be the cyborgs. Sounds like “computer intelligence” is an oxymoron. This is worth cheating death for?

How fortunate we are in the Church to know directly from the Lord about the life after death, heaven and hell, and the life that leads to each. We know that “computer intelligence” and worldly reality – no matter how advanced – will never be a match for spiritual intelligence and spiritual reality. And that living forever in this world – always suspended between heaven and hell, with all the fallout that makes life less than ideal – is no match for the promise of heaven.

People with near-death experiences generally come back to conscious life with no fear of death. They feel certain they have glimpsed the reality and transforming peace of the spiritual world.

All the “computer intelligence” of Kurzweil’s world is no match for that.

(BMH)

A KNOT IN YOUR STOMACH?

Part three of Todd’s series describes people who are afraid of death but “refuse to look up and see God and the angels trying to raise them higher.” They are stuck in this world, preoccupied with the worries of this life. He relates this state to a teaching from the Writings:

“Those who have worried much about the future, and more so those who have as a consequence become grasping and avaricious, appear in the region where the stomach is situated. Many have appeared to me there. The sphere of their life may be likened to a nauseating smell emitted from the stomach also to an ache caused by indigestion. People like these remain in that region for a long time, for worries about the future, when these are compounded by the way such people act, seriously impair and slow down the inflow of spiritual life. This is because people assign to themselves that which is the business of Divine Providence, and those who do this put a stop to that inflow and so cut themselves off from the life of goodness and truth.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5177)

There is another wonderful comforting teaching from the *Arcana*:

“Peace has within it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to an end that is good.” (*Ibid.* 8455)

Far better than any drugstore elixir, the way to get that knot out of your stomach is simply to trust in the Lord.

(BMH)



OFFICES Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

PUBLISHED BY General Church of the New Jerusalem

EDITORS **Bruce Henderson**, Editor
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

Rev. Walter Orthwein, Spiritual Editor
Walter.Orthwein@verizon.net

SUBSCRIPTIONS New Church Life, Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA
\$30 for any address, \$5.00 a single copy

TELEPHONE 267-502-4990

New Church Life

Published bimonthly by
the General Church of the New Jerusalem
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
U.S.A.

www.newchurch.org
www.newchurchlife.org
July/August 2015

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LANGHORNE, PA
PERMIT NO. 81