

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020



Let Us Pray

Prayer is innocence, humility, trust. Ideally we pray, “Thy will be done.” But we pray for a lot of things. What should we hope for from our prayers – and what should we not expect? The Rev. Jeremy Simons offers thoughts on *Prayer for Others: New Church Teachings About the Effects of Prayer*. (Page 21) And the Rev. Jared Buss sheds light on *Answers to Prayers*. (Page 25)

NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180)

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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

Editorials (page 6) include:

- *Fear Not*: It may be hard to look at all that's happening in the world and be optimistic about the future. But the constant, reassuring message from the Lord is "Fear not." No matter what is happening His love and providence are leading us to a good end. So to be a New Church man or woman is to live with a positive and optimistic attitude.
- *Laying the Foundation*: The development of our minds is like building a home with three levels – and the strength of our minds, like the strength of our homes, lies in the foundation of truth.

With this issue the Rev. Walter Orthwein retires as Spiritual Editor of *New Church Life*. Read his fond farewell and tributes from Bruce Henderson, Editor, and Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. (Page 9)

Letters to the editors include three thoughtful responses to the article by the Rev. Christopher Barber: 200 Years and 100 Miles – *Doctrine's Failure to Settle the Slavery Debate in the New Church*. (Page 12)

We launch a new feature in this issue, *From the Bishop's Office*, with a message from Executive Bishop Peter Buss leading off: *Mission and Values*. Subsequent issues will rotate reports from Assistant Bishops Brad Heinrichs and David Lindrooth and the Executive Bishop. (Page 19)

There are many valuable and unique teachings in the New Church about prayer. The Rev. Jeremy Simons offers an overview on *Prayer for Others*: "Those who doubt that prayers are answered, or who have been disappointed that their own prayers have apparently not been heard, may have mistaken ideas about how prayer operates. The influence that prayer has is not on the Lord but on the one who prays." (Page 21) And the Rev. Jared Buss, in *Answers to Prayers*, says: "When we pray, we're totally allowed to tell the Lord what we want; we just need to listen to Him too. He's the one who understands how to soothe our hearts and lift our spirits out of darkness. We don't understand these things. If we tell him, 'Thy will be done,' we might just like what we

receive.” (Page 25)

In a sermon on *Family Ties* the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs says “Our real family should be those people who share common beliefs and convictions from the Word with us and strive to live according to them.” (Page 29)

In a sermon of *The Life-Changing Power of Order* the Rev. Philip Schnarr says that “the Lord’s glorification was a spiritual process that is very relevant to putting our own spiritual house in order. “The Lord’s Word is full of processes for spiritual self-improvement, but there is one thing that tops the charts. It is the cultivation of trust and spiritual confidence in the Lord.” (Page 34)

The Rev. Howard Thompson offers *A Reflection for the New Year on Thought, Rationality and Freedom*. “It strikes me,” he says, “that there is a very powerful force at play that is threatening to derail each of us and to do so with our unwitting consent.” He calls it the “social media algorithm” and invites us to consider “that a constant flow of information that is intended to get you to ‘buy’ something, ‘click’ something, or ‘like’ something is far from a heavenly leading and far more akin to a hellish leading.” (Page 40)

For Swedenborg’s birthday we offer *Who is Swedenborg?*, a pamphlet prepared for visitors to the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, who pick up about 100 of these every week. It includes the statement: “He had no command to establish a church, although he assumed this revelation would be the basis for a new church. This sets him apart from the apostles who were commanded to preach the gospel – and from those claiming special insights to attract a following.” (Page 44)

The Rev. Christopher Barber discovered a plaster cast of what looked like Swedenborg’s skull. It’s not actually, he says, but it’s a fascinating story. (Page 49)

Michael Brown, a 1956 graduate of the Academy of the New Church Boys School, pleads that *As We Retreat into the Future Let Us Not Forget the Past*. The richness of that past is a foundation for an exciting future – as long as we stay true to that vision. (Page 53)

Denmark often is hailed as the perfect country to raise children but Olaf Hauptmann, a student there, says the spiritual development of children is sadly lacking. *So, How to Keep Young People in the Faith?* He says it all begins with “how the angels think,” and giving logical reasons for why you believe as you do. (Page 56)

Church News (Page 59) includes:

- Updated plans for the General Church Retreat next June
- An annual report on the New Church in Asia by the Rev. John Jin
- Highlights from the November meeting of the Academy Board of Trustees, including the appointment of a Chancellor’s Council and an update of the Bryn Athyn College Strategic Plan

IN THIS ISSUE

- A report by the Rev. Michael Gladish on a “theistic” conference at Bryn Athyn College on Science and Religion – with good news for both
- Excerpts from the Dedication Address for an addition to the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church School by the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs
- An update on plans for the Old Village School retirement center in Kempton
- A new initiative for “Building Bridges” in the United Kingdom – bridges between members, congregations and the wider community

Editorials

FEAR NOT

It's hard to be hopeful and optimistic in a world plagued with evil and disaster. Yet the message from the Lord is constant and reassuring: "Fear not."

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (*Luke 1:26*)

"Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (*Luke 2:10*)

"Fear not, neither be discouraged." (*Deuteronomy 1:21*)

"Be not afraid." (Repeated throughout *Matthew, Mark and John*)

"Fear not, for I am with thee." (*Genesis 26:24 and Isaiah 43:5*)

The message resonates throughout the Word: trust in the Lord and His providence and all will be well.

We need that trust and confidence in a changing and challenging world that seems adrift in the stream of providence. Terrorism threatens innocents everywhere. Trends in our culture are increasingly insidious – secular, materialistic, self-indulgent. At the root of it all is a spiritual crisis – turning away from the Lord, which allows evil to flourish.

A new year and a new decade may be met with cynicism, pessimism and worry about where we are headed. In popular culture the future is shrouded with foreboding, fueled by a literal reading of the *Book of Revelation*, with its apocalyptic, end-of-the-world visions. We are still in the throes of the Last Judgment on the pervasive falsities in the world. But we have the comforting vision of a new heaven and a new earth – the Holy City New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven. Fear not.

Yes, we are blessed with a spiritual understanding of what all this means but are not immune from worry and despair. We all suffer temptations, which ultimately are festering doubts about the Lord's presence with us – especially in times of turmoil when what we love and invest our hopes in most are under attack.

But as we struggle through spiritual conflict we are assured that "good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope, and in the end strengthening an

affirmative outlook.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 2234.1)

Hope is the antidote to worry. Our hope and “affirmative outlook” are nurtured by the assurance that the Lord’s providence is operating in *every least particular* of our lives, always leading to a good end. “Those who are in the stream of providence are at all times carried along toward everything that is happy, regardless of the appearance of the means.” (*Ibid.* 8478.4)

But there is also the warning that “those not in the stream of providence are people who trust in themselves alone and attribute everything to themselves. Theirs is a contrary outlook, for they take providence away from the Divine and claim it as their own. It should be recognized also that as much as we are in the stream of providence, that much we are in a state of peace.”

It’s a challenge to see the workings of the Lord’s love and providence in massive tragedies or tiny, insignificant events, but we are assured: “How far someone errs who believes that the Lord has not foreseen and does not see the smallest individual thing with the human race. Or that within the smallest individual thing He does not foresee and lead. When in fact the Lord’s foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with them, and in details so tiny that it is impossible to comprehend in any manner of thought one in many millions of them. *For every smallest fraction of a moment of a person’s life entails a chain of consequences into eternity.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3854)

Our “state of peace” is constantly challenged by the choices we make, especially when we are not looking to the Lord, and the state of the world is not encouraging. The test is trust – trusting that no matter the appearance the Lord is always leading the world, the Church, our own lives toward good. An optimistic, accepting viewpoint is pervasive in the Word. And to be truly New Church – to trust completely in the Lord and His providence – is the essence of living with an optimistic and positive attitude.

“Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads to an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace. He fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him. How far a person attains this state depends on how far he attains love to the Lord.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8455)

Fear not: “For I know the plans that I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and hope.” (*Jeremiah* 29:11)

(BMH)

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The Writings compare the development of a person's mind to the building of a house. Our cooperation is necessary, but "unless the Lord builds the house,

they labor in vain who build it." (*Psalms* 127:1)

He is the Architect, His Word is the blueprint, and His Providence oversees the construction.

As in the case of a material construction project, the building of the human mind begins with laying a foundation. This first stage is very important; if the foundation is weak, it doesn't matter how well constructed or elaborately furnished the rest of the structure is, it will be like the "house built upon sand" that the Lord spoke of in His parable. (*Matthew* 7:26)

In a general sense, our whole experience of life in this world provides the foundation for understanding the nature of heavenly life, because the natural represents the spiritual in every detail. We can comprehend abstract, spiritual ideas because they are made tangible by concrete, natural phenomena. For example, we can get an idea of how the mind is formed by comparing it to the construction of a house.

But more particularly, laying the foundation for spiritual understanding is the use of education, especially religious education. Our inner spiritual home does not simply build itself magically in a moment, but must be constructed, or rather, *instructed*, since mental constructs are formed by instruction.

The goal of New Church education is to cooperate with the Lord in laying down a strong foundation upon which He can build His Church in the minds of each new generation of students, thus increasing the overall presence of the Church on earth.

The foundation of the Church as a spiritual entity in people's minds consists of basic truths drawn from the letter of the Word – the most fundamental of all being that there is a God, that He is One, that He is Human, and that He is the Lord Jesus Christ; and is therefore a God whom we can know and love and have a close relationship with.

All the facts of all the subjects taught, both natural and spiritual, come together in the acknowledgment of the Lord's Divine Human. It is the cornerstone upon which the whole edifice of New Church education rests. It is the rock upon which the Lord builds His Church in the mind of an individual and as an institution in the world.

Building a heavenly character is not just an intellectual exercise but involves how we respond to the various trials and tribulations we go through in this world. As beautiful and interesting as the truths of revelation are, their main use is not just to build and decorate our mental home, but to teach us how to live in it. For it is not just our home, but the dwelling place of the Lord with us. It is His presence that fills it with grace and truth, and makes it a safe and happy place where we will find rest for our souls.

(WEO)

Walter Orthwein: A Fond Farewell

With this issue of *New Church Life* the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein is retiring as Spiritual Editor after nine years of devoted service. Below is a farewell from Mr. Orthwein and tributes from Bruce Henderson, editor, and the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

MY FAREWELL TO NEW CHURCH LIFE

Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to write for *New Church Life*, but have decided to retire as a regular contributor, although I do hope to submit items from time to time in the future. This has been a very difficult decision to make because I have much enjoyed writing for this fine journal and consider it a very important use.

Lack of material is certainly no problem! The storehouse of spiritual treasure hidden within the letter of the Word, and now brought to light in the Heavenly Doctrine, is infinite. I have often thought that the Lord's Word is like the world of nature in that there is no end to the truths to be discovered in it. Just as science, on its plane of inquiry, is continually shedding new light on the mysteries of nature, so the Lord, in His second advent, is bringing the mysteries of faith more and more into the light of understanding.

A saying I like is: "The larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder." The more knowledge we gain, the more we realize how much more there is yet to learn. But sprinkled through the vast darkness of ignorance there are countless stars holding forth the promise of new worlds of knowledge yet to come. The New Church will always be new and exciting because the truth upon which it is founded is eternal.

When I first joined the staff of *New Church Life* nine years ago I worried that we might not receive enough articles to publish. That turned out not



to be a problem – which it shouldn't be, because small though our church membership is, the truth we have to draw upon is so significant – as is the Church's rich and distinguished history, its unique culture, and the relative number and importance of the uses it manages to accomplish.

One of the distinctive features of the New Church from its beginning is that the study of doctrine has not been restricted to the clergy. I can't imagine that there is another church in which the lay people are so actively engaged in reading, thinking about and discussing doctrine. "Now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith" doesn't apply just to the priesthood, but to everyone. So keep reading, and keep those articles and letters to *New Church Life* coming!

New Church Life, published continuously since 1881, serves an essential use as a journal of New Church thought and as an historical record, and it is an important aid in keeping our widespread organization united.

And finally, I want to say that working with Bruce Henderson has been an honor and a delight. He is a devoted student of the Writings, and as a writer and editor he is a real pro. The Church has been fortunate to have had the benefit of his talents in its service for many years.

WITH A SMILE AND A SIGH...

Bruce Henderson, Editor

Shakespeare, of course, had a phrase for times like this: "Welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing."

Nine years ago – with the January/February 2011 issue – the new *New Church Life* renewed its service to the Church and I was blessed to work with the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein as a part-time assistant. He will be missed.

Walter assumed the role of "Spiritual Editor" – not a disembodied presence hovering nearby with a HERESY stamp but a theologian with inspiring insights and a warm, cheerful outlook. He brought his gifts to writing editorials and Life Lines with a gentle spiritual oversight. He is known and loved for his doctrinal scholarship, his keen appreciation for the way the Heavenly Doctrines apply to all levels of life, and for his charming wit. He's been sharing all of this with a grateful church.

He has brought his insights and application of doctrine to these pages throughout the past nine years and the Church – all of us – are richer for it. We'll miss those nuggets of wisdom with their distinctive "signature" – WEO.

Walter has had a long and noteworthy career in the ministry of the General Church – as a pastor in Oak Arbor, Michigan, visiting pastor in Central Pennsylvania, teacher in Bryn Athyn College of the New Church

and its Theological School, leader of many doctrinal classes, and an admired, genial presence wherever he went. His work with *New Church Life* continued his calling with his gift for writing and making the teachings of the Church so relevant to our lives.

I wish Walter and his wife, Kathy, a happy retirement, free from the tyranny of deadlines and blessed with more opportunities for long walks together and time with grandchildren. I hope he will still be disposed from time to time to offer his wisdom, insights and sense of humor. His contributions to the life of the *Life* and the Church are indelible and forever appreciated.

Farewell goes out sighing, but may we always smile thinking of Walter Orthwein – and be forever grateful.

GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

As Executive Bishop, it is incredibly important to have a publication like *New Church Life*, which affords me and others a valuable way of communicating with the Church, and shares wisdom from the Word on a variety of important subjects. [*New Church Life* is designated in *The Order and Organization of the General Church* as “the official publication of the General Church.”]

It is a blessing to have editors in whom I have utmost confidence. The Rev. Walter Orthwein and Bruce Henderson have been an excellent team, consistently producing content of high quality and doctrinal soundness. I am grateful to Bruce for continuing as Editor and look forward to working with him to appoint a new Spiritual Editor.

I add my tremendous appreciation for the faithful work that Walter has done during his years with *New Church Life*. I couldn't agree more with Bruce's characterization of Walter's diligence, doctrinal eye, wit and writing ability. Heartfelt thanks to Walter for his service.

Letters to the Editors

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

The Church and World Issues

To the Editors:

Congratulations to the Rev. Christopher Barber on his excellent and powerfully personal article: *200 Years and 200 Miles – Doctrine’s Failure to Settle the Slavery Debate in the New Church* (*New Church Life*, September/October 2019)

A similar article, drawing the same conclusions, can be found in *The Moment is Now*, a book published last year by the Swedenborg Foundation about the life and work of Carl Bernhard Wadstrom. The article, *A World Apart: the American Antislavery Issue*, by the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence, strongly supports Mr. Barber’s assertions that although Swedenborgians point proudly to the involvement of readers of Swedenborg in the abolitionist movement, the church and its members mostly ignored the issue and some even supported slavery.

It is remarkable that while Swedenborg must have been aware of controversy in England over the issue of slavery, he never mentions it in the Writings. Slaves of African descent were numerous in London during the years that he lived there, and he could hardly have avoided seeing and meeting them.

Slaves and slavery are mentioned hundreds of times in the Writings, and it is clearly spoken about as an evil that everyone should fight to avoid. But the slavery spoken about is almost always spiritual slavery, the slavery of hell, or slavery in Scripture, and only occasionally slavery existing currently in the world.

Even those passages refer to a somewhat different context than the domestic institution of slavery. For example, Swedenborg writes: “*Surely we all love and remember people who were moved by a passionate love of country to fight against its enemies even to their death in order to free it from the yoke of*

slavery." (*True Christianity* 710)

Still, there is no ambiguity in the Writings about the evil of slavery, even if New Church abolitionists would have loved to find passages that spoke directly about the heinous European practice of enslaving Africans. Perhaps the most influential teaching of the Writings on this topic was what appears to be behind Harriet Beecher Stowe's comments about Africans in her 1853 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Rather than dwelling only on the injustice and evil of slavery, she emphasized the praiseworthy qualities of the peoples of African descent. Her descriptions of their nature, such as in her chapter 38, seem to repeat the teachings of *Arcana Coelestia* 2604, *Heaven and Hell* 326 and elsewhere, with which she was likely familiar. The effect on the American public was so great that when Lincoln met her, he is said to have remarked: "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war."

It is worth noting that the New Church in the United States was hardly a monolithic organization in the first half of the 19th century. Consisting almost entirely of independent congregations formed *de novo* from people who were readers of the Writings, with little connection to each other except annual conventions beginning in 1817, the church did not have formal positions on any issues.

Its members were not necessarily well-educated or well-versed in the Doctrines. In fact, few of the era's great thinkers who were influenced by the Writings had any connection at all to the church. So it is not surprising that members' views on issues such as this would reflect whatever opinions were currently popular in their communities, with no great understanding of New Church teachings.

As Mr. Barber pointed out, it is easy from the vantage point of 200 years, living in a culture where the wickedness of slavery is universally recognized, to be disappointed in our ancestors' failure to speak out. But it is a rare person who is able and willing to go against the grain of commonly held views, and even clergy are hesitant to risk alienating their congregations by speaking out on controversial issues.

There is no better current example than the failure of the General Church membership and clergy to speak out against homosexuality and the great harm that it causes. That harm is largely unrecognized today, and vigorously denied, just as the harm of slavery was denied 200 years ago.

Although there is no real disagreement among the clergy about New Church teachings on this issue, it is almost never spoken about. Both clergy and others correctly fear that doing so would alienate large portions of our congregations, especially the young. Political action would be even more widely criticized.

In another era this reluctance to speak out would be as surprising and disappointing as we perceive our ancestors' silence on slavery to be. Our quandary over this might help us to feel some empathy with how challenging and even dangerous it is to take unpopular stands on controversial issues.

I take Mr. Barber's message to be that we need to be vigilant about basing our views on the actual teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine, and not allow ourselves to be swayed or intimidated by our current social environment. If we fail to do this we may find ourselves supporting evils as great as the practice of human slavery. And maybe more fundamentally, as long as racism continues in our culture, the pain of slavery, even though long in our past, will continue to be felt.

Many thanks for an excellent article, that is both touchingly personal and relevant to all of us.

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Dealing with Cultural Bias

To the Editors:

Thank you for publishing the article, *200 Years and 100 Miles: Doctrine's Failure to Settle the Slavery Debate in the New Church*. I very much appreciate the excellent work by the Rev. Chris Barber to communicate his perspective and provide well-documented evidence to show the conflict that existed in the Church on that "peculiar institution."

As is the case with almost any pervasive cultural issue, there will inevitably be strong divisions of opinion. (Of course, in the case under discussion, opinion was divided among the white population. Very few people of African descent were able to give voice to the debate.)

I think Mr. Barber's paper provides a classic example of the strength of inbuilt cultural bias. In many ways, such cultural bias can be a good thing. It provides scaffolding for our character. It supports our moral strength to resist malevolent forces. It provides a stable platform from which to navigate the inevitable changes that life continually throws our way.

Our inbuilt cultural bias seeks to preserve us as we are.

But the Writings do urge change through the sequence of repentance, reformation and regeneration. We cannot stay the same. We must learn to keep that which is fundamentally good – childhood remains, the moral virtues, the

Ten Commandments – and simultaneously go forward to exercise our rational minds for change within the context of the deep love and goodness to which the Heavenly Doctrines speak. Thus, life is a balance between stability and wise change.

The point of this letter is to suggest that when we are considering cultural challenges – societal, political and ecclesiastical – we might try to lift ourselves above cultural bias, above the cultural box which we presently inhabit. Instead, we might try to apply our most pristine understanding of the Doctrines, returning as much as possible to first principles. We might even ask, in humility, “What does the Lord really want to happen?”

This is hard stuff. Perhaps Mr. Barber’s article has illustrated how hard this task can be. But, his article also illustrates the importance of making the effort.

Gregory L. Baker
Hatboro, Pennsylvania

Doctrine and Social Issues

To the Editors:

(Editors’ note: The following was written as a personal letter to the Rev. Christopher Barber. The Rev. Dan Goodenough kindly gave his permission for it to be published as a letter to the editors.)

I recently read the Rev. Christopher Barber’s very good article in *New Church Life* on slavery and the New Church and liked it very much. Though it was hard to read through some of the quotations, I’m very glad he included them because they really show the key elements of the story.

Many years back when teaching Theological School New Church history (which got more curricular time and attention in those days) I discovered the George Bush series in *New Church Repository* and spent a little time teaching about it and the highly diverse New Church attitudes about slavery before the Civil War. To give students more variety in church history teachers, I was moved to other theological courses (my specialty was Christian Church history) and I don’t know what later teachers did with that part of New Church history.

Teaching College Religion 171 in the 1960s and ’70s (*Moral and Spiritual Life*), I used James Baldwin (*The Fire Next Time*) and some other pretty good books from non-white authors to encourage students’ sensitivity about race issues, but I didn’t do much with New Church attitudes toward slavery in 19th

century. So I'm very glad Mr. Barber did – with effective documentation and enough length and quotations to make his points with impact. And keeping his ancestors, Joseph and Anne Barber, in our thoughts added a lot to the dramatic effect. I much appreciated that.

In my own study I didn't go far beyond the George Bush Aphorisms and controversy (*New Church Repository*) and didn't study Holcombe or B.W.H. – fascinating stories again showing amazing diversity in various readers of Swedenborg.

Near the end Mr. Barber asks: "What was it that divided our denomination then?" Good question. From my study of the 19th century New Church in North America and Europe, the answer seems clear, consistent and strong throughout the century: What ARE these books by Swedenborg? Are they essentially from God, or from Swedenborg as he understood God? Again and again, over and over, this question was the real issue. And close behind was the question of what a "New Church" church should be; and how, specifically, should men be taught and prepared to be ministers?

Yes, shocking in our 21st century to read outspoken affirmation of slavery by some 19th century New Church people, and very little New Church spiritual leadership in the American anti-slavery movement. My impression is that most New Church people's views about slavery came from the dominant family, social and political opinions surrounding them. Overall, it took a LONG time for many New Church people to see how the Heavenly Doctrines relate to social issues "out there."

With human communications so much slower and many people living more individually and distantly from each other, new ideas spread and developed much more gradually, and the written word predominated over the spoken word for most people. In the 19th century many New Church people were very new to these spiritual concepts and had plenty of work to understand what they meant in regard to one's own life and family.

From my own teaching and pastoral experience (ordained 1965) I observe that it often takes people – young and old – a long time and persistent inner effort to change their habits of thinking and doing, even when they see clear doctrinal reasons for change.

I'm glad Mr. Barber mentioned Robert Carter, who in time freed his slaves. Clearly, he was a slaveowner who through his own thinking saw Divine truth in the Writings and came to realize the slavery that his society and culture around him accepted was truly incompatible with God's goodness. And this before the American anti-slavery movement had become strong.

Though I haven't studied him in detail, I like to think of Robert Carter as a hero, illustrating personal courage, and how the Lord's truths can dramatically

change a person's outlook if he sees them as Divine ideas leading to good. I wonder how influential his manumission was on other slaveowners.

I know some slaveowners freed individual slaves, sometimes as reward for faithful behavior, but I see Carter's manumission as totally different, declaring to all (whether he spoke it or not), that he believed the slavery condition itself was utterly wrong, so abominable that he must end his ownership of slaves, whatever the cost to family and descendants, and however his peers rejected him for this.

Perhaps Mr. Barber could have made more of the Rev. Richard de Charms, a highly independent New Church minister who clearly saw the evil of slavery and its opposition to our Creator's human order. He strongly stood for ending slavery and was negated by other New Church people for how hard he argued for this – and for most other things he favored, including many principles that the later Academy movement, and our General Church, adopted.

He seemed to rock every boat he was in. The negative reactions to his anti-slavery opinions demonstrate how New Church northerners, even if unfavorable to slavery, felt it was tolerable, at least for now, and not bad enough to raise a big fuss about or make people unhappy by arguing and pressuring to end it soon.

Robert Carter and Richard de Charms were exceptional, and most New Church people/readers of Swedenborg seem to have gone with the contemporary flow of political, social, economic and cultural currents swirling around them, as they'd come to understand them.

My hunch is that American New Church people more or less mirrored their contemporary society, including many diverse views in both North and South. Those friendly toward abolitionism may have saved their passionate energy and courage to build a TRULY NEW Church centering on the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But concerning slavery, until the 1840s and '50s – and even until Fort Sumter – Americans both North and South acted overwhelmed by inertia, and from their silence New Church people seemed part of that inertia. This gives us, their spiritual descendants, much to reflect on, as Mr. Barber shows so well.

I'm still wondering what to make of Holcombe's final conversion against slavery, including its depth. He seems a great example of someone who needed to talk, truly dialogue, with more people throughout his life.

Thanks again for this strong and thought-provoking piece.

The Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough
Two Harbors, Minnesota

How Happy is the Lord?

To the Editor:

I have some questions below. If anyone out there has answers to my questions it could help me, and maybe others, to better understand the nature of God. I believe we are taught, through New Church doctrine, that our understanding of God will help determine our place in our life to come.

Axiom: *Success brings joy; failure brings sadness.*

Postulate: *Success, or failure, is a function of effort over time.*

Query: *Does the Lord God (His Human now having been infinitely glorified) experience happiness or sadness?*

Is the Lord happy when I am good? Is He sad when I am bad? With billions of people simultaneously under His infinite and particular care, can He be infinitely and simultaneously happy and sad all at once?

Since the Lord knows the outcome of everything; if everything is already complete with Him, what gives Him joy, sadness or zest? Joy, sadness and zest appear to be feelings that depend on changes in state – but the Lord is changeless. Can the Lord ever be joyful? It would make me sad to think that the Lord Himself could not be joyful and full of zest about His creation.

That's it! If anyone can shed some light on this, please share your insights.

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, Florida

FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Mission and Values



The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

Note: This begins a new feature in *New Church Life*. Each issue will include a report from one of the three acting bishops: Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr., and Assistant Bishops Bradley D. Heinrichs and David L. Lindrooth.

I thank the Editor of *New Church Life* for the opportunity to share news and perspectives from the Bishop's Office. You can expect to hear updates on projects and events within the General Church from David Lindrooth, Brad Heinrichs and myself, as well as thoughts from doctrine that impact the life of the Church.

As a start, I draw to your attention the mission and core values of the General Church. Our reason for being is currently stated as follows:

- “Helping people live a heavenly life through the teachings of the Lord God Jesus Christ in His Second Coming.”

As is often the case a great deal is packed into that statement. I draw your attention, however, to the central goal: living the life that leads to heaven. While we can readily acknowledge that the Lord is the one who brings us to heaven, and He does so by means of His Word, the emphasis is on the choices we make.

In this regard we can be reminded of foundational teachings in the Heavenly Doctrines:

- “Divine love, and consequently Divine providence, has as its end a heaven consisting of people who have become or who are becoming angels.” (*Divine Providence* 27)
- “The church’s teaching is the means leading to and giving entry to everlasting life.” (*True Christian Religion* 415)
- “Heaven is granted to those who know the way to it and walk in that way.” (*Divine Providence* 60)

A strategy professor in my past once said about a mission: it needs to be able to fit on a coffee mug and it should influence the work of everyone in the organization. I took that challenge literally this past Christmas, providing a coffee mug to many of the teammates working in the General Church Central



Offices. The words emblazoned on the outside are “Live a heavenly life,” offset by a new Open Word logo that we are beginning to use.

For me, the phrase passes the test. It’s short enough to remember, and it can serve as a litmus test for all we do. All priests, teachers and other employees sign up to help people along on their journey to heaven. All people who choose the General Church as their spiritual home do so in part to find support in making heavenly choices in all they do.

Turning to our core values, we would expect all of them to reflect the heavenly life that we are here to promote. I ask you to consider the following list with that in mind, asking yourself: can you imagine an angel, or an angel-in-the-making (you) embracing these values? The core values of the General Church are:

1. Turning to the threefold-Word as the source and foundation for all that we do.
2. Developing faith in the Lord and trust in His providence.
3. Applying principles from the Word to a life of useful service.
4. Sharing the truths the Lord has provided with the next generation and with all who are receptive.
5. Supporting marriage between a man and a woman and honoring the unique and complementary nature of each sex.
6. Embracing families as an essential part of the Lord’s plan of a heaven from the human race.
7. Hearing the call to a better way of living, through the process of self-examination and repentance.
8. Welcoming all who wish to explore these values to participate in the life of the church.

Living a heavenly life and valuing the things that belong to that way of living: that is why the General Church exists. It stands behind any further news item shared here, or any plans that we might put in place. All of it should lead us to the Lord, who teaches us in His Word how to live the life that leads to heaven.

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Prayer for Others

New Church Teachings About the Effects of Prayer

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

What is the use of prayer?

At baptisms, it is customary for the minister to offer a prayer for the child who is about to be baptized:

O Lord, graciously we receive this child. We pray that this child may be enlightened by Your Word, defended in temptation, and led by Your Holy Spirit, now and evermore.

Similar prayers are said at weddings and other occasions, asking the Lord's blessing and protection for others:

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may He cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24-26*)

But questions sometimes arise: What is the use of these prayers? Will our prayers cause the Lord to bless those whom He otherwise would not bless? Does any actual good result when we pray for the welfare of our children, for friends who are sick, or for people who are in some difficulty?

Although most people intuitively believe that prayers have actual effects, there are times when doubts are expressed. Therefore it is important to be clear about what the effects of prayer are, and how these effects come about – not only as we pray for ourselves but also as we pray for others.

How does prayer affect the one who prays?

In the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg we read:

Those who doubt that prayers are answered, or who have been disappointed that their own prayers have apparently not been heard, may have mistaken ideas about how prayer operates. The influence that prayer has is not on the Lord but on the one who prays.

If a person prays from love and faith, and for only heavenly and spiritual things, then there comes forth in the prayer something like a revelation (which is manifested in the affection of the one who prays) as to hope, consolation, or a certain inward joy. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535)

Hope, consolation, or a certain inward joy are the promised results of sincere prayer. The natural objects that many people seek through prayer, however – such as success, good fortune and healing – are never said in the Writings to be the direct result of prayer.

Those who doubt that prayers are answered, or who have been disappointed that their own prayers have apparently not been heard, may have mistaken ideas about how prayer operates. The influence that prayer has is not on the Lord but on the one who prays. In brief, prayers facilitate

“something like an influx into the perception or thought of the mind, so that there is a certain opening of the person’s interiors towards God.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535) When our interiors are opened towards God, we come into a receptive state where God is able to be present with untold benefits.

What is true prayer?

True prayer entails a person’s whole life. It is more than simply “waiting for God.” It includes thinking from and acting according to God’s revealed truth. “Truth is what prays in a person, and a person is continually at prayer when living according to the truth.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 493)

People who are not living a good life, therefore, cannot truly pray, but “when they abstain from thinking and doing evils, and lead themselves, as of themselves, by the truths of the Word to a good life, they make themselves receptive. Then their prayers, devotions and externals of worship avail before the Lord.” (*Ibid.* 248e)

The Lord knows our prayers before they are even uttered, “but still He wills that people should ask first, to the end that they may do it as from themselves, and thus that it should be appropriated to them.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 376)

The essence of prayer is that God's will be done. "In prayer, when inspired by God, there is always the thought and belief that the Lord alone knows whether what is sought would be beneficial or not. Therefore the one who prays leaves the Lord to decide whether to listen to what they ask for, then accordingly pleads that the Lord's will may be done, not their own." (*Arcana Coelestia* 8179)

The essence of prayer is that God's will be done.

Why pray for others?

It is in perfect accordance with Sacred Scripture to ask that the Lord's will be done, both for one's self and for others. The key is to ask only for what contributes to the Lord's kingdom. (cf. *Apocalypse Explained* 815.10) Praying for others is part of being truly human, for "the effort to intercede is in all love." (*Ibid.* 644.23; *Arcana Coelestia* 8573.2) When we truly love another person, we will have that person's welfare in our heart, and therefore in our prayers.

In fact the Writings do not speak highly of those who fail to pray for others. "There are those who think that heaven is to be merited by supplications, yet they pray not for others, still less for all, but only for themselves, and thus their prayers are not heard." (*Spiritual Diary* 1850; see also 1300, 5976; *Arcana Coelestia* 952, 452)

We are therefore not to pray only for ourselves, but for all in the Lord's kingdom. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for others as well as ourselves. There are many examples of prayer for others in the Old and New Testaments, including the admonition to pray for those who injure and persecute us (*Matthew* 5:44) and to forgive others in our prayers (*Mark* 11:25). The Lord "prayed on the cross for His enemies, and this for all in the whole world." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1690)

How does prayer affect those for whom we pray?

Angels are able to "Communicate to another the goodness, blessedness and bliss that they themselves have received." (*Ibid.* 6478) Delight and happiness in heaven are thus "communicated from one to many by means of a real transferring that is remarkable." (*Ibid.* 1392) This communication happens by means of the spheres that surround everyone, both in heaven and on earth (*Ibid.* 8794e, 10130.3) for a person's sphere "inwardly affects their companions." (*True Christian Religion* 433.2)

When a person prays to the Lord from genuine love and faith on behalf of another, the "hope, consolation and inward joy" given by the Lord may be

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communicated in remarkable ways to those for whom they pray.

The communication of love has tremendous power, whether it is expressed in tangible or intangible ways, for love carries all good fortune, success and healing within it. Most essential, however, is the recognition that all good comes from the Lord – for without Him we can do nothing. Our continual prayer therefore must always be “*Thy will be done.*”



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Answers to Prayers

The Rev. Jared J. Buss

(Reprinted from the September/October 2019 *New Church Canadian*)

The Lord told His disciples, “Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (*Matthew 21:22*).¹ That’s a really strong statement – and it might feel like an untrue one. Anyone accustomed to praying wants to believe that their prayers aren’t for nothing. We want to be answered when we pray – but how can the Lord’s statement be true?

Surely there have been thousands upon thousands of fervent prayers that have not resulted in people getting what they asked for. We see this all the time in movies: people begging God for something, closing their eyes tight and saying, “please, please, please.” But it makes no difference – and none of us is surprised. We don’t *expect* prayers to be answered. At least not those kinds of prayers.

To be fair, these sorts of prayers aren’t always especially religious. The Lord said, “Whatever things you ask in prayer, *believing*, you will receive.” Some prayers aren’t about God at all -- they’re just a way of expressing that we really want something. It should come as no surprise that such prayers aren’t effective.

We’re told in the teachings of the New Church that prayer is nothing more (and nothing less) than talking to God. (*Arcana Coelestia 2535*) If we don’t sincerely believe when we pray that we are talking to a living and responding Being – the Living God – then what we’re doing isn’t really praying.

It’s perfectly possible for religious people to imagine that they are praying faithfully without ever actually opening up to a God who exists outside of themselves. Wanting something really badly can lend prayers a kind of urgency that makes them seem devout – but wanting something really badly

¹ The Lord makes similar statements in *Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-2*

Praying is talking to God, so it has to include some awareness of who He is and what He wants; it has to take us at least a little bit outside of ourselves. If it doesn't, then it's just a statement of what we want.

and believing are not the same thing.

Praying is talking to God, so it has to include some awareness of who He is and what He wants; it has to take us at least a little bit outside of ourselves. If it doesn't, then it's just a statement of what we want.

Does this mean that all of those prayers were unsuccessful because we didn't believe deeply enough? That's a question worth taking to heart. What if, even in our moments of sincerest prayer, we've never actually managed to reject the voice deep within us that whispers, "This isn't going to work. God doesn't answer prayers." In that

case we've been answering our own prayers before the Lord can even give His answers.

What if His answers would have been different? The inner voice that censors our prayers might not even be saying to us that God doesn't answer prayers at *all*. We might believe that He'll answer prayers for intangible, spiritual things – that if we ask for courage, He'll give us courage, etc. We can believe this, and still have a critic somewhere deep within that whispers: "But He won't answer a prayer for anything *real*. He'll give you nice feelings, but He won't give you any of the big things that those other, foolish people pray for – like health and success." That voice saps the faith out of prayer. Faith in God and anything that says "God can't" just don't go together.

It's obvious there are some prayers He won't answer: He won't give us things that would be bad for us or bad for other people. But who says He doesn't answer prayers in "real" ways – in tangible, material ways? In the Word He answers lots of prayers in tangible ways.

King Hezekiah had been told he would die, but he prayed to the Lord and the Lord answered: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you." (2 Kings 20:5) Hannah wanted to bear a son, so she stood before the tabernacle "in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish." (1 Samuel 1:10) And the Lord "remembered" her, and she gave birth to Samuel.

Is it impossible that He would give these sorts of answers to our prayers today? What if we've been stripping our prayers of their power by failing to truly believe that "with God all things are possible"? (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27)

In some ways it really doesn't matter what the Lord does and doesn't do in answer to anyone's prayers. It's the willingness to believe that He can do

anything and everything that moves us to put ourselves in His hands – and that is faith.

But what we ask is only half of prayer. This is, perhaps, the part of prayer that's easiest to lose sight of. Prayer is talking to God and talking to someone is a two-way thing. It's about what we want, and it's about what He wants.

Nothing makes this clearer than the Lord's own prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. In the Word we have a record of Jesus Christ Himself praying – and not getting what He asked for. There was a part of Him that did not want to be tempted and crucified, so He prayed to the Divine within Him, "Let this cup pass from Me." But He added, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (*Matthew 26:39. See Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42*) And it was the will of the Divine that He drink from the cup He had been given.

Sometimes the reason we don't get what we ask for in prayer is that the Lord wants something else. Or rather, we don't get what we ask for because the Lord knows that something else would be better for us.

In the Heavenly Doctrines we are told: "The Lord desires the end in view, which is a person's salvation. The Lord knows that end, but the person does not, and the Lord does not do what prayers ask for if that is contrary to the end, which is salvation." (*Arcana Coelestia 8179.3*)

Salvation is what will make us happy, and the Lord wants us to be happy, so how could He possibly give us anything that led us away from salvation? This makes perfect sense when it's written out like this, but when we're in the midst of some sort of struggle and crying out to the Lord for help, it can be really easy to forget that what we want so desperately might not even be good for us.

Even good, religious people can be totally in the dark as to what their spirits need. Even the wisest of us will ask for the wrong thing sometimes. The Lord Himself asked for the "wrong" thing in Gethsemane; only He didn't cling to what He wanted. He laid it down before the Divine.

When we pray, we're totally allowed to tell the Lord what we want; we just need to listen to Him too. He's the one who understands how to soothe

In the Heavenly Doctrines we are told: "The Lord desires the end in view, which is a person's salvation. The Lord knows that end, but the person does not, and the Lord does not do what prayers ask for if that is contrary to the end, which is salvation."

When we pray, we're totally allowed to tell the Lord what we want; we just need to listen to Him too. He's the one who understands how to soothe our hearts and lift our spirits out of darkness. We don't understand these things. If we tell Him "Thy will be done," we might just like what we receive.

our hearts and lift our spirits out of darkness. We don't understand these things. If we tell Him "Thy will be done," we might just like what we receive.

Having said all these things, we can go back to where we began. All of us want our prayers to be heard; all of us want our prayers to be answered. And we can be absolutely, unequivocally certain that the Lord answers our prayers. When we are truly praying – when we are genuinely reaching out to God – He reaches back. Exactly what He will and will not do in response to our prayers is His alone to know. But even when He can't give us what we ask, He answers us, gently bending us to see where His will truly tends.

And if what we ask in prayer does align with what He wants for us – if we ask for His guidance, for His wisdom,

for His strength; if we ask Him to help us become angels; if we tell Him "Your will be done" – then we find *exactly* what we seek. We are told:

If [a person's] prayer springs from love and faith, and if they are wholly heavenly and spiritual things about which and for which he prays, something like a revelation is present within his prayer, which manifests itself in the affection of the one praying in the form of hope, comfort, or some inward joy. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535)

That "revelation," present within our faithful prayers, needn't be a ghostly, whispered thing. Sometimes it's an answer, clear as the light of day. Prayer is anything but futile. Prayer is speech with God – and how could learning to talk to the Lord be a waste of time?



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Family Ties

A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

Lessons: *Exodus* 2:1-11; *Mark* 5:21-42, 3:31-35; *Arcana Coelestia* 6756.2,1

“[Jesus] answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers? Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.’” (*Mark* 3:33,35)

The lessons we read today provide us some very different and compelling images about families. First, Moses’ mother – out of compassion for him – sets him in an ark and floats him down the river to save his life. Then Pharaoh’s daughter has compassion on him, and ends up raising him as her own son. Afterwards, when Moses is grown up, he sees an Egyptian from the nation who adopted him, beating a Hebrew, his native brethren, and Moses is faced with a difficult decision of the family to which he would be loyal.

In the next story, Jairus came to Jesus, “*fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.’*” So Jesus took the distraught father and mother into the 12-year-old girl’s room and brought her back to life and healed her.

The parents and all the people around were greatly amazed and undoubtedly extremely thankful for this great miracle. Anyone who has ever had a sick child can relate to the great love the parents had for their ailing daughter and can palpably feel the anguish they must have felt. The story portrays a very tender image of the incredible love between parents and children.

Then the next lesson from *Mark* provides an image that is almost opposite. Jesus’ mother and brothers come to see Him while He is surrounded by the usual multitudes seeking His great wisdom and healing powers. The people announce to Jesus that His mother and brothers have come to see Him, and He answered: “*Who is My mother, or My brothers?*”

The answer the Lord gave seems so heartless – so cold. Surely His very own mother deserved more respect than this. We can imagine some of the people in the multitude thinking: doesn’t this great Prophet practice what He preaches? Has He forgotten about the fourth commandment, honor your father and mother?

It becomes clear that the Lord is really trying to make a distinction between our merely natural family and our spiritual family. This is a distinction which has been lost since the time of the Ancient Church.

Then Jesus gave a simple explanation to His surprising statement: “*Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.*” So, what can we learn about these differing stories about family ties and connections? The answer is not that complicated, but in its simplicity it is profound. There are two different types of family – spiritual and natural.

We are born as merely natural infants to natural parents. In order to make sure that these helpless infants are properly taken care of, the Lord instills the love of protecting and caring for offspring into the hearts and minds

of the parents. They feed their children, clothe them, provide them shelter, try to keep them out of harm’s way, nurture them, and try to find help for them when they are sick, as in the story of Jairus and his daughter.

For this reason, in the natural or lowest sense of the fourth commandment, we are taught to honor our father and mother. In fact, it is essential that we do honor and respect our parents, especially while we are young. There must be order and the wisdom of our elders should be respected.

So why did the Lord dismiss his mother and brethren and seemingly show them such disrespect? It is fascinating to note that throughout the four gospels the Lord does not once address Mary as His mother but rather as “woman.” (See *True Christian Religion* 102:2) And one time He didn’t even acknowledge her at all. This seems almost callous behavior.

At other times, the Lord’s message about parents and children is even more pointed. He said: “*I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother . . . and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother . . . or son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*” (*Matthew* 10:35-37)

Whoa! That really puts a different twist on the concept of family values! It becomes clear that the Lord is really trying to make a distinction between our merely natural family and our spiritual family. As our third lesson pointed out, this is a distinction which has been lost since the time of the Ancient Church. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6756:2)

Back then people did not acknowledge anyone as their Father but the Lord. They did not acknowledge any other mother than the Church. And the people they called brothers were those who shared similar ideals based on

the truth taught by the Church and the good it encouraged. The passage states it was after they strayed from what the truth taught that charity ceased, and consequently they only called those brothers who were actually brothers in the biological sense.

When charity ceased, they lost sight of the distinction between natural and spiritual families. They ended up placing more value on their blood relationships than they did on their spiritual relationships, and as a result they inverted the proper order that the Lord had intended. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3703:8) In the story of Moses, it is interesting to consider if he was merely acting from support of his blood brothers, or if it was a deeper standing up for what was right and just.

In the spiritual or higher sense of the fourth commandment, to honor your father and mother means to honor the Lord and His Church. This is why Jesus told them: “*Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.*” In other words, our spiritual family – our true family – is supposed to be those who follow the commandments of the Lord given to His Church. The Lord and the Church are our common spiritual parents that unite us together as brothers and sisters.

What the Lord was trying to do with these strong negative statements about warring with our father and mother was to get us to reevaluate our family ties. “*A man’s enemies will be those of his own household.*” What enemies is the Lord talking about? Surely our father and mother weren’t that bad. The Lord’s earthly mother Mary wasn’t a wicked person.

That may well be true. By all accounts in the gospels Mary seems to be quite a wonderful woman. However, both she and our parents passed on to their children something not so good. We received from our parents all their hereditary tendencies toward evil. These are the enemies from our own household that we must fight against.

For some the “enemy” passed on may be belligerence, stubbornness, arrogance or conceit. For others it may be a bad temper, selfishness or the love of dominating. For others it may be lust, love of wealth or the desire to fabricate and lie. Take a moment and think about the family that you came from. Do any

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Our real family should be those people who share common beliefs and convictions from the Word with us and strive to live according to them.

of these traits sound familiar?

The Lord wants us to identify these traits, the hereditary tendencies toward evil that have been passed down and to wage war on them. He does not want to see those undesirable qualities perpetuate themselves in future generations, but rather He urges us to eliminate them in ourselves.

In fact, the Lord modeled this perfectly for us while He was on earth. His soul from His Father was Divine, but through Mary His natural mother,

He took on all the hereditary tendencies toward evil of the human race. Then throughout His life, as the hells flowed in and inflamed these selfish human desires and tendencies, He fought against them and conquered them one by one. Eventually, He managed to put off everything that was merely human which He had received from Mary and glorified it and made His Human Divine. (*Doctrine of the Lord* 35)

We must all go through a similar process if we are going to become angels of heaven. We need to identify those hereditary tendencies toward evil in ourselves that we received from our parents, both father and mother, and conquer them one by one. The hells do not want you to do this. They flow into selfish human parts of you and make you feel pride in your family lineage. This is not necessarily bad if it is regarding healthy family traits like a discerning mind and a generous heart. But they try to use our natural family ties as stumbling blocks and to cloud our minds by having us blindly defend damaging character traits passed on through flesh and blood, even to the point of condoning those evils.

Consider the son who finds a certain sense of pride in being like his father: “He was a stubborn pit bull of a man and so am I – like father like son.” Or the daughter who finds satisfaction in being volatile and explosive like her mother. The hells try to make us think of these traits as being almost admirable. Yes, we are usually proud of where we came from, but let’s make sure we are not being proud of the wrong things.

This is why the Lord exhorts us to look higher than our blood relationships and asks us to consider who our father, mother, brothers and sisters really are. Yes, they are our biological or natural family also, and we should have compassion on them when they are ailing, as Jairus did for his daughter. On the other hand, they should not have their evils excused simply because they are our blood, as King David did in overlooking his son Amnon’s rape of Tamar and then his other son Absalom’s consequent murder of Amnon.

Our real family should be those people who share common beliefs and convictions from the Word with us and strive to live according to them. In a healthy family, hopefully our natural father, mother, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters are also our spiritual family. Hopefully, we are all striving to learn the truth of the Lord's Word and live it in our daily lives. But let's not be naïve and wear rose-colored glasses, either in looking at them or at ourselves.

The same holds true in the community of our Church. Let's make sure we are seeking to support, nurture, guide and instruct those who are on a similar spiritual journey and share the same convictions from the Word. When we see something wrong, something that goes against what the Lord teaches, let us not accept it blindly because it is friends or family, but rather try to help that person move to a better state of life according to what the Lord teaches.

But let us be cautious to distinguish between what might merely be a different point of view of what is right and something that is actually wrong. Many times we jump to the conclusion that someone is doing something evil, when in reality he is doing something good – just differently than we might do it.

May we all strive to form a community that places more value on our spiritual family than our merely natural one – a community where we, like the Ancients, can call each other “brother” in sincerity of heart because we are all diligently trying to live according to the good and truth of the Lord's Word.

If we all work to battle the combined hereditary tendencies toward evil passed down through our families, and put aside our selfish genetic traits, then we will begin to have a community that feels more angelic. We will be able to come together and worship as one family, because we are all bowing our propiums to our Heavenly Father and seeking to do His will. Even as the Lord said in *Matthew*:

One is your master, Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” (*Matthew 23:8-9*)

Amen.



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The Life-Changing Power of Order

A Sermon by the Rev. Philip B. Schnarr

Lessons: *John* 12:20-32; *Arcana Coelestia* 10659.3; *True Christian Religion* 852

Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God. (*Psalm* 50:23)

Picture this. You are in a hurry to get out the door for an important appointment. But your car keys are missing. You look in the usual place near the back door and they are not there. You rummage through the jumbled bowl of extra keys looking for that spare one you think you saw in there but nothing appears. It's so frustrating. And just when you are about to give up, your spouse says, "I think I saw you in the garage last night, dear." And yes, that's where you find them.

So much of our physical life requires organization and a certain level of order for us to function well. If things don't have places then we not only waste a lot of time looking for them, the added burden of mental stress and anxiety can easily trigger hostile inner feelings, showing up as conflict with the people around us. What's the solution? Can you hear your mother's voice? "A place for everything, and everything in its place?"

So think about this. If simply having our physical homes in better order can substantially improve our natural lives, what might happen if the home for our deeper selves, our minds – our spirits – could get the same kind of treatment? What would it be like to feel comfortable and relaxed if we entertained people inside the walls of our spiritual homes, so to speak? Let's consider how the Lord can help us make progress tidying up this private part of our world.

In the Lord's Word near the end of each Gospel we find a collection of stories and teachings from His final days on earth. Here we discover that the Lord provides the very best example of the greatest ordering process of all time. It's the big stage where He set the pattern – wrote the book – about how to clean up a spiritual mess. He calls it being glorified.

In the *Gospel of John* we read that Jesus said: “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” (12:23) Then, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.” (13:32,32) And then Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. . . . And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (17:1,5)

As abstract as it may sound, the Lord’s glorification was in fact a spiritual process that is very relevant to putting our own spiritual house in order. When the glorification was happening during the Lord’s life on earth it was the heart of a realignment process that was spiritually transformative for the entire human race. And the truth is that the Lord’s glorification has also given us the tools to work on this realignment process in our own lives. And if we do our part thoroughly it will not only “spark joy” in our natural lives but bring a “fullness of inner joy” to our spiritual life to eternity.

So, what is this “glorification process” and how can it have a life-changing effect on us? The term itself, “glorification,” can easily come across as abstract and very theological. We don’t hear much talk about it and it can easily be misconstrued. You might think that glorification is talking about external worship and adoration of God for what He has done – for dying on the cross or something like that. But this is not the essential teaching about “glorification” which permeates the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine. (See *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 300)

Before we go on, it is important to realize that we cannot do this subject anything close to justice in the little time we have together this morning. So, let’s focus on the systematic ordering part of the glorification process and show

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it can be helpful to us on our individual spiritual journey.

Put briefly, and oh so generally, the Lord's entire life on earth was dedicated to the purpose of restructuring and rebuilding His inflowing lifelines to human beings. Steadily, from birth all the way to the passion of the cross and beyond, the Lord was on a mission to restore an orderly, functional and loving connection between the Divine Soul within Him and the human race.

This connection had frayed so badly it was nearing a breaking point. Purely material self-interest, and the love of dominating over others, had risen above the spiritual values of loving God and the neighbor. To put it boldly, things were pretty messed up.

From creation, the Lord had designed a systematic, orderly program for people to receive heavenly love and wisdom into their receptive minds and hearts. But over time people's priorities shifted. Instead of looking up to God and outward to their neighbor, their focus shifted downward and inward. And by the time of the Lord's advent, the Divine love and wisdom emanating from our Creator was barely being received by the natural minds of people on earth.

A massive re-organization project called a spiritual judgment had to happen. And that's what the Lord's glorification accomplished. He took on the oppositional forces of hell. He restructured old communication channels throughout the entire spiritual world. He sorted out fresh pathways so that His inflowing life could re-connect with the people who were searching for it. And especially with those who were willing to have it change and bring order to their lives.

In New Church teachings we learn: "When the Lord put off the human [that He received from Mary] He put on a Divine Human." "Thus, He restored to order both heaven and hell. He restored them step by step until He had glorified Himself completely." And it was the Lord's last temptation, "the passion of the cross," where all things were "restored to order." The Lord came on earth that He might glorify His Human, in order that He might keep all things in order to eternity. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2159:2, 4075, 10659:3)

"Keep all things in order to eternity." That sounds pretty amazing but maybe a bit clinical? It was anything but. It was a dramatic, disturbing and conflict-ridden process with human passion and Divine intervention engaged at every turn. Sorting out the bad from the good and making decisions or judgments about them is so much a part of any ordering process. It can appear

chaotic and messy while things are being sorted out. But there was a very clear and orderly progression going on in the Lord's life.

He was demonstrating the ultimate process for managing evil and false disorders and restoring the loving links between Himself and the human race. When we hear the Easter story we sense the raw emotional aspect at the conclusion of the glorification process on the cross. The human the Lord assumed while in the world suffered great physical and emotional pain as the sorting process reached its conclusion.

But that was then, and this is now. What can we learn from the Lord's glorification? The Lord helps us understand through this teaching in *Arcana Coelestia*:

Anything in the Word that means a person's regeneration also means the glorification of the Human within the Lord; for a person's regeneration is an image of the Lord's glorification. (3138, 3212, 3296, 3490, 4402, 5688)

And because a person can get an idea of regeneration more easily than he can of the Lord's glorification, let His glorification be illustrated by means of a person's regeneration. (8353)

The glorification process has a strong correlation to the ordering we must do to experience our own kind of glorification, our conjunction with the Divine. This ordering on our part is in very broad terms referred to in the New Church as a person's regeneration or spiritual rebirth.

When a person is being regenerated, lower things are made sub-ordinate and subject to higher ones, that is, exterior things become servants, and the interior become masters. (*Ibid.* 5161).

In other words, regeneration calls us to put in place an orderly set of moral and spiritual priorities. So here is where we come back to our opening analogy about organizing our physical environment.

There is a trend to use what's called the Marie Kondo system to organize the things in our homes. It has a great over-arching simplicity. First you bring your things out into plain view so that you know the extent of the project. Then you take each object by itself and ask yourself: "How useful is it and does

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it spark joy in my life?" What follows – or what is meant to follow – is a kind of judgment; a letting go of things that are no longer useful; and a bringing together, a kind of bundling if you will, or categorization of those things that will be part of your life going forward.

There are many fascinating analogies to spiritual ordering in Kondo's system. But it is true that putting our physical belongings into a useful order is no guarantee that we will be more kind, truthful and wise, in a word, "regenerated" people. People with good and evil intentions can be equally well-organized in the externals

of life. So, this is where the spiritual, internal ordering process is key. It's our parallel to the Lord's glorification...

In the case of the person who is being regenerated a new state begins when order is turned around. The change takes place when interior things are given dominion over exterior ones, and exterior things begin to serve interior ones – which involves both ideas in the understanding and desires in the will. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2159:3)

Having our priorities, our external environment in order, can be an excellent help to doing this kind of spiritual work, but when it comes right down to it, the internal re-ordering of our understanding and will is far more essential. These will form the vessels for our reception of and conjunction with the Lord.

Notice what was said, "a new state *begins* when order is turned around." Salvation does not come in a moment. Regeneration is a slow process of cleansing and purification. It cannot be hurried. The complete re-ordering of our desires and intentions will not, and cannot, happen overnight. Subtle shifts start happening when we begin to take our spiritual connection to the Lord seriously.

It could be that we begin conversing with the Lord on a routine basis: by listening to His Word, reading it and thinking about it. But also engaging in speech with God as we do when we pray. Talking about the Lord and His teachings with others also helps us to wrestle with them and discover their internal consistency and then allow them to govern our decisions and the way we live our lives.

Often it can feel painful to change our disorderly patterns of thought and behavior. But it can feel freeing as well to let go of worn-out old habits that are

not serving us well. And we must remember that inside that effort the Lord is powering the intense and liberating task of ordering the deeper recesses of our spiritual home.

Another useful spiritual, house-cleaning, order-building strategy is, from time to time, to take stock of what we are thinking about. It's one form of self-examination. We have a God-given power of reflection which allows us to climb above the pile and observe from above what is going on in our minds. From this elevated perspective, we can see our thought processes in a higher light and continuously get better at sorting the pile below. For example, we might notice that we have regular uncharitable criticisms of a friend or spouse in our thought pile. It's time to acknowledge them for what they are, to ask the Lord's help, and to set them aside.

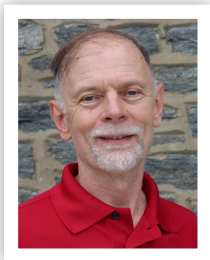
Still another way to put our spiritual house in order is to watch for who we tend to blame for the disorders in our lives. Searching for cause is human nature. But we need to be cautious lest we attribute responsibility to others for our own evils. And it can work the opposite way as well. It is usually counterproductive to take on the burden of organizing other people's moral and spiritual lives, which are out of our jurisdiction.

The Lord's Word is full of processes and tools for spiritual self-improvement, but there is one thing that tops the charts. We know it well. It is the cultivation of trust and spiritual confidence in the Lord. He came in the flesh. He fought intensely for our spiritual freedom. And He experienced the processes we are going through intimately, as part of His own glorification. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4352-3) It is He who empowers us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. (*Matthew* 6:33) And there is nothing more important for us to do.

As the Psalmist said:

The steps of a good person are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way.
(*Psalm* 37:23)

Amen.



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A Reflection for the New Year On Thought, Rationality and Freedom

The Rev. Howard A. Thompson

Over the course of October and November the Roseville New Church (Australia) took an in-depth look at the days of creation. One key concept from Day Two has stayed with me these past few weeks and are the inspiration for this New Year Reflection.

We are told that Day Two – distinguishing the waters above from the waters below – represents our developing awareness that there is a distinction between our inner self and our outer self, between what is the Lord’s and what is ours and between what is really important and what isn’t very important at all.

In *Secrets of Heaven* (8), Emanuel Swedenborg says that “rarely [does this happen] without trouble, misfortune, and grief.” Further in No. 847, when treating of the subject of temptations, Swedenborg notes that a sign that a person is undergoing temptations is an experience of “distress and anxiety over things that conflict with what we love.”

“Conflict with what we love.” Take a moment to meditate on that idea.

There seems to be this underlying theme in spiritual growth that our spiritual journey is one of, not so much constant temptation, but of constant challenging. Our spiritual progress is propelled forward by a constant and ongoing process of testing both our beliefs against what is true (from the Lord) and our beliefs against who we are being. In the end the Lord wishes each of us would have an inner-self aligned with Him and an outer-self aligned with our inner-self.

Here is where my Reflection for the New Year comes into play. It strikes me that there is a very powerful force at play that is threatening to derail each of us and to do so with our unwitting consent. That force is what I am calling

the “social media algorithm” or SMA.

Social media algorithms (SMAs) are a way of sorting posts in a user’s feed based on relevancy instead of publish time. Social networks prioritize which content a user sees in their feed, first by the likelihood that they’ll actually want to see it. In other words, nearly everything you are doing online is being monitored to help build a picture of the things you would like to see in the future. It strikes me that this way of leading – focusing on what you are likely to read (or view) and agree with – stands in stark contrast to the way in which the Lord leads us.

It is a uniquely human trait to have a capacity for disciplined thought and a certain latitude, or rationality and freedom, and these two abilities are in us as gifts from the Lord. Though, whatever we do from our freedom, whether we have thought it through rationally or not, seems to be ours as long as it is in accord with our reason. Since in our early stages of becoming truly human we are entirely self-centered, the Lord allows us to feel that this rationality is our own. Simply put, we nurture, care for and protect that which we feel is our own, more than we would something we do not feel a certain ownership for.

It is by means of these two abilities (freedom and rationality) that the Lord reforms and regenerates us; without them we could not be reformed and regenerated. Consequently, the Lord leads us by means of things that really are our own — both the illusions of our senses and our cravings — but diverts us toward things that are true and good.

So every single moment of regeneration carries us forward from evening to morning, just as it takes us from the outer self to the inner, or from earth to heaven. This is why the expanse spoken of in the Creation Story (the inner self) is now called heaven.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 24)

In short, the Lord uses our own freedom to think what we wish and to understand it in our own way in order to lead us to truths that are in line with Divine Truth that we may freely come to desire to live these truths into our lives. This is an imperceptible leading the Lord does, all the while allowing us to believe that it is we who are progressing in our understanding of the true nature of our spiritual lives, of the Lord and of heaven.

Now, consider how the Lord’s leading, focusing on the development of our rationality, contrasts with the SMA leading of focusing on the things we “like.”

It strikes me that there is a very powerful force at play that is threatening to derail each of us and to do so with our unwitting consent. That force is what I am calling the “social media algorithm” or SMA.

I invite you to consider that a constant flow of information that is intended to get you to “buy” something, “click” something, or “like” something is far from a heavenly leading and far more akin to a hellish leading.

It strikes me that the Lord has created a perfect mechanism for disrupting our thinking, introducing us to truth that contradicts our current understanding and creating within us a sense that, not only have we “found” this truth on our own, but we desire to follow this truth from ourselves.

Today, in our online lives, the SMAs are seeking to lead us to greater knowledge (lower case-t truth) by appealing to our affections, all the while making us feel that we are progressing in knowledge and rationality (and doing so in freedom). Whether you use Google to seek information about the world, Facebook to stay connected with your friends, YouTube to learn

more about your favorite topics or one of many news-feed services to keep up with the events of the day, you are being led by unseen forces that are very much in contrast to the Lord’s leading.

The Lord leads you to believe things that often are in contrast to the things you would like to believe. SMAs, on the other hand, seek to feed you a never-ending stream of things you already believe, or are likely to believe, based on your often less-than-heavenly affections. While the Lord leads us by challenging our thoughts and affections, hell does the opposite. Hell leads us deeper into hell by flattering us as described in this passage from *Divine Providence* 296:

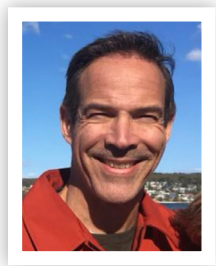
The basic reason evil people lead themselves deeper into evil is that they are making their way farther and farther into hellish communities, getting in deeper and deeper as they intend and do what is evil. This increases their pleasure in evil as well, and it takes possession of their thoughts to the point that nothing feels more gratifying. Furthermore, when we have made our way farther and deeper into hellish communities, we are wrapped up in chains, so to speak, though as long as we are living in this world, we do not feel them as chains. They feel like soft linen or slender threads of silk that we like because they caress us. After death, though, the softness of the chains turns hard, and the caresses start to chafe.

It strikes me that the goal of the social media algorithm is just this; “to take possession of [our] thoughts to the point that nothing feels more gratifying.”

I conclude with a thought contrary to the premise of my own thoughts. Maybe the operation of the SMAs are in Divine Providence and, of course, this is the case as Divine Providence is in the smallest of details. But I suspect not

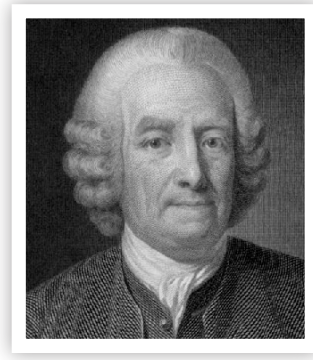
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Who is Swedenborg?



(Note: The following was summarized from the chapter, *Swedenborg: Man Beyond Measure*, in Bruce Henderson's book, *Window to Eternity*, as a pamphlet for the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, where it is very popular with visitors. It is available for other Church societies and anyone else interested.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson called Emanuel Swedenborg "a colossal soul who lies vast abroad on his times. He is not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars."

American poet Edwin Markham said: "There is no doubt that Swedenborg was one of the greatest intellects that has appeared upon the planet . . . the wisest man in millions."

To Helen Keller he was "one of the noblest champions Christianity has ever known."

Who was this man so revered by other intellects? A man with more expertise in more fields than any scientist before or since? A man who left one of the largest collections of theological writings known in the world?

During his lifetime, Swedenborg's contributions to science, philosophy and theology were well known in European intellectual circles, including Immanuel Kant, John Wesley, Goethe, Rousseau and Voltaire.

He was a member of the Swedish House of Nobles, an economist, inventor and scholar. All of this was before the most remarkable period of his life: as a revelator and "servant of the Lord."

This unique spiritual experience separated him from all other renowned

men. Between 1720 and 1745 he wrote 20 volumes on civil, scientific and philosophical subjects. Then, at age 57 and continuing for the last 27 years of his life, he wrote more than 30 volumes of closely reasoned theology, which he claimed came directly from God. (This church, and others like it throughout the world, is devoted to “the new Christianity” of this revelation. It emphasizes acknowledging the Lord and His Word, following His Commandments, and living a life of use and charity.)

Many leading thinkers in the 19th century also saw him as a man of exceptional insight, including Abraham Lincoln, William Blake, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Greenleaf Whittier.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in Stockholm, Sweden, January 29, 1688, to Jesper and Sara Swedberg – an intensely religious family. Jesper was professor of theology at the University of Uppsala and dean of its cathedral. He later became Bishop of Skara, making him a nobleman, and the family name was changed to Swedenborg.

The Swedenborg home was genteel and reverent. Even though Emanuel's mother died when he was 8, her soft nature influenced him throughout his life. Family discussions of religious and classical subjects helped him develop his own philosophy. He said of his youth: "I was constantly engaged in thought upon God, salvation, and the spiritual diseases of men."

At age 11, he entered Uppsala University – not unusual for a boy of high intellectual promise. He majored in philosophy, which included science and mathematics, but also took courses in law, and studied theology and medicine.

Most of his instruction was in Latin; he even wrote poetry in Latin for relaxation. He also learned Greek, Hebrew, English, Dutch, French and Italian, studied music on his own and filled in for the church organist. He was versatile, curious and always practical.

He completed his formal studies at 21 and devoted the next 35 years to self-directed education. He learned physics and astronomy, was skilled in watchmaking, bookbinding, cabinet work, engraving and lens grinding, and

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studied cosmology, mathematics, anatomy, physiology, politics, economics, metallurgy, mineralogy, geology, mine engineering and chemistry.

He made models of a glider and a submarine, hundreds of years before anyone else saw the possibilities, and designed a prototype phonograph, a machine gun and a fire extinguisher.

He plunged into anatomy with the same curiosity and initiative. This was still a primitive science but he not only came closer to understanding the functions of heart and lungs, blood and oxygen than anyone to that date, but was ahead of his time in many other areas of anatomical research.

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His life was not spent indulging personal whims, however. He was devoted to public service, the Swedish government and his country. At 28 he was appointed by King Charles XII as extraordinary assessor in the Royal Board of Mines. His public career included 50 years of service in the House of Nobles and devotion to the welfare of his country.

All of his work rested on the assumption that divine force underlies all matter. He was not satisfied with purely material explanations of the universe. This led him to study the relationship between the finite and infinite, with the human soul as the link between God and man.

At age 57, he felt he had gone as far as he could in explaining the mysteries of human existence based on science. He was about to begin a unique phase of his life that would take him deeper into understanding these mysteries than he ever could have imagined.

It began in 1744 with dreams and visions that left him both fearful and exhilarated. He kept a careful record of what he experienced and how he felt. It was a disquieting period, which he did not yet understand, so he kept the dreams to himself.

Swedenborg believed he had been called by God to transmit a new revelation to the world and devoted himself to that service for the rest of his life. He began a two-year study of the Bible, writing thousands of pages of notes and a complete index for his later theological works. And he perfected his Hebrew and Greek to study the Bible in original texts.

Throughout this spiritual mission, he said he talked almost daily with spirits while living a normal life on earth and stated: "The Lord in His Divine Mercy has granted me the opportunity for several years now . . . to keep company with spirits and angels, to hear them talking, and to speak with them in return. Consequently I have been able to see and hear the most amazing things in the other life, which have never before come into people's awareness

or thought."

He insisted that he was not dreaming but fully awake to what he saw and heard in the spiritual world, could reflect on his experiences with real understanding, and that at all times he was taught by the Lord alone – through angels, but not by angels.

Swedenborg is often identified as a "scientist, philosopher and mystic." But he cannot be so simply classified, because his experience was unique. It has nothing in common with the visions of self-styled seers, and he never encouraged a mystical way of life. His works are an intricate presentation of doctrine, not personal philosophy.

He did not rush into print the moment he felt called, nor attract attention to himself. He waited until he had three years of experience in the spiritual world before he began to write. His first and most exhaustive theological study, *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Coelestia)*, written in 1748, is a verse-by-verse analysis of the internal, spiritual meaning of *Genesis* and *Exodus*.

Other works include: *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Divine Providence*, *the Heavenly Doctrine* (The Lord, Sacred Scripture, Life and Faith), *Heaven and Hell*, *Marriage Love*, *Apocalypse Revealed* and *Apocalypse Explained* (on the *Book of Revelation*), and *True Christian Religion*.

He published his books anonymously, seeking no credit – even among friends – spending a lot of his own money and giving them as anonymous gifts to clergymen, universities and libraries.

He lived a normal, if sometimes secluded, life and never married, leaving him free for his studies. Friends and acquaintances noticed nothing unusual about his life.

As he became well-known for more than science and government service, his books were widely read and discussed. He always insisted that he was commissioned by God to bring this new revelation to the world and never sought personal acclaim.

He had no command to establish a church, although he assumed this revelation would be the basis for a new church. This sets him apart from the apostles who were commanded to preach the gospel – and from those claiming

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When he was 80, a friend wrote: "Someone might think that Swedenborg was eccentric and whimsical, but the very reverse was the case. He was very easy and pleasant in company, talked on every subject that came up, accommodating himself to the ideas of the company, and never speaking of his own views unless he was asked about them."

Engrossed in his crowning work, *True Christian Religion*, at age 82 he made his final journey to complete its publication. He must have felt he would not return, for he made farewell calls on friends and associates, arranged a pension for his faithful housekeeper, and settled his estate.

He had predicted six months before his death that he would enter the spiritual world on March 29, 1772. He awoke from a long sleep that day and ask his landlady for the time. When she told him it was five o'clock, he said, "I thank you. God bless you." Then he gently sighed and died.

In the last month of his life several friends had urged that he make a final statement about the truth of the new revelation that had consumed his last 27 years. He answered pointedly: "I have written nothing but the truth, as you will have more and more confirmed to you all the days of your life, provided you keep close to the Lord and faithfully serve him alone by shunning evils of all kinds as sins against him and diligently searching his Word, which from beginning to end bears incontestable witness to the truth of the doctrines I have delivered to the world."

To another friend shortly before he died he said: "As truly as you see me before your eyes, so true is everything that I have written; and I could have said more had it been permitted. When you enter eternity you will see everything, and then you and I will have much to talk about."

It's Not Swedenborg's Skull: A True Story

The Rev. Christopher A. Barber



Alex Rohtla, left, and Chris Barber in the storage room of Benade Hall where the plaster cast was discovered. Alex holds a copy of Hultkrantz's 1910 report: *The Mortal Remains of Emanuel Swedenborg*.

The skull stared blankly from its dusty shelf. I don't think it was looking at anything in particular. I mean, how could it? It was just a skull. Not even! Merely the plaster effigy of one. "It can't be." I stammered. "But can it? No. And yet . . . how could it be anything else?"

Alex Rohtla, science teacher at the Academy of the New Church, watched me argue with myself in the forgotten storage room on the fifth floor of Benade Hall, the main building of the Secondary Schools. I explained to him that years ago in 1905, five plaster casts were made of a skull. Well, they were casts of a cast of a skull, one that had been made initially in 1823. But not just anyone's skull – Emanuel Swedenborg's. And even that's complicated.

Alex looked on in disbelief. I can't blame him. "And you think *that's* one

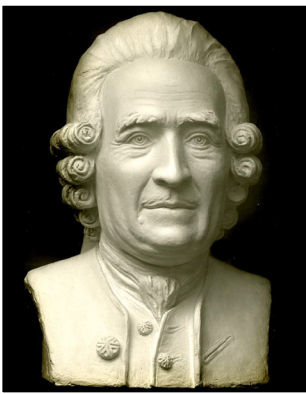
of them?” A question – the answer to which I both wanted to know and was afraid to find out. I couldn’t claim to know for sure. “If I were a betting man,” I posited, “I’d put my money on this being one of those plaster casts.” I would need to examine it more closely, but I wanted to say that we’d found it.

You see, the truth is, Swedenborg’s skulls have a convoluted and contested history. Yes, *skulls* – plural. Swedenborg has had two, and both have been stolen, eluded discovery, and been found in the two-and-a-half centuries since his death. I told you, it’s complicated.

In 1816 someone broke into the crypt in London where Swedenborg’s casket lay and absconded with his skull. In its place he left a decoy – a real human skull, but not one that ever sat on Swedenborg’s shoulders. This was an era when many famous skulls were stolen for private study and collection, so it’s unsurprising that later someone else opened Swedenborg’s casket, and snatched their prize from its pillow. But the authentic cranium was already gone! This second thief would have no reason to suspect that the relic he revered was not of the mortal remains of the great revelator and servant of the Lord, but the decoy.

The authentic skull remained hidden away until the 20th century. When its location came to light, it was examined, authenticated, and restored to his casket in 1978. This restoration would bring everything full circle as, by that time, *the decoy* had already been recovered and restored to the pillow where Swedenborg’s true head once lay.

Just before this earlier restoration, believing it to be authentic, the decoy’s possessor and his friends wanted mementos of the skull. They carefully made three plaster copies and then restored the artifact to what they presumed was its rightful place. These men lived and died believing that they had looked into the face of the man who spoke with God.



The bust of Swedenborg by Hultkrantz, formed on the basis of the decoy skull.

In 1905, five new plaster copies of the decoy skull were made. One of them was gifted to the Academy of the New Church. Here’s the mystery. Here’s why I hoped and argued with myself. *The New Philosophy* reported in 1906 that the Academy was in possession of one of the casts, but there’s no other documentation of any cast ever being with us. Neither the archives nor the museum has any record of it. *New Church Life* is also silent. I had long since abandoned hope of finding the cast gifted to the Academy. That is, until Alex and I explored the old storage in fifth-floor Benade.

We only happened to be up there because I wanted to explore some of the forgotten rooms of the school and he had the keys. The rooms at the top of the school once were offices and classrooms, but now they hold science lab storage – mostly forgotten pieces from teachers of Academy past. Bits and bobs and oddities were all around the room. The skull was among them, sitting beside crumbling taxidermy and scientific equipment.

“And you think *that's* one of them?” Alex asked. Yes, I did. I carefully carried the plaster skull down to my classroom where I had a copy of *The Mortal Remains of Emanuel Swedenborg*. (Hultkrantz, 1910) All it took was a quick look at the cast against photographs of the decoy skull to confirm with absolute certainty that what stared out blankly from the dust of the fifth floor was the 1905 cast given to the Academy.

I can't wait to tell the archives, “We found something; It's *not* Swedenborg's skull.”

This story is very true. Alex Rohtla and I indeed recovered the missing plaster cast of the decoy skull on November 12, 2019. The story of Swedenborg's skulls and mortal remains is very involved and filled with intrigue. It has been detailed many times across various articles, chapters and books. If you would like to read about it, I recommend picking up a copy of *Cranioklepty*. (Dickey, 2009) It contains what I think is the most riveting account of the saga that I've encountered. The author talks about Swedenborg's skulls and efforts to find the genuine cranium on pages 130-140, 245-266 and 285-296.

I am assembling an annotated bibliography of all articles, chapters and books on Swedenborg's remains and will release it at a future date.

So, what happened? How did this plaster skull go missing? After all, it was believed to be Swedenborg's until it was re-evaluated in the 1950s. So far as I can figure, the skull became separated from the museum collection in the Old Library Building (now Fine Arts) before the museum artifacts were relocated to Glencairn Museum and someone failed to realize the significance of the plaster skull, so they put it with general taxidermy. I think its disappearance is that simple.

I have spoken with a few people about this incredible find and some have asked: “If it's not a cast of Swedenborg's real skull, what's the big deal?” That's a reasonable question. If it's an imposter, then why all the hubbub?

I think that even though this skull was not authentically Swedenborg's, it is a very important part of New Church history. Not only has it been a topic of conversation in New Church and secular circles for nearly 200 years, it has played a significant role in the way many have come to view Swedenborg today.

For example, the decoy skull was used in the modeling of the famous bust of Swedenborg by Hultkrantz in the main entrance of the Swedenborg Library

in Bryn Athyn, as well as the bust by Adolf Jonsson that has been restored in Lincoln park, Chicago – a copy of which can be found on the second floor of the Swedenborg Library.

So, even though the decoy skull never belonged to Swedenborg in life, between the 156 years it spent in Swedenborg's casket, and the foundation it served for rendering his visage for modern devotees, it is indelibly a part of New Church people's relationship with this important servant of the Lord.

The Rev. Christopher A. Barber teaches Religion in the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools. He loves to help students grasp biblical and theological concepts in the light of a New Church worldview. He lives in Huntingdon Valley with his wife, Annika (Fitzpatrick), and their son, Jaiell. Contact: Chris.Barber@ancss.org

As We Retreat into the Future Let Us Not Forget the Past

Michael A. Brown

The hopes for a growing church membership have been with us from the very beginning of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, Inc. The fundamental decision was made that education would be the vehicle that grew the membership. The Cherry Street Church in Philadelphia was a beginning. The move to what became known as Bryn Athyn provided a base for the leadership and a strong dedication to what became The Academy of the New Church.

It is important to remember there are many challenges from the early days up to the present: Bishop Henry Benade had been the leader and inspiration for building a church. One of the early issues was whether there were two churches – one church for training priests and another church (the Academy) to teach the laity – or should there be just one church with the Academy as an educational arm of the one church?

Finally, in 1897 Bishop William F. Pendleton settled the issue by breaking with Bishop Benade, who favored two churches under one Bishop. Bishop Pendleton presented a provisional name for the one church: The General Church of the New Jerusalem. This New Church would be open to all.

The first General Assembly of this New Church was held in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, June 25-29, 1897. Bishop Pendleton issued the call. On the fourth day of the Assembly, he presented his “Notes on Government,” which brought forth long cheers from the audience. This new New Church was to be a free church with participation from the laity.

Another outcome was the continuance of the school by moving it from Philadelphia to what we now call Bryn Athyn. The Academy of the New Church was to become the educational arm of the General Church of the New Jerusalem.

There were to be many future challenges: the Lillian Beekman experience, the Kramph Will Case, The Lord’s New Church (which is Nova Hierosolyma), grape juice for the Holy Supper, and the place of women in the church – even

perhaps as ministers.

The vision of the “Holy City New Jerusalem” (*Revelation* 21:2) descending has never been lost. There was, and is, a deep abiding love for “the teachings of the New Church” – known for so many years as The Writings.

One of the blessings of the new General Church of the New Jerusalem was the joy of commitment so many gave to this new venture. There are two ways to look at this tiny community and its mission. First, the hope was that large families would contribute to the growth of the Church. Secondly, there was a deep belief that the Writings, the Second Coming of the Lord God Jesus Christ, would flourish among the educated. Could education be the key to growing the Church?

Education would require facilities and teachers. Benade Hall was built in 1902.

The curriculum of the Academy included a chapel service as well as religion courses. The Theological School was blessed with ministers who would become scholars and teachers. At the beginning of the 20th century a young man from Sweden came to America to become a minister, and in the process became a scholar and a teacher. The Rev. Hugo Ljungberg Odhner is the author of books, along with his many articles and studies, classes and sermons.

The Divine Allegory (1954) is “The Story of the Peoples and Lands of Scripture and Their Spiritual Scriptures as Revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.”

The Human Mind (1968) is the story of the immortal mind: “It is the spirit which lives after death.”

The Spiritual World (1968) is a commentary (470 pages) about all aspects of the spiritual world as recorded in the Writings. Dr. Odhner notes: “The fact is that men [people] generally have no concept of what the soul is or what a spiritual world is, or what heaven and hell really mean.”

Bishop George de Charms, in teaching the seventh- and eighth-grade religion classes, had seen the need to tell the story of the Lord’s life on earth at a level that young students could understand. *The Life of the Lord* was published in 1948. This story can be read at any level of a person’s understanding. It brings us closer to the angels.

At the college level, Bishop de Charms wrote and taught *The Growth of the Mind: A New Church Interpretation* (1953). Other works include *The Tabernacle* and *The Four Gospels*.

These works, and others like them – along with the dedication of teachers and ministers – have provided a firm foundation for what is to come. The participation and contributions of members of the laity are a vital part of that foundation.

The numbers tell the story about growth in the General Church of the New Jerusalem, Inc. However small the numbers, however great are the uses of each and every member. We live in two worlds, the natural and the spiritual. The church on earth is the ultimate which makes possible our existence.

The Retreat of June 2020 signals the end of Assemblies. As we look ahead we leave behind a map of the societies that are slowly sinking into the sunset. The world has changed; the way people communicate has changed; and the teachings of the New Church can now be seen and heard anywhere on the planet by a worldwide web of computers and satellites.

We look ahead to the future spiritual growth of the worldwide New Church. May our present efforts and practices continue to fulfill the uses that support the growth of a worldwide New Church.

Michael A. Brown is a 1956 graduate of the Academy Boys School. He and his wife, Lynn, live in Tucson, Arizona. Contact: *mikelynnbrown2@gmail.com*

How to Keep Young People in The Faith?

Olaf Hauptmann

I would like to talk about how we how we keep young people in the faith. However, in order to justify a specific approach, I would like to begin by considering how the angels think.

One of the themes in *Heaven and Hell* that has continued to give me a sense of wonder and amazement is how in many respects heaven is more like this life that we tend to expect. It is pointed out again and again that people tend to think of the afterlife as kind of ethereal. We're inclined to think that heaven is the very opposite of the natural material world, so we think that angels are different from people, when in fact they are people. They still have a body with arms, legs, hands and a face. In heaven they also have houses, roads, government, gardens with flowers, libraries with books, etc.

There are also differences. For example, most things seem to be better in heaven, the houses, gardens and government are all prettier there. The peace that the angels feel also much surpasses the peace we feel here on earth, and so with their wisdom. All in all, it sounds like a pretty good place.

So, if after these considerations we are to look at how the angels think, it should not surprise us that they think much like people here on earth. The problem then is that we live in a pluralist age. That is, there is a whole host of ways to think these days and there is no clear consensus on which is right. Fortunately, the Lord does not leave us without guidance on this question either. We are told how the angels confirm their belief in the Lord and how they think:

Nothing can spring from itself, but only from something prior to itself; therefore all things spring from a First, which they call the very Being of the life. (*Heaven and Hell* 9)

This is a logical argument. So now we know that the angels think logically. But we also know more than that – that the angels use logic when they confirm their faith in the Lord. And we know that the angels' argument is a lot like one of Thomas Aquinas's arguments for God, known as the "The Second Way," or

the argument for a first cause. Hence, we know that the angels use good old medieval logic.

In fact, in *Heaven and Hell* 9 we find several logical arguments for God. The first is the argument from a first cause. Then there is an argument from what we might call "continuous existence." Then we find an argument from good and truth, which has much in common with Thomas Aquinas's Fourth Way, also known as the argument from degrees.

Once we start to pay attention, we may begin to notice these and other arguments for God throughout the Heavenly Doctrines. And now that we know the angels use these arguments, we might feel some incentive to get to learn them ourselves. I suspect we would like to join the angels one day, then it may not be bad to know something about how they think.

As for my part, I have always believed in God. However, it is only in the last five years I have been learning and studying logical arguments for God and I have found it personally rewarding. There is something wonderful about being able to give logical reasons for what you believe. This is maybe best illustrated if you imagine being asked: "Why do you believe in God?" When I did not know how to answer that question, I certainly felt it was anxiety provoking. Now that I know how to present several good logical arguments for God's existence, I find the question delightful.

However, beyond being personally rewarding it is also immensely rewarding to teach these arguments to my children. I live with my wife and six children in Denmark, which is a fiercely secular society. As my New Church faith is a central part of my life, I naturally worry that my children will abandon the faith for a secular life of hedonistic pleasures.

In this respect the angelic art of logical arguments for God is not an easy quick fix. I must confess that it was difficult for me and took some time before I got a grasp of this subject. Then I had to teach them slowly to my children. It took several years. Now, however, the fruits are unmistakable. My teenage sons are not afraid to explain or debate their beliefs with their agnostic or atheist classmates. I therefore feel confident that my children will hold onto their faith. Now they have good reason to.

How You Can Do It

My recommendation to you, if you have children or grandchildren, is that you should be worried about their faith. Unfortunately, it is not enough to give our children a book of Christian apologetics. They most likely won't read it. You will have to do some heavy lifting yourself.

I recommend you read William Lane Craig's book, *Reasonable Faith*. It is not an easy read. However, if you attack it with time and patience I believe you

will find it very well written and a rewarding read.

I must admit I gave up the first time I tried to read it. Now I consider it one of the best books I have read. I have read other books on apologetics, but they are not as good. If it is still too difficult (it was for me) you may want to start with *Cold-Case Christianity* by J. Warner Wallace. This helped me get into the kind of thinking needed for apologetics and enabled me to dive into the more difficult literature on the subject. Both writers have also made endless amounts of material in the form of podcasts available online which can be very helpful.

Preferably you will make this study while your children are small, which I know is not an easy chore to fit into the schedule of busy parents. But it works best if you can teach it to them slowly over years so that when negative questions about faith come up – usually around the early teenage years – then they are already equipped to answer these questions and you are equipped to discuss it with them. The task is much harder if they have already adopted a negative attitude toward the faith.

However, I urge you not to give up. As parents or grandparents, we have a special access to those young people. Although we may feel they do not listen much to us we should consider that they probably listen more to us than to anyone else. I therefore encourage you to take up this challenge. With time and patience, I believe it can be richly rewarding for yourself as well as for those whom you love.

Olaf Hauptmann lives in Denmark with his wife, Polania (Nobre), and their six children, where he is studying philosophy at Aalborg University. Contact: ohauptmann@gmail.com

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

GENERAL CHURCH RETREAT 2020

Momentum is building for the General Church Retreat 2020. Main sessions are coming into focus. A number of key partners have stepped up to anchor an amazing children's program. A pricing plan has been set that makes the event accessible to all who wish to participate.

This communication aims to provide a program and pricing overview, and to warmly invite attendance. More detailed information is available at www.gcretreat2020.org, and registration will open February 17, 2020.

Main Sessions. The theme for the Retreat is: "Behold I make all things new: a way forward focused on the Lord and a life of useful service." As we gather to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the sending out of the 12 disciples on June 19, 1770, we have the opportunity to consider what the General Church is doing today to honor the cause that the Lord set in motion.

Main sessions will take place on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Each session will include interactive presentations by multiple people within a specific theme. It might be helpful to think of a TED Talk format, with opportunities to ask questions and explore the theme with others in attendance. Each session will include worship, music and at least two people teaming up on the presentations.

- Session 1: Loving: Devotion to the Lord, and care for one another
- Session 2: Learning: Drawing wisdom from the Word
- Session 3: Living: Inspiration to live and serve in authentically New Church ways

Programs for Children and Youth. We are excited by the way the children's program is coming together. With the help of the Cathedral Camp team, the Glencairn Museum, and the Academy Secondary Schools, we are able to offer a rich program for children and young people ages up to 18.

Pricing. Our pricing model aims at affordability. Previous General Church Assemblies have been built on a break-even model, such that the real costs of programs, housing, food and hosting are passed on to attendees. The General Church is willing to underwrite a significant portion of the program costs, asking only a \$50 per person charge for adults and children. Recognizing that even this modest cost might restrict attendance for those needing to pay for travel and housing, a user-friendly process is being organized to request financial assistance.

We plan to publish actual per-person costs and to invite free-will contributions from those who are able to provide them. Our goal in this pricing model is to take cost out of the equation in terms of choosing to attend.

Dates. The General Church Retreat 2020 (formerly referred to as the General Church Assembly) will take place in Bryn Athyn from Thursday, June 18, to Sunday, June 21. The Retreat will conclude after church on Sunday. There will be a special organ vespers that evening as a post-Retreat event.

We encourage you to talk with your family and friends about attending this General Church Retreat. We offer a rich program for adults and children, showcasing what the Church is striving to do to carry forward the mission of the New Church, within an affordable model. The bottom line is: you can afford to come and you are warmly invited.

ASIA NEW CHURCH REPORT

The Rev. John Jin

This New Church is the crown of all the churches which have up to now existed upon earth. (*True Christian Religion* 786)

As 2020 begins we would like to share with you all that has been happening with our Asian New Churches. It's been 20 years since we started our mission in Asia with the goal of "becoming a happy human being by understanding and living the Lord's teachings in Heavenly Doctrine and being part of the Lord's community to share it with our neighbors." In the meantime, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you who have given endless trust and support through many failures and much sluggishness.

May the Lord bless and keep you and your family in this New Year.

What's New?

Korean New Church Self-Support Project

The Asia New Church is running a self-reliance mission – basically meaning that ministers do not receive any stipend from the General Church. For this, the Korean New Church Corporation planned the Korean Project, which

includes the Seoul New Church Building for worship and community service, plus the Corporation Building for basic income from the self-reliance mission.

This took five years, including fund raising of more than \$2 million from Korean New Church members and Seoul New Church, and more than \$2 million from the Rev. Jungé Fund, the Pitcairn Foundation, and the General Church Matching Fund (\$1.5 million). In January, the General Church and the New Church Corporation in Korea dedicated the building. (See March/April 2019 *New Church Life*, page 154.)

China Mission Conference

Since 2018, the *China Mission Conference* has gathered every season for the China Mission driven by one person's efforts alone to a systematic, sustainable, organized effort, initially focusing on young people and those without any Christian background. We discussed how to support the mission, how to reach the "gentiles," and how to approach young people and intellectual society.

Spiritual Leaders' Training

New Church Theological School: The Revs. John Jin and Andy Dibb have prepared to open the China New Church Theological School for the last two years. Now we have finished the Courses (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* and *True Christian Religion*) and are recruiting the teachers, students and a translation worker for the text and lecture. We hope to open it in January.

The Heavenly Doctrine Discussion Group: This discussion group is run by Chinese New Church lay leaders, thoroughly exploring the teachings in Chinese. This past year we covered regeneration, repentance and other subjects.

Seminar for New Church People: In 2019 we held New Church seminars in ShenChen and ShamgHai, building up the New Church and developing a strategic plan in the current political situation.

Translations

In 2019, translation work successfully completed *Arcana Coelestia* volumes 2 and 3. Now we are working on volume 4, *Apocalypse Revealed* (revised), *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* (revised), and *True Christian Religion* (revised).

Chinese New Church members started fund raising for translation, and one person does translation as full-time work with a minimum salary base.

The translation team discussed publishing *Heaven and Hell* in Singapore or Taiwan to help spread New Church teachings into Chinese, Asia and other countries (about 100 million people).

Spiritual Communities and Outreach

It is very difficult to grow because of political pressure and other reasons, however the *Real Life Group* (online) continues to meet every other week. The Leading Group, Translation Group, Study Group and Swedenborg Readers Group meet diligently through the internet. But actual group meeting (face-to-face) is very limited.

The Swedenborg Research Center Website

The SRC is used instead of a church name. This website (*swedenborgstudy.org*) is taking charge of the China New Church Library. It keeps uploaded translations of the Writings, secondary books, online discussion materials, audio and new readers' guide materials. It will also compare Swedenborg's teachings with Chinese traditional teaching and other religions for the gentile mission. We promote visits to the website to reach out to young people and intellectual groups.

Other News

Korea

As we announced at our dedication service, the Korean New Church is moving forward with its "tent-making" mission. However, in Korea the economic situation faced recession, therefore the rent profit decreased and building debt was incurred, making it difficult to repay. The Korean New Church is making a lot of effort to steadily pay back and contribute to the growth of the church.

The Korean New Church continues to grow in various ways, including translation work as well as the training of ministers through the Theological School. *Apocalypse Explained* 2 and 3, and *Arcana Coelestia* 1 are in translation and will be published. For the young people's mission the Korean New Church is developing video and audio material and other media.

Japan

Although membership is not growing or decreasing, the Japan New Church continues Sunday services and study group meetings in Tokyo and Kyoto. **Mr. Suzuki** and others continue as volunteers to work on new translations.

Treasurer’s Note:

Hwa Yean Kim

Although the Asia Mission faces many challenges, we are developing step-by-step with hope and vitality under the Divine mercy of the Lord. I’d like to make one request. Our New Church members in China are especially in a very difficult situation as you know from world news. Please pray for them. “*Verily, verily, I say to you, ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life shall lose it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.’*” (John 12:24,25)

Your generous donations allow us to continue this vital work. We are very grateful for your continued support.

Philadelphia Korean New Church
 c/o Hwa Yean Kim
 537 Anne Street
 Huntingdon Valley
 Pennsylvania 19006

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Highlights from the November 20, 2019, meeting:

Chancellor Peter Buss has convened a Chancellor’s Council, consisting of ministers from Bryn Athyn College and the Academy Secondary Schools. They agreed to the charge of providing counsel to the Chancellor and support for Academy colleagues.

Bryn Athyn College

Brian Blair, President

The Strategic Plan for the College (2017-2021) was presented with updated initiatives. It includes seven goals with multiple strategies for achieving objectives:

1. Financial Sustainability
2. Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention
3. Quality Work Environment
4. Academic Program
5. Higher Quality Student Life Experience
6. Infrastructure
7. Alumni and Community Relations

The increase in the number of resident students, with 80% of recent applications expressing interest in campus residency, is a sign of increased quality of student life. The College Center, as expected, has become a popular gathering place for students. There has been a 50% increase in students accessing mental health counseling. (This is a trend throughout American colleges.) These services contribute to student retention and academic success.

Cameras have been installed around the campus, improving safety for students and faculty.

The College Committee of the Board is being reconstituted, with members to be appointed.

Academy Secondary Schools

Jim Adams, Managing Director

Enrollment is stable at 215, with 46 students in the dormitories. A successful open house in October attracted 51 families. Efforts are underway to hire a recruiting and admissions consultant.

Thanks to a special donation, the tennis courts will be refurbished next spring or summer.

Cairnwood Estate

Shannon Walko, Director

Proposed bylaws will be re-presented to the Cairnwood Board of Governors at its next meeting after further study of certain issues and comparison with Glencairn Museum bylaws.

With Cairnwood decorated for Christmas it was a popular destination for tours, as well as season tea events, which attracted more than 900 people over nine days.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION: GOOD NEWS FOR BOTH

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish

(Reprinted from the Washington Society *Echo*)

In 2011 **Dr. Ian Thompson**, a nuclear physicist in California, published a book: *Starting Science From God*. In it he proposed rational scientific theories capable of explaining many of the mysteries of modern science based on the operation of God in the orderly steps and stages of creation. It was the beginning of a new era of study we now call “theistic science.”

Now this work has been complemented by another book just published

by the Swedenborg Scientific Association, *Intelligent Default*, by the **Rev. Dr. Reuben Bell**, (wherein) he makes the case for Swedenborg's theistic science in relation to "the problem of organic form." As he says, it's not a question of whether God created and maintains the world, it's a question of HOW, and he answers that question in excruciating scientific and philosophical detail.

Both of these books were featured at a conference held in Bryn Athyn on October 12, where several other high-level scholars joined the authors in addressing a very privileged audience of about 35 men and women on everything from influx and correspondences to molecular biology and quantum physics, showing, again, in detail, HOW God works in the natural world.

In response to a question during a panel discussion, the speakers all said that their work was not an attempt to prove the existence of God to the atheists among us; but it was and IS a humble attempt to provide answers to many of the questions that science simply can't answer without recourse to certain illogical assumptions, or axioms, as, for example, that the world was created out of nothing, or that incredibly complex life forms arise and continue to exist "by chance."

The concept of intelligent "default," in particular, marries the principle of orderly spiritual influence with the seemingly random distribution of physical matter such that life flows in when the forms are ready to receive it, and that they are made ready through an aggregating process embodying the love and wisdom of God in every sub-atomic, quantum detail. This is not "creationism," nor is it pure Darwinian evolution, but a whole new approach to the mysteries of how the world works based on the revelation for the New Church.

It is deep stuff, and as one who attended the conference (and labored to understand the books) all I can say is that it is incredibly interesting and convincing – if you have the patience for it. It is also incredibly inspiring, and useful not only for confirming one's belief in God but also for answering the unanswered questions of science – in the language itself of science!

So if you've read this far and any of this interests you, or if you know someone who might benefit from the conversation, call or email the **Rev. Alan Cowley** in Boynton Beach, Florida, to find out about the regular meetings of the "Theistic Science Study Group" at that church every Monday at 10 a.m. Participants, including Drs. Bell and Thompson, Skype in from all over the country, and new members are always welcome. Do you have to be a genius to participate? No. But it helps to know a little something about science and the Heavenly Doctrines. Rev. Cowley can be reached at 561-704-2199 (cell), through the church at 561-736-9235 or by email at amcowley@gmail.com.

You can also watch video recordings of the October 12 conference, including all the panelists, at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIt4Nj7CMpTs8ncgKwKvnbQ>

KEMPTON NEW CHURCH SCHOOL DEDICATION ADDRESS

Following are excerpts from an address delivered by the **Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs** at the dedication of a new addition to the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church School in October. This addition primarily serves Kempton's new high school. The dedication was covered, with photos, in the November/December 2019 *New Church Life*.

It is a wonderful day as we celebrate the dedication of the addition for the Kempton New Church School, and it provides us an awesome opportunity to reflect on the value of New Church education. So ask yourself: what do I value about New Church education? We would probably find a great variety of what people value, treasure and hold dear.

One thing that hopefully would be a part of everyone's response would be that the Lord must be at the center of it. In the beautiful readings from the Word we are clearly taught that "*unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it,*" (*Psalms* 127.1) and that the house of the prudent man did not fall because he had "*built his house on the rock.*" (*Matthew*:7:24)

This clearly tells us that for this New Church school to continue to prosper, it needs to have the truth from the Lord's Word as the foundation for everything it seeks to do. This very simple principle means that New Church schools should look different than others because our source of guidance is primarily and essentially from the Word, not from the world. In fact, New Church schools likely will be viewed as counter-cultural because the values we champion from the Word are at odds with what much of today's culture promotes, based on fallible human intelligence.

The prudent man's house withstood the deluge of falsities from the hells because he had understood this and built his house on the rock. This is why we must unabashedly embrace the fact that the Lord is the foundation of all we do, otherwise we will run the risk of getting washed away. Teaching our children in the light of the Lord's Word enables them not only to know what is actually true, but to know it so well that it cannot be perverted, and this gives them the strength to stand firmly on the rock.

From its beginnings, New Church education has always understood that there must be a harmonious partnership between the home and school for it to be truly effective. All instruction, whether at home or at school, is meant to open the mind of children, ultimately to the Lord Himself, so that they can know Him, love Him, and be conjoined to Him. When the home and school are united in making the Lord the center of all they do, then the instruction of the children is exponentially better, and their affirmative attitude toward the Lord's Word is enhanced and encouraged.

Developing this affirmative attitude and simply believing "*they are true because the Lord has said them . . . is the principle that leads to all intelligence*

and wisdom.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2568:4) In a world that is ever more skeptical toward the Lord’s Word, fostering an affirmative attitude is increasingly important. Especially with teenagers, as doubts arise and they begin to challenge what they have been taught, we must gently and continually urge them to start from that affirmative principle, for then they will begin to see countless confirmations of the Lord’s truth in everything they study in science, nature, art, music, economics, mathematics, history, etc.

During this crucial time of development, we no longer want our teens to accept what the Word says to be true, simply because we say so, but because they are beginning to see it and understand it for themselves. This is one of the reasons why the symbol of the open Word was chosen for the New Church.

Another of the founding principles of New Church education was the belief that our children are the most fruitful field of evangelization. Contained within it is the realization that being born, baptized and raised in the New Church does not necessarily make us New Church people. We must freely choose this for ourselves from freedom according to reason.

Reasoning is not an ability that elementary school students properly possess, so they cannot really choose to be New Church at that young age. This is why the high school years are such a vital time. This is when our teens are sorting through the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures and the Heavenly Doctrine and deciding whether or not they will choose to become New Church men and women. In a way, this is where they are “evangelized” or not.

In the establishment of the New Church High School here in Kempton, there was a recognition of how important this formative period in adolescence really is toward their spiritual development. Now with this beautiful new addition there is an environment specifically designed to foster innocence, encourage an affirmative attitude, promote the worship of the Lord, and urge the living of His Commandments.

NEW RESIDENCES COMING FOR KEMPTON SENIORS

Tom Kerr

Old School Village, Inc. is a private, not-for-profit charity created solely to provide safe, affordable housing, at a facility called “Old School Village” (OSV) in Kempton for New Church seniors sixty-five years of age and older.

Hugh and Margaret Heinrichs are paragons of patience. They have been anxiously waiting to move into OSV for longer than I am comfortable remembering. If *actual* promises weren’t made, these two surely were given repeated signals that their new home would be available “soon.”

And still they wait patiently. But now the end – or is it the beginning – is



truly in sight. With a bank loan in hand, a helping hand from the General Church, and some incredible largesse from donors, we plan for a January 2020 start of construction and the opening of doors for occupants by the end of the year. We don't have every dollar we need, but providence has brought us this far and will see us through. Don't be reluctant to make a tax-deductible contribution to: Old School Village, Inc. c/o Treasurer Roger Schrock, PO Box 162, Kempton, PA 19529.

(By the way, this charity is connected to the Kempton New Church only by association, not legalities. Were this project to fail, all its assets would pass to the church, or failing that, to the General Church. The Kempton New Church Board of Trustees affirms candidates for the charity's board of directors. So, while Old School Village, Inc. is spiritually linked to the Kempton New Church through a sense of purpose, the church bears no financial or legal responsibility for the charity's viability.)

Some history: In 2017, we bought the local mothballed former public elementary school at a bargain price, hired a local architectural firm, and began



Hugh and Margaret Heinrichs

the process of carving the building into 12 one- and two-bedroom apartments.

Some of our team dove headlong into the design process with the architects, while others tackled the business aspects of the project, as well as doing interior building demolition. Happy to say, remarkably little of the building's detritus had to be trashed. Many cabinets and countertops, as well as all the heating-and-cooling equipment, found new homes in the recent addition to the Kempton New Church School, the Kempton Community Center, a local winery, and the basements and garages of our friends and neighbors.

After many, *many* hundreds of people-hours, we have a plan in place and a building ready for transformation.

Given that the building lies in the heart of the village of Kempton proper, and that the property is permitted, by right through local zoning regulations, for a disturbing array of possible uses, the community had great concerns about how the building would be used. It could have been a gas station or a prison! Add to that the place the building holds in the hearts of those who were students there over its 55-year life as a school. (Some children of New Church families went there before Kempton New Church School got going.)

When we bought the property and publicly announced its intended use, an audible sigh of relief was heard from many in the general community. Our progress is being watched locally with great interest and appreciation.

OSV has many features: in addition to the 12 apartments, there's a bedroom-and-bath for use by out-of-town guests; a small gymnasium to serve as a community meeting room; a commercial kitchen (largely empty presently); bathrooms for visitors; a lounge (formerly the school's library); a paved parking lot; maturing trees; and almost seven acres adjacent to permanently preserved farm fields.

Just down the street are the post office, a hotel/restaurant, the Kempton Community Center, the Albany Township Historical Society Museum, and the Wanamakers, Kempton & Southern Railroad (runs on weekends). The Kempton New Church and School are five minutes away by car, and world-famous Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and the Appalachian Trail are about 10 minutes away. Beautiful Leaser Lake, a county park, is just up the road, as is the famed and remarkable Wanamakers General Store.

The larger towns of Hamburg and Kutztown (home of Kutztown University) are each about 15 minutes away. The cities of Allentown, Bethlehem and Reading are each about a 30- to 45-minute drive. Allentown has an international airport.

It has been 47 years since the first New Church settlers came to Kempton to create a new society. All of us – young and old – are grateful for the many gifts the Lord has provided here. We have many dedicated society members with whom to worship Him.

We are blessed with a 75-student, K-12 school, and are nested in beautiful farmland next to the Blue (Kittatinny) Mountains. We have a kindergarten, a cemetery, and many good things in between – but we struggle to retain our valuable seniors. There are no apartment buildings nearby, and there is a paucity of small lots for building homes. So, when one needs to down-size for whatever reason, few possibilities present themselves, and moving away becomes a likely option. This creates a serious gap in the society's composition.

We surely want to hold on to Hugh and Margaret and other treasured members of our “senior class.” Their wisdom and stability, as well as their own desire to be near their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are reasons enough to make this work. OSV will help to keep us whole.

OSV was established primarily for Kempton New Church seniors but other New Church members are invited to apply, and if space permits, could be admitted. If you have questions, please contact me at tjkerr3@gmail.com, 484-436-1014, or PO Box 162, Kempton, PA 19529.

BUILDING BRIDGES

John Berridge

(From the December/January Newsletter for the General Church in Great Britain)

There is a new group within our United Kingdom Church membership. At the recent All Age Weekend (at Purley Chase), the “Bridges” group started work. We are a group of eight volunteers, plus the two ministers (the **Rev. Louis Synnestvedt**, Colchester New Church, and the **Rev. Ethan McCardell**, Michael Church, London), who are working on how we can build bridges between all members, congregations and groups and extend such bridges to the wider community.

Many of you will recall that we were formally known as the Futures group. But that nomenclature is now history. We have a new beginning and I made the case at a recent General Church Council meeting that we should report to that group – a proposal which they accepted. The Council also endorsed that our Bridges group should consider the preparation of a strategic plan for the Church in the United Kingdom.

In the meantime, we have gone back over the original Draft Manifesto and all the feedback it generated with the intention of identifying non-controversial ideas which should be simple to implement and which would hopefully make the wonderful news that we have to share more accessible to all.

We will bring these ideas together over the next few weeks and hopefully 2020 will see us starting on a number of projects to secure a more sustainable New Church in the United Kingdom. Contact: john.berridge0@gmail.com

Life Lines

THE ANGEL IN THE MIRROR

Among the many blessings of our New Church teachings is our sure faith in the life after death. Heaven is real to us, not just a hope. Hell is real, not just a threat. We are free to choose between them. And angels are not just specters floating on clouds with wings and harps and halos but real people from earth living useful lives of peace and joy.

Belief in angels is universal and historic. Throughout history, art and literature are filled with images of angels. They are messengers of the Lord, heralding “peace on earth, goodwill toward men” – messengers for kindness, grace, compassion.

It’s a common perception that angels – and devils – are all around us. We’ve seen the cartoon with an angel on one shoulder, a devil on the other, each whispering in our ears to influence our choices. Special people in our lives we call angels. But there is still a lot of mystery about angels, even in the New Church.

There was a small group program sponsored by the Bryn Athyn Church in the fall – *Angels: Loving and Leading* – which is available to other groups and societies. Over five weeks it focuses on:

Angels 101: The reality of angels as people who once lived on earth and are not idle but live joyful, active lives. And they are not in some distant, dreamlike realm but always close to us. “The Lord has provided that there should be angels and spirits with each individual, and that a person should be ruled by the Lord through them.” (*Heaven and Hell* 247)

What Do Angels Do? “In New Church theology (we have) a vision of angels as beings who are humble, kind, growing, serving and spreading love.” We can imagine many jobs on earth not needed in heaven (doctors, bankers, insurance agents – the list goes on and on) but are told the number and variety of uses in heaven defy imagination.

When Angels Feel Absent: We don’t always feel the presence of angels, but only because we have turned away from them. They are always there. “The Lord give His angels charge over you, to keep you in your ways.” (*Psalms* 91:11)

How Guardian Angels Are With Us: It’s commonly believed that guardian angels hover over us, protecting our spirit, if not our bodies. They

aren't watching us directly but associate through our spheres. "Angels watch carefully and unceasingly to see what the evil spirits present with a person are trying to do. And so far as the person allows them, they turn evils into good." (*Secrets of Heaven* 5980)

Becoming an Angel: We don't suddenly become angels when we enter heaven. "We cannot become angels, that is come in to heaven, unless we bring something of an angelic character from living in the world." (*Divine Providence* 60) "All who become angels carry their own heaven deep within themselves because their love is the love that constitutes their heaven." (*True Christian Religion* 739) "The more anyone receives heaven the more that person is a container of heaven, is a heaven, and is an angel." (*Heaven and Hell* 73)

There's a familiar story of a young girl pestering Swedenborg to show her an angel. He leads her to a covering and asks her to lift it. What she sees is a mirror. And what she sees, of course, is herself – an angel in the making.

There is no mystery, no fantasy about angels. We know we won't be magically transformed into angels when we enter heaven. We become angelic through the course of our lives – choosing innocence, choosing kindness, choosing to follow the Lord. That's how we find the home for our spirit in heaven that we have already chosen on earth – the home of an angel.

(BMH)

DOES THE CHURCH SAY PEOPLE ARE?

I have heard that some people, especially young people ("millennials"), have the impression that our church teaches that people, even little children, are inherently evil. But the New Church, including our branch of it, teaches no such thing.

The *old* Christian doctrine of "original sin" says that all people bear the guilt of Adam and Eve's sin, and that it is only because of Jesus' death on the cross that anyone is spared from God's righteous wrath and punishment. The teachings of the New Church refute "original sin" most emphatically – and especially any notion that little children are evil. Children are innocent, and all who die as children go straight to heaven, whether or not they were baptized. That teaching is one of the things people who become acquainted with the New Church especially love about its teachings.

"Original sin" was an attempt to solve the perennial problem of human evil. If the God who created us is good, then why is there so much evil in the world? The explanation for human evil offered in the Writings is the doctrine of "hereditary evil," which says that we are all born with an inherited tendency toward evils of various kinds. These only become actual evils with us to the extent that we act upon these inclinations.

The faculties of liberty and rationality (free will and reason) with which the Lord has endowed us make it possible for us to choose between good and evil, truth and falsity. We are different from animals, which are governed only by instinct. Love cannot be forced; a free response is necessary. The very empowerment that enables us to freely choose heaven, also makes the opposite choice a possibility.

Good comes from God; evil, which is simply the rejection of good, comes from man. And since human goodness must be freely chosen, the possibility of evil arises with the existence of good. The existence of heaven presupposes the possibility of its rejection. Hell is not inevitable, heaven could exist without it; but the very nature of heaven (love freely given) presupposes the possibility of it being rejected (which is what hell is – a perpetual refusal of heaven).

"Hereditary evils" are like hereditary predispositions to physical ailments. But in the Lord we have a spiritual Physician, whose intention is to heal our soul and restore order to our mind so that the life of heaven can flow abundantly into us, with all the happiness it brings.

By means of His Word the Lord enables us to identify desires and thoughts which are contrary to the heavenly order of human life, and He gives us the medicine (truths) that we need to heal our infirmities. He tells us what is right and what is wrong, not to condemn us, but to save us.

(WEO)

"IF MAN ONLY BELIEVED..."

A striking, often quoted statement in the Writings on the origin of good and evil is this one from Heaven and Hell:

If man only believed, as is really true, that all good is from the Lord and all evil from hell, he would neither make the good in him a matter of merit, nor would evil be imputed to him. For he would then look to the Lord in all the good he thinks and does, and all the evil that flows in would be cast down to hell from which it comes.

But because man does not believe that anything flows into him either from heaven or from hell, and therefore supposes that all things that he thinks and wills are in himself and therefore from himself, he appropriates the evil to himself, and the good that flows in he defiles with merit. (*Heaven and Hell* 302; also in *Divine Providence* 320)

(WEO)

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

In our sense of helplessness against the onslaught of terrorism, mass shootings and catastrophe we are often reduced to offering "thoughts and prayers" for victims and families. Sincere as these feelings are, they are sometimes dismissed in today's culture as empty expressions because they don't prevent the next

tragedy. But we need to be aware of what our “thoughts and prayers” can do – and what they cannot.

In his article on *Prayer for Others* (page xxx), the Rev. Jeremy Simons says: “Those who doubt that prayers are answered, or who have been disappointed that their own prayers have apparently not been heard, may have mistaken ideas about how prayer operates. The influence that prayer has is not on the Lord, but on the one who prays.” Genuine prayer “opens our interiors toward God and makes us receptive to God’s presence with us.”

We know that the Lord loves everyone and wills everyone to go to heaven, and that He also loves us enough to give us freedom. Within the balance between the influences of heaven and hell, good and evil, the Lord permits what He does not will, including our freedom to choose hell over heaven. And He will not step in to prevent personal or widespread tragedy – to preserve our freedom. His love and providence are in what follows, always turning outcomes toward good, even if we may not be aware of all the after-effects in this natural world.

The essence of our prayers should always be, “Thy will be done” – trusting in the love, wisdom and leading of the Lord. We do what we can to comfort victims and cooperate with His healing. Our “thoughts and prayers” certainly can help – help us and help the suffering. But it is the Lord who is always leading to good. And so, always, let us pray: “Thy will be done.”

(BMH)

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the evil in the world and our culture. What can we possibly do to counter its influence and make a difference? Well, the Rev. Jeremy Simons also says in his article that we can do something – not so much through our actions but through our spheres.

Angels, he says, are able to “communicate to another the goodness, blessedness and bliss that they themselves have received.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6478) And, “This communication happens by means of the spheres that surround everyone, both in heaven and on earth, for a person’s sphere inwardly affects their companions.” Indeed, angels are known to each other by the quality of their character – the spheres they project.

We all know people who project certain spheres – innocence, kindness, humility, peace. There are also people with negative spheres – power, intimidation, cruelty, greed. And, “This communication (with others) happens by means of the spheres that surround everyone.” We each have a sphere that may influence others – for good or evil – without our even being aware of it. So, we need to be aware of the importance of cultivating the sphere we present

to the world.

True Christian Religion 433.2 teaches: “We all have a spiritual atmosphere that emanates from the feeling derived from our love, and from the thinking prompted by those feelings. This atmosphere deeply affects other people.”

We not only have a certain power in the sphere we project, but our growth and regeneration are based in what we choose to love – and that is what defines our sphere. That sphere is generated by our ruling love, which always connects to use because it is in use that the good we receive from the Lord is manifested in our lives. That manifestation is the sphere we project – whether we’re aware of it or not.

True Christian Religion 457 teaches: “God loves each and every human being; and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love.”

This is both humbling and inspiring. What could possibly give our lives more meaning than to be conduits for the Lord to connect with other people, and through those connections to help make this a better world?

There’s not a lot we can do on our own to really change and improve the world in measurable ways, but through the spheres of what we choose to love we can be influences for good. We can have a positive effect. With the Lord’s help we can make a difference.

(BMH)

WHAT IS “NORMAL?”

Is there such a thing as a universal norm for human behavior that applies to all people in all times? Or are norms just a matter of local custom and individual preference? A society that adopts a culture of moral relativism and extreme individualism would say the latter – but does anyone really believe that? Everyone views *something* as beyond the pale. Every society has its taboos.

The modern, secular way of determining what is normal and acceptable is simply to look at how people behave. This is the method pioneered by Margaret Mead and Alfred Kinsey. “Normal” is then defined by what people do (or say they do), and the bias of the researchers who filter and interpret the data.

The deeper problem with the modern approach though is that human beings have a dual nature: we are born natural (in a basically animal state), but for the purpose of becoming spiritual (that is, human). What’s normal for us in our animal state is far from normal in our human state. What people do is not the best guide for what they *should* do.

In ancient Rome it was *normal* for people to watch cruel spectacles in the coliseum for entertainment. In the Middle Ages people and animals were routinely tortured. Throughout most of human history slavery was universally

accepted as the norm. In the early 20th century, eugenics became wildly popular in America and Europe. *Not* to apply to human beings the kind of selective breeding farmers use on animals came to be viewed as gross negligence.

These things were *normal* if we define "normal" as whatever a society happens to accept as normal. What will people 100 years from now think of some of the things we accept as normal today? In some areas of life, the bar of normalcy has been raised in our culture, but in others it has been lowered.

In His Word, the Lord has given us the means for distinguishing ideas and customs which conform to the heavenly norm from ways of thinking and acting which are contrary to the authentic humanity our Creator intends for us.

The true norm for human behavior is found in the order of heaven, in the way angels think and live. It is set forth in the Lord's Word – in the Ten Commandments, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem.

In this world, the heavenly norm stands out as exceptional, but it is what we pray for every day when we say "as in heaven, so upon the earth." It is a *hope* that we must never stop striving toward.

(WEO)

BACK TO CIVILITY

The growing lack of civility in our culture is aggravated by the anonymity and perversity of social media and behavior, where hate and anger and cynicism seem to reign unchecked. This seems especially true in political discourse, where opposing points of view are increasingly disrespected and even villainized.

A mild-mannered acquaintance was recently taken aback by such an attack and began looking for ways to elevate what used to be civil discussions from the heat of anger and accusation to the warmth of charity. It starts with this familiar teaching from the *Arcana*:

In the Christian world it is doctrinal matters that distinguish churches: and from them men call themselves Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists, or the Reformed and the Evangelical, and by other names. It is from what is doctrinal alone that they are so called, which would never be if they would make love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor the principal of faith. Doctrinal matters would then be only varieties of opinions concerning the mysteries of faith, which truly Christian men would leave to everyone to hold in accordance with his conscience, and would say in their hearts that a man is truly Christian when he lives as a Christian, that is, as the Lord teaches.

Thus from all the differing churches there would be made one church; and all the

dissentions that come forth from doctrine alone would vanish; yea, all hatreds of one against another would be dissipated in a moment. . . . The Ancient Church just after the flood, although spread through many kingdoms, was yet of this character, that is, mendiffered among themselves as to doctrinal matters, but still made charity the principal. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1799.4)

Our friend suggests an adapted version, which could be a useful guide:

In the civil affairs of the natural world it is political matters that distinguish parties; and from them man call themselves Democrats, Republicans, Liberal, Conservatives, and by other names. It is from what is political alone they are so called; which would never be if they would make love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor the principal of patriotism. Political matters would then be only varieties of opinion concerning the mysteries of politics, which truly patriotic men would leave to everyone to hold in accordance with his conscience and would say in their hearts that a man is truly a patriot when he lives what the Lord teaches, that is, as he loves his country. Thus from all the differing parties there would be made one church; and all the dissentions that come forth from politics alone would vanish; yes, all hatreds of one against another would be dissipated in a moment, and the Lord's kingdom would come upon the earth.

Arcana Coelestia 1016.2 also teaches: “Charity is like the warmth in springtime or summer that causes grass, plants and trees to grow. Without charity, or spiritual warmth, nothing grows.” Including civility, respect, kindness.

(BMH)

BRING BACK THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Speaking of civility, where have you gone, Mr. Rogers?

When our children were young, we felt comfortable leaving them in front of the TV with *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*. All the values we cherished were reflected and reinforced there. Many a child was sweetly comforted because “Mr. Rogers thinks I’m special.” Do Sponge Bob Square Pants or any of today’s Super Heroes convey that effect today?

A popular new movie – *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* – celebrates the life of the beloved Mr. Rogers. It pays homage to this humble, unassuming man who brought kindness and healing into a broken world. Hearts are rekindled with the gentle way he had of connecting with children, calming their fears, and helping them to feel safe and good about themselves. He had that effect on adults too, his genuine goodness disarming cynicism.

He never spoke down to children. Where we might feel awkward talking to a child in a wheelchair, he put that child at ease by sitting down at eye level and talking calmly about what it feels like. This was his gift. He treated everyone with kindness, respect, acceptance. And he recognized that children are special – that they have something to teach all of us.

And Jesus said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew 19:14*)

We need the innocence of children, so championed by Mr. Rogers, in this caustic world.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (*Isaiah 11:6*)

This is the vision of the "peaceable kingdom." This is the legacy of Mr. Rogers – kindness, compassion, charity for all. He was the epitome of the Great Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." He embodied the teaching: "Charity is the image of God." (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 106)

Mark Twain said: "Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see." Kindness is the language Mr. Rogers used to give children – and their parents – feelings of hope and peace, love and kindness, safety and acceptance. We could use a lot more of that in the neighborhood.

(BMH)

FROM CATERPILLAR TO BUTTERFLY

Asking what is normal for a human being is like asking what is normal for a caterpillar. Its wormlike state is normal for a time, but it is also normal for it to change into a butterfly. That is its destiny.

A caterpillar that does not become a butterfly is not a normal caterpillar because of what a caterpillar *is* – namely, a butterfly in its first stage of development.

Our destiny as natural human beings is to become spiritual human beings; in fact, angels. Unlike caterpillars, we have a choice about what we'll become. The ability to choose is a gift, but also a burden and a responsibility. We can't *not* choose. We are born into a proto-human state, and will either grow spiritually, regenerate and become fully human, or degenerate and become less than human. In the end, those are the only alternatives, for individuals and for a whole culture.

A society is humane in so far as it helps people grow out of their caterpillar state, and supports and encourages them in their aspiration to become butterflies.

(WEO)

PARENTING 101

From college campuses to street corners we see distressing images of unruly young people, full of anger, intolerance and foul language. It isn't all of them, to be sure, but enough to be concerning. The Academy of the New Church Boys

School is one oasis.

My wife and I recently heard a presentation by Boys School Principal Jeremy Irwin that is worth sharing. The Academy Secondary Schools host several open houses a year, each attracting 50 families or so and yielding a steady stream of recruits. Jeremy says, “we don’t hide who we are” and always lead with our mission to “prepare students for a principled and useful life in both the natural and spiritual worlds.”

“Spiritual worlds” sure gets visitors’ attention and leads to welcome questions and discussion. When new students come to the Academy they know what they are in for – and have already bought into it.

Jeremy likes to call his school – and it is the same for the Girls School – a family. He proudly boasts that in the Stuart Hall dormitory they do “family worship” probably better than most of the homes in the community. Both schools open their day with chapel, but every school night the boys in the dorm also have family worship — often led by themselves.

Another example Jeremy cites is Doug Reuter’s senior English class, which includes an eclectic list of books, ranging from the classic tale, *Beowulf*, to the hip and garish *Bright Lights, Big City*. What theme could you possibly find in such a disparate reading list? Well, Doug has one: teaching young men to be good fathers and good husbands. Where will you find another high school reading list with such an essential goal for this needy world?

Coincidentally, that night I read a column in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* by a young mother despairing of the modern culture – especially in big cities – where too many teenage boys live urban versions of *The Lord of the Flies*.

The writer calls out their parents: “You may feed them, give them a place to live, and send them to school. But you have failed miserably in training your children to be decent human beings. You haven’t given them any moral guidance. Nor have you taught them to value and respect themselves. Because you failed Parenting 101, your out-of-control hellcats are steadily chipping away at the quality of life in this city.”

Contrast that to the Academy Boys and Girls Schools which embrace the opportunity to act as surrogate parents to their family of students. (Some of these students come out of that inner-city environment, and they and their parents make a real commitment to become part of this family – including several hours of commuting each day.) The schools are actively and enthusiastically preparing them “for principled and useful lives in both the natural and spiritual worlds.” Senior boys are deliberately preparing to be caring fathers and loving husbands. I’m sure the girls are getting the same emphasis and preparation. The goal is that when these students marry they will take these values into their own families. And so they give us all hope.

(BMH)

Announcements

BAPTISMS

The innocence of the Lord flows into angels of the third heaven, where all are in innocence and wisdom; passes on through the lower heavens, but only through the innocent affections of angels there; and so descends directly and indirectly into little children. (Conjugial Love 396)

Aggro, Salomey Gyanewah – Abelemkpe, Greater Accra, Ghana, November 1, 2019, Rev. Hennock Aggro officiating.

Ahoin, Claire Charlotte – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, March 31, 2018, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating. Delayed report.

Aimé, Ouattara Klinnaga – At Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire, April 20, 2019, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Bäckman, Pia Evelyn – At Colchester, Essex, England, May 26, 2019, Rev. Louis D. Synnstedt officiating.

Bau-Madsen, Maisie Za'Hari – At Lafayette, Colorado, February 10, 2019 (born January 20, 2017), daughter of Darren and Angela Bau-Madsen, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

Bau-Madsen, Otho Nash – At Lafayette, Colorado, February 10, 2019 (born December 21, 2018), son of Darren and Angela Bau-Madsen, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

Boh, Emmanuel Bitra – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, March 31, 2018, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating. Delayed report.

Bomisso, Thingo – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, November 1, 2019, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating.

Bussard, Lucille Marilyn – At Rochester, Michigan, November 10, 2019 (born August 6, 2019), daughter of Michael and Aryn Bussard, Rev. Derek P. Elphick officiating.

Bussard, Michael – At Rochester, Michigan, November 10, 2019, Rev. Derek P. Elphick officiating.

Dadie, Felicite Melanie – At Youpougou, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, October 13, 2019, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating.

Dagbassoue, Jonatine – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Doué, Ulrich Serge – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, November 1, 2019, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating.

Gnepa, Natangel – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born May 13, 2014), son of Wele Fidel and Jonatine Dagbassoue, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Juliff Bäckman, Josefina Alison – At Colchester, Essex, England (born January 17, 2008), daughter of Gary Juliff and Pia Bäckman, Rev. Louis D. Synnstedt officiating.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kopistansky, Timothy – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 16, 2019, Rev. Erik J. Buss officiating.

Kouadja, Azaria – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born September 13, 2006), son of Jacques Kouadja and Pelagie Yamba, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Kouakou, Andromare N'zraman – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born March 12, 2009), son of Celestin Diby and Patricia Tape, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Kouassi, Juliette Adjoua – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Kouassi, Juste Boris N'Guessan – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born May 5, 2008), son of N'Dri N'Goran and Nadege Kouakou, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Lumsden, Josephine Mae – At Kempton, Pennsylvania, November 14, 2019 (born November 7, 2019), daughter of Derrick and Eden Lumsden, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

Miller, Elliot Kynett – At Sarver, Pennsylvania, November 9, 2019 (born April 10, 2019), daughter of Ryan and Lauren Miller, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Monti, Vanessa – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, November 1, 2019, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating.

Newman, John Daniel – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 27, 2019, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Nutche, Austin James – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 2, 2019 (born July 10, 2019), son of Jason and Meghan Nutche, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Okou, Emmanuela Affoue – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born December 8, 2009), daughter of Prospere Okou and Nadia Kouassi, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Otien, Mathilde Affoue – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Patterson, Anthony Michael – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 20, 2019 (born May 18, 2019), son of Anthony and Melissa Patterson, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Sekongo, Martine Ouanble – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Soro, Isaac – At Bouake, Gbeke, Côte d'Ivoire, July 6, 2019 (born January 1, 2012), son of N'Dahatien Soro and Martine Sekongo, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Zoua, Bertine – At Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, March 31, 2018, Rev. Cyprien K. Mangoua officiating.

CONFIRMATIONS

I will meditate on Your precepts and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word. Give me understanding and I shall keep your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:15,16)

Alden, Benjamin Matthew – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 24, 2019, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Draper, Blaise Sally – At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, November 3, 2019, Rev. Malcolm G. Smith officiating.

MARRIAGES

When married partners love each other tenderly, they think of eternity in regard to the marriage covenant, and not at all of its being terminated by death. (Conjugal Love 216)

Boyesen-Smith, Eyvind Brayden Boyesen and Leanna Jill Smith – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 30, 2019, Rev. Scott I. Frazier officiating.

M’Bro-Memel, Herve Amani M’Bro and Patricia You Memel – At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, July 14, 2018, Rev. Sylvain A. Agnes officiating, Delayed report.

McQueen-Gyllenhaal, Cadin Grahame McQueen and Rebecca Christina Gyllenhaal – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, December 6, 2019, Rev. Christopher A. Barber officiating.

Tate-Odhner, Nicholas Anthony Tate and Clara de Chazal Odhner – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 26, 2019, Rev. Derek P. Elphick officiating.

Dash, Sylvia Claire Brown – November 3, 2019, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. 63.

Doering, Loyd Alan – February 11, 2019, of Huntsville, Alabama. 91.

Edwards, Jeanne Costello – November 25, 2019, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 58.

Kluss, Vera Maria – October 28, 2019, of Bowie, Maryland. 96.

McClarren, Terry Robinson – June 26, 2019, of Pensacola, Florida. 78.

Potts, Luken William – November 10, 2019, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 80.

Seri, Henri Tape – December 30, 2018, of Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. 68.

Soderberg, Dolores Burnham – September 23, 2019, of Stafford, Virginia. 91.

Yardumian-Smyth, Brian – October 6, 2019, of Pawley’s Island, South Carolina. 87.

DEATHS

A person lives as a person after death. The Lord, who is Jehovah from eternity and the Creator of the universe, has provided that the condition of a person who conjoins himself with Him by living according to His commandments be more blessed and happy after death than his condition before it in the world. (Conjugal Love 28)

Alan, Thomasine Rowntree – November 1, 2019, of New Glarus, Wisconsin. 86.

Alford, Edwin Franklin Jr. – November 11, 2019, of Bowie, Maryland. 87.



ADVANCEMENT

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"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21



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