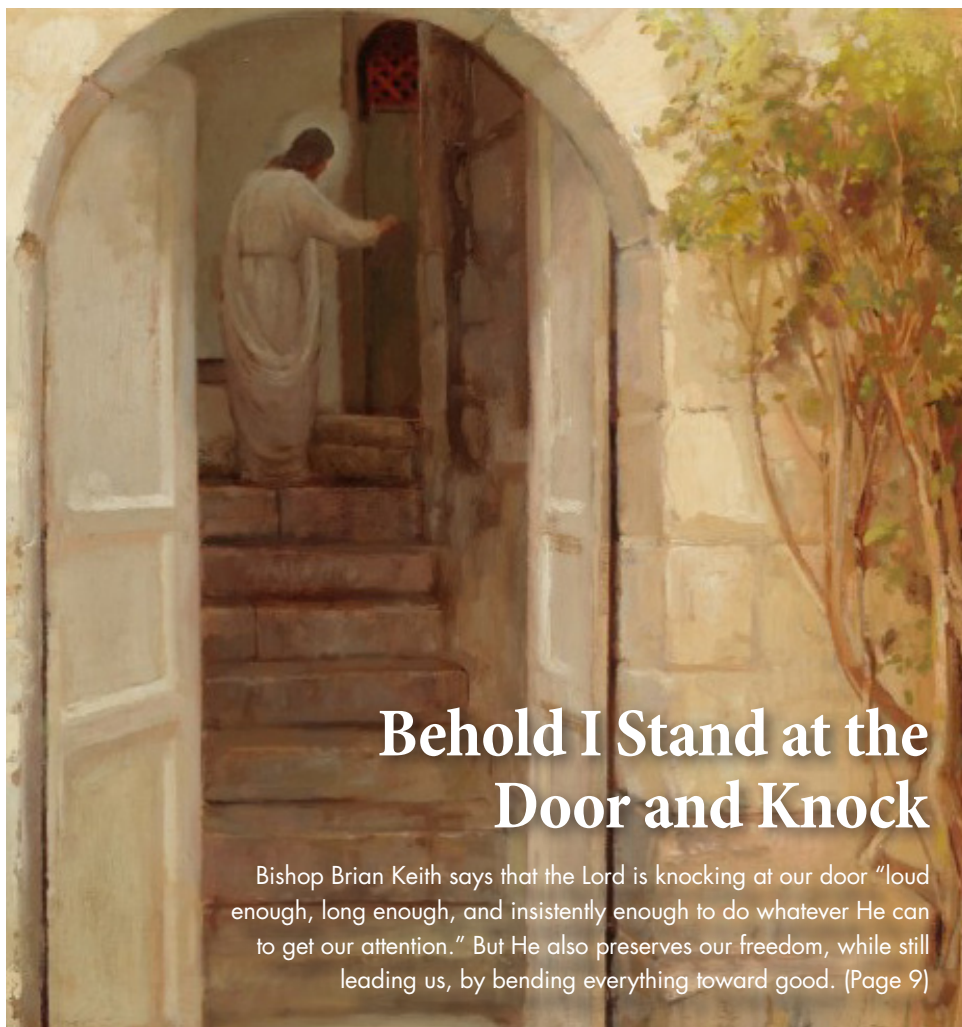


NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017



Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock

Bishop Brian Keith says that the Lord is knocking at our door “loud enough, long enough, and insistently enough to do whatever He can to get our attention.” But He also preserves our freedom, while still leading us, by bending everything toward good. (Page 9)

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New Church Life

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

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In This Issue

How does the Lord preserve our freedom while leading us? The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith says He does it by insistently knocking at the door to get our attention, without ever forcing us to do anything, and constantly bending everything in our lives toward good. He says: “The Lord is present in our lives more than we can ever imagine. Without it we would have no hope for salvation. His mighty power is an immediate presence, caressing our minds and gently leading us to see what we would not otherwise and do what we inherently would not.” (Page 9)

What can I do to make a difference in a world that is often overwhelming hope with misery? The Rev. Dr. Thane P. Glenn says we make a significant difference just by living our lives with kindness and charity. “There really is no limit,” he says, “to the hearts that can be touched around the world by our daily choices, our daily gestures of fairness and faithfulness.” (Page 22)

The Rev. Edward Akotey, pastor of the Nteso Group of the New Church in Nteso, Ghana, looks at the lessons of Abram and writes in a sermon that “Unity brings progress into every aspect of human life.” (Page 27)

Following an article in the May/June 2016 issue of *New Church Life* by the Rev. Gerald Waters, “Surely We Are Not Swedenborgians,” and several letters in agreement, the Rev. Derrick A. M. Lumsden describes, “Why I call myself a Swedenborgian” – “because I believe it is an honest and effective way to communicate with non-Swedenborgians while pointing to Divine revelation itself.” (Page 32)

When the Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman did a memorial service for Shareen Blair in the fall he noted that she was fondly remembered for her Word-based meditations accompanied by soft music. As a tribute to her he offers a preamble to his memorial address, “The Lord is Speaking to You.” (Page 35)

In *Introducing Our Ministers* the Rev. Brett D. Buick tells how he served for four years in the U.S. Army after college, then into a six-year career as a lawyer, before even thinking of entering the ministry. And now this assistant to the pastor in Kempton, Pennsylvania, says, “I can’t imagine doing anything else.” (Page 38)

In a sermon, “I Am the Bread of life,” the Rev. Brett Buick says that as we

ask the Lord to “give us this day our daily bread,” He is constantly nourishing us with His love and giving us the strength to persevere and do what is right. (Page 42)

The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein reviews a new book from the Swedenborg Foundation: *The Ten Commandments – The Secrets of Spiritual Growth Found in God’s Principles for Living*. He says, “The new light shown upon the Ten Commandments in the Heavenly Doctrine, revealing so much that is in them which was not seen before, is an example of how the Lord’s promise to ‘make all things new’ has been fulfilled. Some of the oldest writing in existence is now shown to be as fresh as ever, and even more vitally important and illuminating than people dreamed.” (Page 45)

Church News, beginning on page 47, includes:

- Highlights of Academy Board of Trustees meetings in 2016
- The annual in-depth report on the Church in Asia by the Rev. John Jin
- The Swedenborg Foundation’s internet connections which are taking off throughout the world
- An invitation to a European Assembly in England in August
- A review of *Twelve Qualities of a Spiritual Mind* by brother and sister Harry W. Barnitz and Dawn Barnitz Potts

Editorials

WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL

When a Pharisee tempted Jesus, “Which is the greatest commandment in the law?” He answered him: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (*Matthew 22:36*; see also *Mark 12:29-31*)

So, it is not only a commandment to love the Lord – completely – but it is “the first and great commandment.” Add loving our neighbor as ourselves and these are the Two Great Commandments upon which “hang all the law and the prophets.” That means loving the Lord and the neighbor are the essence of the entire Word.

The Ten Commandments are relatively black and white: worship no other gods, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t commit adultery, don’t covet. But how do we love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind? It sounds daunting – maybe too much to expect amid the demands of daily life. But the Lord’s yoke is easy. He just wants us to live lives of love and use. That is how we love Him and love our neighbor.

Throughout the world we witness what happens when people do not love God. Too many don’t even know Him. Others may feel they just don’t know how to love Him. God can feel remote and mysterious. The plaintive lament sung by Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar* – “I don’t know how to love you” – struck a chord with audiences. How do we really love Him – especially with all our heart, soul and mind?

But the Lord gives us many illustrations. In *Matthew* the familiar story of “What would love do?” was the basis for a recent General Church Journey Program: “For I was hungered, and you gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” And when the people said they had not seen Him hungry, thirsty and naked, He told them: “Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me.” (*Matthew 25:35,36; 40*)

That is how we love Him – simply by loving and serving others.

When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Peter said: “Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.” Jesus just said to him – and to us: “Feed My sheep.” (*John 21: 15-17*)

There is nothing complex or overly demanding in the Two Great Commandments. Consider the simplicity of: “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.” (*Jeremiah 7:23*)

The Lord’s love for us is constant. We know that if it ever ceased, if only for a moment, we could not survive. And how does He love us? His providence overlooks every moment of our lives, not shielding us from the consequences of our free choices – or the choices of others – but always bending us toward good, always lifting us up toward heaven, if that is what we choose, and never giving up on us.

Our love for Him and for our neighbor should be as sure and constant – not as something added to our daily lives but just incorporated into the way we choose to live. That starts with loving the Lord’s commandments simply by living them. As we shun evil and turn to Him, goodness and love from the Lord flow into us and can be reciprocated.

As we reflect on our day before going to sleep we might ask ourselves: Have I loved the Lord today? Have I read the Word? Have I been kind, grateful, useful? Have I loved the Lord with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind? Have I fed His sheep?

(BMH)

RELIGIOUS FEELINGS: A SENSE OF HOLINESS

The life of religion encompasses feelings, thoughts and deeds. The doctrinal ideas and charitable works associated with religion are well known to us, but religious feelings are a little harder to pin down and are not discussed as often. So I plan to follow this with a series of editorials on the subject during the year.

Feelings flow, like streams from a fountain, from the love that forms a person’s will and constitutes the essence of the person. The most profound feelings are religious, as are the thoughts they inspire; they have to do with God, heaven, and things that have the greatest value and significance for us.

The first religious feeling we’ll look at is **a sense of holiness**, or Divine presence. It is what Jacob felt when he awoke from his dream and said: “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.” (*Genesis 28:16*) It involves feelings of awe, wonder, mystery, and holy fear. “And he was afraid....” (*Genesis 28:16*)

An adjective that has been used to describe the quality that provokes such a sensation is “numinous.” The *noumenon* is the realm of spirit, as opposed to the natural world of *phenomena* that we can apprehend by our physical senses.

Kant and other writers have referred to the “numinous,” but as far as I know, Swedenborg does not use the term; and in the Writings the word “phenomena” applies to things in both worlds, the spiritual as well as the natural.

But terminology isn’t the important thing. Whatever it is called, most people have experienced a sense of holiness at one time or another. Not a vision, or a voice, or an out-of-body experience, but just a strange sensation, however vague, that there is some higher reality – uncanny, otherworldly and powerful – that transcends but also touches and affects this world.

Why some people are more prone to religious feelings than others, I do not know. Perhaps some need them more than others for their regeneration. Strong, ecstatic religious feelings are rare, and appropriately so, because during our life in the world we need to concentrate on our work here. The risk of profanation, or mental unbalance, are also reasons why spiritual experiences are relatively rare in modernity. In any case, they should not be sought as an end in themselves.

On the other hand, total and unrelieved immersion in the natural stifles the spirit, and we do need to see, *and feel*, the sun of heaven breaking through the clouds occasionally. We need to have enough awareness of spiritual reality to bolster the belief that God is present and working in the world. The “Moses” in us needs an occasional “burning bush” experience to inspire us to leave the “Egypt” of merely natural life.

All people are capable of religious feelings, because of the life that flows into every human mind from the Lord. It is because of His presence within us that we are able to sense His presence in the world outside us. Even those who deny God, or at least a personal God, may have an intuitive sense that there is a mysterious force of some kind behind the order and beauty of nature that we can see.

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious,” Einstein wrote. “It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.”

Religion did not arise out of lame attempts by scientifically ignorant people of ancient times to explain natural phenomena, as our skeptical, supercilious age supposes. Religion is a response to a reality that people even today are able to detect and are affected by. Religious ideas are so maddeningly (to the materialists) persistent because they are inspired by religious feelings, which are intrinsic to human nature.

(WEO)

Letters

Letters may be sent to the Editors of *New Church Life* at
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
or e-mailed to Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org.

Insights Into China

To The Editors:

I was struck by an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on December 18, 2016, that revealed a touching parallel to something said in the Writings about China.

The article was titled: “Struggling to understand the new U.S.; Chinese worry about the direction of foreign policy under Trump.” It described the efforts of scholars in China to grasp the meaning of the unexpected election of Donald Trump. They worried about the American public’s loss of confidence in its governing system, and the collapse of U.S. support for the global trading system that had helped China rise. Then I read this:

One Fudan doctoral student told me: “The U.S. I knew was a very limited blue part of the country. Young people in China should be encouraged to travel in red parts of the country. Most of us didn’t understand that U.S. people suffered from the trade deficit with China.”

This last statement immediately made me think of Swedenborg’s encounter with Chinese in the spiritual world, recounted in *Arcana Coelestia* 2596, *Heaven and Hell* 325, and *Spiritual Experiences* 3067.

What they were like in general it was given me to conclude from the fact that they are of a caring nature, or they are moved by charity. I was inspired to see this from the fact that at once when I was burning with the desire for them to approach, moved by that desire they joined me. Then also from the fact that when they were thinking it was they alone who had inspired the things I was writing just above about mental imagery [3064-5], when told that there were also others, who were indignant that they said it was they alone, whereas it was many. Then they fell so deeply into the thought whether they had done wrong against their neighbor claiming things which belonged to

others, that I perceived their emotion, which was both one of shame and one of acknowledgment that they had injured their neighbor, as well as many other worthy feelings that I cannot describe. (*Spiritual Experiences* 3067)

I have always been impressed with these statements and felt that they describe a very admirable quality. So I was touched to see that same quality in the newspaper account.

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Out of Step?

To the Editors:

In a recent letter to the editors of *New Church Life* (September/October 2016, page 418), a prominent minister of the General Church wrote, in part: “Our old way of holding our faith – as being the one and only answer to people’s theological questions – is largely out of step.

“People, in my experience, are not searching solely for a theology but are searching as well for a mission-centered purpose-driven community. So that is where we must start – with created loving, caring, compassionate communities that move forward into the world with purpose.”

Out of step with whom, or with what, I wonder? The Lord’s revelations through Emanuel Swedenborg are *the way of life for all mankind – God’s WORD, in other words!* How could it be that, ‘holding that faith as being the one and only answer to people’s theological questions’ is now considered to be “*out of step*”?

If what we want is mission-centered, purpose-driven communities we should take lessons from the Rev. Dr. Robert Schuller with his Crystal Cathedral and his Hour of Power TV show. He had a following of millions!

However, in the end his church went bankrupt and its cathedral was sold to the Catholic Church. Do you suppose that maybe the real power lies in *the truth of God’s Word*? I, for one, am not sure that compassionate communities moving forward with worldly purposes is where we “must start.” Should we be trying to provide “what people are searching for,” or should we be trying to share “a *new view of the way, the truth, and the life*”?

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, Florida

Inspiring Material

To the Editors:

I went to the Bryn Athyn Cathedral to find New Church literature to hand out here at Gloria Dei Personal Care where I now live.

Julia Schmucker gave me the New Church Perspective Series pamphlets, including: Who is God?, Marriage Can Be Everlasting, Life After Death, and others.

These are like precious gems – so clear, easy to understand and beautiful. They could inspire young and old in the Church and also help people unfamiliar with the Writings.

Charis P. Cole
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

How the Lord Preserves Freedom, Yet Still Leads – by Bending

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

One of the treasured teachings of the New Church is how the Lord preserves human freedom. In fact, one could argue the ability to act in freedom according to reason – the first law of Divine Providence – is a bedrock of what makes us human. It is described as the Lord’s dwelling place with us. (*True Christian Religion* 74:3) As the Lord leads us, He protects and ensures that we are never compelled to believe what is true or to do what is good unless we choose it. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1947, 5854:2; *Apocalypse Explained* 1138:2-6, *Divine Providence passim*)

This is further explained:

The Lord could through angels lead a person into good ends by omnipotent force; but this would be to take away the person’s life, for his life consists in entirely contrary loves. Therefore the Divine law is inviolable, that a person shall be in freedom, and that good and truth, or charity and faith, shall be implanted in his freedom, and by no means in compulsion; because what is received in a state of compulsion does not remain, but is dissipated. For to compel a person is not to insinuate into his will, because it is then the will of another from which he acts; and therefore when he returns to his own will, that is, to his own freedom, this is rooted out. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5854:2)

So the Lord will never force us to be good. While He provides the Word, He does not compel anyone to read it or listen to it. He does not coerce anyone to attend church. He won’t intervene and stop us from doing something wrong. And when we have done something wrong, there is no thunder from heaven admonishing or threatening us. In fact, with a little bit of effort it is not too difficult to quiet the nagging voice of conscience!

But such emphasis can be placed on the Lord leaving us in freedom that it can appear He is rather sitting on the sidelines, awaiting the exercise of our free choice. And only then does He respond to it.

The Lord will never force us to be good. While He provides the Word, He does not compel anyone to read it or listen to it. He does not coerce anyone to attend church. He won't intervene and stop us from doing something wrong.

While a portion of the Lord's leading is necessarily in response to our choices, I believe that He is much more active than merely watching what we are up to and responding from time to time. My thesis is that He is a constant active force in our lives, and could even be described as a gentle aggressor.

Perhaps the best way to frame the question is: How far will the Lord go, short of compulsion, to lead us to good?

It is clear from the Heavenly Doctrines that the Lord is not passive, but extremely active in our lives. Consider the language in these quotations: "[T]he Lord is *continually*

urging and as it were entreating." (*Arcana Coelestia* 5471; all italics in this presentation for emphasis are added to the text.) "God is omnipresent in good, *perpetually urging and demanding* to be received." (*True Christian Religion* 490) "The Lord is present with every one, *urging and pressing* to be received." (*True Christian Religion* 766; see also *Spiritual Experiences* 6080; *True Christian Religion* 498; *Last Judgment Posthumous* 215; *Invitation to the New Church* 23, 50)

These are not reactive or passive stances but rather depict someone forcefully pushing upon us to influence our thinking and actions. This is an asserting, forceful God who is passionately and lovingly present and leading us.

How Does the Lord Knock on Our Doors?

A beloved quote from the New Testament is: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (*Revelation* 3:20) The question is: how does the Lord knock?

It is easy to think of it as an occasional gentle knocking that we can listen to or not. In one sense that is correct because He is not going to break our doors down. Yet consider how the Heavenly Doctrines explain what the Lord is doing: "The Lord *continually urges and presses* upon a person to open the door for himself" (*Divine Providence* 119:2), and "the Lord is continually present, knocks at the door, *is urgent and wishes to enter.*" (*Apocalypse Explained* 798:6;

see also *Life* 57; *True Christian Religion* 720; *Apocalypse Explained* 741:3; *Apocalypse Revealed* 217) So we might better understand this as the Lord rather loudly and insistently knocking – to get our attention and motivate us to open the door.

Upon reflection, we can all probably see the Lord's hand, or knocking, in our lives. The issues that we really should be dealing with tend to come out. The Word, when read or heard, can frequently convict us of our evils, if we are willing to pay attention. Other people will point out our mistakes and flaws. In marriage there are few places to hide. And it is amazing to see and try to deal with one's hereditary evils in one's children; they quickly learn how to push all our buttons!

These are just a few of the ways in which the Lord knocks to get our attention and encourages us to turn to Him, His truth, and follow His ways. He thus confronts us with our shortcomings and almost impels us to address them.

The story of Jonah illustrates this. Jonah fled to avoid the Lord's command to preach to the Ninevehites so they might be saved. Did the Lord just let him go? No. He caused a great storm to threaten the boat he was in. And when he was thrown into the sea, the Lord caused a great fish to swallow him. It was only when Jonah accepted his responsibility that the Lord had him spat out onto dry land. In one sense the Lord took care of Jonah. But from Jonah's perspective the journey and what the Lord did to encourage him was certainly not an easy or gentle process.

Scriptural stories frequently show the Lord being more confrontational, or at least less helpful, than people might want. Moses' excuse of not being able to speak well, to avoid leading the Israelites, was rejected by Jehovah. When Elijah was in despair, hiding in the mountains after overcoming the prophets of Baal, the Lord did not give him solace but told him to get back to his duties.

In the Sermon on the Mount, when the Lord identified an Old Testament law, such as not committing adultery, He made it harder on them by telling

While a portion of the Lord's leading is necessarily in response to our choices, I believe that He is much more active than merely watching what we are up to and responding from time to time. My thesis is that He is a constant active force in our lives, and could even be described as a gentle aggressor.

The image of the Lord knocking at the door is actually one of the Lord knocking loud enough, long enough, and insistently enough to do whatever He can to get our attention.

them to keep more than just the literal statement. And He told the rich young ruler who had kept the commandments to go and sell all that he had. The list could go on and on.

Throughout Scripture there is praise and hope for the Lord to be powerful. Jehovah is frequently thanked for bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt “by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.” (*Deuteronomy* 7:8) In the Lord’s Prayer we conclude with, “Yours is the kingdom and the power and glory forever,” declaring we want Him to have Divine power to lead us,

to save us. (*Matthew* 6:13) And we admit our weakness when say, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (*Psalms* 46:1)

In fact, when we turn to the Lord for help, what are we asking for? Money? Success? Everything to go smoothly? As we know so well, those types of prayers are rarely, if ever answered. But prayers that ask the Lord to affect us, to touch our hearts so we can deal with difficulty, are more likely to enable the Lord to be present and help. So we are, in effect, requesting the Lord be present in our thoughts and affections, holding them and leading them.

So the image of the Lord knocking at the door is actually one of the Lord knocking loud enough, long enough, and insistently enough to do whatever He can to get our attention. In fact, the Heavenly Doctrines occasionally depict it as the Lord knocking and us resisting Him by holding the door closed! (*Divine Providence* 33:2, 233:3; *Apocalypse Explained* 412:20)

It is not surprising that the Lord makes such a racket knocking on our doors. We might ignore Him and what is good otherwise, for our innate freedom is at odds with His goals for us: “Divine providence continually operates counter to and in conflict with a person’s will.” (*Divine Providence* 234; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 2406:2, 4612:3, 6474, 7042; *Heavenly Doctrine* 183; *Heaven and Hell* 296, 523; *Divine Providence* 211, 219:4; *Spiritual Experiences* 1256) In fact, everyone is so drawn to evil that a person “cannot be torn away except by force.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6368)

Bending and not Breaking

If we are so oppositional to the Lord’s leading, beyond knocking on our doors, how does He do it? Not by compulsion, but by an interior bending.

A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench; He

shall bring forth judgment unto truth (*Isaiah* 42:3); that is, He does not break fallacies, nor quench cupidities, but bends them to what is true and good. (*Arcana Coelestia* 25; see also *ibid.* 1874, 1992:4, 2053:2, 2180:5, 6205, 9039; *Spiritual Experiences* 2392; *Apocalypse Explained* 409:2)

That is, “He leads people gently, bending and not breaking, thus leading away from evils, and leading to good.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 409:2) He pushes and prods us – not so forcefully that we feel threatened to fight against Him. But He nudges our thinking and feeling – a little bit here, a little bit there, over and over again. Perhaps it is like how a sheep dog manages a herd; he is in constant motion, nipping at the heels of one sheep and then another, shifting the direction of a few sheep, and then, through them, the entire herd.

The Lord is particularly gentle yet forceful with what we have embraced from infancy. We know how difficult it is to change our ideas because, whether true or false, they are so connected to our affections.

The principles which a person imbibes from infancy the Lord never breaks, but bends. If they are things that the person esteems holy, and are such as are not contrary to Divine and natural order, but are in themselves matters of indifference, the Lord lets them alone, and suffers the person to remain in them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1255; see also *ibid.* 2180:5, 9039; *Apocalypse Explained* 627:7)

This is especially the case in regard to worship, as seen by the Lord allowing Himself to be called by one of the names of the many gods worshiped in the early phases of the Israelitish Church.

The reason why the Lord was willing to be first represented before them by the name “Shaddai” is that the Lord by no means desires to destroy suddenly (still less in a single moment) the worship that has been inseminated in anyone from his infancy; for this would be to tear up the root, and thereby destroy the holy state of adoration and of worship that has been deeply implanted, and which the Lord never breaks, but bends. The holy state of worship, that has been rooted in from infancy is of such a nature that it cannot endure violence, but only a gentle and kindly bending. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1992:4)

The reason why the Lord does not suddenly break our affections or ideas is that the result would be devastating for us, and counterproductive to His goal of a heaven from the human race. In describing temptations, it is noted that “if people were broken in the least, they at once tended toward hatred against the Lord.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2196) Also, if someone were broken “he would be miserably deprived of his life.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5854:3; see also *Spiritual Experiences* 2490, 3014, 2628)

This is not to say that the Lord’s bending of us does not at times feel somewhat turbulent. This is depicted in the Word: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, You will not despise.” (*Psalms* 51:17) “Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot be made whole again.” (*Jeremiah* 19:11) And the

The Lord's bending is also not a sudden event, but a process effected throughout our lifetimes. His sight and leading encompass not just years, but centuries and milleniums.

power of hell “was completely broken by the Last Judgment.” (*Divine Providence* 263e; see also *Heaven and Hell* 509)

The fundamental change of turning us from self-centered individuals to thoughtful, caring people is a break from the past, eventually becoming a completely new orientation. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3296e) “And the crooked places shall be made straight.” (*Luke* 3:5) And even though the overall process is gentle, there can be turmoil from time to time.

Temptations are an example of this, for in their doubts and despairs they seem to shake our very foundations. Most know the experience of a temptation that

“touches a person's very life, assailing, destroying and transforming it.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 760; also *ibid.* 762, 857:2, 1664:6, 2694, 5773; *Heavenly Doctrine* 199)

While our experience of them can be depressing and painful, within them the Lord is gently bending us to turn us away from evil loves and their fallacious ideas, and to embrace, at least a little bit more, what is heavenly. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3318; see also *ibid.* 711, 868:2, 887, 2272, 2334, 6663) They soften our evils and falsities so that they are more yielding and thus more good and truth can be instilled. So temptations are a process of bending, yet they can appear devastatingly forceful at times.

Bending is Gradual

The Lord's bending is also not a sudden event, but a process effected throughout our lifetime. His sight and leading encompass not just years, but centuries and milleniums. So He only bends us as much as we can bear at any given time. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6472:2; see also *ibid.* 1992:4, 3470:3; *Spiritual Experiences* 1937, 2012, 2017 ½, 2920, 3747, 4203) This is described when the Lord was promising that He would drive out all their enemies from the land of Canaan. He said:

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.
(*Exodus* 23:29, 30)

This means there will be “no hasty flight or removal of them . . . [but] removal by degrees according to order.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9302, 9333; see also *ibid.* 59) Thus the Lord works with our less-than-perfect states and over time,

in many situations, touches our feelings and thoughts, and step-by-step draws us toward Himself.

The Lord uses angels to effect this: “The angels attentively and continually observe what the evil spirits and genii with a person are intending and attempting; and insofar as the person suffers it, they bend evils into goods, or to goods, or toward goods.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5980; see also *ibid.* 2796:2, 4307, 5992; *Spiritual Experiences* 585, 1088, 2194, 2994; *Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2, 3)

Curiously, we are told angels “bend him to good by means of his own cupidities, and to truth by means of the fallacies of the senses.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 50:2; see also *ibid.* 6472:2; *Spiritual Experiences* 2012, 2196; *Apocalypse Explained* 151:2)

Related to this is a description of how the evil spirits try to lead a person toward a hellish goal, but the Lord moderates the person and turns him or her to a good end so that the intention of the evil spirits is diminished to being non-existent. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2918; see also *ibid.* 4122)

Another example of this is ambition. (*Divine Providence* 183:4; *Spiritual Experiences* 2796) It begins as a self-centered focus of striving to achieve for self. But, as a person is doing the work, the Lord is in the background quietly and slowly shifting the focus from self to the use itself that is being performed. This is seen in the Jacob story, where he worked many years for Laban, and it was only after that he could return home and humble himself to his elder brother. (See also *Spiritual Experiences* 2351 for how the Lord turns irritability or anger into zeal.)

This does not mean that the Lord will always be successful. As much as we do not want to recognize it, there are people who resolutely choose evil over good, hell over heaven. But even here, the Lord does not give up and abandon them. His providence continually works with them to lessen the impact of their repeatedly hellish choices. So we are taught:

A person is bent from evil to good so far as he suffers himself to be bent in freedom, and (if he cannot be led to heaven) continually from the most atrocious hell, into which he makes every effort to plunge, into a milder one. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489; see also *ibid.* 3854:2, 5155, 8391; *Apocalypse Explained* 1145:10; *Divine Providence* 183; *Spiritual Experiences* 3115)

So people “are bent by the Lord *as far as possible* to good.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2796:2, 3869:3, 9039; *Spiritual Experiences* 2630, 3115; *Apocalypse Explained* 907:3; *Conjugal Love* 208:2)

How Does the Lord Bend Us?

What means does the Lord use to bend us? We are told there are “countless varieties of ways” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2994; see also *Divine Providence* 295,

296:10-15; *Spiritual Experiences* 2194; *ibid(m)* 4743), and ways “that no words can describe.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8631; *Divine Providence* 336) And we are told that this bending is beyond our conscious minds. (*Divine Providence* 211; *Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2)

The angels “gently lead and bend to good, and do not break, the very influx being tacit and scarcely perceptible, for it flows into the interiors, and continually acts by means of freedom.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6205; see also *Earths in the Universe* 170; *Spiritual Experiences* 2194, 3892; *Arcana Coelestia* 10808) And even that the Lord leads a person “so gently and silently that the person knows no otherwise than that everything proceeds from himself.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9587; see also *Heavenly Doctrine* 148; *Spiritual Experiences* 295, 628, 3892)

Generally, the Lord influences our thinking and feeling, our thoughts and affections. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2) He uses remains – all the states of warmth and affection, and ideas of truth – to bend us. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1906:2, 561) He also restricts what flows into us from hell, determining how much we can endure or resist at any given time. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10808, 5992:2; *Spiritual Experiences* 3845) He uses whatever affections for good that we have to moderate our evil impulses. (*Arcana Coelestia* 494:2, 10109; *Spiritual Experiences(m)* 4625) He also uses our efforts to resist evil (repentance) to moderate its influence on our lives. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2364)

Where we make the effort to lead good lives the “falsity and evil of ignorance may be easily bent to truth and good.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2280:6) One presumes the same dynamic exists with non-Gentiles. Another way is seeing how the Lord bends our minds through the uses we perform, causing to think and feel differently than before. (*Charity* 190; *Spiritual Experiences* 2911)

A function of the Lord allowing us to make self-destructive and harmful choices (permissions) is that He can then guide us away from even more damaging thoughts and actions. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489, 7811; *Divine Providence* 234f; *Spiritual Experiences* 2151, 2223) Into the most basic sensual delights of touch, eating and drinking, “spiritual good is insinuated by the Lord; and thereby what is worldly is then tempered, and thus afterwards has its happiness therein.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2204)

The Lord even enters into our selfish lusts (cupidities) or fallacies to gently bend our feelings. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8487:2, 24:3, 50:2, 6472:2; *Spiritual Experiences* 2102, 2196) The Lord also uses people to influence – to bend – us. Swedenborg reported: “Once also when I was in the company of angels I had their steadfast faith, which I could not have outside their company. . . . Hence also it can be concluded how human minds are led and bent by the Lord.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 1256) And at the innermost level of our minds, all the innumerable things of our understanding and will, the Lord is present,

touching, pushing and leading them.

...during the regeneration of a person the Lord draws them out, each and all in their order, and separates and disposes them so that they may be bent toward truths and goods and may be conjoined with them, and this with diversity according to the states, which also are innumerable. (*Arcana Coelestia* 675; see also *Spiritual Experiences* 2804, 4037)

Example of Marriage

The same bending dynamic exists in marriage. An angelic couple, in reflecting back on their relationship, recognized that their initial happiness was more a state of heat than light. “We found that it is gradually tempered as the husband is perfected in wisdom and as the wife grows to love that wisdom in her husband.” (*Conjugal Love* 137:3) And the superior wisdom of wives was explained when Swedenborg was speaking with several married couples in heaven. The wives, saying their husbands are not aware of their own affections which influence their thinking, but they (the wives) know them, declared:

Yet we moderate them so prudently that, by permission and sufferance, we acquiesce in everything that pertains to the desire, pleasure and will of our husbands, merely bending it when possible but never forcing. (*Conjugal Love* 208:2; see also 294:2)

In heaven couples who tenderly love each other have a heightened awareness of all things of each other. And wives from their higher wisdom consciously moderate or bend their husbands’ affections.

But in this world, while the same underlying process occurs, it does not appear to be conscious, as it was for those angelic wives. Describing the marital process of transforming a husband’s self-intelligence into a love for his wife, the Writings note:

Woman was created from man by a transmission and replication of his distinctive wisdom, which is formed from natural truth, and that man’s love for this wisdom was transferred to woman so as to become conjugal love; moreover, that the purpose of this was to replace love of self in man with love for his wife, who, from a nature innate in her, cannot help but turn the love of self in man to his love for her. I have been told, too, that this comes about as a result of the wife’s love, without either the man or the wife being conscious of it. (*Conjugal Love* 193:2)

How Does the Lord Treat Our Freedom?

Given that the Lord will not compel or break, but bends, how carefully does He treat our freedom? In one sense He treats it absolutely; He will not violate it. Yet, He will touch it and actively massage it. The Lord “governs and bends the person to such a quality; and this by *a continual moderating of his freedom.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3854:3; *True Christian Religion* 504:5) He leads “through freedom.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6472:2, 4031:4, 9587) And He actually “bends one’s freedom.” (*Ibid.* 7007:3; 3869:3)

The Lord is not disrespecting our free choices when He exerts pressure upon us. He is merely engaged in the ongoing process of providentially leading us.

Viewed in light of these teachings, it appears our freedom is not an absolute, fixed-for-all-time set of decisions or staked-out territory. Rather it can be thought of more as our affections and their thoughts at any given time being affected or influenced by an array of external or internal forces. We can, and often should, change our minds or the exercise of our freedom. So what was a decisive position from our freedom at one stage can evolve.

In a sense, our freedom can grow. Or, as the Writings put it, the Lord bends a person to be “*set in freedom.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5993:2) Hence the Lord is not disrespecting our free choices when He exerts pressure upon us. He is merely engaged in the ongoing process of providentially leading us. If we insist on maintaining a position that is in disorder, He will not force us to change. But He will continue knocking at our doors, using endless means to steer us, to shift our feelings, thoughts and eventually choices.

How Forcefully Will the Lord Act?

The fact that the Lord’s leading (bending) is gentle and silent does not mean it is in any way weak or passive. “It is like a strong current in the ocean which unseen draws a vessel.” (*True Christian Religion* 652:3) Consider this image: Ocean currents are incredibly powerful. Well-known advice for swimmers caught in a rip tide drawing them further into the ocean is to go with the flow and await rescue. For to fight it will exhaust and soon drown them. Even ships with powerful engines are affected, burning extra fuel when they go against it.

In the other world the Lord is frequently described as using force. Separations of evil from good are often dramatic. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 549, 842; *Arcana Coelestia* 582; *Spiritual Experiences* 4632; *Apocalypse Explained* 426, 489:2, 681) Keeping evil spirits within limits so the angels are not harmed, and the devils are not harmed more than is allowed, also involves force. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8054:2; *Charity* 157) And “angels in heaven plainly perceive that . . . by the Lord they are withheld from evil and kept in good and so in truth, and this by a mighty force.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5758, 6952:6, 7989)

In our own regeneration the Lord’s providence is described as powerful. The Lord withholds us from evil “by an influx of the life of the Lord’s love, and this with a force exceeding great,” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3318:5; see also *ibid.* 6945:3, 7206:2, 6474; *Spiritual Experiences* 4521), and “by a mightier force than

a person can ever believe.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2406:2) And the Lord’s efforts to draw us to heaven is “by a mighty force” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1049), or “by the strong force of love.” (*Ibid.* 1735)

The Lord’s love is greater than anything we can imagine, tenderly caring for us in all stages of life. It comforts, it consoles, it warms us. But it does this with a mighty force, even sometimes in spite of ourselves. And in this He takes a very strong hand – as strong as we will allow.

Being Led More Easily, or With Difficulty

The bending of the Lord, from our perspective, can be a more gentle or turbulent process depending upon how we respond to it. Those “who do not allow themselves to be driven by passion and falsity, are more easily led.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 1936; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 736, 1198, 1679:2, 7442:4; *Apocalypse Explained* 721:26) Our stubbornness, our trying to go against the current of the Lord’s leading, makes for a bumpier process. (*Spiritual Experiences* 3024)

And some evils are more difficult to wrestle with than others. The “hardest of all combats is with the love of rule from the love of self. He who subdues this easily subdues all other evil loves, for this is their head.” (*Divine Providence* 146)

The more we work at trying to follow the Lord, the easier it can become. For example, “actual repentance is easy for those who have now and then practiced it, but it is a very difficult task for those who have not.” (*True Christian Religion* 561f)

Does this make it easier or harder on the Lord? He is infinite and omnipresent, thus He is the same in Himself and as He flows out to people. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 77-81, 124, 128, 147) The only variation is in reception. So there can be the appearance that His life can be easier or harder. This is seen in the story of creation, on the seventh day, “because the Lord then had rest.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10360; see also *ibid.* 85, 8495:3, 8510, 10367:7, 10730:2; *Heaven and Hell* 287; *True Christian Religion* 301) Certainly, the Lord’s infirm human did need rest between temptations, even as the Divine within was constantly guiding the universe. The Writings

The Lord’s love is greater than anything we can imagine, tenderly caring for us in all stages of life. It comforts, it consoles, it warms us. But it does this with a mighty force, even sometimes in spite of ourselves.

The Lord is present in our lives more than we can ever imagine. Without it we would have no hope for salvation. His mighty power is an immediate presence, caressing our minds and gently leading us to see what we would not otherwise and do what we inherently would not.

note that “the universe is governed by the Lord with no trouble, but very easily.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2234, 499, 2466, 3168)

Yet one can speak of the Lord having an easier time of leading those who are willing to follow:

... since it pleases the Lord to lead people according to order, it is therefore easier to lead one who is in order than one who is not in order. The latter must first be led back to the path, into order, and this takes place over a period of time, so as not to break the person.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 1937; see also 2223, 3283, 4396)

Also, the Lord can be said to be very active during our temptations. “Nor does He rest until love acts as principal; then the combat ceases.”

(*Arcana Coelestia* 63, 84, 87, 851, 852, 8893; *True Christian Religion* 46, 302) And after temptations have been successfully endured, “there is a state of the conjunction of good and truth, thus at that time a state of rest for the Lord also.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8506)

This is a wonderful appearance that we need to have of the Lord, especially when we are going through spiritual struggles. It can give us an affectional sense of His love for us and His efforts on our behalf. “[T]he salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble.” (*Psalms* 37:39)

Conclusion

The Lord is present in our lives more than we can ever imagine. Without it we would have no hope for salvation. His mighty power is an immediate presence, caressing our minds and gently leading us to see what we would not otherwise and do what we inherently would not.

Our freedom is paramount because we do have to make choices – what we will allow our thinking process to focus upon, what we will say, what we will do. The Lord will never compel us nor break us. But He will insistently knock at our doors, urging and pressing us as much as is possible.

This is a function of the Divine love. It is omnipresent and passionate about reaching us and leading us for our own good. It cannot sit back and watch from afar. Nor can it simply let us make hellish choice after hellish

choice. The Lord intervenes, in silent careful ways, to curve or bend us. If He cannot lead us away from evil, He will at least lead us to a lesser evil. He never gives up, never leaves us.

Let us rejoice in the greatness of His love and mercy toward us. And while we will not be certain of what He is doing in any given situation or state, we can be assured that He is present and actively leading and caring for us. For He has all power and all glory forever.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord strong and mighty

The Lord mighty in battle. (Psalm 24:8)



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OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

INDICATIONS OF PROVIDENCE

Here we have another term which is firmly established in our vocabulary but is nowhere to be found in the Writings, although it expresses an idea derived from them. The phrase has been taken to mean that the limits imposed by a situation, what seems possible at any given time, are indications of Providence as to what should be done, and much less has been said in the Church about seeking and following the indications of Providence.

It is our belief that this idea should be approached with great caution, and in the light of the teaching that the Lord never shows or tells men directly what to do; for the dictate of men's loves may cause them to see different indications of the exigencies of the same situation. There are indications of Providence; but these, we believe, are the teachings of the Word.

What Can I Do?

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Thane P. Glenn

Lessons: Luke 10:25-28 and 3:8-14; True Christian Religion 422

Would it make a difference if you were never born? It's a startling question. Would it make any difference if you had never been born?

Perhaps you've had the experience of walking in Manhattan or London at a busy midday intersection; perhaps you've been overwhelmed by the sheer population of the crowd around you – people of so many different backgrounds crossing paths, so many different interests, different beliefs – more or less completely indifferent to one another. If you're like me, maybe you've had the thought: *If I weren't here, if there were one fewer person in this crowd, would it have any impact at all? Would it have even the least impact?* It's estimated that there are 7.4 billion people in the world. Do I – do we – really make any difference?

Last summer 49 people were killed in a shooting in Orlando, Florida, another 50 were wounded. During the election season there were widespread accusations of voter tampering here in United States. We are in the midst of the ongoing crisis of Syrian refugees – millions of people displaced from their homes, many with little or no food, many stuck at international borders. Some analysts predict it will get worse – more children drowning in dangerous sea crossings. It goes on and on.

What can I do? What can I do about it? What should I do?

Perhaps we might complain to our friends about the injustices in world. That might do a little good. Perhaps we might post our political opinions on social media, start debates. That might do a little good. Perhaps some of us might be called to write letters to our congressional representatives about gun control or foreign policy. That might do a little more good. But does it really make a difference? What can I do? How can I make a difference?

According to the teachings for the New Church, there is an answer to the question: *What can I do?* The answer may seem surprisingly boring, even almost disappointingly mundane, but it is actually quite profound. Let me

read at more length the passage from *The True Christian Religion* I read in our lessons:

Real charity is dealing fairly and faithfully in whatever position, business or work one is engaged in. . . . This is real charity, because it can be defined as doing good to the neighbor daily and constantly, and not only to the neighbor as an individual but also collectively; and the only way of doing this is by good and fair dealing in the position, business or work in which one is engaged and with anyone with whom one comes into contact. Because this is what a person does every day, and when they are not doing it, it still constantly occupies their mind, their thoughts and intentions. A person who exercises charity in this way becomes more and more a living form of charity; for justice and faithfulness develop their mind, and the exercise of good will shapes their body, and in process of time the formation of their mind prevents them from willing and thinking of anything but those things which have to do with good will. (§§422-423)

Real charity is dealing fairly and faithfully in the work of our daily lives. And wasn't this John the Baptist's message to the people of Judea? To the tax collectors, he said: *Take only what is appointed for you to collect. Don't steal a little extra off the top.* To the soldiers, he said: *Don't intimidate anyone. Don't use your force or authority to do anything more than what is just.* This is the message for us, too: do my daily work fairly and faithfully.

Okay, but how is that going to help the communities affected by the Orlando shootings? How is it going to fix voter fraud? How is it going to feed and house people suffering halfway around the world?

The profound and important idea of this teaching is that what we do in the work of our day-to-day lives shapes who we are, and that makes a difference. Let me say that again. The way we do what we do every day shapes who we are, and that makes a difference.

So what we do as employees, as customers, as wives, husbands and parents, as neighbors and friends, every day, can we strive to do it fairly and faithfully? What does that mean? Let me give you some very basic examples.

That means don't overestimate the hours your company bills to a wealthy client simply because you *can*. Why? Because that action becomes *you* – a false witness, a liar – and you don't want to be that.

It means don't criticize your neighbor behind her back for her political stance in order to curry a sense of superiority with another neighbor. Because that becomes *you* – a backstabber, a panderer – and you don't want to be that.

The profound and important idea of this teaching is that what we do in the work of our day-to-day lives shapes who we are, and that makes a difference.

So what we do as employees, as customers, as wives, husbands and parents, as neighbors and friends, every day, can we strive to do it fairly and faithfully? What does that mean?

It means don't use your upset temper as an excuse to belittle your spouse or children. Because that becomes *you* – a bully, spiteful – and you don't want to be that.

See, because as you become more those things, the world becomes a little more that way. People become more used to being cheated, disregarded, put down, and they learn to respond in kind. Sadly, that's much of the world we live in today.

But when we do the opposite, when we strive to carry out our daily tasks fairly and faithfully, the world does become a better place. When we don't falsify ourselves, even if it inconveniences us or makes us look bad, when we exercise patience, kindness, fair-mindedness, well, then, *we* become true, patient, generous, and the world becomes a little more just, more faithful.

Now this morning we read two stories from the Gospels in which people ask: "What should I do?" The answer seems to be that we love our neighbor by acting fairly and faithfully in the work of our daily lives.

But there is a third story in the Gospels in which the same question is asked. In this story, a man runs to Jesus, and asks: "What should I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The Lord's initial answer is not surprising: essentially, treat others fairly and faithfully in keeping the commandments. And He lists them: "Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother." And the man answers, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." The Lord's next response adds something startlingly new to the picture:

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (*Mark 10:17-21*)

This is a hard saying! It's easy to hear the Lord's words here as rebuking the man for not doing enough, for falling short.

But notice that Christ does not say, "One thing you're disappointing in, one thing you're not good enough at." No, the text says that Jesus *loved* him, and He says, "One thing you *lack*." Our God wants our lives to overflow with blessings, and He tells us. *One thing you still lack. Sell whatever you have, give to the poor, take up your cross, and follow Me.*

Our Lord knows that it's not as easy as simply choosing to follow the commandments, simply deciding to do our work fairly and faithfully. He knows that as we strive to carry out our daily interactions fairly and faithfully, we'll face temptations. Shortcuts, flashes of temper, defensive self-righteousness. So He lovingly calls us to follow Him – to call on Him as we bear the cross.

To sell *all* we have: let go of the notion that *we* can make it all work out, that it's up to us to determine what is right for everyone else.

Sell all we have and give to the poor. The teachings for the New Church suggest that giving to the poor is to carry out our daily interactions fairly and faithfully *in a spirit of true charity* (*Apocalypse Explained* 893.4)

– to recognize that we are all, in a sense, poor and needy. We're all hungry for kindness, all thirsty for a clearer understanding. We all spend time feeling vulnerable, or like we're the odd one out (naked, a stranger). All of us at times feel trapped or discouraged (imprisoned, sick). So Jesus tells us – in every interaction – *sell all that you have, and give to the poor*.

Inasmuch as we offer each other respect, when we would rather dismiss as thoughtless the values of a different political party; inasmuch as we offer each other patience, when we would rather call out that frustrating customer service representative at the other end of the phone; inasmuch as we offer each other kindness, when we would rather make sure that family member knows how wrong or irritating they are; inasmuch as we strive to treat everyone around us as sisters and brothers in need of a charitable attitude, those little gestures of good will can continue to ripple out – and who knows how far they extend?

Here in our little corner of the earth, it can be so hard to believe at

[As] people become more used to being cheated, disregarded, put down, and they learn to respond in kind. Sadly, that's much of world we live in today. But when we do the opposite, when we strive to carry out our daily tasks fairly and faithfully, the world does become a better place.

There really is no limit to the hearts that can be touched around the world by our daily choices, our daily gestures of fairness and faithfulness.

times that we really make any difference. Sometimes it might feel like we have to figure out how to carry the whole world. But as the teachings for the New Church say, every moment of our lives has a series of consequences stretching to eternity. (*Arcana Coelestia* 854) There really is no limit to the hearts that can be touched around the world by our daily choices, our daily gestures of fairness and faithfulness.

I'll close this morning with words of the prophet Isaiah:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then shall your light break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer . . . "Here I am."
(*Isaiah* 58:6-9)

Amen.



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Unity Brings Progress Into Every Aspect of Human Life

A sermon by the Rev. Edward Akotey

Lessons: Genesis 13:1-12; New Jerusalem 187-188

Please let there be no strife between you and me, and my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will take the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left. (Genesis 13:8-9)

These are the words of Abram, which he spoke many years ago, and they reveal human inclinations to conflict. Today, we can see many conflicts in the world: some are between nations, political parties, ethnic groups, religious groups, families, husbands and wives, all around the world. Indeed, some of the conflicts are so dangerous that they can negatively affect the normal life of people.

In the past, the world experienced conflicts such as first and second world wars, which led to the death of millions of innocent people. The question is: what causes conflict in our societies, and how can these conflicts be resolved peacefully?

To answer these questions it must be understood that in human societies conflict can quickly break out when one section of society criticizes or opposes the good works of the other. The constructive criticisms or oppositions often cause disagreement among people. This is because the Lord created every individual human being differently and that we all think and act differently from one another. Individual differences of the mindset and character are some of the basic reasons we approach issues relating to our development differently.

In *Arcana Coelestia* we are instructed that: “For there cannot be in the universe one thing that is exactly like another, and that subsists in a distinct way; it must be various, that is, different from all others, in order that it may be anything by itself.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9002)

As a result of how the Lord created us differently from one another, if

individual differences of opinions are managed well society benefits from the contribution of their ideas. On the other hand, if they are not handled well they can trigger conflict which can negatively impact the lives of people. The Heaven Doctrines state:

All things of the human mind, and with them the interiors of all things of the spirit, are capable of being turned either downwards or upwards. They are turned downwards when man loves himself above all things; and they are turned upwards when he loves the Lord above all things. This is an actual turning. Man from himself turns them downwards, while the Lord from Himself turns them upwards. The ruling love is what turns. Thoughts do not turn the interiors of the mind except so far as they are derived from the will. That all this is true man does not know; and yet he ought to know it in order that he may understand how he is led out of hell and led into heaven by the Lord. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1163)

We may ask ourselves, who is Abram whose name was later changed to Abraham? And why is his admonition regarding conflict very necessary in our lives today? It is a well-known fact that Abram is a revered religious figure in all the major religions in the world, and the Word describes him as “a Father of many nations.” (*Genesis* 17:4-5) In the *Arcana Coelestia*, we learn that he represents the Lord. (# 1989, 2569) And in details, “The Lord is the Creator, that He created the heavens and earth, also that He creates new ones; and man is said to be a new creature.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 4837) Therefore, the revelation that Abram represents the Lord implies that what he said in regard to conflict can be described as an instruction manual for human beings to use to guide their lives in this world.

And the Biblical record indicates that the father of Abram was Terah, and after the death of his father the Lord ordered Abram to leave Haran and go to a foreign land called Canaan. And he humbly complied with what the Lord commanded him to do. (*Genesis* 11:27-32 and 12:1-3)

Abram acted in accordance with the Lord because the people of Haran were worshipping idolatrous gods; and the Lord intended to raise a new generation of human beings that could obey His commandments so that a new church could be formed. (*Joshua* 24:1-3)

We are informed: “Haran means interior idolatrous worship.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1367) So Abram’s departure from Haran was to enable him to position a new foundation to serve the Lord. We read in the Word: “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him: To your descendants I will give this land. And there he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.” (*Genesis* 12:7) The Heavenly Doctrine explains:

In the Word the land of Canaan means the church . . . and the church is with those only who are in spiritual good and at the same time in natural good; in such the church is formed by the Lord; for the church is in man and not outside of him, consequently is not with those with whom these goods are not. These goods with their delights are signified by “milk and honey.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 619:7)

Unfortunately, when Abram got to Canaan, a few years afterward, the productive capacity of the land was short-lived. We are told: “There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land.” (*Genesis* 12:10) Famine can be defined as extreme scarcity of food. In the Heavenly Doctrine famine means, “The destruction of spiritual life by evils.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 323:2) Egypt depicts temptation against Abram. We are informed that, “Egypt means the natural man and its knowledge, that they may fight a man against his brother, and a man against his companion, means against good and truth.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 223:14)

Literally, what causes the famine? Probably the rain failed, resulting in the famine. This was difficult for Abram and he moved to Egypt. What is surprising here is that it appears Abram did not experience famine in either Ur -- his original hometown – or Haran. Why now in the Promised Land? Why did the Lord, who is Omnipotent, Omniscience and Omnipresence, not inform him about this impending catastrophe?

We may not entirely know the exact reason but we can see from the Writings of the New Church that: “The Lord’s Divine providence causes both the evil and the falsity to be serviceable in the way of equilibrium, of relation, and of purification, and thus in the conjunction of good and truth in others.” (*Divine Providence* 21)

Since Abram represents the Lord it might be interesting to look into the Lord’s life briefly. *True Christian Religion* states: “It is acknowledged in the church that when the Lord was in the world He was in two states, called the state of humiliation and the state of glorification.” (104:8) In the state of humiliation, the Lord appears weak and helpless in the task ahead of Him. We read: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (*Matthew* 27:46) And in the state of glorification the Lord performs miracles:

When He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him saying, Lord, save us we are perishing. But He said to them, why are you fearful, O you of little faith? Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying who can this be even that the wind and the sea obey Him? (*Matthew* 8:23-27)

Analyzing the concept of the Lord’s humiliation and glorification, and how it links up with Abram, we can guess that the fact that Abram followed the Lord in his life does not mean that everything was going to be fine for him. Likewise, as we also make the effort to follow the Lord in our lives, it does not signify that our life situations will always be perfect. And we may often face

challenges as we serve Him. Like the Lord or Abram, what is important to do in the midst of all the troubles is that we must at all times apply the Divine truth in our lives no matter how provoking the circumstances might be, and with the Lord's help, we can overcome the challenges successfully.

Undeniably, the land of Canaan presents a temporary challenge for Abram because of the famine, and it was made possible through the hells to tempt his faith in the Lord. We read:

All temptation entails feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, regarding salvation, and other things such as these; for people who experience temptation suffer mental distress, even to the point of despair, in which state they are kept for the most part so that at length they may be confirmed in the conviction that all things are subject to the Lord's mercy, that they are saved through Him alone (*Arcana Coelestia* 2334)

Luckily, the temptation against Abram was over, and he emerged as a better person to accomplish his divine task in the Promised Land.

Then Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and gold. And he went on a journey from the south as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai. (*Genesis* 13:1-3).

Certainly, Abram upgraded his religious life before he came out of Egypt because, "Abram was very rich in cattle (livestock) signifies the goods with which the Lord was then enriched; in silver, signifies the truths; and in gold, signifies the goods from truths." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1549:2) Surprisingly, however, "Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks, herds and tents." (*Genesis* 13:5) The Heavenly Doctrine tells us:

Lot represented things of the senses, by which are meant the external man and the pleasures he derives from sensory things, thus the most external things which usually captivate the mind in childhood and lead it away from the things that are good. For to the extent a person indulges in pleasures arising from evil desires he is drawn away from the celestial things that belong to love and charity. Indeed, present within those pleasures there is love originating in self and in the world, and with those loves celestial love cannot accord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1547)

It must be noted here that although Abram overcame the temptation of the famine in the Promised Land and the consequences of going to Egypt, yet again one more temptation was about to come his way on account of Lot, who was always travelling with him, due to Lot's selfishness and materialism of this world. The Word says:

Now the land was not able to support them that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. (*Genesis* 13:6-7)

At this point, the emerging contention between the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot was about a battle for superiority, which had the potential to destroy many good things about their lives. Nevertheless, Abram was ready and willing to deal with the situation before it got out of control:

Remaining from temptation after it is over, there are further states of truth and good to which their thoughts – which would otherwise dart off into interests that are insane and draw the mind away into an aversion to what is true and good – can subsequently be turned to the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2334:1)

Acting in response to the strife of the herdsmen, Abram told Lot: “Please separate from me . . . then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east and they separated from each other.” (*Genesis* 13:9-11) And we learned that:

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him. Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are -- northward, southward, eastward and westward. For all the land you see I give to you and your descendants forever. (*Genesis* 13: 14-15)

Abram dealt with Lot without any misstep because he learned many lessons during the first temptation in the Promised Land, and at this time in his life he would not allow the self-centered love and materialism of Lot to dwell with him again. As a result of the action he took to enable Lot to separate from him, he secured the Promised Land for his descendants forever.

Like Abram’s era, the world today has seen many conflicts. And when we reflect on the fact that Lot depicts self-love and love of the world, and how he accompanied Abram and Sarah like a shadow to Canaan and Egypt, we can conclude that some of the causes of conflicts among human societies can be attributed to selfishness and materialism – which are still dominant in the world today.

Careful study of Abram’s life reveals that every individual in this world is on his or her journey to heaven, which is our Promised Land. And as we endeavor to do good, self-love and love of the world intend to barricade us; and if we can seek the Lord faithfully, obey His commandments and shun evil just as Abram did, we can experience progressive peace in this world and hereafter, when we die, we can go to heaven.

Amen.

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Why I Call Myself a Swedenborgian

The Rev. Derrick A. M. Lumsden

This article is a direct response to the Rev. Gerald Waters' article, "Surely We Are Not Swedenborgians," in the May/June 2016 issue of *New Church Life*, and the responses that share his perspective. But more than that, I hope to lay out why I believe it is a good idea to own the term Swedenborgian.

First let me say I respect what I understand of Mr. Waters' motives. The desire to support our adherence as a church organization to the works of Emanuel Swedenborg as Divine revelation is something we should ever be on guard to protect. And maybe some people call themselves Swedenborgians from the motivation of affiliating themselves with Swedenborg rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. However, I suspect those who are willing to stand apart as "Swedenborgians" are not necessarily in danger of the term leading them away from a commitment to the works as Divine revelation.

The term itself is a container. What matters more than the external is what goes into the container – unless, of course, the term actually causes damage to the idea we are trying to express, which can happen. For example, claiming the term cult for ourselves and trying to infill that term would obviously be a bad idea. However, I contend that calling ourselves Swedenborgian is not such a bad idea. In fact, I think there are ways we can use it that help reinforce that our loyalty is to the Lord, not to Swedenborg.

There are three main reasons I call myself Swedenborgian:

1. The Heavenly Doctrines and Scripture give us permission to reference the human author of the work.
2. It effectively communicates to other Christians.
3. It provides a useful hook for future communication.

First and foremost, we should look to the example of the Lord through Divine revelation. In the works of Swedenborg we find a phrase that is used very often "in the works of" or "in." (In the Latin "in" followed by the name of the author represents a single work *apud*, which is used 5,000 times according to a Latin word search of the Heavenly Doctrines. Not all 5,000 are references

to authors, but many are.)

A few examples of this use are “in *Matthew*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9818), “in *David*” (*True Christian Religion* 852), and “in *Moses*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5764). I think we often forget that many of the names of the books of the Bible are titled and called by the human author of the work.

The examples in *True Christian Religion* 852 and *Arcana Coelestia* 5764 are particularly interesting to me in that they are not references to a book called by the author’s name. They are referencing *Psalms* and *Deuteronomy* respectively. I find this interesting because there was another way of referring to these works, but instead of calling them by the commonly accepted title (which Swedenborg also references) he specifically calls to mind the human author.

Not only does Swedenborg do this, but the Lord Jesus Christ does this. Just to cite two examples: “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’” (*Mark* 7:10) and “For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’” So by the example of Scripture and the Heavenly Doctrines, we are given permission to call the works by the name of the human author without diminishing the Divine authorship of the works.

The second major reason I call myself a Swedenborgian is that Christians have an established practice of calling their doctrines by the name of some human author, for example Lutherans, Calvinists and Franciscans. Now in this case, there is some Divine-to-human slippage.

These three examples are all human authors of a particular doctrine and life to which a person may ascribe. However, see the above argument. We may refer to the human author of the work without actually diminishing the Divine authorship. In some ways I think this is a great accommodation to a person’s own state. Their state gets to dictate how they understand the term rather than me trying to force an understanding on them. But it also communicates in a relevant way while pointing them to the specific author. And most importantly, it is not a human derived accommodation, but an accommodation that the Lord uses to communicate.

The third major reason I call myself a Swedenborgian is that it meaningfully communicates an idea while giving a person his or her own freedom to follow up. And I say follow up because I most often use this term with people who are not of my church. If a person to whom I am talking is familiar with the New Church, I would rather reference a particular work or a particular passage than the author of the works as a whole.

Where I find it most useful to call myself Swedenborgian is with non-Swedenborgians. And this is when the issue most often comes up. By using the

term Swedenborgian, I give them a hook by which they are in freedom to do further research. If they wish to know more about the faith and beliefs which I hope my conversation has well communicated, they can effectively Google the term and be pushed toward the works themselves. Googling “New Church” or “New Christian” yields all sorts of stuff that is irrelevant to what I hope they find.

I call myself a Swedenborgian because I believe it is an honest and effective way to communicate with non-Swedenborgians while pointing to Divine revelation itself. I know the desire to remove the term from our vocabulary is a desire to bring us closer to the Lord in His Word, but I don't think that happens primarily through terms.

I know if anyone is led to the Word itself the Lord will be there. I trust the Lord to do the work of speaking to someone through the works of Swedenborg should they find them. He will lead them to a right understanding of those works if their hearts are open. And if they find the Lord there, I hope they come back to share that joy with me, and at that point we can continue to walk His road together.



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OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

INFESTATION

This term is used only in connection with spirits who are being vastated in the lower earth. These are said to be infested by evils and falsities injected by the hells which are round about, to the end that their own evils and falsities may be removed, goods and truths be insinuated, and they be brought into the state of being capable of elevation into heaven.

Thus the term refers to a special process which is so called because it is like an incessant attack from which there is no escape and which appears to be almost overwhelming. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 7147)

The Lord is Speaking to You

The Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman

On September 10, 2016, it was my privilege to deliver the memorial address for Shareen Blair, who passed on at the age of 93. She was the fifth child in a family of 10 children, the mother of five children, and a lifelong member of the General Church. Many remember Shareen as a gifted organist who played for church services in Bryn Athyn, Pittsburgh, Glenview, Denver, Tucson and Sarver (Pennsylvania).

Shareen is also remembered for her Word-based meditations, simple readings of the Word, accompanied by soft music, while people sat quietly, letting the Words of scripture enter their spirit. As the Lord said to His disciples, “*Let these words sink down into your ears.*” (Luke 9:44) Interestingly, when a document called “*The Rules of Life*” was found among Swedenborg’s unpublished manuscripts, the first rule was: “¹Diligently to read and meditate on the Word of God.”

The Lord speaks to us through the Word

Throughout both the published and unpublished works, two themes occur and reoccur like a major theme in a great symphony: *the Lord speaks to us through His Word and the Lord gives us eternal life through His Word.* In brief, our whole spiritual life depends on hearing the Word of the Lord and letting His words sink deeply into our spirits. Here are just a few of the many passages that repeat this theme:

A person has life by means of the Word. (*Sacred Scripture* 3)

The Lord is present with everyone, and is conjoined to everyone through the Word. This is because the Lord is the Word, and in it as it were speaks with everyone. (*Ibid.* 78)

The Word unites a person to the Lord and opens heaven . . . it fills a person’s will with the goods of love and a person’s intellect with the truths of wisdom; thus every person receives life through the Word. (*True Christian Religion* 191)

¹ It is not clear whether or not these were written by Swedenborg himself or whether he found them somewhere else. For more information see <http://www.newchurchhistory.org/junfacts/index9d51.html?p=457>

Life flows in from the Lord through the Word. This life, which is the light of truth in the understanding, and the love of good in the will . . . is called “eternal life.” (*Ibid.* 618)

To those who desire truths for any spiritual use, the Lord gives everything that contributes to that use. He does this from Himself through the Word. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 889)

In the light of these teachings from the Heavenly Doctrines, consider these words from the Old and New Testaments:

Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live. (*Isaiah* 55: 1-3)

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (*Matthew* 4:4)

Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened unto us the Scriptures? (*Luke* 24: 32)

It is the *spirit* that gives life; the flesh profits nothing: *the words that I speak* unto you, they are *spirit*, and they are life. (*John* 6:63)

These passages put the matter before us unequivocally: the Word is the Lord’s means of connection to the human race. In fact, “the Lord speaks with the person of the church in no other way than through the Word.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10290:2). It is no wonder then that the gospel according to John begins with the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” (*John* 1:1) Whenever we are devoutly reading or listening to the Word, we can be sure that God is speaking to us.

This being the case, it is incumbent upon us to find a way to hear the Lord speaking to us through His Word. Not just that, but we must also find a way of hearing Him speaking *directly to us* about our own lives. In other words, whenever the Word is speaking about Abraham, or Joseph, or Mary, the Lord is speaking to each of us – to the Abraham *in us*, to the Joseph *in us*, to the Mary *in us*. His message is always personal, immediate and direct.

In order to emphasize this important idea, Shareen’s meditations frequently used the words “I” and “you” instead of “we” and “them.” She did this to highlight the idea that the Lord is always speaking through the Word to each person, individually, giving that person a direct, personal message. Here are two examples:

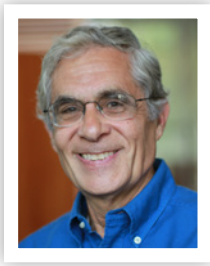
1. Original passage: “He will guide our feet into the way of peace.” (*Luke* 1:79)

Shareen’s version: I will guide **your** feet into the way of peace.

2. Original passage: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (*Revelation* 3:20)

Shareen's version: Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If **you** hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to **you** and dine with **you**, and **you** with Me.

In the memorial address for Shareen, we honored her memory and her work by practicing one of her meditations during the sermon. The readings were from notecards Shareen had used for leading meditation groups; the background music was provided by organist Kenneth Coy who played a version of "Softly and Quietly Jesus is Calling" while the passages were being read.²



The Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman is Assistant Professor of Religion, English and Moral Philosophy at Bryn Athyn College. He has served in congregations in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Atlanta, Georgia. He and his wife, Star (Bruner), co-wrote the book *Rise Above It* and lead classes based on it. They live in Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania. Contact: ray.silverman@brynathyn.edu

² An audio of the memorial address is available at <http://www.newchurchaudio.org/event.php?event=25086>

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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INFINITE

The Infinite itself is said to be the Divine itself or the Lord Himself, but the Infinite from itself is the Divine proceeding or the Lord in others created from Himself, thus in men and angels, and this Divine is the same as the Divine Providence.

It is said that of the Infinite nothing can be predicated except that it is. However, if we think of those things which are characteristic of the finite – beginning and end, inner and outer limitations, spatial qualities, depreciation in time, and so on – and then abstract them, we can enlarge our idea. (See *Divine Providence* 55)

☞ *Introducing Our Ministers* ☞



The Rev. Brett D. Buick

From Tanks and Courtrooms to the Pulpit

Before 2011, when Brett Buick was well into a career as a lawyer, he had never really considered becoming a priest. Now, he says, “I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

He is happily serving as assistant to the pastor in Kempton, Pennsylvania, where he and his wife, Karla (Cole), are raising their six children, but it was an unusual path that got him there.

Brett grew up in the Bryn Athyn area and was schooled in New Church education from kindergarten through two years of College. He earned a BA in Government from the College of William and Mary. Then came two career experiences that may have seemed a long way from the ministry – the United States Army and working as a lawyer. But when the call started knocking he eagerly opened the door.

Brett may be the only New Church minister who served as a tank platoon leader and scout platoon leader in the Army from 1998 through 2002, which included deployment in Kuwait in 2001. He was there during the 9/11 terrorist bombing in the United States.

He says, “Being a platoon leader in the United States Army taught me

lessons that affect what I do just about every day – the idea that leading is really serving is one and the importance of getting input from different perspectives in decision making is another.

“Being in Kuwait for 9/11 was something I will never forget. We were out there sitting in the middle of the desert for five months and came back to a country that would never be the same.”

Once he had completed his commitment to the Army he entered the George Mason School of Law (now the Antonin Scalia Law School) in Arlington, Virginia, where he earned his law degree. He also served as a law clerk for Gene E. K. Pratter, Judge of the Federal District Court in Eastern Pennsylvania. “This was a tremendous experience for a young lawyer. I was able to see some very skilled attorneys (and some others not so skilled) ply their trade in Federal Court.”

As a young lawyer his practice focused on commercial litigation. He also did pro bono work that included representing child victims in sexual abuse cases to protect their mental health records from being used in trial.

From 2007-09 he was an Assistant District Attorney for the Montgomery County (Pennsylvania) District Attorney’s Office. “This was a highlight of my legal career. Trying cases and working with law enforcement officers and dedicated public servants was quite a privilege.”

He also became a guest lecturer at Bryn Athyn College after Dr. Greg Rose asked him to tell his students about the United States court system in his Political Science 101 class. He has been doing that just about every year since.

In 2009 Brett returned to private practice and two years later he started hearing a call to the ministry.

“I was about six years into my law practice when the idea first began to occur to me. I found that when I read the Writings on the train in the morning during my commute into Philadelphia I began asking myself what it would be like to teach what I was reading. This began in the winter and continued into the spring of 2011. After dismissing the idea that this was the early sign of a call to the priesthood, life continued on into late spring.”

Then he attended church



Karla and Brett Buick

one Sunday in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral which happened to include the inauguration of several men into the priesthood. “I had seen these services before, but this one hit me differently.”

Afterward, he spoke to Rev. Dr. Andy Dibb (Dean of the Theological School) a couple of times. “Andy said something to me that really helped as I was wondering whether I was being called to the priesthood or not. He said that many men have described the calling as being similar to the decision to ask their wives to marry them. This helped greatly because I knew nothing like that had happened to me. But little did I know at the time that a month later it would all change.”

He decided to apply to Theological School on July 21, 2011. “That evening, while saying evening prayers with my wife and children, I heard a verse of scripture in my head (which I have chosen to keep to myself). After finishing our prayers, I looked up the verse and its internal sense and was hit with the realization that the Lord was calling me to the priesthood. About a year later I began my studies in Theological School and haven’t looked back since!”

Among his key experiences there, he says: “Pretty much every single class and conversation with Rev. Stephen Cole during Theological School was a key experience. He helped me discover what it means to really see the Heavenly Doctrine as the Second Coming of the Lord.

“As countercultural as the Heavenly Doctrine is, it is quite easy to see what is written there as limited by the human faults of Emanuel Swedenborg. But what Stephen helped me begin to discover is that the Heavenly Doctrine does not present itself as limited by any human being. In fact, it presents itself as the Lord Himself speaking to us in His Second Coming!

“Once I made this realization and came to terms with the implications of this understanding, everything changed. I am now tremendously excited about seeing more and more



The Buick family: Left to right, back row: Natalie, Brett, Karla with Nathan, Bennett. Front row: Aven, Anna, Bethany.

of how the Lord has indeed made all things new when we think and act from the Heavenly Doctrine of His Second Coming as the infallible Word of God.”

That excitement enlivens his work in Kempton, which includes these highlights:

- Working with the Kempton New Church Youth Group in connection with the Rev. Nathan Cole and his efforts to connect New Church teens
- Developing a distinctive New Church curriculum for the Kempton New Church High School in U.S. History, Civics and Economics
- Experimenting with remote teaching (grades) 9/10 religion class to homeschooling students living outside of Kempton
- Participating in the Jacob’s Creek Family Camp
- Leading doctrinal classes, performing baptisms, working with couples in preparation for marriage, providing Holy Supper, visiting the Kansas City circle, and of course researching, writing and delivering sermons.

He is also an adjunct faculty member at Bryn Athyn College, teaching Systematic Theology and Introduction to Business Law.

“I love everything I am doing,” he says, “and hope the Lord keeps letting me do it!”

His favorite passage from the Writings is *True Christian Religion* 245, especially this part:

It is not doctrine but wholeness and purity of doctrine, consequently the understanding of the Word, that establishes the church. Neither is it doctrine, but a faith and life in accordance with doctrine, that establishes and constitutes the special church in the individual man. So too it is not the Word that establishes and constitutes the church in particular in man, but a faith according to the truths, and a life according to the goods, which man derives from the Word, and applies to himself.

His personal interests include family, the outdoors, sports and current events: That family includes six children, ranging in age from 18 to 2.

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I Am The Bread of Life

A Sermon by the Rev. Brett D. Buick

Lessons: Exodus 16: 4, 14-15; John 6: 30-35, 51, 58; Apocalypse Explained 899

The Lord says in the *Gospel of John*, “I am the Bread of Life.” Let’s think about this statement: “I am the Bread of Life.” First think of eating bread. Think about what it feels like to be very hungry and then to get a piece of nourishing, filling bread. When you eat that bread, it creates an almost instant sense of filling you up, doesn’t it? Bread has a sort of fullness to it that is different than other foods.

Thinking about what it is like to eat a delicious and filling piece of bread can help us understand why the Lord said He is the Bread of Life. Taking and eating bread from the Lord corresponds to being filled up with the Lord’s love. Just as eating bread gives us a feeling of fullness and sustenance, the Lord’s love is constantly filling us and giving us life. The Lord truly is the Bread of Life, this is what He does. He feeds us.

Think about all the stories in the Word that involve the Lord feeding people.

In *Exodus* we learn about how the Lord gave manna to the Israelites. For 40 years He gave them the bread of heaven so they could survive. (*Exodus* 16:35) Without this bread from heaven, they would have died as they marched through the desert on their way to the land of Canaan. Without the Lord’s love, the human race would perish. Like the Israelites we need the bread of heaven – the Lord’s love – every day.

In *I Samuel*, we also learn about the Lord providing bread in a difficult time. When David and his men were fleeing from Saul who was trying to kill them, they ate the holy bread, the shewbread of the tabernacle. (*I Samuel* 21:1-6) This bread sustained David and his men when they were most in need of food. And while this bread was reserved for the priests, the Lord, Himself, when He was on earth hundreds of years later, endorsed this eating of the holy bread. (*Matthew* 12:3-4) Just like David and his men were sustained by the shewbread while they were fleeing from Saul, the Lord’s love will sustain us when we are fleeing from harm.

In the first book of *Kings* we learn about when Elijah was fed bread by ravens in the midst of a drought and then how, as the drought worsened, he came to a widow for food. The Lord made the little flour and oil that she had last as long as necessary so she could feed Elijah, so he then could live and also so she could feed herself and her son, saving them starvation. (*I Kings* 17:7-16) Like the bread the widow had, the Lord's love does not run out.

In the New Testament we learn that the Lord was born in Bethlehem, which means in Hebrew, the House of Bread. And we see that the Lord Himself fed crowds of four and five thousand people. And finally, as one of His last acts before being crucified, He offered the bread of the Last Supper to His disciples.

So when we think about all of these stories in the Word, and many others, we can see how the Lord feeds throughout the Word with bread that gives life.

But did you know that these stories in the Word about the Lord feeding with bread nourish the angels too? The Lord teaches in the Heavenly Doctrine how this works:

When bread is mentioned in the Word, the angels become aware not of material but spiritual bread; thus instead of bread they perceive the Lord, who is the Bread of life. . . . And because they perceive the Lord, they perceive what is from the Lord, thus His love toward the universal human race. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4217)

The angels see in these stories from the Word how the Lord is filling us with His love even in the most difficult times of life – like the Israelites starving in the wilderness, like David fleeing from a murderous Saul, like Elijah during a terrible drought, or the disciples in the New Testament who knew that the Lord was increasingly becoming the target of the Pharisees' plot to kill Him.

When we are having a hard time, spiritually starving, fleeing from evil around us, or worried about terrible events that seem to be unfolding, now we can think like the angels do about the Lord as the Bread of Life because we have the teachings that the Lord has given us from heaven, reminding us that the Lord is with us and feeding us with His love. All the time.

The Lord teaches:

The manna signified the Lord's Divine Human. And because it signified the Lord's Divine Human, it signified heavenly food, which is nothing else than love and charity together with the goods and truths of faith. This food is given by the Lord in the heavens to the angels every moment, and thus perpetually and to eternity. This also is what is meant in the Lord's Prayer by "Give us this day our daily bread"; that is, every instant to eternity. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2838.4)

Like the angels, we too receive the Lord's love every moment, and with these teachings from the Lord, now we can recognize it. We can know that His love is behind any good thing we do. We can know that His love is behind any truth that we learn and we know that His love is the only thing that really sustains us and gives us life.

So every time we say the Lord's prayer, and ask the Lord to "give us this day our daily bread," we can think about the Lord filling us with His love, giving us the strength to do what is right, forging ahead in the desert. Every time we read about bread in the Word, we can think of the Lord filling us with what we need to survive spiritually in times of drought. And every time we take the Holy Supper or watch others take the Holy Supper, we can think about the Lord filling us with His loving presence and being conjoined with Him.

As the crowd said to the Lord: "Lord, always give us this bread." (*John 6:35*)
Amen.

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

INFLUX

With this term is related one of the most fundamental doctrines given in the Writings. It denotes the successive operation of what is higher into and through what is discretely lower, as of thought into speech, will into action, and so on. The essential idea is that nothing under God acts of itself, but through the operation into it of something higher, and this all the way back through the scale of degrees to the Lord Himself.

Influx should not be thought of in terms of water being poured into a cup, but rather of a wave motion impinging upon a substance which reacts and is thus a receptacle. This is important because it shows that the inflowing source and the receptacle are not merged. The Divine does not become finite in proceeding; yet neither does man become Divine in receiving Divine influx.

Two pairs of related terms should be noted, first, general and particular influx. General influx, which is from the Lord through the order of the heavens, is into those things which are in the order of their life, such as animals; particular influx, which is from the Lord through angels and spirits, is into those things which are not in order, that is, the minds of men. Note that man's body is under general influx.

The second pair, immediate and mediate influx, are readily distinguished. Influx through heaven or through the Word is mediate; influx from the Lord into the human soul, which is above the angelic heavens, is immediate. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6128, 5850, 5854, 5862, 6058, 6495)

BOOK REVIEW

The Ten Commandments

The Secrets of Spiritual Growth

Found in God's Principles for Living

*Translators: The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole, the Rev. Dr.
Jonathan S. Rose and B. Erikson Odhner*

The Ten Commandments are the first part of the Word revealed by the Lord, and constitute its foundation and core. They were known long before they were revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai; they were given then, very dramatically and engraved on stone, to impress upon people that they are not just man-made laws but Divine laws. Human society would be impossible without them. Similar sets of principles – echoes of those Commandments – are found in all the world's religions.

The various other teachings and stories of the Word are reminders or expansions or demonstrations of the Commandments given in *Exodus* and repeated in *Deuteronomy*. And in the New Church, their deeper, spiritual meaning has been revealed. We see that they refer to more than natural killing and stealing and adultery, but to the spiritual wrongs these things represent. The whole book on *Conjugal Love*, for example, is really an unfolding of the sixth Commandment. In that book, the full spectrum of meaning contained in “Thou shalt not commit adultery” is set forth, explained and illustrated.

“Behold, I make all things new,” the Lord says. (*Revelation 21:5*) The new light shone upon the Ten Commandments in the Heavenly Doctrine, revealing so much that is in them which was not seen before, is an example of how the Lord's promise to “make all things new” has been fulfilled. Some of the oldest writing in existence is now shown to be as fresh as ever, and even more vitally important and illuminating than people dreamed.

The inner spiritual meaning of the Ten Commandments is revealed in four places in the Heavenly Doctrine, and now, all four of these commentaries have been published together in one volume for the first time, in a new book

from the Swedenborg Foundation: *10 Commandments: The Secrets of Spiritual Growth Found in God's Principles for Living*.

The sources from which the sections of the book are taken are: *Arcana Coelestia* and *Apocalypse Explained*, in which the Commandments are discussed in a series of inter-chapter essays, and in further commentaries on them in *The Doctrine of Life* and in *True Christian Religion*. (In this new volume the names of these books of the Writings are translated as *Secrets of Heaven*, *Revelation Explained*, *Life* and *True Christianity*).

The translators are: B. Erickson Odhner, the Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Rose and the Rev. Dr. George F. Dole. There is an introductory essay by the Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman, and the editor of the new volume, Morgan Beard, executive director of the Swedenborg Foundation, supplies a helpful note at the beginning in which she explains how the Commandments are treated of in each of the four places in the Writings that discuss them.

Also, since this new volume draws upon several different translations, she shows how they are harmonized so that the original Latin words are translated consistently. For example, she notes that the Latin *affectio*, commonly translated as “affection,” may also be rendered *feeling, desire, love, inclination toward, or response to*. In this volume *affectio* appears as “passion.” (See a note on “*affectio*” in *Life Lines*, page 64.)

I hesitate to say a word about translation since I am not a Latinist or a translator, so take whatever I say with a grain of salt. But I’m not sure about some of the particular word choices in this new volume: “passions” seems way too limited a word to use as a translation for *affectio* in all places. No translation is perfect, though. All involve compromises and trade-offs in the effort to be true to the original Latin while at the same time conveying the meaning clearly.

The work of translation never ends because language evolves, and having new ones can serve to catch our attention and make us aware of statements that we may have glossed over in previous readings because their impact was obscured by the antiquated language of the translation.

I was quite impressed by how clear and easy-to-read the new translations in this volume are. It seemed to me that the *power* of the truths being presented came across very well.

This new volume should be a valuable resource for those who wish to make a study of the Commandments in light of the Heavenly Doctrine. It brings together in an easy-to-access format the various ways in which the Commandments are to be understood.

(WEO)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Highlights from meetings in 2016:

Andrew Alden was unanimously elected in July to fill out the term of **Lael Odhner** and was subsequently appointed chair of the New Church Investment Fund.

Andrew studied for two years at Bryn Athyn College before earning a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Economics and Finance from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He also earned a Master's in Financial Engineering degree from the University of California, Berkeley.

He has more than eight years of experience in the asset management industry, working for such firms as Vident Financial, Lattice Strategies (now Hartford Funds), CPP Investment Board, Guggenheim Partners Asset Management and Citco Fund Services. He is Head of Quantitative Research at Vident Financial and manages more than \$1 billion in United States and global equities strategies.

In 2013 Andrew and **Ilin Kuo** were married in Taiwan. They live in San Francisco.

Communication

Chancellor Brian W. Keith said in October, "We are providing more forums for communication and cooperation between all schools in Bryn Athyn," and that the College and Secondary Schools are working more closely together than ever.

The Academy and General Church Boards will be exchanging highlights of their meetings, and **General Ronald Nelson** has been invited to attend Academy Board meetings as a liaison from the General Church Board. Bishop Keith also serves as a liaison because he attends the meetings of both Boards.

Bryn Athyn College

The new **Sherri R. Cooper** and **Daniel W. Goodenough** residence halls, completed on time for the 2016-17 school year and \$89,000 under budget, were dedicated at Charter Day.

Attendance this year is above 300, which is on target, with a roughly even split of men and women. The growth target is 400-500 students, with more emphasis placed on attracting traditional New Church students. **Dr. Roberta Nolan** is the new Admissions Director for the College.

New programs are being developed to attract students in education, building arts, biology and women's field hockey. The Master of Arts in Religious Studies program (MARS) is under review to increase enrollment. A search is underway for a PhD to lead the Graduate Education Program. The College is also looking at food service, social life, academic advising and career planning to promote student retention.

The next building under consideration would be a Student Center and funding options are being explored.

There are four students enrolled in the Theological School, with the possibility of five entering next year.

Secondary Schools

Progress continues on deficit reduction – from a \$5.2 million deficit in 2011 to less than \$1 million last year and a \$75,000 deficit projected this year. Revenue is becoming more balanced between endowment income, tuition and gifts. Admission efforts are increasing, especially with traditional New Church families.

Future building projects in the planning stages include improving the interior of de Charms Hall and the Fine Arts Building, general infrastructure, and air conditioning for Benade Hall and the Fine Arts Building.

THE CHURCH IN ASIA

The following is from a year-end report and fund-raising appeal from the **Rev. John Jin**, who is the regional pastor for Asia and is responsible for outreach to the Korean-speaking community in the United States.

China

The Rev. Tim (whose last name is withheld for security reasons) was the first New Church minister in China. He started worship every Sunday morning with students, teachers and helpers in JiuJiang City in the Jiang Xi province. These people are trying to spread our church one member at a time and believe that this New Church will continue to grow.

In September a New Church high school opened its doors in JiuJiang

City. It is an alternative school, which allows us to teach from New Church doctrines, and is not bound by Chinese communist regulation. To share a few quotes from the students and Tim:

“I am a high school student and I came from Guizhou. Now I am here. When I was in my hometown, I didn’t have books or clothes but now I study in a very lovely environment. We have a very good teacher, who teaches us how to be quality students. I dream of becoming a teacher to help poor children like me. I got baptized last October by Rev. Jin who came from America. After that, I felt a sense of peace and pleasure in knowing that I can move forward with helping others.” (**He Ju**, 17)

“I am a student from Guizhou. I got baptized in October. I love to learn English, listen to English music and watch English movies. When I was 11, I didn’t know how to study and what to do in the future. At that time, I met my teacher Tim and he taught me and guided me. He told me that I should have a dream saying, ‘A dream will have powers.’ Now I am studying at the JiuJiang Alternative New Church School. I am very happy because I know what I want to do and I now have a dream. I want to be a translator, and translate many New Church books and spread the New Church teachings.” (**Cao Yan**, 17)

Though these are wonderful testimonials, Tim also shares some of the challenges: “Teaching senior high school courses is not easy with only one teacher and me. Now, even one teacher left a month ago. If I cannot find teachers, I will have to give up this New Church school and send the students to a regular high school. So I am praying to get New Church qualified teachers and overcome these financial challenges.”

Seminar for New Church People in China: On October 1-3, 2016, we held a New Church Seminar in JiuJiang. Ten people attended (family members of current church members not included) and 13 students attended as auditors. The theme was, “What is the New Church?” During the seminar we worshiped and also held baptisms for 13 New Church members. It was a very moving and enlightening time.

New Church Theological School: Among the Chinese New Church members, there are about 15 who want to study New Church teachings more thoroughly. Therefore, they have decided to spend one year preparing a curriculum of study. During the preparation year, Rev. Jin has been teaching online courses (via GoToMeeting app – video conferencing) on *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* and *True Christian Religion*, starting this past November.

What we continue to do:

Translation and Publishing: A formal translation group has been formed under **David Zhang**. Their work includes: *Conjugal Love*, *Arcana Coelestia*, *True Christian Religion* (2nd volume), and *New Jerusalem and its*

Heavenly Doctrine. A Chinese New Church member in Australia introduced the Writings to a Canadian Chinese man whose name is Audrey and now he diligently studies the Writings. He is running a publishing company in Canada and will revise and publish *Heaven and Hell* (which David Zhang translated) in Canada.

Education Support: Rev. Tim continues to support two student groups in Guizhou, including 16 students who are in their senior year in high school. After six years of studying in JiuJiang with Tim, they will return to Guizhou where they will prepare for their college examination. Now that they are over 18 years old, they will each go to a different university. They will be the first group of university students in the village.

Some have expressed continued interest in wanting to become teachers so that they could go back to their village to teach children who may not have the financial means to do so. Many, if not all, will pass the test but they will continue to need some support to get through their college years. Moreover, we have heard stories of the junior high schoolers who are also in need of financial support to get through their schooling so that they can eventually get to the universities, but may have fallen back into the “old ways” of living, such as getting married at an young age, in order to lift the financial burden on their families.

Other news:

Nepal: Rev. Jin baptized eight children who are part of the Loving Arms Mission Orphanages, back in May. They have decided to close the orphanage, originally run by **Kent Rogers** and his wife, **Shova**, as their children have all grown up and become independent. Among them, one is married, four are in college, and others have jobs. We are so grateful for the Lord’s guidance through these years and special thanks to Kent and Shova for all of their work in Nepal.

Korea: The Korean New Church continues to grow in various ways, including translation work as well as the training of ministers through the Theological School. As they continue to move toward a self-support system, they are continuing to work on the Korean Project. We hope to see a new building to house all of that work in 2017.

Japan: The people diligently and sincerely want to develop the New Church and to continue new translation work as volunteers.

United States: Even with Rev. Jin, who formally announced his retirement last December, the Philadelphia New Church continues to worship with him as their teaching minister. The California group (with missionary **Jea Chung** as the lead) keeps growing. They started both an on-site as well an off-site (video conferencing) worship services to meet the needs of the group members. **Rev. Yang**, who is a retired minister in Korea, preaches time to time via the internet.

Regional Clergy Meeting: In May, we had a Regional Clergy Meeting in Tokyo, Japan, with the Assistant Bishop **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.** In attendance were: **The Revs. Peter Devassey, Todd Beiswenger, Tim Zhou, Gyu Yang, Jong Lee, Soon Lee, Seung Kim, Young Jung, Nang Kim, Yong Jin, Shiro Matsumoto, Seiichi Sakae,** and theolog **Jea Shin** and Candidate **Sachio Nakato.** Australia, India, China, Korea, Japan and America were the countries represented.

(**Hwa Y. Kim**, treasurer of the Philadelphia Korean New Church, adds: Without your help this year our New Church missions in Asia will get very difficult. Please help us in building the Lord's New Church in Asia. Checks may be sent to:

Philadelphia Korean New Church
 Attn: Hwa Kim, Treasurer
 537 Anne Street
 Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006)

SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION

The Swedenborg Foundation board and staff held a two-day retreat in the fall to build on the new direction adopted at the last strategic retreat in 2012. The Foundation then had shifted its focus to online content – from Facebook to YouTube – while also encouraging anyone interested to download the Writings free from its website.

The result so far is that the YouTube channel records more than 200,000 views each month, and three million people are connecting each month with posts on the Heaven and Hell Facebook page.

At the fall retreat the board agreed that the mission continues: to foster an informed and increasingly broad engagement with what has been revealed through Swedenborg. “Our greatest hope,” the Foundation says in its November/December newsletter, is that by spreading his teachings as widely as possible “we can help to make the world a better place by giving people a path to peace and happiness.”

Four specific aspirations are:

- Engaging with millions of people around the world
- Facilitating breakthroughs based on Swedenborg’s thought in physical sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities
- Ensuring that messaging balances different Swedenborgian viewpoints in the world
- Ensuring the best systems are in place for board and staff to work together

The Foundation is also exploring new media channels such as apps and

virtual reality, committing to continuing the New Century Edition beyond its current scope, and creating more core study materials such as an annotated Swedenborgian Bible.

YouTube

The Foundation's increasingly popular offTheLeftEye YouTube channel, which is home to the weekly webcast *Swedenborg and Life*, reached 40,000 subscribers in October, following a month of record high views and minutes watched. That doubled the subscribers from a year before.

The Foundation reports that one of the most popular programs – *Why Don't Those Who've Died Communicate With Us More?* – went viral in mid-September. “On a peak day we had 29,425 views and 287,901 minutes watched, and for the next week or so the channel continued to have unusually high viewership. The overall result was that September was the channel's best month ever, with 373,461 views and 3.4 million minutes watched.”

Curtis Childs, who hosts these programs every Monday evening, also made appearances on two online shows in the fall which are aimed at spiritual seekers around the world.

One was the *Dr. Julie Show: All Things Connected* with Dr. Julie Snow. This is a platform for authors, teachers and business leaders to talk about social change, the power of consciousness, and emerging trends in health, science and spirituality. Curtis talked about Swedenborg's greatest hope for the human race. The other was a two-part video interview on *Wisdom From North*, an Oslo-based webcast hosted on YouTube, where he talked about such topics as Swedenborg's spiritual experiences, life on other planets, and how to deal with negative thoughts.

EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY

A European Assembly is scheduled for August 4-7, 2017 at the High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, north of London. The theme is: *From Where We Are – No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, the Lord leads you from that place.*

In addition to the ministers serving in the United Kingdom and Europe, the list of speakers includes: **the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith, the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., the Rev. Dr. Ray and Star Silverman, the Rev. Chuck Blair, the Rev. John and Lori Odhner, the Rev. Michael Cowley, and the Rev. David Lindrooth.** They will be sharing the theme with adults, young people and children.

The venue is described as spacious, set in 40 acres, with good links to public transportation. The program will include plenty of leisure time.

The cost for three nights is £225, which converts to about \$286 but may change slightly due to currency valuations.

More information is available at the website: <http://europeanassembly.eu>

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TWELVE QUALITIES OF A SPIRITUAL MIND

(Reprinted from The New Church Voice of Florida)

Forrest Dristy

It is well known that the number 12 is very prominent throughout the Bible. There were 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 stones in Aaron's breastplate, 12 gates to the New Jerusalem, and so on. Why is this number so special? There must be some kind of spiritual reason behind it all, and a recent book called *Twelve Qualities of a Spiritual Mind* tries to elucidate the matter.

The authors are **Harry W. Barnitz** and **Dawn Barnitz Potts**, a brother and sister who are well known New Church people, both of them members of The Lord's New Church. Their combined efforts have resulted in a most unusual book.

The Rev. Harry Barnitz was a New Church minister from the time of his ordination in 1943 until his premature death in 1972, when he was only 52 years old. He was known for thinking on a grand scale, as evidenced by his first book, *Existentialism and the New Christianity: Towards a New Universal Synthesis*.

At the time of his death he left behind an unfinished manuscript that his sister Dawn fortunately brought to completion and published in 2015 as *Twelve Qualities of a Spiritual Mind*, the book we are now considering. In doing so she makes it evident that she shares with her brother a penchant for large thoughts.

In view of Harry's theological background, it is not surprising that the book contains much material drawn from the Writings, especially in regard to the correspondential significance of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles. But a large part of the book is devoted to a subject that many readers will not expect, a topic that involves a completely different example of the special significance of the number 12. It is the 12 signs of the zodiac.

Of course this takes us into the subject of astrology and raises the question of how these 12 signs are related to all the examples of 12 that appear in the Bible. So we find ourselves in new territory with a lot of ground to cover.

The longest chapter of the book considers each of the signs of the zodiac in order, starting with Aries and continuing on through Pisces at number 12. Each one is discussed at some length with a description of the mental characteristics of people who are born under that sign. Also each one is assigned one of the Biblical tribes, one of the apostles, and other associated features.

The information given is apparently drawn from both the Writings and traditional astrological literature. Also included are many artistic depictions done by several members of the Barnitz family, including **Downing Barnitz, Nell Barnitz Nilson** and **Robin Barnitz**. Their family seems to be highly gifted.

The Foreword was written by the **Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose**, a well-known Swedenborgian scholar and translator. Overall it is a challenging and thought-provoking book. I suppose that most New Church people would prefer to focus their spiritual study directly on the Writings, but for those who may wish to explore the possibility that astrology contains a remnant of wisdom from the Ancient Church this book would be a good starting point.

NEW CIRCLE IN CHARLESTON

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith is pleased to announce the formation of the Charleston Circle in South Carolina. **The Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton II** and the **Rev. Geoffrey Howard** have retired in the area and are providing regular services to the people there.

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

INNOCENCE

By this term is meant willingness to be led by a power not one's own. Spiritual innocence, or the innocence of wisdom, consists in an interior willingness to be led by the Lord rather than by self. It is adjoined with man and is the Divine good proceeding and leading man to heaven. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 7902, 9938; *Heaven and Hell* 280)



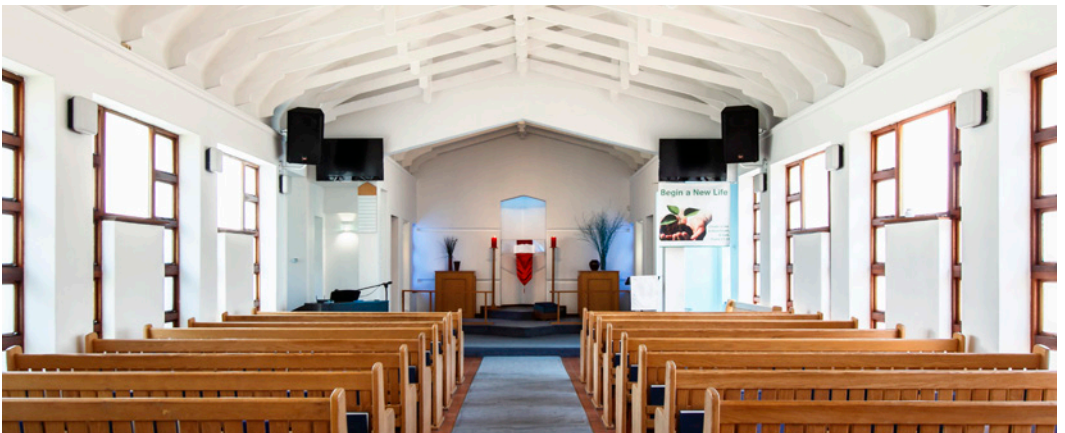
Left to right: Samson M. Abuga, David Lindrooth, Mark Allais, George Omosu Magero, Phila Xaba, Brian Keith, Bheki Dube, Emanuel Wanjala Juma, Malcolm Smith, Mandla Sithole (a candidate), Gerald Waters, Fred Onsiro Ang'asa, and Protus Mkhize. (Samson, George, Emanuel and Fred came from Kenya for the meetings.)



The grounds around the New Church Buccleuch



New Church Buccleuch in Johannesburg





Nativity from Guatamala (pictured above)

This was made by a young man who supports three younger siblings with carvings that he sells in a local marketplace. The painted floral designs are likely inspired by native clothing.



Nativity from Naples, Italy (pictured above and below right)

This elaborate Presepio is on loan from the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial in South Philadelphia. The figures were collected over a 30-year period by Elizabeth Anne Evans of nearby Bucks County, Pennsylvania, during annual trips to Italy.



Nativity in the Italian (pictured above and left)

Presepio Tradition

This Nativity, inspired by the tradition of the Presepio in Naples, Italy, was crafted by and is on loan from American artists Karen Loccisano and R. Michael Palan. All of the settings, figures and details were painstakingly created by hand.



Glencairn has such a large collection of Nativities – either owned or on loan – that the month-long display is different each year. It is seen and appreciated by thousands of visitors.



**Nativity made from banana leaves
(pictured above and below)**

A Venezuelan artisan crafted this Nativity from banana leaves and other natural materials



**Nativity with a Heavenly Host, Masaya, Nicaragua
(pictured above)**

This brightly painted Nativity, with a heavenly host of 20 angels, is from the personal collection of Garrick Hyde and his family in Utah. They run a family charity, World Nativity, which imports Nativities from poor and developing countries. These figures are carved from cedar wood and painted by local artisans in Managua.



**The Raymond Pitcairn family nativity
(pictured to the right and below)**

These three nativity scenes were made by Winfred S. Hyatt for the Raymond Pitcairn family in the 1920s. They were originally made for Cairwood and were moved to the newly completed Glencairn in 1939. The family tradition was that this would be the first thing the children would see on Christmas morning.





The New Church Westville in Durban. This beautiful church was designed by John Frost.



The Alexandra New Church in Johannesburg



The Impaphala New Church



Life Lines

LET THERE BE LIGHT

We are just a month or so separated from Christmas. Doubtless some bright lights prolong the cheer on trees and houses. Hopefully there is still a lingering glow in our hearts.

Throughout the Word light is a symbol of truth, of hope, of love. Twinkling lights and candles are so much a part of Christmas because this is why the Lord was born on earth – to shine a new light in a darkening world. His light was heralded by an angelic star. Wise men came to worship Him because they had seen and followed His star.

The prayer flowing out of Christmas and into the new year is that those of us who walk in darkness – and we all experience that at times – may see the light and reflect it in our lives. The darkness of the human spirit will always be with us, and light is the best defense we have. It was best expressed in the hope and prophecy of Isaiah about the birth of the Lord: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined.” (*Isaiah* 9:2)

An Indian tribe in Oklahoma once encouraged its youth to “live like men who are at home in the daylight.” Isn’t that what we all long for amid the dark impulses infecting the world: people who are “at home in the daylight,” with nothing to hide.

It is no coincidence that the Word begins and ends with visions of light. *Genesis* opens with God creating the heaven and earth, but “darkness was on the face of the deep.” And God said: “Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.”

In the final chapters of *Revelation* we get the beautiful vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

The whole of the Word is to be “a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (*Psalms* 119:105)

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” (*Matthew* 5:14)

And He says in the *Gospel of John* – several times: “I am the light of the

world: he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (*John* 8:12)

He brought that light into the world – and again in His Second Coming – because of the darkness enveloping the world: “And this is the condemnation: that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (*John* 3:19-21)

That is the light we are to carry forward as a beacon for the world: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (*Matthew* 5:16)

(BMH)

DIVING INTO LIFE

I began reading an old book that had been gathering dust on my shelf for decades: *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Antoine de Saint Exupéry (1900-1944), who also wrote *The Little Prince*.

He was an aviation pioneer who flew a postal route from France to various places in Africa and elsewhere at a time when planes had few instruments and pilots depended upon the stars, cloud formations, and whatever they could see of features on the ground for guidance. But much of his flying was over water and vast deserts, including the Sahara, so there was often nothing below to help him find his way. (He disappeared on a reconnaissance flight over the Mediterranean for the Free French Air Force in 1944.)

This sentence caught my eye: “The machine which at first blush seems a means of isolating man from the great problems of nature, actually plunges him more deeply into them.” The point was that being up in a plane did not lessen his attention to the land below, but actually increased it – which struck me as a great metaphor for what that mental “machine” we call religion does.

Prayer, studying doctrine and meditating on the Word may seem “at first blush” to be a way of escaping the problems of daily life – the *real* problems of the *real* world, as we tend to see them. But spiritual thought actually “plunges us more deeply into them.”

When we “mount up with wings like eagles” (*Isaiah* 40:31) and become involved in the spiritual dimension of life, the real and eternal significance of the natural problems we must deal with is seen more clearly. It is then that we gain the higher perspective and wisdom we need to better navigate our way through our life on earth.

(WEO)

CONSCIENCE

The horizons of life have expanded greatly in the modern world, presenting us with all kinds of choices people in simpler times did not have. This makes the development of a genuine conscience to guide us all the more imperative.

The Lord gives us an inherent sense of right and wrong, but it has to be formed and nurtured. To develop a true conscience we need to learn the teachings of the Word, reflect upon them, and apply them to life.

When living by spiritual principles becomes a matter of habit, the value and beauty of Divine truth becomes more and more apparent. We take it to heart, and it forms a new will in the intellectual part of our mind – which is the definition of *conscience*. The truth is then no longer just a matter of knowledge, but of life. Truth that is loved speaks to us, and to act contrary to it would make us uncomfortable.

People speak of being “troubled by conscience,” but the real cause of the discomfort is that we have acted badly, not the awareness conscience gives us that we have done so. If you burn your finger on the stove, it is the heat that causes the pain, not the nerves that enable you to feel it. If a sound grates on your ears, the problem is not that you are able to hear, but that the sound is discordant.

(WEO)

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND THE POST-TRUTH?

For several years now the Oxford Dictionaries name a “word of the year.” These new words have become part of our vocabulary – and are signposts for the way our culture is heading. Not surprisingly, most of these words recently have their roots in new world technology: hashtag, app, tweet. This year’s entry is post-truth.

Post-truth is part of the fallout from the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the raucous presidential campaign in the United States. It is an adjective defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

So truth becomes not something clearly defined by facts but by slippery interpretations, sometimes based on “fake news stories” planted in social media. Truth has become a victim of group think and emotional moorings, like the “situational ethics” of the 1980s. This “truth” is whatever people say it is, defined by personal whim and feelings rather than facts.

This is not a healthy sign – either for the state of our politics or our culture. We all need to be guided by truth in our lives – universal and absolute truth, the Lord’s truth. When we are led astray by various versions of truth, constructed

from our own inclinations as something called “post-truth,” it is no wonder we are lost.

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” is often quoted glibly – as though any truth or “post-truth” will do. What we are less likely to hear is the prerequisite that Jesus spake to His disciples: “If you abide in My Word, then you are My disciples indeed.” Then – only then – “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” (*John* 8:31-32)

We cannot really be free – to make good and informed choices – without knowing the truth that comes only from the Lord. We do not make up that truth for ourselves – and then argue about interpretations. Real truth – not post-truth – is revealed by the Lord alone in His Word.

There are claims to truth all around us, and given the amorphous nature of so much of what passes for truth these days, it is no wonder we witness the cynical acceptance of “post-truth” from all of those looking in the wrong places.

Better the guidance from the Lord in *Apocalypse Revealed* 224: “Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths which should constitute your faith and life. Everyone whose soul desires it is capable of seeing the truths of the Word in light.”

We count on truth to make us free and wise. Wisdom is what we search for and wish for – in the way we lead our lives and in the way our nations are led. And we won’t find it in a post-truth world. “You have reached wisdom when you no longer have any concern about understanding what is true and good, but are motivated by and living what is true and good; for this is wisdom.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10225)

(BMH)

A WINDOW INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS

The Sunday morning Bryn Athyn Cathedral service includes three lessons from the Word: the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrine. When I heard the third readings on November 6 I thought: How wonderful this is! Here we have – in five sentences – a revelation of the very essence of human psychology.

As regards temptations, this is the way it is: the hells fight against a person, and the Lord for the person; to every falsity the hells inject, there is an answer from the Divine. The false ideas which are from the hells are injected and flow into the external or natural part of the person; but the answer from the Divine flows into the internal or spiritual person. This latter influx, which is from the Divine, does not come to the person’s perception as much as the falsities do; neither does it move the singulars of his thought, but the general direction, and in such a manner that it scarcely comes to the perception otherwise than as hope and the consequent consolation, in which there are nevertheless countless things of which the person

is ignorant. These are such things as agree with his affection or love, especially his affection or love of truth and good, from which he has conscience. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8159.3)

The workings of the mind are endlessly mysterious, but the driving force behind all of them is the tension between the life flowing into it from heaven and the contrary influences from hell, and the ongoing resolution of that conflict. This is the crux of the matter – which is an appropriate way to put it since “crux” is Latin for “cross,” a symbol for the psychic pain we have to go through to regenerate, and the promise of victory in our spiritual combats.

(WEO)

‘CRUX ANSATA’

Speaking of “the crux of the matter,” my exhaustive research has revealed that “crux” is a shortened form of “*crux ansata*,” a Latin term for the ancient Egyptian symbol of life, the ankh. “Ansata” means “handle,” so the ankh is a “cross with a handle.”

The Egyptian gods were often portrayed carrying it by its loop, sometimes one in each hand with their arms crossed over their chest. The cross depicted by the Coptic Christians of Egypt was also in the ankh or *crux ansata* form.

The ankh looks like a sandal strap, which may have been used as a hieroglyph or pictogram signifying life, perhaps because the Egyptian word for “sandal strap” and “live” sounded the same.

But there must be something more here than mere coincidence in the sound of the words. The roots of human language are spiritual. Similarity in the sound of words – especially as we go further back toward the heavenly origin of language – is not just coincidental. There is an organic connection between their original, essential meaning, their sound, and their written form.

What does a lowly sandal strap have to do with eternal life? Well, it reminds us of the importance of walking in “the path of life.” (*Psalms* 16:11) And that “all religion relates to life” – the actual, down-to-earth practical business of life. (*Doctrine of Life* 1) And of the humility shown by John the Baptist when he said he was not worthy to stoop down and loosen the Lord’s sandal strap. (*John* 1:27)

We cannot lift ourselves up by our own sandal straps, but faith, when lived, elevates our mundane existence and makes it holy. The truths of faith are the Lord’s “handle” on us. But living by them requires that we go through the painful ordeal of temptation. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (*Luke* 9:23) The old self must die that a new self may live, and guide our feet on the path to heaven.



The vertical post and horizontal arm of a cross may also be seen as representing the male and female aspects of humanity, and the circle above as standing for the infinite Divine Human from which the qualities of each sex are derived. Note that the “circle” is not perfectly round, but pointed at the bottom, and thus suggests the shape of the human face. So we have a symbol of infinity (a circle), but an infinity that reaches down toward the finite; a God who seeks connection with the earth and mortal men.

The ankh was also an amulet for strength and health. We cannot heal ourselves, but the Lord can, because He has taken to Himself all power in heaven and on earth by uniting the Divine and the Human in Himself. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; our part is to respond to His invitation to “come unto Me,” and walk with Him.

(WEO)

TRANSLATING AFFECTIO

The unusual and rather mysterious phrase “affection of” appears often in the older English translations of the Writings – as in, for example, “the affection of truth.” Newer translations change “affection of” to “affection for” (or “desire for,” etc.). “Affection for” seems obviously appropriate in some contexts, but not all. In modern usage, “affection” usually means a fondness *for* something, but when the Writings were written it also meant to be affected *by* something.

In any case, it seems to me that an affection *for* something implies that we have been affected *by* it. But it is not just the thing we happen to like that affects us; we must also be affected by an influx of some love, good or bad, that causes us to like that particular thing.

For example, if we like music (have an affection for it), it is because we are affected *by* music; and not just by the sound that comes to our ears from without, but by a love of spiritual beauty and harmony that affects our mind from within.

Similarly, one who has “an affection for truth,” or who “loves truth,” is one who is affected *by* truth. Truth affects us, or we have a feeling for it, especially because of the good truth has within it, represents and leads to (“the good of truth” or “good from truth”).

Context helps us decide how to translate *affectio*. In one place “affection for” might give the best idea of the meaning, while in another “affected by” might be more to the point. In all cases, though, both ideas are present.

(WEO)

OUR MORAL COMPASS: WHICH WAY TO TRUE NORTH?

A popular book these days on how we think – and why we think the way we do – is *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt. As a professional psychologist he offers a lot of good and useful insights into how we get so entrenched in our positions – religious and political – that we tend not to listen to other points of view or look for common ground.

His psychology/sociology jargon gets a bit tedious at times. But what diminishes Haidt's perspective is his self-proclaimed identity as a "new atheist." Everything for him flows from reason and science; God and religion are dismissed as unhealthy delusions. His "new atheism" asserts that "religion is the root of most evil" and is the primary cause of war, genocide, terrorism and the oppression of women. He scorns religious beliefs that "bind and blind" and are really just an excuse for building community.

Indeed, a lot of evil has been perpetrated in the name of religion throughout history, but that is from man's own perversions, not religion itself. We know that all evil comes from hell, not from faith in God. Religion does not advocate war, genocide, terrorism and the oppression of women.

So Haidt's concept is flawed from the outset. He sees morality in simplistic terms of harm and fairness – defined, of course, by "science and reason." We see morality as much more than that, and rooted in spiritual principles.

For a traditional Christian perspective, consider Dr. William Bennett, author of *The Book of Virtues* and other well-respected books on values and history. In *The Moral Compass – Stories for Life's Journey* he says the basic assumption of the book "is that much of life is a moral and spiritual journey, and that we undertake it . . . to find our way morally and spiritually."

We can't do this, he says, with vague values defined by subjective ideals. Instead, we must raise our children "as moral and spiritual beings by offering them unequivocal, reliable standards of right and wrong, noble and base, just and unjust."

New Church doctrine and New Church education go a step further. The distinctiveness of the Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College stands out immediately in their commitment to enhancing the civil, moral *and* spiritual lives of students and developing both a moral and spiritual conscience.

In his seminal book on New Church teaching, *Education for Use*, the Rt. Rev. Willard D. Pendleton said that "the frightening realities of the world" – which have only become more frightening since this was first written in 1957 – "emphasize 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."

You won't find that worldview in the "righteous mind" of a "new atheist," no matter how scholarly his study of thinking and behavior.

We find true guidance in the teachings explained by Bishop Pendleton, which are at the heart of New Church education: "Sooner or later – and hopefully sooner – we must be brought back to the realization that moral order is basic to all social life and that this order is inscribed upon two tablets of stone which constitute the primitive covenant between God and the man whom He created."

(BMH)

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Here is another "third lesson" (from a December 11, 2016 service at Bryn Athyn Cathedral) that gives us a concise and beautiful description of the "hidden agenda" governing each person's life. According to the Divine plan for our journey through life in this world, we proceed from the spiritual morning of childhood to the evening of old age, and then in heaven are brought back into a new morning "in which the rudiments of wisdom that were planted in us while we were in the world grow and thrive to eternity."

The Lord is present with each and every human being. He exerts insistent pressure on us to receive Him. When we do receive Him, which occurs when we acknowledge Him as our own God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, his First Coming occurs [in us], which is the twilight before dawn. From then on, we begin to be enlightened intellectually in spiritual matters and to grow into deeper and deeper wisdom.

As we receive this wisdom from the Lord, we move through the morning into midday. The day continues into our old age until we die. Then we come to the Lord Himself in heaven. There, although we died old, we are brought back into the morning of our lives, and the rudiments of wisdom that were planted in us while we were in the physical world grow and thrive to eternity. (*True Christian Religion* 766)

(WEO)

SOWING SEEDS WITH TRUST AND HOPE

Who knew that the Parable of the Sower would find a whole new relevance in the age of the internet?

The item about the work of the Swedenborg Foundation in Church News (page 51) talks about the great success of its YouTube series in reaching people all over the world. There were more than 40,000 subscribers in October and the list grows every day. People are eagerly tuning in to learn more about the teachings revealed to and through Emanuel Swedenborg.

What is the implication of all this for the growth of the New Church? We

have no idea. We just hope it is making a difference. But we can be sure that the Lord's providence is involved with every heart touched by these teachings – whether from a YouTube video, a book, a pamphlet, a Bryn Athyn Cathedral tour, or just a casual conversation among friends.

So we are all sowers, spreading the seeds of the Church – often without being aware, or knowing whether the seeds are falling among rocks and weeds or in good soil. All we do know is that providence is involved in every particular of everyone's life. So the best we can do is spread our seeds lovingly and just marvel that the process is so much greater than we are.

(BMH)

European Assembly, August 4-7, 2017

High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, North of London

Fancy a summer holiday in the United Kingdom? Come join us for our second European Assembly. Our theme:

*From Where We Are . . .
No matter where you are on your spiritual journey,
the Lord leads you from that place.*

Our list of presenters and worship leaders is still being finalized, but will include clergy serving in the United Kingdom and Europe, laity, and a few special guests.

This Assembly is open to adults and families, and we will welcome and encourage active participation by everyone.

Our chosen venue is spacious, set in 40 acres of grounds. Transport links are good. We will gather from Friday afternoon and depart after lunch the following Monday. There will be plenty of leisure time for people to get acquainted or renew friendships.

The cost, for three nights, will be £225 per person; children 14 and under are free of charge.

<http://europeanassembly.eu>

Please contact Dale Morris to book a place or get further information: dale.morris@zen.co.uk; Prospect Cottage, Church Street, Stonesfield, OX29 8PS, England



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