

# NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

**JULY/AUGUST 2021**



## **Baptism and Implanting Remains**

Everyone loves a baptism – for its sphere of innocence, the blessing on a baby’s life, the commitment and responsibility taken on by the parents, the first of remains being instilled, and the loving, enduring promise from the Lord for this potential angel. See a sermon on baptism and remains by the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs. page 268.

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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 258) include:

- *The Gift of Innocence*: We are all born into innocence – that sweet willingness to be led by the Lord. We are also born with inclinations to evil of every kind. That assures our freedom. It also defines the challenge of being “born again” into that innocence that leads to heaven. But the Lord is always there, lifting us up and showing the way.
- *Are Feelings Inborn? Can They Be Changed?* “The subjective appearance is that we have little or no control over the way we feel, or that our feelings cannot be changed. The Writings assert that this is not the long-term reality. It is true that of ourselves we are powerless over our feelings, and many factors do impinge on and limit our freedom. In the end, however, we are free.”

We all are blessed when we begin our journey as newborns – with the sacrament of baptism and the Lord’s mercy implanting remains throughout our lives. In a sermon about this whole process the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs talks about our duty as parents to uphold the “contract” of baptism – and the protection offered by the Lord through “all the states of the affection of good and truth which a person is gifted by the Lord, from earliest infancy even to the end of life.” (Page 268)

One of the most familiar stories in the Word is Noah and the Ark. The Rev. Solomon Keal offers a sermon on *Noah and the Dove – A Parable for Our Lives*. As first a raven and then a dove are released from the ark after 40 days and 40 nights of rain and flood, “The behavior of these birds appears to give Noah clues about the end of the flood.” But even more importantly, “what clues can they give to us about the ends of the floods in our lives?” (Page 274)

In *From the Bishop’s Office* the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. talks about the importance of trust – trusting in the Lord and in each other – and how that relates to being part of the church. He says: “May we grow in our ability to place ourselves more fully in the hands of the Lord. May we also extend the courtesy of trust to others, that the Lord is working with them and causing them to do great things.” (Page 281)

In her Commencement Address for Bryn Athyn College, Reagan Odhner advised the graduates to be true to their values, no matter what life throws at them. She speaks from experience. She served two combat tours in Afghanistan with the U.S. Marines, overcame cancer, and works all over the world to improve the living conditions of those in need. And always it has been her values that have guided her. (Page 285)

In the Commencement Address for the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools the Rev. Chuck Blair counseled the graduates simply to “Build.” We know, he said, that “on the other side of this ‘leaving’ and the journey that follows it is a wondrous land, a promised land. It is a land filled with beauty and enchantment. It is a land as well filled with giants, walled cities and challenges galore. That is the land in which you will build. And build you must.” (Page 290)

Countries all over the world set aside special days to honor those men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down their lives in war for the cause of freedom. In the United States this is Memorial Day on the last Monday in May. We publish Bruce Henderson’s Memorial Day address in Bryn Athyn, which focused on three local young men who paid that price. They represent the connection we feel with names on plaques and gravestones from battlegrounds all over the world that call us to be worthy of their sacrifice. (Page 306)

The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers says in a study on *Divine Foresight and Human Free Will*: “We are free to choose our targets, and in our lives we choose many. Sometimes we change our minds. . . . That is where our essential freedom lies. It is because of this that we can reform ourselves and so be regenerated by the Lord.” (Page 292)

One focus of the Rev. Jeffrey Smith in serving the church is our young people and he asks: do we have a problem? It is often said that a church is only as healthy as the next generation. And while it is not only the decline in church attendance among young people that concerns our future, it does raise questions. In what will be a continuing series on the topic, Jeff is looking for help with the answers. (Page 312)

Church News (page 316) includes:

- Bryn Athyn College Commencement, graduates and awards
- Academy Secondary Schools Commencement, graduates and awards
- The Annual Meeting of the General Church Corporation and elections to the Board of Directors
- Latest pastoral moves throughout the Church
- Highlights from the Academy Board of Trustees May meeting

IN THIS ISSUE

- The opening of the Old School Village retirement facility in Kempton, Pennsylvania
- Two new graduate certificate programs in religious studies offered at Bryn Athyn College
- A new hire in General Church Advancement
- Election of new Board members at the Annual Meeting of the Swedenborg Foundation

# Editorials

*Bruce Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

## THE GIFT OF INNOCENCE

The easy part is just being born into innocence. The hard part is something we are called to do on our own: become reborn into the innocence of trusting and following the Lord rather than our own inclinations. The process is eased by the Lord helping us all along the way, from implanting remains to gently leading our spirit.

We are all moved by the image on the cover of this issue – a beautiful, innocent baby being baptized with the water of the Holy Spirit. There we see the commitment of the parents to raise their child to love the Lord and live by His commandments. We also see the blessing and promise by the Lord to lead that child to heaven.

But there is nothing easy or guaranteed about all this. As we are all born into innocence, we are also born with inclinations to evils of every kind. This is what spiritual freedom is all about. We all know the struggle – for ourselves and for our children.

We long to keep our children in a sphere of innocence as long as possible, but it's almost impossible in an increasingly challenging world. Parents have always worried about whatever tempts their children to stray, but never has the culture been more seductive, insidious and threatening. We may echo the despair of William Butler Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming*, written just after the carnage of World War I and a personal family tragedy:

Things fall apart, the center cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

With the threat so pervasive it is hard not only to preserve the innocence of children but also to embrace the calling as we grow older: to reclaim that innocence so that we may enter heaven. No matter how hard the hells fight to lead us astray, the Lord is giving us all the help we need – as long as we are



receptive to it.

We all know the story when Jesus was asked by His disciples who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He set a child in the midst of them and warned: “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matthew* 18:1-3) When a bewildered Nicodemus asked, “How can a man be born again when he is old?” Jesus told him – and all of us: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (*John* 3:4,5)

That’s what it all comes down to – the journey of life, always cycling back to innocence. As we are drawn to the innocent sphere of babies and children, so are we drawn to that state in the elderly – people who have come to peace and are willing to “let go and let God.” In between is the struggle, where we try to keep our focus on the Lord while being pulled by our own self-centeredness and wayward delights. We may assume that such habits can be easily subdued, but this is what makes the journey both challenging and hopeful. It is also why rebirth is such a theme in the Word – the ultimate triumph in the worldly struggle between good and evil. “To the extent that we are kept from our self-centeredness, the Lord flows in.” (*Heaven and Hell* 278)

We may look at children with a sense of longing. They are inherently happy and trusting. Why can’t we be that way again? But we can. We become innocent when we are as eager and willing to be led by the Lord as we were as children to be led by our parents. But it is not “child’s play” to receive the kingdom of God, becoming as that little child again. It takes courage and perseverance to set our ego aside and follow the Lord, but it is the ultimate deliverance.

The difference between a baby’s innocence and our own as we become reborn comes down to choice. In children it is inborn. We have to choose the innocence of being led as adults – or choose against and go our own way.

What makes the process all the more challenging – and essential – is that the crisis of our culture affects adults every bit as much as the young. At its heart it is the choice between what is worldly and what is spiritual. There seems less and less spiritual awareness in much of our world – any sense of serving our soul, not our body. But the Lord is always there, assuring us that His yoke is easy and His burden light, and ready to lift us up – as reborn children – in His arms into heavenly happiness. Thus “the ceremony of innocence” triumphs. And we are twice blessed. Forever blessed.

(BMH)

### **ARE FEELINGS INBORN? CAN THEY BE CHANGED?**

Can we change our feelings? There are many states and human conditions that seem to us to be unchangeable, or immutable. Alcoholics, addicts, and many

others testify to feeling that their condition was inborn and that they were powerless to change it. All of us in our struggles to improve our health, our habits, our work, and our relationships can feel similarly.

The Writings support the idea that every person is inclined by heredity to many different kinds of feelings – some good, some not so good. They state that we inherit tendencies to every evil, and to some evils more than others. But they do not suggest that these inherited tendencies are determinative, and instead place our actual behaviors in the realm of human free will.

Genetics play a significant role in all of our behaviors – even to the point that they appear to be determinative. But the understanding of science about their effects is really nothing more than that people have inherited predispositions to these behaviors, which is what the Writings state.

The most common statement in the Writings about our inherited evils is that we are, from heredity, inclined to “evils of every kind”:

We, the human race, have been born into evils of every kind. From birth onward we have tendencies toward things that come from hell. Unless we are born again or regenerated, we cannot come into heaven. (*True Christianity* 329; *Divine Providence* 83, *New Jerusalem* 83)

The Writings are also explicit in stating that the specific practices that parents engage in are passed on as inclinations to their children:

In addition to all this, young children vary in their nature and disposition. They do so because of their heredity derived from parents and by succession from grandparents and great grandparents; for **any action which has been confirmed in parents through habitual practice acquires a natural disposition to it and is implanted through heredity in young children.** And this is how they come to possess varying inclinations. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2300)

**Qualities that have become matters of one’s love and consequent life are passed on hereditarily to offspring.** People know that a person is born into evil, and that he acquires this state hereditarily from his parents. Some also believe that he acquires it not from his parents, but through his parents from Adam, but this is an erroneous supposition. A person acquires the state from his father, from whom he has his soul, which is clothed with a body in the mother. For the sperm which comes from the father is the first vessel receptive of life – a vessel, however, of such a character as it was in the father, being in the form of his love, and everyone’s love in the greatest and least of its forms is the same. The sperm

moreover carries within it an endeavor toward the human form, into which it also gradually develops. It follows therefore that evils we call hereditary come from fathers, and so from grandfathers and great-grandfathers, being transmitted in succession from them into their offspring. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 269)

Hereditary evil derives its origin from every one's parents and parents' parents, or from grandparents and ancestors successively. **Every evil which they have acquired by actual life, even so that by frequent use or habit it has become like a nature, is derived into the children, and becomes hereditary to them,** together with that which had been implanted in the parents from grandparents and ancestors. The hereditary evil from the father is more inward, and the hereditary evil from the mother is more outward. The former cannot be easily rooted out, but the latter can. When one is being regenerated, the hereditary evil inrooted from his nearest parents is plucked up by the roots; but with those who are not being regenerated, or who cannot be regenerated, it remains. This then is hereditary evil. (See also n. 313, 494, 2122, 2910, 3518, 3701) This is also evident to everyone who reflects, and also from the fact that every family has some peculiar evil or good by which it is distinguished from other families; and that this is from parents and ancestors on down. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4317.4)

These passages suggest that all of our inclinations, even inclinations toward specific behaviors, are inherited. As the passage immediately above states, everyone knows that families exhibit common tendencies and behaviors.

These tendencies, then, are the evident starting point of our perceived desires. They make us sensitive and receptive to experiences influencing us in the direction of particular behaviors. They make us feel different from other people, who do not feel the same way that we do. They are part of the identity that distinguishes us from everyone else.

Numerous statements also make it clear that these tendencies to evil continually increase, unless they are checked by regeneration:

The only thing that breaks the inclination and tendency toward evil that is passed on by parents to their offspring and descendants is the new birth from the Lord that is called regeneration. In the absence of rebirth, this inclination not only remains uninterrupted but even grows from one generation to the next and becomes a stronger tendency toward evil until it encompasses evils of every kind. (*True Christianity* 521)

Hereditary evils are derived, increased, and accumulated from parents and ancestors in a long backward series, and not as is believed, from the first man's eating of the tree of knowledge (n. 313, 494, 2910, 3469, 3701, 4317, 8550). Therefore, hereditary evils are at this day more malignant than formerly (n. 2122). Infants who die such and are educated in heaven are from heredity nothing but evils (n. 2307, 2308, 4563). Hence they are of various dispositions and inclinations (n. 2300). Every man's interior evils are from the father, and the exterior from the mother (n. 1815, 3701). (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 83)

The key difference between the popular understanding of the genetic or biological determination of our character and identity, and the inherited tendencies described in the Writings, is that while the former are considered to be immutable, hereditary evil is only a tendency. While it disposes a person to behave in certain ways, every person is free to adopt or reject these inclinations.

We are not born with actual evils but only with a tendency toward them. We may have a greater or a lesser tendency to a specific evil. Therefore after death no one is judged on the basis of his or her inherited evil; we are judged only on the basis of our actual evils, the evils we ourselves have committed. This is clear from the following commandment of the Lord: "Parents will not be put to death for their children; children will not be put to death for their parents. Each will die for her or his own sins." (*Deuteronomy* 24:16) I have become certain of this from my experience in the spiritual world of little children who had died. They have an inclination toward evils and will them, but they do not do them, because they are brought up under the Lord's supervision and are saved. [3] The only thing that breaks the inclination and tendency toward evil that is passed on by parents to their offspring and descendants is the new birth from the Lord that is called regeneration. (*True Christianity* 521)

This is consistent, I believe, with the current understanding of the scientific community on questions about the origins of various behaviors, from alcoholism to risk-taking. They are caused by a complex interplay of genetic, hormonal, social and environmental influences. While scientific statements about these kinds of things do not explicitly include "free will", the suggestion of a multiplicity of factors is as close as science comes to the idea. "Free will" is not a scientific characteristic, because everything in science is determined by the laws of nature, including randomness. But free will is taught in the Writings. In fact, they teach that "nothing becomes attached to a person except

what he does in freedom in accordance with his reason.” (*Divine Providence* 138)

So according to the Heavenly Doctrines our heredity disposes us to act in certain ways, but in the end we are free to choose whether to affirm those dispositions or rebel against them. The subjective appearance is that we have little to no control over the way that we feel, or that our feelings cannot be changed. The Writings assert that this is not the long-term reality. It is true that of ourselves we are powerless over our feelings, and many factors do impinge on and limit our freedom. In the end, however, we are free. If we pray to the Lord and follow His teachings, shunning evils as sins, He can change our feelings. We have no immediate direct control over our feelings, but they can be modified by the Lord as we choose how to think about them or to act contrary to them. The Writings tell us that actions precede, and that our feelings about those actions often come later:

Action comes first, then the desire for it in the person's will follows. For when a person is led by his understanding to carry out any action, he is at length led by his will to do it, till at last he has taken it on as an action performed habitually. When this point is reached it is introduced into the rational or internal man; and once it has been introduced, truth is no longer that which motivates him when he does a good action but good. For now he begins to feel within it something of what is blessed and so to speak of heaven. This remains with him after death, and by means of it the Lord raises him up to heaven. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4353)

This process of change is described numerous times in the Writings and is a gift from the Lord. If a love that we have is an evil one, it must be possible for it to change. If this were not possible, the love could not be called an evil.

(JFS)

# Letters to the Editors

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

## *Seeking Greater Engagement*

To The Editors:

As a result of his encounter in the Dutch city of Delft with the Lord on the night of April 6, 1744, Swedenborg knew that he was loved by God in a deeply personal way which, in the nature of things, is impossible to communicate entirely to a third party. Over the following years he visited heaven on many occasions.

One can imagine the extraordinary beauty that he was able to experience in heaven, but he was not able to describe the effect it had on him despite his best efforts. For the readers of the *Arcana*, it remains an *arcana*, just as the lover extolling the beauty of the beloved remains an *arcana* in the ears of the listener.

However, if one has had the experience of falling in love one can understand to some extent Swedenborg's interpretation of Abraham's journeys in the Promised Land. As Swedenborg says, Abraham represents Divine celestial love, and the promised land is a place seen through those wonderful spectacles.

Swedenborg was disappointed by the muted response from the various eminent people to whom he sent his various volumes, as outlined in the article by Alexis Vega-Singer and Jonathan S. Rose in the January-February 2021 *New Church Life*, page 52. This is still true in spite of the work of Gjørwell mentioned on page 56 of the article. I worked in Sweden for two years as a doctor and none of the several doctors I met had heard of Swedenborg.

In *Deuteronomy* 6.4 we have the well-known command of God to love Him with all our heart and so on. However, it is a command, and you cannot love by command. The words "thou shalt love the Lord thy God" can also be understood as a prophecy or a promise. As we know, God created the sun and moon on the fourth day of creation, referring to the coming of love. It is just as impossible for a man to place the sun, or for that matter the moon, in the sky as it is to love by command.

As Swedenborg implies, the creation story is the story of the individual development of men and women. Puberty comes and conjugal love arrives as if by Divine promise, like the sun appearing on the fourth day of creation.

Reading the first few chapters of *Genesis* it is puzzling to note that God found it “not good” that man should be alone. As it says in *Genesis 2:20-21* God having formed every beast of the field and brought them to Adam, “there was not found an help meet for him.” Adam had God, so it is puzzling that God by Himself, was not meet, or in modern English, sufficient for Adam’s emotional needs.

In *Genesis 2:22* we read that God brought Eve to be with him as a kind of stand-in for Himself, but much easier to love than Himself.

Swedenborg’s Writings are part of the Divine Word. In a sense he meant them to be a description of the beauty of heaven, just as you and I attempt to describe the beauty of the form and character of somebody with whom we are conjugally related, “a significant other” as the phrase has it. Often, the stock phrase, “I cannot see what he/she sees in him/her” describes the situation. It is no use the lover expanding on the merits of the beloved to a third party. All his/her words will fall on stony ground apart from polite nodding of the listener’s head.

Swedenborg knew that he was loved by God in a deeply personal way which, in the nature of things, is impossible to communicate to a third party. One can imagine the extraordinary beauty of the places that Swedenborg was able to experience in heaven, but it is very difficult to “picture” that for someone else. There is not the same emotional impact as experiencing it first-hand. It remains an *arcana*, just as the lover extolling the beauty of the beloved remains an *arcana* in the ears of the listener.

I think John Pitcairn hoped that by building a Swedenborgian center in Bryn Athyn there would be an increase in interest in the Writings, and the numbers of the Church of the New Jerusalem would increase. As we know, it did not do so to the degree which Pitcairn had hoped for. I think he also recommended that New Church people have lots of children, as another way of building up numbers. But one cannot guarantee that New Church children will grow into enthusiastic New Church adults.

However, this concept of begetting children implies, or corresponds, with a love between a man and a woman. Most people do not make the connection between this love and Divine love, which can fill our lives like the sun. As with Adam and Eve in the garden, one of the best ways for a man to experience the love of God is to love and be loved by a woman; a help-meet for him.

David Lister  
Hook, Hampshire, United Kingdom

## *An Enduring Image*

To The Editors:

Once again your writers have done a special job from start to finish with the March/April issue of *New Church Life*.

Your cover for this issue (When the Veil was Torn in Two) struck me as special. My mother, Lucille Synnestvedt Blair, taught Sunday School in Pittsburgh for many years. One of her favourite demonstrations of Good Friday was to tear a piece of material very dramatically while reciting, "It is finished."

Also, in the Life Lines tribute to E. Boyd Asplundh (page 161) his date of birth was given incorrectly as May 4, 1929. It was actually 1926.

Kenneth Blair  
Sarver, Pennsylvania

## *Delight in Sharing*

To The Editors:

The Rev. W. Cairns Henderson wrote on page 330 in the July 1973 issue of *New Church Life*:

"The May issue of the *Missionary News Letter*, sponsored by the Church Extension Committee of the General Church, and edited by Richard Linquist, offers several examples of ways in which efforts are made toward the growth of the New Church within those whose who are in it or in its sphere and toward its extension among others."

This comment followed a six-page article entitled *Sharing*, written by me, that was published in that issue.

I was 34 years old then and the emotional boost that I felt from seeing my name and ideas published in the official magazine of the General Church apparently ignited a fire in me to write additional items for the Church. Subsequently I submitted more than 30 articles for publication that were approved of by former editors: the Revs. Martin Pryke, Morley Rich and Donald L. Rose.

I would say in all modesty that these editors displayed a high degree of wisdom in choosing to publish my thoughts or perhaps they were just desperate to publish almost anything by a member of the laity during their



tenures as editor.

Yet I am just one of many faithful and, I hope, humble readers of this magazine, now and in past years. I envision this congregation of readers as having minds smiling at truths, shining from the printed words in *New Church Life* – truths directly quoted from Revelation and as interpreted and expressed in written forms by members of the ministry and laity.

Richard Linquist  
Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

# Baptism and Implanting Remains

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

Lessons: *Deuteronomy* 6:1-13; *Mark* 12:28-34; *Arcana Coelestia* 190

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (*Deuteronomy* 6:4-7)

These words spoken by Moses to the children of Israel just before they entered the land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership were a part of his farewell address. They came immediately following a restatement of the Ten Commandments, and so the impact of them is magnified considerably.

Think about it. Moses had been like a father to them, guiding and leading them through all kinds of trials and temptations. Now he was giving them some last words of advice from the Lord before they set about their conquest of Canaan. Specifically, he told them that they should acknowledge the one and only God and love Him with all their heart, soul and strength. And that all the words he commanded them – the Ten Commandments – should be continually in their hearts. This was the necessary key to their successfully entering Canaan, just as with us it is the key to successfully entering heaven.

Now, considering the baptism we had the pleasure of celebrating this morning, note the instructions to the parents that followed: “You shall teach [these things] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as

frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

What an incredible message to reflect upon! Notice, it did not say that we should make a passing attempt at teaching our children the Ten Commandments, or occasionally mention that the Lord should be loved above all things.

It said that these things should continually be before the eyes of our children, frequently talked about and discussed, until they become indelibly written on their hearts. This commandment of the Lord in His Word is directed specifically to us as parents, because the Lord knows that this is vital in the raising of our children to become angels of heaven. This is a very tall order and a huge responsibility that we take on as parents when we bring our children to be baptized, and so in celebrating a baptism it is useful for us to reflect upon on how successfully we are following these instructions.

The Heavenly Doctrine frequently states that the Lord’s primary goal in creation is a heaven from the human race. In order to accomplish this end, He has provided for two loves which flow from conjugal love – the love of procreating and the love of protecting what has been procreated. (*Conjugal Love* 385)

It is obvious that both of these loves are necessary in providing for a heaven from the human race. For if a couple procreates and produces a dozen children but fails to protect them from evil influences, or to raise them to obey the commandments, then they will not necessarily choose the life that leads to heaven. Therefore, if we have had the privilege of becoming the parents of a child in this world, our work has just begun, because now we have the responsibility of protecting them and raising them to become angels of heaven.

So what does the Heavenly Doctrine say about how we can go about successfully achieving this task? The first proactive step we can take as parents is providing for the implantation of remains from the Lord in our children. Our third lesson described remains as: “all the states of the affection of good and truth which a person is gifted by the Lord, from earliest infancy even to the end of life” in this world. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1906:1) It points out that without implanting these good, peaceful and innocent states to counterbalance our hereditary evil we would be worse than wild beasts!

And that’s not the worst of it. Another passage points out that without

This commandment of the Lord in His Word is directed specifically to us as parents, because the Lord knows that this is vital in the raising of our children to become angels of heaven.

If we have had the privilege of becoming the parent of a child in this world, our work has just begun, because now we have the responsibility of protecting them and raising them to become angels of heaven.

remains a person would be doomed to “eternal damnation.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 561) From this it is clear that we should never underestimate the extreme importance of implanting remains in our children.

We are told that there are three different kinds of remains implanted during the course of our lives: “the goods of infancy, the goods of ignorance, and the goods of intelligence.” (*Ibid.* 2280:2)

Let’s look at the goods of infancy. These remains are implanted from birth until the child is beginning to be instructed and to know certain things – roughly from birth until age 10.

These remains of innocence are implanted by the Lord through the celestial angels primarily through the sense of touch. Nursing at their mother’s breast, a sphere of love and affection from cuddling with the child, holding him or her in your arms, hugging them, and showering them with kisses. Also, by providing an orderly and peaceful environment in the home, where they feel safe, nurtured and supported.

These remains the Lord implants are primarily through the actions of the child’s parents and their siblings. They are implanted without our conscious awareness, which is meant by the words of our text: the Lord your God will give you “houses full of all good things, which you did not fill.” (*Deuteronomy* 6:11)

The next remains implanted are called the goods of ignorance. These are implanted during the age of instruction, which the Heavenly Doctrine defines as between 10 and 20. Throughout the child’s schooling, remains continue to be implanted by parents in the home, and now many are also implanted by teachers – especially when they are teaching them the stories of the Word, which helps to support the idea that New Church education founded on the Word really is critical to the development of our youth.

These remains, more now of truth in this state of instruction, are implanted without our conscious awareness, which is meant by the words: the Lord your God will give you “hewn-out wells which you did not dig.” (*Deuteronomy* 6:11)

The final kind of remains implanted are called the goods of intelligence, from age 20 and upward. Now the ability of the Lord to implant remains in us is no longer solely according to the actions of our parents and teachers,

but becomes primarily our own responsibility. We allow the Lord to implant these remains in us when in states of sincere humility and innocence we reflect upon what we know to be good and true from reading the Word.

Interestingly, these last remains, the goods of intelligence, are called “the best” of all the remains implanted, because there is now wisdom attached to the states of innocence. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2280:5) But the passage points out that the remains received in infancy are still absolutely vital, because those initial states of innocence are the building blocks that all the other remains to be implanted are founded upon.

Now let’s focus on how the promises a parent makes at a baptism connect to the words of our text. At the time of baptism, a parent promises that for themselves and for their child they will acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth, that evils will be shunned as sins against Him, and that a life of good will be learned and lived.

Our text instructs us as parents to teach loving the one only God above all things and obedience to the commandments “diligently” to our children. At baptism we bring our children before the Lord and promise to love and acknowledge Him as the one God of heaven and earth and to obey His commandments by shunning evils as sins and living a good life. The sign used in baptism that we will do these things is the mark of the cross made on the child’s forehead and chest.

This is a sign that the acknowledgement of the Lord and shunning evils as sins will be done with all our heart and all our soul. Just as our text said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

It is important to note that baptism is a *sign*, as the Heavenly Doctrine puts it, that a person will renounce the devil and all his works, and have faith in the Lord. (*True Christian Religion* 685:2) But just as the sign of a handshake given to seal a contract or promise becomes meaningless if the contract is reneged upon or the promise broken, so the sign of baptism becomes meaningless if the promises agreed to are not kept.

Just as the sign of a handshake given to seal a contract or promise becomes meaningless if the contract is reneged upon or the promise broken, so the sign of baptism becomes meaningless if the promises agreed to are not kept.

So let us all use the wonderful occasion of infant baptism as an opportunity to reflect on the promises we made to the Lord at the time of our children's baptisms and the promises that our parents made for us when we were children.

Baptism is an important sign that we will do these things for ourselves and for our children, but it does not confer instant salvation. It merely indicates a contract that we enter into with the Lord, that we will do our best to love Him above all things and to demonstrate that by following His commandments. It is a sign that we are willing to undertake the process of regeneration, meant by the Lord's words: "You must be born again. . . . Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (*John 3:7,5*)

Regarding this process of being born again, we are told that "all regeneration is effected by the Lord by means of the truths of faith and a life according to them." (*Arcana Coelestia* 10387) This teaching helps to emphasize the importance of the instruction the Lord gives to us as parents, teachers and adults in our text: "You shall teach [these things] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

So let us all use the wonderful occasion of infant baptism as an opportunity to reflect on the promises we made to the Lord at the time of our children's baptisms and the promises that our parents made for us when we were children.

Are we doing our best to help the Lord implant those goods of infancy, those remains of innocence, by taking every chance we get to cuddle and nurture our children? Are we doing all we can to teach them the first and greatest of all the commandments, to love the Lord their God and Creator with all their heart, soul and strength? Are we actively encouraging them, as frequently as possible, to learn the Lord's commandments and impressing upon them the importance of obeying them? And perhaps most importantly, are we modeling this desirable behavior appropriately for them by doing these things ourselves? Are we diligently making the worship of the Lord and a life of religion the focal point of our family?

Let us remember well these words of the Lord in our story from the gospel of Mark: "To love [the Lord] with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." (*Mark 12:33*)

When we make religion a part of our life by living according to the

commandments, we are making the true kinds of offerings and sacrifices that are pleasant in the sight of the Lord. And as we raise our children to do so as well, may our families be able to respond affirmatively to the Lord's challenge: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" by enthusiastically proclaiming: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (*Joshua 24:15*)



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# Noah and the Dove: A Parable for Our Lives

*A Sermon by The Rev. Solomon J. Keal*

Lessons: *Genesis 8: 1-19; Psalm 32: 6-7; Isaiah 54: 9-10; Matthew 6: 25-27; Secrets of Heaven 705, 741, 905*

Then God remembered Noah, and all that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. (*Genesis 8:1*)

The story of Noah and the Ark, and the great flood that filled the earth, is familiar to Christians and non-Christians alike. In fact, parables and myths about floods can be found in many cultures and religions around the world. The frightening imagery of being trapped by floodwaters is one that many people in the world can relate to in some way.

Many of these mythological flood stories appear to describe an angry god punishing the human race. However, in the New Church we are fortunate to know that the parable of Noah describes the way that the Lord preserves and protects us during hard times because of His never-ending love for the human race. (See *Isaiah 54: 9-10*)

As we heard in the lessons, a “flood” symbolizes times of spiritual struggle or what are called “temptations” in the Writings of Swedenborg. (See *Arcana Coelestia 705, 741, 905*) This correspondence has become part of our everyday language. (*Ibid.* 506) When we’re going through a difficult spiritual state, we talk about being “swept away” or “lost at sea” or about “drowning” or barely able “to keep our head above water.”

Even modern psychological language uses the term “flooded” to describe feeling overwhelmed by emotions such as anger, stress, fear, grief, depression, selfishness or negative thoughts. We will all experience spiritual “flooding” at some point in our lives, so one of the first stories in the Word addresses this.



The ark is a symbol for our mind (see *Arcana Coelestia* 638-645) which can get tossed about by floods of negative thoughts and feelings from the hells. During those floods the Lord protects and preserves the goodness in us (Noah), so that even though we may feel miserable, we are not completely destroyed. (*Ibid.* 530)

But then we might ask, how do we get out of situations like that? How do we find safe passage to the solid ground of peace and calm? How do we find our way out of temptations and spiritual struggles? As I was reading what the Heavenly Doctrines say about this story, I kept looking for answers: How can I end the spiritual floods in my life? How can I make it so that I will stop feeling the way I feel? And the answer came back to me: “I can’t, but the Lord *can*.”

We can’t change the way we feel, any more than Noah could end the flood on his own. The forces of the hells are too big for us to handle on our own, like a vast ocean. (See *True Christian Religion* 68) We can’t lift ourselves out of temptation by our own bootstraps. The Lord is the One who brings an end to the “floods” in our lives. Part of our job is to have patience in riding out the storm, and to trust that “this too shall pass.”

The floodwaters rose for “forty days and forty nights” (*Genesis* 7:12), symbolizing spiritual struggle or temptation. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 758-762) And the “waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.” (*Genesis* 7:24) But Noah and his family didn’t set their feet on dry land until about a year after the flood began! (*Ibid.* 7:11; 8:14)

It takes time for our spiritual “floods” to recede, and so it takes a lot of patience and trust on our part. But this story does describe something else that we can do as we “trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.” (*Psalms* 37:7) And it has to do with a kind of “spiritual bird-watching.”

We begin by opening the window of the ark. (*Genesis* 8:6) This symbolizes opening our minds toward heaven and the Lord. When we turn to the Lord in prayer, the Heavenly Doctrines tell us that Lord can fill our hearts with hope and comfort. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2535) In fact Noah’s name means “comfort.” We can get a sense that there is light at the end of the tunnel for us. When we turn to the Lord in His Word, we can be reminded of the many ways that the Lord and His angels are protecting us from harm, even during hard times. (*Ibid.* 863)

How can I end the spiritual floods in my life? How can I make it so that I will stop feeling the way I feel? And the answer came back to me: “I can’t, but the Lord *can*.”

The behavior of these birds appears to give Noah clues about the end of the flood. So what clues can they give to us about the ends of the floods in our lives?

But the next part of the story describes an interesting and somewhat cryptic series of events involving birds. Noah first sends out a raven, which flies back and forth. Next, he sends out a dove, which returns to him. Then he sends the dove out again, and this time she returns to him with an olive leaf. Finally, Noah lets the dove go again and this time she doesn't return. The behavior of these birds appears to give Noah clues about the end of the flood. So what clues can they give to us about

the ends of the floods in our lives?

Throughout the Word, birds represent our thoughts. (*Ibid.* 745) In our lesson from the Gospels, when the Lord is comforting us and encouraging us not to worry, He asks us to "look at the birds of the air." (*Matthew* 6: 25-26) The Lord wants us to observe our thoughts. Because in observing our thoughts we can begin to see patterns in the way that the flooding recedes in our minds. And when we familiarize ourselves with these patterns we can feel more comfort in knowing that the Lord is leading us out of the flood.

The first bird that Noah releases is a raven, which flies "to and fro," back and forth. The Heavenly Doctrines teach us that the raven represents falsity or lies. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 864-867) The first stage in the Lord delivering us from spiritual floods involves a time when we are confused and uncertain.

The Writings say: "False ideas then flit through the mind; they depart and return." (*Ibid.*) "We are left with almost no idea of what is true and good. We are so unsure that we scarcely know whether anything is true." (848) In this stage, our mind is filled with "numberless misconceptions." (865.2) For example, after a time of depression, the thought might fly through our minds that we are weak and worthless. This is a lie, but it flies through our minds nonetheless.

Sometimes we can get flooded with anger in our relationships with loved ones and then the thoughts might fly through our minds that "they *always* treat me badly," or "they've *never* done anything nice," or "they *made* me react the way I did," or "I was *justified* in my violent reaction." These, too, are lies, but we often believe them anyway.

You might be wondering, in what way is this knowledge offering me comfort? The comfort can be found in simply knowing that this is normal. It's normal for us to be confused after a spiritual flood. It's normal for our minds to be filled with lies from the hells at such a time. But our job, as we look out

the window of the ark, is to be a spiritual bird watcher; to look at the birds of the air; to observe our own thoughts. When we can identify a thought flying through our minds as a lie from hell, then we are at the first stage of being freed from our spiritually flooded state. We see a raven.

In the second stage, Noah releases a dove, but the dove comes back to him. A dove was seen at the Lord's baptism as the form of the Lord's Holy Spirit. (See *Matthew* 3:16) In a similar way, this dove also represents the Lord's truth. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 870) This is the stage where we begin to find some clarity about our spiritual state. We begin to know the truth, and the truth begins to set us free. (See *John* 8:32; *Psalm* 55)

We might experience a flood of feeling overwhelmed by depression, grief or stress. In that flooded state, we might not even recognize *why* we feel miserable. But after we begin to identify some of the lies that the hells are telling us, we then begin to see more clearly why we feel the way we do.

For example: "I just realized that the reason I'm so moody today is because it's the anniversary of my Mom's death. I see now that this is grief." Or, "I'm sorry I got so angry with you. I'm just realizing that I'm so snappy today because of stress at work." The true ideas begin to fly through our minds. The flood waters haven't fully receded yet and we might still feel miserable, but at least we are more aware of what's going on.

But the dove flies out and then comes back to Noah. The Writings tell us that this represents a sense of ownership and control over these true ideas. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 873-878) Even the language of the story conveys this with its focus on the person of Noah as he sent out the dove "from himself," and that she returned "to him . . . So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself." (*Genesis* 8:8-9)

The Heavenly Doctrines say that in this stage "we imagine that we are doing good deeds and thinking true thoughts under our own power." (*Arcana Coelestia* 874) So it's as if we're hanging on to that dove and claiming it as our own. In this stage we might clearly identify the truth about whatever spiritual struggle we're in (the dove flying out), but we also think that we can control it on our own (the dove returning to Noah).

So we might correctly identify that we are experiencing depression, or grief, or anger, or stress, but then mistakenly think that we can control those things through sheer force of will. "I see now that my anger in this relationship is connected to false ideas from hell. Now that I know this, I will never get angry again. *I've* got it under control." Or, "I see now that I've been feeling depressed. Now that I know that, *I* can fix my depression, so that I never feel depressed again." But the spiritual struggles that we face in life are bigger than we can tackle by ourselves, with our own limited power. So we are not completely out of the flood yet.

In the final stage of this story, Noah sends out the dove and it does not return. This stage is perhaps best summed up by the familiar phrase: “Let go, and let God.”

In the third stage of this story, Noah sends out the dove and it returns with an olive leaf. By itself, this imagery brings a greater sense of hope. Somewhere there is dry land. We’re getting closer to more stable spiritual state. Like day three of the Creation story in which the plants begin to grow, this stage symbolizes a time when we see signs of spiritual growth in our lives. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 29, 879-887)

The Heavenly Doctrines say that “when we are being reborn, true ideas are sown in us, and the Lord bends our false thinking in the direction of those ideas. Then falsity seems to have been dispelled and it is the goodness He gives us as a gift that accomplishes this.” (*Ibid.* 887)

In this stage we might look back on the situation in which we experienced flooding and see how that situation is actually helping us to grow spiritually. For example, we might get in an argument with a spouse or a loved one, experiencing floods of anger or negative thoughts. But as we begin to come to a place of clarity, we might be able to observe (somewhat reluctantly): “This argument has probably been good for us. We are learning and growing from going through this difficult time.”

We’re still stuck in the flood but we see signs of growth happening. Any time we experience the thought that “this is probably good for me,” we can imagine that we are Noah seeing the dove return with an olive leaf, and perhaps we can find comfort in knowing that we are being led out of the flood.

In the final stage of this story, Noah sends out the dove and it does not return. This stage is perhaps best summed up by the familiar phrase: “Let go, and let God.” Because of identifying the lies for what they are (the raven),

and seeing the truth more clearly (the dove), and seeing signs of spiritual growth (the olive leaf), our spiritual flood is nearing the end.

This is the stage where we begin to let go of expectations. We let go of resentments. We let go of the need to be right. We let go of the need for an apology. We let go of perfectionism.



And we even let go of ownership of our thoughts, as it says in the Writings: “If we believed that – as is truly the case – everything good and true comes from the Lord and everything evil and false comes from hell, then we would not claim the goodness as our own and make it self-serving or claim the evil as our own and make ourselves guilty of it. (*Divine Providence* 320) We let go, and we let God. The dove is free, and so are we:

Spiritual flooding is a normal part of our spiritual lives. It’s not fun, but it’s going to happen. And the Lord protects us during those times, like Noah was protected in the ark.

Liberation is symbolized on an inner level not by the dove’s return to the ark but by its being sent from the ark and not returning. (*Secrets of Heaven* 876)

The dove – religious truth, or the truth of faith – like the other birds, the animals, and Noah, was no longer trapped in the ark by the flood water. As long as it stayed on the ark, buffeted by the flood water (falsity), its state was one of slavery, of captivity or imprisonment. . . . Its state of freedom is depicted in the fact that not only Noah but everything else with him too went out of the ark. . . . The first of them all to leave was the dove, that is religious truth that grows out of goodness, because all freedom comes from the goodness connected with faith, that is, from a love for what is good. (No. 891)

When we’re overwhelmed by flooding in our lives, the Lord works hard to protect us. But because of the flood, we often end up trapped inside our own heads, as Noah and his family were trapped in the very Ark that saved them. So the final piece of being freed from our floods is that we come out of our own heads, we come out of ourselves and into the life of love and useful service to other people. We are not saved by faith and trust alone but by faith married to charity. That is when we are truly grounded and truly free and at peace. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 905) And letting go of the dove – letting go and letting God – is the sign that we are ready for that life.

Spiritual flooding is a normal part of our spiritual lives. It’s not fun, but it’s going to happen. The Lord protects us during those times, as Noah was protected in the ark. But spiritual struggles, temptations, spiritual floods, are bigger than we can handle on our own. The Lord is the One who has the power

to lead us out, to free us from those states. When we turn to Him, He gives us signs that we can watch for. “Don’t worry . . . look at the birds of the air.” (*Matthew 6:25-26*)

At first we will be confused by lies from the hells. Look for the raven. Even when we begin to see the truth more clearly, we tend to want to be in control and fix things on our own. Look for the dove returning to us. But in going through hard times, we can begin to see small signs of spiritual growth in our lives. “This is probably good for me.”

Look for the dove with the olive leaf. When we’re ready to let go, and let God, then we will experience freedom from our flood.

Look for the dove not returning. As we watch these birds of the air and become more familiar with the patterns in our lives, we will find that the Lord has surrounded us with songs of deliverance. Perhaps in that we can find some comfort. As it is said in the *Psalms*:

Everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found. Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near that person. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. (*Psalms 32:6-7*)

Amen.



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

# Trust the Lord and Each Other



*The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.*

One of the core values of the General Church is: *Developing people's faith in the Lord and trust in His providence.* I would like to expand on a dimension of trust in the Lord that has to do with how we regard one another, and what it means to be a part of the church.

Let's begin with a few familiar concepts about trust in the Lord. We know that people experience inner peace as a result of "their perception of the Lord's presence." (*Arcana Coelestia* 5963) It comes as a result of the belief that the Lord is "disposing their lot" (*Divine Providence* 179), and that they are "being carried along constantly toward happier things." (*Arcana Coelestia* 8478:4) As we know, the Lord's message to Joshua is a message to all of us: "Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (*Joshua* 1:9)

We know, however, that there are things we can do to increase our trust or to compromise it. We learn, for example, that "trust cannot possibly exist except within the good of life." (*Arcana Coelestia* 2982:2) Another passage says that "confidence [in the Lord's salvation] is possible only for someone who lives rightly." (*Doctrine of Faith* 26) Conversely, "everything bad, especially trust in self, takes away the state of peace." (*Arcana Coelestia* 8455:2)

With that as a backdrop, we turn to the ways these and other teachings apply to our trust in each other. A compelling teaching links these two concepts in the following way:

Trust in Jehovah, that is, in the Lord, does not exist except with those in whom love is present, that is to say, love to the Lord and toward the neighbor; for faith does not reside with any others. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8240)

Our calling, as we know, is to look with affirmative eyes at others, "noticing



all the goods and truths that are theirs.” (*Ibid.* 1079:2) Then we can say, even those with whom we differ, “This is my brother (or sister). I see that he worships the Lord and is a good person.” (*Ibid.* 385:5).

A further link between our trust in the Lord and trust of one another has to do with resting in the confidence that others are doing their spiritual work together with the Lord. They have their tether to the Lord in His Word as much as we do and in some cases more. Gone, when that is the perspective, is the concern that we need to engage inappropriately with them to keep them on track or to correct their missteps.

The Lord may indeed call us respectfully to challenge and provide feedback at times, but in the larger picture we can leave it to Him. This goes to the good that we see too, trusting that the Lord is inspiring them in positive ways, and seeing them as capable of great things in response to the Lord.

With these thoughts in mind I bring forward a concept that you may have heard in the context of church leadership: “government by influx.” It leans on the fact that influx from the Lord is real and happening with all of us. We read that “good from the Lord is constantly flowing in” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2577; cf. 3142, 3159), and that “the Lord is present with everyone, urging and pressing to be received.” (*True Christian Religion* 766)

We know further that He uses guardian angels to flow in indirectly, who “breathe into [us] every kind of good and truth, as well as a horror and dread of evils and falsities.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 50:3) This extends to the workings of conscience, by which we know that the Lord leads us all. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1944:3, 2842, 9112ff)

The power of this concept can be seen in two realms of life. One is within the employment realm of the church – primarily pastors and teachers. From a management perspective, we are wise to count on the fact that they care about our spiritual mission and are devoting themselves consistently to bringing the Lord’s influx to bear on their work. Much more free and expansively capable is a workforce where people are trusted, both in their professional conduct and in the realm of their conscience. It need not mean any checks and balances or supervision, but the leaning is toward trust – to believe that the Lord is flowing into them and leading them – that government by influx is happening.

The second realm of life is the church in general and our regard for our fellow members. Imagine sitting in a packed worship service and regarding all those people the way the Lord sees them – as on their way to heaven, striving to live from spiritual principle, responsive to conscience in their own ways, and capable of great things. Of course, He knows all of our flaws, knows our temptations, and leads us through our steps off of the path to heaven. But trust in the Lord can extend into confidence that He is providing and leading each of us as our Savior – and He is incredibly good at it.

Think of the ways this perspective could show up within a church. Trust



can be extended to people to carry forward volunteer initiatives with their creative energies. We can look at people taking on various projects with a sense of wonder at what they will come up with. Think also about the ways in which the Lord calls us all to serve or to engage with the people and world around us based on our faith – to expect others to live from spiritual principle. Isn't it true that a church that inspires people to reach out and do their part, and honors the ways in which people are living a heavenly life, will see a more engaged and contented membership?

Government by influx is intertwined with trust in the Lord, for it is the Lord's government. Our part is to trust that He is bringing His influence to fruition – in our lives and in the lives of others. He does at times balance that influence with “government by command” – with logical consequences to bad decisions. That happens within a church context, in employment and within any membership. But the lean can usefully be toward a trust in the influx – in the Lord's providential leading.

The core value we are focusing on is: *Developing people's faith in the Lord and trust in His providence*. May we grow in our ability to place ourselves more fully in the hands of the Lord. May we also extend the courtesy of trust to others, that the Lord is working with them and causing them to do great things.

#### **BISHOP'S COUNCIL UPDATE**

Readers of *New Church Life* may be aware of the formation of a Bishop's Council within the last few months. The purpose of this group is to provide lay counsel to the Bishop's Office on issues of import in the life of the church. This 17-member group consists of these men and women from around the world who are giving of their time to this renewed use:

- Kathryn Kloppers** – Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
- Brendon Cockerell** – Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
- HuiLing Sun** – Hurstville, New South Wales, Australia
- Lincoln Smith** – Mitchellville, Maryland, United States
- Richard Narh** – Tema, Ghana
- Emmy and Jared Hasen** – Caryndale, Ontario, Canada
- Roger and Kathy Schrock** – Kempton, Pennsylvania, United States
- Owen Smith** – Glenview, Illinois, United States
- Marian van Genne** – The Netherlands
- Mandela Thomas** – Seattle, Washington, United States
- Tom and Rachel David** – Boston, Massachusetts, United States
- Helen Ference** – Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, United States
- Doug Hunt** – Boulder, Colorado, United States
- Thando Tshabalala** – Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

These fine people join the Rt. Revs. Brad Heinrichs and David Lindrooth and myself for meetings approximately every other month. So far our agendas have focused on getting to know each other, digesting what the bishops do, and reviewing some of the core strategies of the General Church. Our most recent meeting considered the concept of two-way communication mechanisms between General Church membership and the Bishop's Office.

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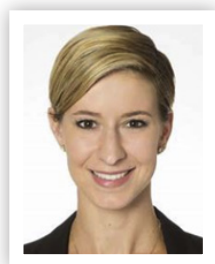
# Be True to Your Values

*Reagan Odhner*

*From the introduction by President Brian Blair: We are honored to welcome Reagan Odhner as our commencement speaker. She is a U.S. Marine veteran who served her country while devoting much of her adult life to helping people improve their living conditions through education and research.*

*With the Marines she served two tours of active duty in Afghanistan, including difficult combat situations. She also worked with an elite Female Engagement Team which worked on community development programs. She then completed her education at Stanford University, which was interrupted with a cancer diagnosis that she overcame.*

*Since receiving her degree in economics in 2017 she has worked for various global organizations that support public well-being and international development to improve the lives of people in need.*



Good afternoon President Blair, members of the faculty, members of the Board and Corporation, guests and friends, students and graduates. This is a huge accomplishment for you and first, I want to acknowledge the hard work you have all put into making it to this milestone.

You have managed to navigate getting a degree under extraordinary circumstances. The past year-and-a-half have followed a narrative uncannily similar to a post-apocalyptic movie plotline, and now, you are expected to take your degree and go out into the world and make a career, a future, a life. That is crazy, and it is OK if that inspires anxiety or uncertainty or fear.

At some point in the past few years, each of you probably felt the burden of financial stress, compromised health, or social discord in some form. One way or another you have endured trauma and had to deal with failure.

There is a long list of justifications that you could have understandably

Your milestones will change - so the principles you put into place to guide you through the unanticipated challenges you will face are more important than having those milestones clearly mapped.

put forth to delay graduating. But you persevered and you should thoroughly enjoy each moment of this day. It takes determination and hard work to keep putting in the effort when you're surrounded by so much uncertainty.

Take a deep breath and appreciate the seat you're sitting in, the temperature of the air, the people around you. Let the weight of your accomplishment sink in.

#### THINGS WILL CHANGE

But you know it's not all downhill from here, and remember, it's the *uphill* climb that gets you to new heights. I wish I could tell you the crazy is over,

but in life there is always more crazy around the corner.

Yes, your horizons are broadening – your opportunities are endless. But a broadening horizon also means a broader array of new things to fear, new trauma, and failure that you didn't anticipate. How are you supposed to find your path amidst all of that? Maybe you already know what your next steps are – a job, a gap year, more school. Maybe you think you have everything mapped out. Maybe you have no clue where you'll be in three years. That's OK!

Whatever you think you will be doing, you probably won't anyway, and even if you do, it won't look like you think it will. There are a million different jobs out there to be done and the job you end up with may not even exist yet. You may change your mind along the way. The vast majority of adults I meet are not where their younger selves would have guessed they'd be. On average, the generation ahead of you stays at their job a median of less than three years. I bet you haven't built that into your 10-year plan.

Use this shift from college to the job market not just to detail your life plan. Also take this milestone as an opportunity, a *moment* of downhill comfort, to figure out what *really* matters to you. The jobs that are right for you will align with what you think is most important: perhaps things like: compassion, faith, justice, liberty.

#### DON'T BE AFRAID TO CHANGE COURSE

Your milestones will change - so the principles you put into place to guide you through the unanticipated challenges you will face are more important

than having those milestones clearly mapped. Don't just worry about where you're going, think about who you're going to be on the hard journey there.

When I graduated from college, I took a risk to move to a foreign country alone because I was following a path defined by my values. That choice to move made about as much financial sense as joining the Marines

and at the time it didn't seem like a smart career move, but taking the risk to pursue what I thought was important has paid off. I continue to develop a career in alignment with my values; the circumstances keep changing but the opportunities keep growing.

And you may have to take the first job that will pay you. That's OK! Take that job, and do great work and let that serve as a stepping stone as you plan your path to jobs that better align with who you want to be. Give yourself permission to take a job that doesn't appear to equal worldly success to other people, as long as it lines up with what you value most.

I was taught the value of *service* throughout my education here, and service was at the core of my decision to enlist.

#### LET LIFE EXPERIENCES HONE WHAT MATTERS TO YOU

I was taught the value of *service* throughout my education here, and service was at the core of my decision to enlist. On that deployment, those moments where I saw the human side of war refined my perception of what was important. They caused me to change my life path in order to orient toward a different way to pursue my core values.

If you're interested, here is an example of how this happened. In Afghanistan, my teammate and I would travel around to villages to set up classes for kids whose schools had been blown up, so we got to know a bunch of the local kids. After a couple months we noticed this tiny kid would find us and follow us around with his slingshot. Can you guess what he was doing? He was protecting us. There we were, a squad of armed Marines, and this tiny barefoot kid and his brother followed us around like they were our personal security detail to try and keep us safe. A child with a heart like that should have endless opportunities, but he doesn't because of where he was born.

It was interactions like this that reshaped what I thought I knew about what it means to serve. That value evolved from something I had been taught to something that I owned. I had gone out into the world in search of a future and a career. I took a risk and sought out that experience, and it brought me back to values I had been taught, it honed those values, and now those values

Your education here at Bryn Athyn College has provided you with something truly special that you can't get at most colleges; a principled framework for navigating trauma and facing *any* adversity that life hands you.

are integral to who I am.

Those moments where you realize what really matters to you – worldview-shaping, values-galvanizing experiences – usually come from hardship, vulnerability, uncertainty or fear. When you find those moments in your life, don't be afraid to adjust your plan; embrace that hardship as an opportunity to come more into alignment with your calling, and more in alignment with your values. Trauma can be a tool to strengthen or refine your values.

I arrived at Stanford University after leaving the military, ready to learn. After just six months of classes

I was diagnosed with cancer and had to drop out. That was scary, but it also gave me time to think. I spent entire days convalescing in this one chair in our kitchen. My family still calls that chair the “dying hole,” which highly educated people will recognize as a literary reference to the important Disney movie, *Madagascar*.

In that time, I came to realize that if I hadn't been born in this country with access to the best health care specialists, I likely wouldn't survive. Internalizing that over months of recovery strengthened my resolve to contribute to extending opportunity to those who do not have the same level of privilege. I was able to think about a traumatic experience in that light because of the framework I learned here. My learned framework set me up to get through that, and in turn, getting through that strengthened my guiding principles.

### **YOU HAVE THE TOOLS TO SUCCEED**

Your education here at Bryn Athyn College has provided you with something truly special that you can't get at most colleges; a principled framework for navigating trauma and facing *any* adversity that life hands you. The lessons you've learned here about how to serve others and live a value-driven life have set you up to face challenges, refine your guiding principles and find your path.

As you work your way along, your principles will come even more into focus, they will become more *value*-able. For example: the teaching that being of use is a form of worship. At the time, that just felt like this thing that people were telling me, but life's challenges made it an indispensable part of how I live.

So keep thinking about those principles, itemize them, even write them all down, rank them in order of importance. They will come more into focus along the way as you test them under fire. That has certainly been the case in my experience.

If your values are not perfectly mapped out now, that's OK. That's why you are commencing on this lifelong journey. Let those values guide you through trauma, vulnerability and fear. Have confidence that you are not going into the inevitable battle against those things unarmed. You have the tools.

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# Build

*The Rev. Chuck Blair*

At occasions like graduations, it is easy to slip into easy platitudes of “Nothing can stop us” or “We can be whatever we want to be.” While sometimes these statements are joyously true, the crucible that you, the Class of 2021, have lived through has shown us empathetically that statements like these are not always true. Simply put, life is not always what we would have it be.

So, what are we to do? Build. We are, as Kipling famously said, “To stoop and build [again] with worn out tools.”

I am struck, in this building project, how God’s promise appears to work. Here we go to the promise given Abram and Sarai, the progenitors of the three great faiths, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’” (*Genesis 12:1*)

There are countless ways to read this blessing. The one I want to focus on is one word, “Leave.” Abram and Sarai are to leave, to leave what they have known, what they have built, and build again. That is how the blessing works.

The command to “leave” to find the blessing, to secure the blessing, is a hard one. It is hard because “leaving” is forever that . . . hard. And this is where faith arrives, a faith that Emanuel Swedenborg defined as the eye of love. Faith then is not certainty, but perspective.

We – as those gathered here today – have faith in you, and faith with you. We know the past two years have been filled, as years can be, with challenges unforeseen, blessings unimagined, and the gentle knowledge that God has held and is holding us through this all.

We together know this as well – that on the other side of this “leaving” and the journey that follows it is a wondrous land, a promised land. It is land filled with beauty and enchantment. It is land as well filled with giants, walled cities and challenges galore. That is the land in which you will build. And build you must.

As you build, please remember:

1. Hard work is never easy
2. Value meaning over entertainment



3. Criticism is cheap – and tearing things down is not a great feat

I have seen this simple process of leaving by choice or not, moving by choice or not, and rebuilding, work its magic over and over again.

Thoughts here to go to Eva Kor. Born into a loving Jewish family, Eva was an identical twin, sent to Auschwitz concentration camp where she lost her father, mother and brother. She quite literally lost everything. But – and here is the miracle – she also chose. She never gave up her ability to choose. And, she chose to build again.

Driving Eva back from the Philadelphia airport on a snowy I-95 north to speak at NewChurch LIVE might have been the most spiritual moment I have encountered. Here was a woman – a person who knew unimaginable loss but who filled this tiny space of our car with a grace and generosity of spirit I had never witnessed. I remember looking, later on the evening, at the tattoo serial number on her arm, placed there by the Nazis, and thinking in humble, quiet amazement about all she came to know.

I know what Eva would say to you: build.

I know what your parents would say to you: build.

I know what your teachers would say to you: build.

I know what one very proud dad would say to his beloved daughter Tegan: build.

And, I imagine, I know what God says to all of us: build.

That in the end is our choice. Do we build or not?

While you don't know the journey ahead – its blessings and its breakings – you do have the tools. You do have the education from this amazing school. You do have each other. You do have God holding you through it all – that gentle call as Jesus would phrase it, to “Follow me” and that gentle command, uttered more than 300 times in the Bible, “Fear not.”

Your job then? BUILD.

We see nothing of this universal providence, and if we did see it, it would look to our sight like the scattered heaps and random piles that passersby see when a house is being built. The Lord though sees a magnificent palace constantly under construction and constantly being enlarged. (*Divine Providence* 203)



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# Divine Foresight and Human Free Will

*The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers*

**T**he traditional Christian view of Divine foresight may be described as follows:

God is omniscient. He knows everything down to the least detail. God is eternal. He is not bounded by time. Being omniscient and unbounded by time, He therefore knows not only the past and present but the future as well. He foresees the entire future of the human race and the entire future of each individual person. He sees the future as though it were present, and no person can change what He foresees. People are still free because they do not know the future and therefore the future is ever new to them. But God does know the future, and therefore in the Divine sight the future is as something already accomplished.

The problem with this view, however, is that it is founded on an erroneous idea of time. Consequently, before proceeding with a discussion of Divine foresight and human free will, we must first consider the nature of time, as to what it is and what it is not.

## **The Nature of Time**

Unlike space, time in itself has no independent existence. If it is to be measured, it must be measured in spatial terms. That is to say, it must be measured in terms of objects in space. Time indicates the progression of alterations in objects or in their duration (duration being a progression without alteration).

In short, time is a matter of progression. When we measure time, we measure it by comparison with objects in space that exhibit a steady, unwavering progression. A clock or watch is such an object. A timer is such an object. Its hands or numbers present a steady unwavering progression in or through space, against which we can measure other progressions. Without those timepieces in space, we would be unable to measure time.

In the grand scheme, the progressions that produce our days, months and years are due to the rotation of the earth and its solar passage around the sun. Again, these progressions are the steady progressions of spatial objects, objects in space that are themselves spatial, objects which can be measured in spatial terms.

So considered, we must inevitably conclude that time is a characteristic of space and does not exist independently of space, which is to say, of spatial objects in space.

Try to conceive of time apart from space. Independently of the progression or duration of something spatial, time can exist only in the imagination, unmoored, completely theoretical, incapable of depiction or description. And that is because, apart from something spatial, time has no independent existence.

### **The Impossibility of Time Travel**

Can an object exist simultaneously in the past and in the present? The answer is no. The same spatial object cannot exist simultaneously in two places, that is to say, in two areas of space. No matter how similar, two objects in two areas of space are just that, namely, two objects and not one.

The same is true of objects in time. The same object cannot exist simultaneously at two different times. The adverb “simultaneously” means “at the same time.” If an object can be said to exist simultaneously at two different times, the objects are not one but two.

Consider movies depicting a character who encounters his younger or older self in the past or future, in which the two coexist for a time. They are then not one but two. If they are to be understood as the same person, we are faced with a logical impossibility. Either they are two separate persons, or they are simply imaginary and not real. If they are two, they cannot be one. If they are one, they cannot be two.

Consider also the fact that if a past-you were to exist, there would be some time elapse between the past-you and the present-you. How much time would separate the two? One year? One month? One week? One day? One hour? One minute? One second? One nanosecond? The time elapse reduces to zero, and in that case there would be an infinite number of “yous,” which is not possible. No mortal is infinite in any way or aspect.

The same would be true of the time difference between any present-you and some future-you. The difference would again reduce to zero, producing an infinite number of “yous,” extending seamlessly over an indefinite, unending length of time. Yet the you that you know exists only in the present.

The fact is, the only way you could visit the past would be to grow younger, which no person and no thing has done since the beginning of creation. And to visit the future, you need only to continue living as you are, although each

second instantly becomes the present, and instantly then the past.

### **Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity**

Einstein's theory of relativity includes one of a special relativity relating to time. It holds that time slows down or speeds up depending on how fast an object moves relative to another. It posits also that nothing can exceed the speed of light, and that as something approaches the speed of light its mass increases and time slows down. The classic example of this phenomenon is illustrated by the supposed case of an astronaut who sets out on a long cosmic voyage, leaving his identical twin behind. As a result of the speed of his travel, time for the astronaut slows so that he ages more slowly than his twin on earth. On returning, the astronaut twin is then physiologically younger than his twin.

If Einstein was right (and empirical evidence so far confirms his theory), it calls into question the idea of time as a universal continuum. If time for the astronaut can differ from time for his twin, it means that time is only relative and has no independent existence in itself. It means that time is an adjunct of space, or of objects in space, as an expression of their progression or duration (a progression without alteration), and does not exist apart from those objects.

### **Future Time**

Since there is no time continuum apart from spatial objects in space, inasmuch as only those objects can exhibit a progression or duration, and since objects in the past do not exist simultaneously with those same objects in the present, it is also true to say that objects in the future cannot exist simultaneously with those same objects in the present.

If object A were to exist in the future simultaneously with object A in the present, then we would have to conclude that the objects were two and not one. But object A is by definition only one object. Therefore, to suppose object A to exist simultaneously in the future must be only an imaginary supposition and not real.

In other words, there is no future time and no past time. They are useful concepts, but not ones that exist in reality. Everything that exists does so in the present. Past events are only memories, and future events only anticipatory ones. It is important to know this and to understand it in order to know and understand the relationship of Divine foresight to human free will. "For with the Lord things that follow and things to come exist together in the present." (*Arcana Coelestia* 9787)

Because Divine foresight is an aspect of Divine omniscience, before going on we must first say something about that omniscience.

### **Divine Omniscience**

The word "omniscience" means "all-knowing." People cannot be omniscient

because no one person can know everything. No matter how knowledgeable a person may be, he or she cannot know the details of specific actions of all people and all things in the present, and still less of all people and all things in the past or future.

“Omniscience” is therefore a term applied only to the Divine. Only the Divine Creator can know everything, even to the most minute, whether in the present or in the past and future.

Does knowing everything imply knowing anything? Can knowing everything imply knowing something that is not true, whether in the past, present or future?

It seems absurd to pose the question, but things not true have been historically attributed to the Divine Creator. Many people believe in the doctrine of Christ’s atonement for the sins of mankind. Is the Divine Creator aware of this atonement? Is this something that the Creator knows, not simply as an attribution, but as an historical fact? Since the Atonement is and was not a fact, we must conclude that it is not known as a fact by the Divine Creator.

Omniscience, in short, is a complete knowledge of everything true, and not of anything without actual existence, whether in the past, or the present, or the future.

Omniscience cannot know that a man is a woman. Omniscience cannot know that the Christian Church dates back a thousand years before the birth of Christ. Omniscience cannot know that iron will eventually evolve into gold. Omniscience cannot know any of these things, because they are not true, were not true, and are incapable of becoming true.

Does this imply a limit to Divine omniscience?

Suppose a person goes outside on a cloudless night and beholds the starry heavens. What he sees is light coming from those stars millions of miles away. Now he goes inside his house and lies in his bed staring at the ceiling. No longer does he see light coming from the stars. Has his eyesight been somehow compromised? Has he lost some of the power of his sight? In fact the power of his eyesight remains the same as it was. The change has occurred in the objects of his sight. Without the barrier of his bedroom’s ceiling he could still see the stars. The limitation exists in what he sees, not in his power of sight.

Everything that exists does so in the present. Past events are only memories, and future events only anticipatory ones. It is important to know this and to understand it in order to know and understand the relationship of Divine foresight to human free will.

It is the same with Divine omniscience. His omniscience knows what is knowable, what has been previously knowable, and whatever may possibly be knowable in the future. But it cannot know what does not exist and so is not knowable; it cannot know what previously has not existed or occurred and so is not knowable; and it cannot know what cannot possibly exist or occur in the future and so is not knowable. Not knowable because it has no existence to be known or capability of becoming known, whether in the past, present or future. The limitation lies in what can be known and does not imply any limitation on the power of Divine sight.

### **Divine Foresight**

Foresight is, as said, an aspect of Divine omniscience. It is a knowledge of future events and occurrences. We, too, can speculate about the future and often make accurate guesses about things to come. Without that power there would be no civilization as we know it. Without that power we would be unable to plan for the future. But our speculations, hypotheses, estimates, guesses and opinions regarding the future are only that, namely speculations, hypotheses, estimates, guesses and opinions, because our knowledge of past and present events and occurrences is too limited to provide an unerring knowledge of the future.

By contrast, Divine omniscience, having a complete knowledge of all that is and all that has come before, is able to accurately divine all that may eventuate and so will be.

But what if present events and occurrences should change? In the first place, Divine omniscience will have foreseen those changes, if not as inevitable, still as possible, perhaps even as probable.

The question then is: Can present events and occurrences change? Many events and occurrences are inevitable. If that were not so, there would be no branch of study called physics, which relies on physical laws that are constant and not subject to change. The same is true also of chemistry and of all other "hard" sciences. Without the inevitability of such events and occurrences, we would have none of the fantastic achievements of our modern civilization.

But there are also some events and occurrences that can change, events and occurrences that are not inevitable. It was not inevitable that I should write this paper, for example. It is something I have chosen to do, because it is a subject that has interested me. Perhaps it was something Divinely foreseen. But until I formed my determination to set down my views of it, the paper remained a possibility and not something inevitable.

### **Human Free Will**

Some philosophers, psychologists and sociologists have maintained that people

do not have free will. We are all products of our heredity and environment, they say, and whatever we do could have been predictable.

“But I feel free to choose this or that,” you may reply. “Only an appearance,” they say.

So let’s try an experiment. I have in my hand a pencil. Will I drop it or hold on to it? You choose. Which will I do? Whichever you choose, I plan to do the opposite. In other words, my choice will depend on your choice. Are either of these choices predictable?

A sociologist professor of mine once described the role of heredity and environment as constituting a kind of box, within which we are free to think and do whatever we choose to think and do. Though we are unable to think or act outside of those limits, within them we can say and do what we choose to say and do.

Human free will, in other words, has its limits. Within those limits we are free, but our freedom is circumscribed by both our heredity (nature) and our environment (nurture). None of us, for example, is free to become an 18th century Chinese peasant woman. None of us is free to live to an age of 200 years (at least not in this life).

Because we must have free will in order to make choices, and we must make choices either to will good or to will evil and so to do good or evil, therefore Christian rebirth requires our free will. Heredity and environment may incline us more or less one way or the other, but still the outcome is unknowable as something inevitable until we actually make our choices.

So, for example, although many criminals emerge from urban broken families, so also do many police officers. The paths chosen are not predictable. Though many parents introduce their children to religion and churches, some remain as adults and others leave. Again, the paths chosen are not predictable. Although our choice of spouses is limited to people we meet, still our final choice is a choice of free will. Indeed, nothing can make us love this or that person, or make this or that person love us in return, and that is because love will be free. Free will is an intrinsic characteristic of love.

Nothing dependent on human free will, therefore, is infallibly predictable. Not even by Divine foresight. Divine foresight may foresee all the possibilities, but not inevitabilities to the degree that they are outcomes of the exercise of free will. Sometimes we may even surprise ourselves. We think that in such and such a situation we would react in one way (thus as something foreseen), and yet when the occasion arises we react in another way. I know I have had this experience.

Again, the limitation is not in the power of Divine foresight. The limitation is in the circumscribed exercise of human free will and choice and their outcomes. Though restricted by influences beyond our control, our freedom

Though restricted by influences beyond our control, our freedom to will and do as we choose within the limits of our heredity and environment remains a fundamental freedom that cannot be reliably or infallibly predicted.

to will and do as we choose within the limits of our heredity and environment remains a fundamental freedom that cannot be reliably or infallibly predicted.

### **The Implication of an Infallible Foresight**

The question is: Can something foreseen not eventuate? And if it does not eventuate, can it have been foreseen?

If foresight is a foresight of inevitabilities, the implication is that human free will is a myth. Shakespeare in that case would be right, that all the world is a stage and we all players upon

it, speaking lines we are expected to speak, performing actions we are expected to perform.

One argument maintains that all our free choices are themselves foreseen, and therefore that everything we do or say, although foreseen, is still the product of our free will. But that is hindsight, not foresight. If foreseen as inevitabilities, they are choices that must eventuate, and as such they are not the products of free will.

Consider, for example, the following scenario. You take your spouse to dinner at your favorite restaurant. The previous six times your spouse has ordered the salmon. You expect he or she will order the salmon again. But this time your spouse orders the lasagna. Your expectation – shall we say your foresight – was wrong.

And yet you also expected that he or she would order from the menu. In that respect your expectation – shall we say again your foresight – was correct. We might even say infallible. You could know for sure that he or she would not order kimchi in an Italian restaurant, just as he or she would not be able to order a hamburger in an Asian restaurant. In other words, you can foresee possibilities and not impossibilities.

In application to the Divine, we may ask that if He were to foresee your ordering the salmon in your favorite restaurant, could you perhaps change your mind and order the lasagna? If you could, you would be exercising your free will. If you could not, but must choose from the menu what Divine foresight foresees, not merely as possibility, but as an expected inevitability, then you are not free to change your mind, and if you are not free to change



your mind, you do not have free will.

The point is that, like you, the Divine foresees possibilities and not inevitabilities. The difference is that His foresight is omniscient, able to foresee infinite possibilities within the limits of your history, nature and environment; but not your choices before you make them.

If I take you to a restaurant and expect you to order the salmon, and my expectation cannot be disappointed, then you are not free. So, with Divine foresight. If your choices are expected, and that expectation cannot be disappointed, again you are likewise not free.

In short, Divine foresight is in the nature of an expectation, but not an inevitable one. Your choices have limits, but within those limits you are free to choose.

Does this make Divine foresight fallible? No, because all your possible choices are foreseen. But not as inevitable choices. Only as possible. If this suggests a limitation to Divine foresight, it is only because the objects of His sight are finite and so limited. The power of His foresight remains unlimited.

### **The Heavenly Doctrines Regarding Divine Foresight**

What may come as a surprise to some is that the Heavenly Doctrines appear to corroborate the view that Divine foresight is a foresight of possibilities and not inevitabilities. We cite here a few pertinent passages:

. . . there are things to be regenerated that are innumerable, in fact, illimitable in number . . . , and every one of them has illimitable offshoots, that is, progressions and derivations towards interior things and towards exterior things. A person knows nothing at all of this, but the Lord knows all things and every single thing and provides for them every moment. If He were to pause even for an instant, all the progressions would be disturbed, for what is prior looks to what follows in a continuous series and produces series of consequences to eternity. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5122:3)

Providence has regard to the state in its successions to eternity, which cannot be provided for unless foreseen. To make provision for what is present and not at the same time to foresee what is to come and so not to make provision for the future during the present, would be without end, without order, and consequently without wisdom and intelligence, thus not from the Divine. (*Ibid.* 5195)

When he is a little child, a person receives good from the Lord. . . . This good forms the beginning of a new will in the person, and in

the following age it grows in accordance with his life of innocence with his companions and in accordance with his life of goodness and obedience toward his parents and teachers, but still more with those who afterward suffer themselves to be regenerated. This the Lord foresees and provides according to the state of life that follows. . . . And this He does from the first thread of life even to eternity. (*Ibid.* 9296:2)

With those who are being regenerated, the interior and exterior things are set in order by the Lord for all the following states, to the extent that present things involve future things, and likewise future things when they become present, and this to eternity. For the Lord foresees all things and provides all things. (*Ibid.* 10048:2)

Every change or variation in the state of the human mind changes or varies something in the course of things at the time and so in the course of things that follow. How then not progressively to eternity? The case is like that of an arrow shot from a bow, which, if it should deviate in the slightest from the mark upon its being aimed, would at a distance of a thousand paces or more deviate immensely. So would it be if the Lord did not guide the states of human minds every least moment. (*Divine Providence* 202:3)

We say that the operation of Divine providence to save a person begins at his birth and continues to the end of his life. To understand this one must know that the Lord sees what a person's character is, and foresees what the person wills it to be, thus what it will be. Moreover, for him to be human and thus immortal, his will's freedom cannot be taken away. (*Ibid.* 333:1)

. . . every person . . . is directed from earliest infancy with a regard to a life to eternity. The providence of the Lord, therefore, commences from earliest infancy. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5002)

### “Pray Enter More Deeply . . .”

Do the Heavenly Doctrines ever appear to represent the traditional Christian view, namely that the Divine sees the future as though it were present, and that therefore the future is to Him as something already accomplished?

The answer is admittedly yes. A number of passages seem to treat it so. (See for example see *Arcana Coelestia* 587, 1755, 2679 at the end, 3854:2,3, 4136:2, 4383, *Divine Providence* 67, 202:3, 203.) But in these passages the truth is different from the appearance.

Some angels once accused Swedenborg of having in his thought the traditional Christian ideas concerning a trinity of persons in the Godhead. But Swedenborg replied: “Pray enter more deeply into my thinking, and perhaps you will see an agreement.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 961:6, *Brief Exposition* 119, *True Christian Religion* 26) So the angels did so, and they found that Swedenborg did not actually entertain those ideas, but ideas that were decidedly different.

The same advice, to enter more deeply into Swedenborg’s thinking, almost certainly applies in reference to his statements regarding Divine foresight.

Consider the following passage from *Arcana Coelestia* (*Heaven’s Secrets*) 3854:2,3, already alluded to above:

The Lord foresaw from eternity what the human race was going to be like in the future and what every member of it was going to be like, and that evil was going to increase all the time, so that at length man, of himself, would rush headlong into hell. . . . And since the Lord foresaw from eternity what man was going to be like in the future and even into eternity, it is clear that His providence is present in the smallest individual things, and, as has been stated, is governing him and diverting him so that he may be such, this being achieved by a constant moderating of his freedom.

It appears from this as though Divine foresight is a foresight of inevitabilities, in accord with the traditional Christian view. But the ellipsis in the quotation omits an important qualifier. The important qualifier is this declaration:

For every smallest fraction of a moment of a person's life entails a chain of consequences extending into eternity. Indeed every one is like a new beginning to those that follow, and so every single moment of the life both of his understanding and of his will is a new beginning.

In other words, Divine foresight is a foreknowledge of consequences, depending every moment on the present, every moment in the present constituting as though a new beginning of events to follow. This is a foresight not of inevitabilities, but of possibilities.

The fact that the passage cited contains language reflective of the traditional Christian view ought not to overshadow the intervening sentence. The intervening sentence demands a whole new interpretation of the case.

A similar dichotomy of language is found in *Spiritual Experiences* 5002:

Concerning the durations of people’s ages, why some live long and others not long: The Lord foresees every person’s life as to how long he will live and in what manner. He is consequently directed from earliest infancy to a life to eternity . . .

It is important for people to feel spiritually free. God created us to have free will, and the exercise of that freedom is real and not just apparent.

This again makes it seem as though Divine foresight were a foresight of inevitabilities. But consider the next and concluding clause in the entry:

... so that the Lord's providence commences from earliest infancy.

The first part of the entry suggests that the Lord foresees everyone's life as an inevitability, even as though from eternity. But the concluding clause makes clear that the case is not so, that foresight of a person's life begins with

his birth, and it is fair to say that it depends then on the choices the person makes during his life.

### **The Importance of a Proper Understanding of Divine Foresight**

It is important for people to feel spiritually free. God created us to have free will, and the exercise of that freedom is real and not just apparent. A foresight of inevitabilities conflicts with that understanding. We are not, in the Divine sight, merely players on a stage, speaking lines we are expected to speak, doing things we are expected to do. We are truly free in the lives we choose within the limits of our environment and heredity. If it were not so, we would be incapable of reformation and thus incapable of regeneration. If it were not so, we also could not be held responsible for our words and actions, any more than animals can be held responsible for their modes of life and actions.

The relationship of our lives to Divine foresight and consequent providence is illustrated by the case of a spearman or musketeer aiming at a target. (*Divine Providence* 333:3, cf. 202:3) It is necessary to understand that it is not God who chooses the target. If He did, we would not be free. Rather it is we ourselves who choose the target. Our aim, however, is not perfect. We are not perfect marksmen. No matter what target we may choose, if left to ourselves we might well, if not always, fail to strike it. To use a favorite phrase of the late Bishop George de Charms, the "overruling hand of Providence" serves to invisibly correct the course of our efforts toward that target, so that despite our clumsiness we strike the target we have chosen. Thus it is fair to say that, whether in our marriages, or in our occupations, or in any of our other relationships and pastimes, it is the Lord who contrives our successes, and not we ourselves alone.

Still we are free to choose our targets, and in our lives we choose many. Sometimes we change our minds. We are free to change our minds, which is to say, our targets. That is where our essential freedom lies. It is because of

this that we can reform ourselves and so be regenerated by the Lord. What the Lord foresees is the consequences of our choices, and a good thing, too. For without that foresight, our lives would be simply a case of hit-or-miss. Divine foresight foresees consequences that we do not see, and directs us in such a way as to ameliorate unfortunate consequences or to turn us aside from them toward better ones.

As a foresight of possibilities – of all possibilities, no matter how minute or how unlikely – Divine foresight leaves us our free will and yet at the same time enables His providence to bless us and keep us in unseen ways, not by overruling our choices, but by enabling their success.

We are free to choose our targets, and in our lives we choose many. Sometimes we change our minds. . . That is where our essential freedom lies. It is because of this that we can reform ourselves and so be regenerated by the Lord.

### Addendum

#### Time in the Spiritual World

What we have said about time in the natural world applies as well to the spiritual world. Where there is progression and duration, there is time.

But don't the Heavenly Doctrines tell us there is no time in the spiritual world? Don't most New Church people believe there is no time in the spiritual world?

The United States Central Intelligence Agency has as its motto, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," quoting *John* 8:32.

But the truth does not set criminals free. Neither does it set any evildoers free. As stated, then, the motto is not exactly true. Knowing the truth does not necessarily set anyone free.

The full statement is: "If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him. (*John* 8:31,32)

Without that preamble, the statement is incomplete and not always true. The same is the case with the statement, "There is no time in the spiritual world."

Now admittedly we find a number of statements in the Doctrines saying that in the spiritual world there are no times, but instead of times states. We are told also that angels have no notion of time but are conscious instead of states.

But as these states exhibit progression, succession, and so duration (*Heaven*

*and Hell* 162, 163, *Arcana Coelestia* 4901:2), they are in fact states that appear to exist in time and to develop in the progress of time (cf. *Apocalypse Explained* 571, 747).

Why, then, are we told so often that there is no time in the spiritual world?

The answer is that time in the natural world and time in the spiritual world differ in origin. In the natural world, time is imposed on us. In the spiritual world time is innate and projected. Or, in other words, in the natural world time is objective; in the spiritual world it is subjective.

Time in the natural world is imposed on us and is objective because every measure of time we have is founded on the revolution of the earth and its solar path around the sun. Yes, the day is distinguished into 24 hours. But that is an arbitrary number set sometime in the past. It could just as well have been distinguished into some other number of hours. But the distinction between day and night is not arbitrary. It results from the earth's rotation.

The case is similar with the annual calendar. Yes, the year is distinguished into 12 months. But though founded on the rising and setting of the moon, the calendar months are now out of phase with the moon. The beginning and end of the calendar year is also arbitrary. The Roman calendar, for example, began with March. Today's calendar begins with January. But the rotation of the seasons is not arbitrary. It results from the earth's solar path around the sun.

By contrast, in the spiritual world there are not these fundamental phenomena to produce days and nights or the four seasons. The spiritual world does not revolve on an axis, nor does it follow a path around the spiritual sun. Indeed, the spiritual sun remains fixed in the east. Days and nights and seasons are instead projections of the inhabitants' states, and they are therefore not fixed but fluid. That does not mean that their world is without time, because their states exhibit progression and duration. Otherwise their world would not be real; indeed, it would be non-existent. Marriages, for example, would not endure, having no duration. Spirits could not think, because it takes time to think. There could be no narrative accounts. Indeed, the spiritual world would be without the history described in the Doctrines.

So yes, there is time in the spiritual world, *but not such as exists in the natural world*. The additional qualification is an all-important codicil. Though I cannot find it in the Doctrines, still it is a true statement, and it is the additional qualification that makes it true.

The inescapable conclusion must be, therefore, that when the Doctrines say there are no times in the spiritual world, they mean there are no fixed periods of time. When they say there is no time in that world but state, they mean there is no objective time, but a subjective projection of time in accordance with the inhabitants' states. And these projections give an appearance of time, similar to time in the natural world.

We end with this description in *Divine Love and Wisdom* 73:1,2;

The Divine is present through all time independently of time. As the Divine is present through all space independently of space, so it is present through all time independently of time. For no property of nature can be predicated of the Divine, and space and time are properties of nature.

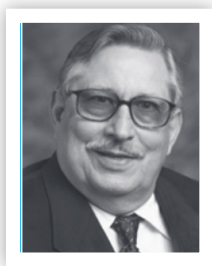
Space in nature is measurable, and so, too, is time. Time is measured in terms of days, weeks, months, years and centuries, and a day then in terms of hours, a week and month in terms of days, a year in terms of the four seasons, and centuries in terms of years.

Nature has this measurement from the apparent orbital motion and cycling of the world's sun.

The same is not the case, however, in the spiritual world. Progressions of life there in similar manner appear to take place in time, since people live in that world with each other as people in this world do, which is not possible without an appearance of time; but time there is not distinguished into periods as in the world, for their sun stands constantly in their east, never moving, because it is the Lord's Divine love that appears to them as the sun. Consequently they do not have days, weeks, months, years, or centuries, but instead of these states of life, which result in transitions, transitions which cannot be called transitions of time but transitions of state.

So it is that angels do not know what time is, and when they hear time referred to, they perceive instead a reference to state. Moreover, when state is what determines time, time is only an appearance; for a state of delight causes time to seem short, and a state devoid of delight causes time to seem long.

From this it is apparent that time in the spiritual world is nothing other than a quality of state.



**The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers** is retired and lives with his wife, Kirsten (Rydstrom) in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. He has been an associate professor of Religion and Latin in Bryn Athyn College and served for many years as a General Church translator. Contact: [nbrogers@verizon.net](mailto:nbrogers@verizon.net)

# Memorial Day 2021

*Note: This Memorial Day address, delivered May 31, 2021, in Bryn Athyn, is published here after numerous requests. We hope its message will resonate in other nations as well, where various observances – including November 11 Remembrance Day in Canada, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day in the United Kingdom, and the April 25 ANZAC Day in Australia and New Zealand – honor those who gave their lives in war in the cause of freedom. This includes the prayer offered by the Rev. Eric Carswell, pastor of the Bryn Athyn congregation.*

## Memorial Day Prayer

*The Rev. Eric H. Carswell*

Lord, we gather on this Memorial Day with grateful hearts for those who have fought and died that we might have the benefits of freedom and opportunity that we have today. Help us to reflect on all that was lost for so many, some never seeing their 20th year, never marrying or being there to raise a family, missing the rich fulfillment of decades of service through their work. They found their final rest long, long before they would have seen retirement years. In the words of Abraham Lincoln: Let us “be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.” Truly may it be so. Amen.

## Memorial Day Address

*Bruce Henderson*

Thank you – all of you – for being here today to remember and to honor the men and women who gave their lives in service to their country and to the cause of freedom. They deserve our deepest gratitude and respect – every day.

We are here this morning as part of the tableaux of remembrance that echo across the land. But we always come to Memorial Day with mixed emotions



– solemn and uplifting – honoring and mourning those who sacrificed their lives.

Since the Civil War, more than one million Americans have died for the freedom of others – for family and friends, for countrymen and strangers. Each died before his time and each tragedy resonated through loved ones and communities. Each of them had a life arcing into an unrealized future. And every name on a plaque – like the ones here in Borough Park – is worth remembering and saluting because each of them made a commitment to something larger than life itself. The sum of that commitment is our freedom.

Take a minute this morning to look at the names on these plaques – men from this community who served in our nation’s wars. We know these families. We still feel that connection with men who stood here with us not that many years ago, who were part of the liberating forces of D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge.

All of these men and women had long lives calling to them but were driven by urges to accept responsibility and protect freedom – to love their neighbors more than themselves. These are values nurtured in schools and churches and around dinner tables. This is what we honor them for today – their character.

Beyond this tranquil setting are two indelible symbols for me of what “laying down your life for your friends” is all about: the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, and the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

That iconic World War Two cemetery sits solemnly above the D-Day beaches where the cataclysmic horror of 77 years ago has given way to sacredness and serenity. As far as the eye can see 10,000 stark white crosses and Stars of David stand eloquent and mute – but shout the price of freedom.

There is an eerie stillness among those endless, perfect rows of graves, their symmetry mocking the wantonness of war. The impact of all those brave young men forever silenced dulls voices to whispers. This is hallowed ground.

You read the names on alabaster tombstones and understand that each of these men had a story, had a dream. And each was a hero to his loved ones and his country.

Walk to the edge of the cemetery and you look down on Omaha Beach. We’ve seen its horror recreated in movies – *The Longest Day* and *Saving Private Ryan*. Still, it defies imagination: that sunny sky blackened with 10,000 planes, that shimmering sea menaced with 5,000 ships, that pristine beach forever haunted with memories.

What you see now – children and families frolicking in surf and sand, amid brightly colored umbrellas – is what they bought that day with their lives. But they would not begrudge the laughter drowning out the echoes. This is what they died for. They rest in peace.

Some 23 years after D-Day my wife Carol and I visited a family she knew in St. Malo on that Normandy Coast. The grandfather described for us how they fled inland when the invasion began. Returning days later, they found nothing standing but their kitchen door. I asked him if they resented the Americans for destroying their home and their town. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he said: “We loved the Americans. They gave us freedom.”

The connection to real people is all the more compelling at the Vietnam Memorial, where the names of more than 58,000 Americans are etched into that stark slash of black granite. It is altogether fitting that it rests in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, forever echoing his prayer that “these men shall not have died in vain.” As we search the wall its numbing power is that our own faces are reflected in all these names. They were, after all, just like us.

Many of us know someone on The Wall or are deeply stirred by connections to families in our community. Two of the names engraved there are among the finest young men I have ever known: Dan Ebert and Richard Simons, whose names also grace Academy athletic fields where they competed so honorably.

Dan was my wife’s beloved first cousin and our oldest son proudly bears his name. We all know Rick’s brothers and sister in this community. He was one of us. They are both remembered with smiles and tears.

Rick loved adventure and loved writing. After high school he and a classmate rode their bicycles across the country and he sent reports back to a local newspaper. He was a great athlete in the Boys School – football, basketball, baseball. A teammate told me that Rick was the most unselfish player he ever knew, drawing defenders to himself on the basketball court, then feeding him the ball for an easy layup.

After graduating from the Boys School Dan went to Georgetown University, where he rowed crew and was both captain and stroke for their eight-man shell. In 1964 they won the prestigious Dad Vail Regatta in Philadelphia – the largest rowing event for college and high school teams from all over the country.

In 2014 Dan’s team came back to Philadelphia to celebrate the 50th anniversary of that historic victory. The seven remaining members went out of their way to spend a day in Bryn Athyn. They wanted to see the school, the church, the community that helped produce such an outstanding young man. They treated Carol like a celebrity as a stand-in for Dan, with grace and kindness. The highlight that day was a gathering in the Bryn Athyn Cemetery, just over the hill. Each man stood beside Dan’s grave, in the order they sat in their boat, saluted him and spoke about what he meant to them – as a teammate and a friend. It was touching and emotional.

Rick was a Green Beret in Vietnam. Dan was a captain leading a combat platoon. Each was engaged to be married and excited about the future. I had

a chance to speak with each of them before they returned to Vietnam for the last time. They had no fear or trepidation, only a calm conviction that they were doing the right thing – standing up to communism and fighting for freedom. They trusted in providence. Both were deeply loved by the men who served with them.

We also remember that mournful day 15 years ago when Tristan Smith came home from Iraq to the solemn pageantry of a hero's funeral. His dog tags spoke to his abiding faith: "If I live, I live in the Lord. If I die, I die in the Lord." He, too, was among the best and brightest who answer the call to serve God and country – and never look back.

Such brave young men teach us about life – what it means to sacrifice, what it means to serve, what it means to love. Like all the names on tombstones and plaques, they speak to sad stories of what might have been, but proud stories of what their lives still mean to us.

Vietnam and Iraq were not popular wars in our history. Dan and Rick and Tristan may not have picked them as the best battlegrounds for their ideals. But they stand forever with the Band of Brothers who have liberated more countries and freed more people than any nation in history. They claimed no ground on foreign soil except for the military cemeteries that honor those who left home with a mission and never returned – but are forever at peace with their sacrifice.

That all these men and women "shall not have died in vain" depends on how well we learn the lessons they gave their lives for and that history teaches. Through all recorded history only 268 years have been without war somewhere in the world. There have been "good wars" and "bad wars," necessary wars and inevitable wars, wars that changed history, wars of folly, and wars that are forgotten footnotes.

We strive to elevate our civilization, against forces determined to drag it down. But we know that all the wars that plague our history, and foreshadow our future, are rooted in the spiritual conflicts we are all called upon to combat. The more resolute and courageous we are in fighting these battles, the lesser the threat that our sons and daughters and grandchildren will be sent – again – to pay the price of freedom.

Every memorial – whether in France or Washington or our Borough Park – is a reminder of all those willing to die so that we have something to live

That all these men and women "shall not have died in vain" depends on how well we learn the lessons they gave their lives for and that history teaches.

Every memorial is a reminder of all those willing to die so that we have something to live for. To remember them with honor is to commit ourselves to the day when our prayer is answered: “As in heaven, so upon the earth.”

for. To remember them with honor is to commit ourselves to the day when our prayer is answered: “As in heaven, so upon the earth.” To forget what they did – and why – is to risk that their deaths were in vain, and that our lives are jeopardized.

This is why we honor today those who set the example for us – the Dan Eberts and Rick Simons and Tristan Smiths of our nation – who showed us by their lives, their service and their character what it means not to have died in vain.

Their stories, their dreams, their sacrifice, are framed in what has become known simply as “The Letter,”

written in 1861 by Sullivan Ballou to his wife, Sarah, so poignantly captured in Kenneth Burns’ TV epic on the Civil War. It is a classic expression of what brave men risk in going to war – and why – about their faith in a greater meaning to life, and about the pain of those who love and lose them.

Sullivan tells his wife of the great debt he feels for those who endured the blood and suffering of the Revolution. He is perfectly willing “to lay down all the joys in this life to help maintain this government and pay that debt.”

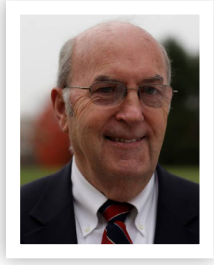
He concludes: “Sarah, my love for you is deathless, and yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly to the battlefield. If I do not return, never forget how much I loved you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name. If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be with you in the brightest day and the darkest night. Always. And when the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath – my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead. Think that I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again.”

Sullivan Ballou died one week later at the first Battle of Bull Run. He did not live to see his sons grown or his dreams fulfilled. But he helped assure that they would grow in a free, united nation, guided by principles that are still a beacon to the world. That was worth dying for. And it is comforting to think that Sarah indeed felt his presence – and found him waiting.

And like a quick breeze stirring our flag and our hearts this morning, let us remember all those fallen soldiers represented by Dan Ebert and Rick Simons and Tristan Smith. I still see their smiles. I know their friendship. I remember

MEMORIAL DAY

again their caring, their kindness, their sincerity and their commitment. And I know that they – and all the others whose names connect with us from gravestones and monuments – are never far away. That we shall meet again. That they did not die in vain. And that they deserve to be thanked and remembered. This day. Every day.



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# Young Adults: Do We Have a Problem?

*The Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith*

*Disclaimer 1: First of all, full disclosure: I'm a millennial (according to some statistics, while according to others, I'm not). I never thought of myself as one, but if they tell me I am, it must be true. Apparently, I'm not a young adult, though. This term applies to adults who are between 18 and 35 years old.*

*Disclaimer 2: Also, I will be throwing around a bunch of relative statistics while quoting just a couple. I try to refer to trends that appeared in surveys about church attendance without making too much direct reference to the numbers themselves. I do this because I've heard that there are three kinds of lies, and one of them is statistics. There are observable situations within our church that appear to have some correlation within the statistics of the broader Christian church. I try to focus more on the trends than the numbers themselves. .*

**I**t seems that the church has a problem. Involvement in the General Church has flat-lined. It's getting harder and harder to get people to show up to events. As an organization that depends on participation and people doing things – not to mention regular contributions – the life of the church is completely dependent on the numbers and activity level of its membership.

Even if we, as an organization, were well-off enough to be unconcerned about our annual contributions (which we no longer are), all communities still require a certain critical mass of peoplepower to carry out regular church and social activities. If nobody shows up to church, the minister has nobody to preach to.

OK, so, we have plateaued. That's not SO bad. At least we are holding steady, right? Well, "yes" and "no." Yes, our global attendance numbers have

leveled off; but no, because our North American numbers are actually in decline. In fact, if not for our African siblings, the global participation numbers of the General Church would be sloping downward.

Many like to blame it on the young adults: “Kids these days. Am I right?” The dearth of young adults in our church is easily observed by attending almost any church service. Is there anything that we can or should do?

In the Broadway show *Hamilton*, the King George character sings a song, “You’ll Be Back.” This is a tune that the General Church – and other Christian churches – have been singing for decades. The General Church is not unique in our young people plight. Nationally, Christian organizations are seeing declining numbers. Yet, there exists this idea that young people go off to college, spend some time away from the church, and then find their way back when they start raising a family. The idea stems from a phenomenon known as the life-cycle effect in which a number of habitual life-long trends emerge around political life, church involvement, etc.

This is the stereotypical church life-cycle effect: children go to church with their families at a young age. As they move into their teens and young adulthood, attendance steadily decreases. Then as young adults, they return to church as they start having families of their own. The frequency of attendance is said to peak at 36-45 years old. Finally, as their families age, they either grow closer to or further from the church. Check out these websites:

- <https://www.barna.com/young-people/>
- <https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/09/04/what-is-the-life-cycle-effect-does-it-appear-in-the-data/>

Depending on whose graph you look at, these trends haven’t necessarily played out in the past with much statistical significance. Some graphs show a noteworthy jump in attendance in the 36-45 age range, while others are far more subtle.

Regardless of what does or does not happen in a statistical line graph, some churches are still relying on the “you’ll-be-back” membership retention model. But it doesn’t seem to be working as we prayed it would. The life-cycle model aside, what numbers do indicate is that overall attendance is down.

Regular attendance that, decades ago, used to be once or more each month

The dearth of young adults in our church is easily observed by attending almost any church service. Is there anything that we can or should do?

Young adults aren't the only ones not showing up to church. Sure, the percentage of young adults who don't show up is greater than older generations, but they are by no means the only reason for low church numbers.

has now turned into just a few-to-several times each year. Additionally, whereas prior generations' church attendance held steady or increased as they aged, the most recent generations who are approaching and moving into their 30s are tending to decrease their church activity.

Some in our church still believe that young people will be back. They are betting on what they believe is a simple delay of the inevitable return. They could be right. We are going through a time of unknowns. What if these young adults are simply delayed in their ability to recognize the need for faith and a religious community in their life. Maybe the generations who

are now aging into their 30s and 40s are going to have a change of heart in their 50s.

But maybe they won't.

The important thing is that we can still blame our declining church attendance numbers on these up-and-coming generations, right? They should go to church. They should support the community. They should become members. Why can't they be more like their parents?

Well, maybe they *are* like their parents, or at least, like their parents' generation. Young adults aren't the only ones not showing up to church. Sure, the percentage of young adults who don't show up is greater than older generations, but they are by no means the only reason for low church numbers.

Over the past 10 years, the percentage of young adults who became unaffiliated with Christianity (16%) was double that of Generation X (8%). Baby Boomers have also been trending away from Christianity. ([https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/pf\\_10-17-19\\_rdd\\_update-00-017/](https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/pf_10-17-19_rdd_update-00-017/)) So, the younger generations may be exiting in greater numbers, but they are not alone. Just a few paragraphs above, I mentioned the observable dearth of young adults; but isn't the dearth of older adults equally observable? Enough about dearths. With the decline in membership and participation that we are experiencing come a variety of questions. Here are some that come to my mind:

- What is getting in the way of people joining in church activities?



- Is there anything that we can proactively do to alter the downward trajectory?
- Should we change any of our habits as an organization in order to keep people involved?
- Are we operating at maximum effectiveness, or is there room for improvement in the things that we do?

The answers to these questions are as varied as we all are as individuals. Statistics, doctrinal passages, and spiritual and natural theories are not in short supply. They all provide some useful insights into why participation is down and whether or not we can do anything to increase it.

In the next installment of this series, I will offer my opinion on the situation, along with some input from the young adult population that I am blessed to serve. In a very small nutshell, my sense is that there is room for improvement. Even though we may not be doing anything particularly wrong, this doesn't mean that we can't do better. So, the question is, how can we do better? I will be offering my opinions, and I welcome yours here: [Jeffrey.Smith@newchurch.org](mailto:Jeffrey.Smith@newchurch.org).

With the decline in membership and participation that we are experiencing come a variety of questions. . . . The answers to these questions are as varied as we all are as individuals.



**The Rev. Jeffrey Smith** wears three hats in his work for the General Church. The biggest has him overseeing several pilot congregations in West Africa, while improving documentation around best practices. Another hat has him ministering to congregations without a full-time pastor. His third hat has him serving and reaching out to young adults throughout the church. He and his wife, Kelsey (Griffiths) live in Bryn Athyn.

# Church News

*Compiled by Bruce Henderson*

## **BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT AND AWARDS**

Bryn Athyn College of the New Church awarded 65 degrees at its 144th commencement on the campus of the College on June 12, 2021 – a sun-splashed coming-out party from COVID-19. This included two firsts: four Bachelor of Fine Arts graduates in the new Building Arts major; and eight Master of Science degrees in Special Education.

Graduates in all programs included: 33 Bachelor of Arts (15 *cum laude*); 19 Bachelor of Science (19 *cum laude*); and one Master of Divinity, in addition to the Fine Arts and Master of Science graduates. The graduates represented three countries (Canada, Israel and the United States) and eight states (Alaska, California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania). See photos on pages 329 and 330.

**Reagan Odhner**, who attended Bryn Athyn College for two years, was the commencement speaker, delivering an inspiring address: *Be True to Your Values*. Reagan is a graduate of Stanford University, a cancer survivor, served two combat tours in Afghanistan with the United States Marines, and works throughout the world to support public well-being and international development. Read her commencement address on page 285.

Here is a listing of the graduates and awards:

### **Bachelor of Arts** (\* indicates *cum laude*)

<b>Roy Aharonovich*</b> – Risehon Le Zion, Israel	<b>Alec Grollman*</b> – Laguna Niguel, CA
<b>Lauren Ball*</b> – Mitchellville, MD	<b>Amanda Harris</b> – Hamilton, NJ
<b>Dawson Broomhead</b> – Philadelphia, PA	<b>Trevor Kleckner</b> – Bethlehem, PA
<b>Talia Brown*</b> – Downingtown, PA	<b>Cole Lambertus*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA
<b>Bennett Buick*</b> – Kempton, PA	<b>Elizabeth Leyva-Diaz*</b> – Philadelphia, PA
<b>Jayda Campbell</b> – Bristol, PA	<b>Nicholas Malvasi</b> – Lincroft, NJ
<b>McKenzie Chalmers</b> – Calgary, Alberta, Canada	<b>Tariq Moore</b> – Philadelphia, PA
<b>Marcell Chappelle-Curry</b> – Philadelphia, PA	<b>Savanna Otero</b> – Philadelphia, PA

**Matheus Chavez\*** – Farmingham, MA  
**Hailey Clark** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Alexis Colbridge** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Daniel Condon** – Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
**Tanner Congdon\*** – Anchorage, AK  
**Angela Creneti\*** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Amy Daskilewicz\*** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Connor Devereux** – Montville, NJ  
**Morgan Flynn\*** – Anchorage, AK

**Danaja Overton** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Destinee Richardson** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Ryan Schmittinger** – Souderton, PA  
**Aven-Leigh Schnarr\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Jarrett Shapcott** – Langhorne, PA  
**Lydia Strobe\*** – Ewing, NJ  
**Rayna Synnestvedt\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Rahim Washington** – Philadelphia, PA

### **Bachelor of Fine Arts**

**Tess Brown\*** – Kempton, PA  
**Elizabeth Jackson** – Bryn Athyn, PA

**Drayton Mapp** – Toronto, Canada  
**Oskar Simons** – Mitchellville, MD

### **Bachelor of Science**

**Jacqueline Bein\*** – Abington, PA  
**Allaina Brock\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Anwyn Brock\*** – Rochester Hills, MI  
**Alerica Carr** – Kitchener, Ontario, Canada  
**Clayshonia Cogmon** – Chester, PA  
**Christine Daum\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Carolyn Erb\*** – Abington, PA  
**Francis Flowers\*** – Warminster, PA  
**Michael Flynn** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Anamata Hashmi** – Philadelphia, PA

**Denali Heinrichs\*** – Kitchener, Ontario  
**Jasna Janikic\*** – Jenkintown, PA  
**Lian Lenihan** – Jenkintown, PA  
**Julia McCabe\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Daniella Portillo-Raudales** – Mill Hall, PA  
**Justin Rallo** – Baltimore, MD  
**Veronica Selvan** – Holland, PA  
**Tina Tu\*** – Silver Spring, MD  
**Dakota Ulmer** – Commerce, MI

The valedictorian for the Bachelor program was **Anwyn Brock**.

### **Master of Science in Special Education**

**Beth Adams** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Jessica Baker** – Jenkintown, PA  
**Laura Hill** – Kitchener, Ontario, Canada  
**Kelly Schuman** – Folsom, PA

**Katharine Sparks** – Elkton, MD  
**Erica Stine** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Brenna Sweeney** – Bowie, MD  
**Jara Zwolak** – Philadelphia, PA

### **Master of Divinity**

**Justin Schorann** – Kempton, PA

The valedictorian for the Masters Program was **Justin Schorann**.

### **Academic Awards**

**Allaina Brock**  
**Talia Brown**  
**Bennett Buick**

### **Department Awards**

Biology: **Anwyn Brock** and **Christine Daum**  
Business: **Alec Grollman** and **Rayna Synnestvedt**  
English and Communications: **Hailey Clark** and **Lydia Strope**  
Mathematics: **Angela Creneti** and **Aven-Leigh Schnarr**  
Religion: **Bennett Buick**

### **Athletic Awards**

The College was not able to offer all of its sports programs this year because of covid restrictions so there were not the usual male/female scholar athlete and outstanding athlete awards. Instead there were academic/athletic awards.

Team academic awards went to women's volleyball and men's basketball teams which had the highest cumulative grade point average for the fall and winter trimester. Individual academic awards went to the top three male and female students for the fall and winter trimesters.

### **Alumni Graduates**

These seven alumni of Bryn Athyn College, who took advantage of its pre-nursing program, received their nursing degrees in May 2021:

**Samantha Baez**  
**Payton Boler**  
**Sierra Heinrichs**  
**Alexis Juritsch**  
**Jess Philipp**  
**Kyla Rogers**  
**Brielle Williams**

Also, **Travis McCurdy** (BS Biology 2016) graduated with a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from the University of the Sciences.

### **ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION AND AWARDS**

The Academy Secondary Schools returned from a year of COVID restrictions to a near-normal graduation June 12 in the Asplundh Field House. The seniors were there, in procession in all of their finery – with parents and friends, faculty and Corporation, and others joining online.

There were 59 graduates: 19 from the Girls School (14 graduating with

honors) and 40 from the Boys School (16 graduating with honors). Beyond the United States and Pennsylvania, they represented Australia and China, plus the states of Connecticut, Georgia and New York. See photos on pages 331 and 332.

The commencement speaker was the **Rev. Chuck Blair**, a long-time popular teacher and housemaster in the Secondary Schools, now pastor of NewChurch LIVE. He charged the graduates to “Build.” Read his commencement address on page 290.

Here is a listing of the graduates and awards:

**Graduates of the Girls School** (\* indicates With Honors)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Lucinda Baltz*</b> – Rydal, PA              | <b>Freya King*</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA    |
| <b>Laken Bau-Madsen*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA      | <b>Samantha Klein</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA |
| <b>Tegan Blair*</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA    | <b>Hanna Matsukawa*</b> – Wyndmoor, PA        |
| <b>Sofia Boyesen*</b> – Slatington, PA         | <b>Carawyn Mergen*</b> – Southampton, PA      |
| <b>Rachael Cole*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA          | <b>Emory Neukum</b> – Abington, PA            |
| <b>Anaïs Connelly*</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA | <b>Jocelyn Roscoe*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA       |
| <b>Julie Daum*</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA     | <b>Crystal Shi*</b> – Shenzhen, China         |
| <b>Caelyn Henderson*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA      | <b>Emma Stine</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA            |
| <b>Larissa Hulon</b> – Wyncote, PA             | <b>Lainey Synnestvedt</b> – Kempton, PA       |
| <b>Thea Keal*</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA      |   |

The valedictorian was **Hanna Matsukawa**.

**Theta Alpha Gold Medals were awarded to:**

- Rachael Cole**
- Hanna Matsukawa**

**Honorary Girls School diplomas were awarded to:**

- Sharon Hurd Boyesen**
- Gina Brenfleck**
- Dawn Michelle Gay**

**Graduates of the Boys School** (\* indicates With Honors)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Zack Brenfleck*</b> – Philadelphia, PA    | <b>Patrick McManus*</b> – Philadelphia, PA |
| <b>Travis Brown</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA         | <b>James Melvin</b> – Philadelphia, PA     |
| <b>Wade Courtney</b> – Abington, PA          | <b>Felix Orthwein*</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA    |
| <b>Jordy Dawkins</b> – Queens, NY            | <b>Jake Peppelman</b> – Bryn Athyn, PA     |
| <b>Dante DeMaria</b> – Huntingdon Valley, PA | <b>Alex Petrignani*</b> – Easton, PA       |

**Patrick Dooley** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Trajan Frazier\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Jarvis Friesen** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**James Gay\*** – Elkins Park, PA  
**Jacob Glenn** – Gold Coast, QLD, Australia  
**Aidan Harrison** – Easton, PA  
**Damian Hendricks** – Kempton, PA  
**Logan Hyler\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Jackson Irwin\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Daniel Jackson** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Daniel Kees\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Magnus Lawing** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Ethan Lewin\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Amal Lewis** – Atlanta, GA

**Derron Pitcairn** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Henry Roth** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Joel Schriver** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Sterling Stein\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Becket Sullivan\*** – Huntingdon Valley, PA  
**Sean Thornton** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Colin Trost** – Philadelphia, PA  
**Andrew Tucker** – Trumbull, CT  
**John Wagner** – Abington, PA  
**Simon Wang\*** – Chengdu, Sichuan, China  
**Rafe Williams\*** – Bryn Athyn, PA  
**Cooper Wynn** – Rydal, PA  
**Nate Yi** – Colledgeville, PA  
**Leo Zhang\*** – Tianjin, China

The valedictorian was **Ethan Lewin**.

A Boys School Gold Faculty Award was presented to **Rafe Williams**.

An Honorary Boys School Diploma was awarded to **Mark Brenfleck**.

**Academic Excellence Awards:**

Girls School: **Meg Matsukawa**  
**Hanna Matsukawa**  
Boys School: **Evan Buss**  
**Levi McFall**

Emilie K. Asplundh Scholarship Award: **Meg Matsukawa**

**Athletic Awards:**

Girls School

Elaine S. Asplundh Award – **Caelyn Henderson**  
Marah P. Boyesen Award – **Anaïs Connelly**

Boys School

Payson Lyman Award – **Jake Peppelman**  
Stanley F. Ebert Award – **Zack Brenfleck**

**Faculty commendations:**

Girls School

**Rachael Cole**  
**Anaïs Connelly**  
**Freya King**  
**Hanna Katsukawa**  
**Carawyn Mergen**

Boys School

**Zack Brenfleck**  
**Julien Buss**  
**Trajan Frazier**  
**James Gay**  
**Logan Hyler**  
**Jackson Irwin**  
**Ethan Lewin**  
**Amal Lewis**  
**Patrick McManus**  
**Jake Peppelman**  
**Alexander Stein**  
**Rafe Williams**

**GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION**

At the June 26 annual meeting of the General Church Corporation in Bryn Athyn the following were elected to three-year terms on the Board of Directors: (\* denotes incumbent)

**John Berridge\*** Deal, Kent, United Kingdom  
**Wade Buick\*** Kempton, Pennsylvania  
**Barbara P. Horigan** Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
**Rene H. Johnson\*** Russell, Pennsylvania  
**Stephanie Klippenstein\*** Maysville, Missouri  
**Brynna C. Smith** Boston, Massachusetts  
**James Uber\*** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
**Ned Uber\*** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
**Wayne Wadsworth\*** Marietta, Georgia  
**Tanya M. Woker** Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

**Catherine A. McQueen**, Bryn Athyn, was elected to fill the unexpired term of **Patrick Mayer**.

Thanked for their service to the Board were: **Amy Buick**, Jenkintown,

Pennsylvania, and **Jennifer Pronesti**, Bryn Athyn, who have served the maximum three consecutive terms; **Cheryl B. Cooper**, Bryn Athyn, who served one term; and **Patrick Mayer**, Bryn Athyn, who resigned for health reasons with two years of his third term remaining.

### **PASTORAL MOVES**

These latest pastoral moves, effective July 1, have been announced by **Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr.:**

- **The Rev. Pearse Frazier** assumes a full-time position as Assistant Director of Outreach in the General Church Central Offices
- **The Rev. Louis Synnestvedt** is pastor of the Boynton Beach New Church in Florida
- **The Rev. Nathan Cole** is acting pastor of the Morningstar Chapel in Atlanta, Georgia
- **The Rev. Nathan Gladish** is acting pastor of the New Church of Boston, Massachusetts
- **The Rev. Jung Ui Lee** is assistant to the pastor of the Olivet New Church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- **The Rev. Justin Schorran**, newly ordained, is assistant to the pastor of the Carmel New Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

### **ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

*(Highlights of the May 7-8 meetings)*

#### **Chancellor**

**The Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.** reported continuing discussions about the Academy rental policy. Doctrinal guideposts have been developed on marriage and disorders, to help guide this and other discussions. The issue remains unsettled and persistent negative attitudes continue toward the Academy over this policy.

#### **Vice Chair**

**Brent McCurdy**, who continues on the board, has filled his term as Vice Chair and was praised for his unwavering and inexhaustible energy “in relentlessly championing the mission and vision of the Academy” and for his constant presence at committee meetings and Academy events. **Dr. Charles Lindsay** takes over as the new Vice Chair.



### **Bryn Athyn College**

Commencement exercises took place June 12 on the college grounds. This included first-time graduates from the MS in Education Program and from the Building Arts Program. (See the Commencement Address by **Reagan Odhner** on page 285 and a listing of graduates and awards beginning on page 316.)

Recruitment has been very successful. Through branding efforts – including the new website – focusing on spirituality, more mission-fit students are coming to the College.

The College is losing: **Dr. Wendy Closterman** as Dean of Academics and Faculty, but she remains on the faculty as a professor; **Renée Rosenfeld**, retiring as Director of Human Resources; and the **Rev. Grant Schnarr** as Senior Chaplain, who becomes the Faculty Council Chair. Replacing them are: **Dr. Jonathan Kline** as Dean of Academics; **Dr. Marcy Latta** as Dean of Faculty; **Dr. Suzanne Nelson** with the added position of Athletic Director; and the **Rev. Coleman Glenn** as Senior Chaplain.

The first draft of the self-study report for accreditation is nearing completion. The Visiting Team will be on campus in April 2022.

### **Academy Secondary Schools**

The Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools returned from a year of covid interruptions to a traditional graduation on June 12. (See the Commencement Address by the **Rev. Chuck Blair** on page 290, and a listing of graduates and awards beginning on page 319.)

The Middle States Association re-accreditation has been granted and objectives are being worked into a new strategic plan. An expansive curriculum review is underway, which will include surveys.

This has been a challenging year with disagreements over school opening and teaching methods during the pandemic, with uncomfortable feedback and intense scrutiny. Hope remains that issues will be addressed in a charitable and orderly way.

This summer the Secondary Schools will hold a retreat to focus on the purposes and mission of the schools and to make sure that the core values of the New Church are being incorporated into “everything we do.”

### **Glencairn Museum**

Despite the pandemic Glencairn Museum was able to provide the Secondary Schools 20 programs in a digital format that ordinarily would have been given in person. Under covid restrictions Glencairn also created a digital program on medieval and renaissance tapestries, as well as digital panel discussion and programs. An exhibit – Craftsmanship at Glencairn: Five Artists – is planned.

Research projects include:

- A report on the inspiration behind Raymond Pitcairn's use of the "clouds of heaven" motif throughout Glencairn
- A published paper on the historic significance of the oil-on-wood Glencairn Pieta (circa 1435-1440), with a shift from Gothic to new Flemish painting styles
- Creation of a 3-D model of the Cherry Street Church in Philadelphia – the original home of the Academy – and completion of a book on the stained glass collection (more than 200 panels) by **Michael Cothren**. Glencairn is working toward a full re-opening, including guided tours.

### **Cairnwood Estate**

During the 32 weeks that Cairnwood could be open, 90 events were held. Cairnwood programs continue to focus on the beginnings of the Bryn Athyn community, which provides a segue to Glencairn and the Cathedral, as well as outreach to the community and Academy schools.

### **Elections**

The Board of Trustees elected:

- Trustees **Emily G. Hasen, Kyle Genzlinger, Brent McCurdy, Ron McQueen** and **Isaac Smith** to the Board Committee
- Trustees **Scott Brickman, Chris Carter, Susan de Maine, Jessica Edmonds** and **Charles Lindsay** to the Bryn Athyn College Board Committee
- Trustees **Susan Asplundh** and **Chris Carter**, plus **Stephen Morley** (member at large) and **Sean Lawing** (Faculty Representative) to the Glencairn Museum Board of Governors
- **Brian Blair, Lynn Genzlinger** and **Drew Nehlig** to three-year terms on the Cairnwood Board of Governors

### **Treasurer**

**Alens Xhoxhi** has been hired as assistant controller. Consolidated budgets for 2021-2022 show a combined deficit of \$2.8 million – \$418,000 lower than the present year.

Several capital projects will be undertaken – all with funding sources from gifts or endowment – including Phase 1 of the Glencairn infrastructure project (\$1.5 million) and the Pitcairn Hall accessibility ramp (\$146,000).

### **Investments and Advancement**

Academy investments have benefited from the extremely strong and broad asset performance in the stock market.

Full Board participation in giving is at 21 out of 24. So far only 66% of Corporation members have given, compared to 87% last year. The average age of donors is increasing. Ways to expand giving by young people are being explored.

## OLD SCHOOL VILLAGE IS WELCOMING OCCUPANTS

*Tom Kerr*



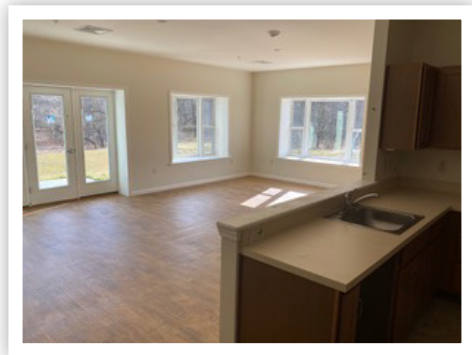
Outside Old School Village

After numerous delays – the last big one relating to a door-certification sticker the size of a quarter – the dream of attractive, reasonably priced apartments in Kempton, Pennsylvania, for New Church seniors (65+) able to live independently is now a reality. Old School Village, which was converted from a former public-school building,

currently houses eight people in five (of 12) shiny new apartments. These folks are settling into life in a micro-New Church community only a five-minute drive from the Kempton New Church and School, and a stone’s throw from several New Church neighbors.

All on the ground floor, the 11 lovely one-and two-bedroom units range from 620 to 1,250 square feet. There is also a 430-square-foot studio apartment. Each unit has its own patio. There is a common laundry, a large lounge with a kitchenette, a small sitting room, a guest bedroom-and-bath for short-term visitors, a gymnasium for many uses, and a large (to be made functional in the future) commercial kitchen.

While the nearly seven-acre property is in the village, it’s bordered on two sides by acres of permanently preserved land being enhanced by its owner for wildlife habitat. The Maiden (or Ontelaunee) Creek, a tributary to the Schuylkill River, is within this space. Birdlife and other wild things



Inside Old School Village

(all friendly) find the mix of trees and open space an amiable habitation and love to show off to those sipping coffee outside on their patios or in the comfortable lounge, through its big windows.

There's plenty to do in Kempton. Young and old learn and worship together in our church community in an effort to follow the Lord's leading. We enjoy regular and festival services and doctrinal classes led by our several ministers. The K-12 school is a beehive of activity and offers opportunities for seniors to view plays the children put on, among other events. World-famous Hawk Mountain Sanctuary – the world's first sanctuary established for birds of prey – is a sight to behold any time of year, but particularly during the fall bird migration. And Hawk Mountain loves volunteers. The 2,190-mile Appalachian Trail runs through the sanctuary, if you're up for that.

The Kempton Community Center is within the village and offers a place to walk, beautiful new tennis courts, a large playground, a chance to watch Little League baseball, and an honest-to-goodness country fair each year, among other things. Lovely Leaser Lake, a fishing and (non-motorized) boating lake, is nearby, as is the delightful Wanamaker, Kempton & Southern Railroad, which offers steam-train rides. Lots for the grandchildren – and the grandparents – to do.

Old School Village, Inc., is a free-standing, not-for-profit entity established solely to provide shelter for senior New Church members. Members of the Kempton congregation have first dibs on apartments, but other New Church men and women are most warmly encouraged to apply.

For more information and to arrange a visit, contact Tom Kerr at [tjkerr3@gmail.com](mailto:tjkerr3@gmail.com), or 484-436-1014, or PO Box 162, Kempton, PA 19529.

## NEW COLLEGE COURSES AVAILABLE

Bryn Athyn College announces two new graduate certificate programs in religious studies, beginning in the upcoming fall term, 2021:

- Our three-course (9-credit) certificate in **Spiritual Growth Studies** provides students the opportunity to explore spiritual growth from multiple disciplinary perspectives, framed by principles of Swedenborgian thought.
- Our three-course (9-credit) certificate in **Biblical Interpretation** provides students the opportunity to explore Biblical interpretation from multiple disciplinary perspectives, framed by principles of Swedenborgian thought.

These certificate programs are ideal for people interested in focused graduate study of the teachings for the New Church but who are not prepared to commit to a full Master of Arts in Religious Studies program. Programs can

be taken remotely or in person.

For more information, please see our website (<https://brynathyn.edu/mars>) or contact program director, the **Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn**, [thane.glenn@brynathyn.edu](mailto:thane.glenn@brynathyn.edu), 267-502-4844.

## A NEW FACE IN ADVANCEMENT

*Mark H. Wyncoll, Director*

I am pleased to announce that **Janet Carswell Lockard** added her extensive skill set to the Advancement team beginning June 15. She is replacing the irreplaceable **Tara Fehon** who retired on June 30. Janet is serving as Donor Relations manager.

Janet brings to the use her life-long experience as a New Church member and her awareness of the unique culture of our donors, members and friends. Her work history of excellent customer relations and the use of communications technology will continue to help us build a base of financial support for the uses we mutually treasure.

Janet has been serving the General Church Central Offices for the past 20 years in General Church Education. It will be additive to our shared work to have her bring this experience to the Donor Relations position. It is our intent to have her work in both Education and Advancement.

## SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION

At the 171st annual meeting of the Swedenborg Foundation in West Chester, Pennsylvania, four new directors were added to the Class of 2021-25:

- **The Rev. Christopher A. Barber**, a teacher of religion at the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania
- **Dylan Hendricks**, Austin, Texas, Director of the Institute for the Future
- **W. Bergen Jungé**, Bryn Athyn, retired information technology professional
- **Peter D. Toot**, founding Director of the Trillium Small Group Center. He has served 14 years on the Board and is Board Secretary.

There were two vacancies caused by the resignations of **Colin Amato** and **Larry Conant**. Elected to replace them were **Kim Shine**, Seattle, Washington, who is on the data center assurance team for Microsoft, and **Devin Zuber**, Berkeley, California, who is an associate professor of American Studies, Religion and Literature at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

Long-time directors the **Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose** and **Stuart Shotwell** resigned from the Board because of their employment with the New Century Edition. They become ex officio Board members so that they may continue

acting in an advisory role. Replacing them on the Board are: **Stephanie Rose**, a producer living in Brooklyn, New York, and **Micah Sadigh**, a psychology professor and department chair at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

## GLORYLAND

**Drew Signor**, who shared a passion for the nature and spirituality of Arizona with the **Rev. Frank Rose**, has published a book, *Gloryland Reprise: Walking the Southern Arizona Wilderness and the Spiritual Implications of Landscape*.

Signor is a poet, essayist, song writer and artist who spreads his heart and soul among 50 brief chapters that sing Arizona's song.

In his Acknowledgments (Credit Where Credit is Due) he says: "I have also been profoundly moved by Swedish philosopher and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. I have alluded to his theory of Spiritual Correspondence in this book. The quotes in 'Beautiful Things' and 'The Walk Out' are his."

He also says of Swedenborg's influence: "I have thrilled to his theology and believe it worthy of investigation, both by the believer and non-believer, the scientist and the intellectual, or a simple man of faith such as myself. Just as John C. Van Dyke taught me to see that the landscape itself is a painting, Swedenborg taught me to see that the artist, exquisitely manipulating the natural canvas, finesses all with a spiritual hand and in measures divine."



(Photos by Serena Sutton and Michelle Chapin)



Suzanne Nelson, left, and Wendy Closterman



The graduates



The faculty



Commencement speaker Reagan Odhner with President Brian Blair



The Procession



The outdoor setting



Graduates Denali Heinrichs and Justin Schorann – soon to be wed – with family



The celebration toss



Anwyn Brock, valedictorian



(Photos by Holly Adams, Bruce Cronlund and Serena Sutton)



Girls School Valedictorian  
Hanna Matsukawa



All smiles



Behind the masks, left to right;  
Chancellor Peter Buss, Principals  
Jeremy Irwin and Kira Schadegg,  
and Chaplain Barry Halterman



Heartfelt hugs



Boys School Valedictorian Ethan Lewin



Seniors with their banner



Chuck Blair with graduates



Graduate Caelyn Henderson with parents, Greg and Jenna, and siblings Grayson and Morgan



The class song



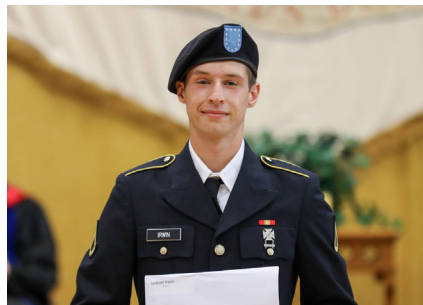
Commencement speaker Chuck Blair: 'Go forth and build'



The Procession



Dante DeMaria, left, and Jackson Irwin, dressed for their military future



# Life Lines

*Bruce Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

## **MYRA JOHNS ASPLUNDH**

*(November 13, 1928 – May 12, 2021)*



Boyd and Myra as a young couple

Myra Asplundh was a doer. All of her life, she got involved and got things done. Sometimes her work and her generosity were visible, but much of her and Boyd's support for people and causes we knew nothing about. That's the way she liked it. She was in it for the doing and the caring and the helping, not for recognition. And while the Church and New Church education took up much of the doing in her life, she was always first a wife and mother. She had her priorities right.

In his Memorial Address the Rev. Stephen Cole called her "a mother in Israel." This alludes to the prophetess Deborah in the Book of *Judges*, who "did not simply go out to lead the Israelites against King Jabin. Instead, she roused up the people from their inaction." She did not conquer the enemy on her own, "but the victory would

not have happened without her urging and inspiration."

Deborah says of herself: "I arose a mother in Israel." Myra was not as given to dramatics, but she surely was a mother in the church who left her mark by making plans, getting things done, and stirring others to action.

She was a leader and a doer with Theta Alpha – at both the local and international level – and the legendary Religion Lessons mailed to outlying families throughout the church. She was described in the *Theta Alpha Journal* as someone with "great abilities and apparently inexhaustible energy" – which continued her and Boyd's charitable work with The Furniture Lady for many years at an age when most people have happily retired.

Apparently, it took three women to fill Myra's shoes when she stepped down from Theta Alpha in the 1980s. And with a discussion planned at the 1984 General Assembly on the role of women in the church, Myra left a challenge for women that expressed much of her philosophy:

“Having been involved in the uses of Religion Lessons, Sunday School and Theta Alpha all my married life, I see some problems that may arise about the role of women in the church. Serving in (these) uses I am impressed with the lack of help which these and many others are experiencing. The helpers are harder and harder to find. Women of the church are busier and busier, but not in the uses of the church.

“I believe that women in the church today, and in the future, will have to make some hard decisions. Priorities will have to be reviewed and perhaps re-evaluated. Having worked in Theta Alpha and Religion Lessons so long, I am very much aware that it is the Lord's Church, and we can only do our stumbling best to help make it grow. But we cannot let our hands hang down and hope that someone else will do it.”

Myra surely would agree that women – and men – have been stepping up in volunteer roles throughout the church and its schools and communities. But it's still a valid charge to the men and women of the church from one “Mother in Israel” who never let her hands hang down, waiting for someone else to step up.

And so much of all that she did was with Boyd at her side. They set the example for their family – grown to some 100 descendants – and for all of us. As Mr. Cole concluded his Memorial Address: “We can only imagine the number of people affected simply by seeing them walking, hand in hand, across the campus – or on into eternity.” May they never be out of our sight.

(BMH)

### THE BLESSED REMNANT

One of the many comforting teachings in the Writings is that for all the religious and moral decline in the world, the Lord needs only a remnant of people reading, loving and living the truths of the Word for the New Church to grow. The same is true for our ability to enter heaven.

For all of the forces around us that are not hospitable to the growth of the New Church, the power of the Lord's love and mercy needs just a few good men and women to prevail:

“The church is a church (where) the Lord is adored and the Word is read. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1069)

This is all the encouragement we need – for the growth of the New



Church and for the direction of our own lives. We know that as a result of the Last Judgment the New Church can be formed in people's minds only as the falsities of the former church are removed. Only then can Heavenly Doctrine be received.

We also know that the New Church is created on earth according to its increase in heaven. But that fact – along with the teaching that the church must remain small at first – is not an invitation to complacency but to action. That means we should be doing what we can to grow the church – beginning in our own minds and lives.

The Lord gives us assurances in the *Genesis* story of Abraham bargaining with the Lord for sparing the corrupt city of Sodom, where his brother Lot lived. Abraham asked first if the Lord would spare Sodom if just 50 good people lived there. Given assurances from the Lord that He would do so, Abraham bargained for 45, then 30, 20 and 10. At each step, the Lord agreed. But there was not even the “remnant” of 10 good people. So, after Lot and his family escaped, Sodom was destroyed.

There is rich spiritual meaning within all this – about the spiritual correspondence of each number with the degree of regeneration among the people. The message also has clear application to our own lives. You really have to want to go to hell – to completely deny the Lord and live for your own selfishness and worldly pleasures. But if we have at least a remnant of good to work with, the Lord can use that to elevate us to heaven.

No connection to heaven is possible unless somewhere on earth there is a church where the Lord is known through that Word. . . . Even if this church consists of comparatively few people, still the Lord is present throughout the world by means of the Word, since heaven is connected to the human race through the Word. (*True Christian Religion* 267)

(BMH)

## THE TRIUMPH OF GOODNESS

This September 11th is the sobering 20th anniversary of the terrorist attack that leveled the World Trade Towers in New York City, gouged out a portion of the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and left a crater in a field in western Pennsylvania where brave passengers stopped a hijacked flight homing in on Washington's Capitol or the White House. More than 3,000 innocent people died that day and our memories are forever seared.

But beyond the devastation of lives lost and families shattered, buildings obliterated and our own lives left reeling, our hearts were uplifted as well in the aftermath. There were many heroic stories of sacrifice that day – from the

passengers taking charge of Flight 93 to police and fire fighters rushing into the doomed towers to save people and sacrificing their own lives. But in the days that followed there have been thousands of little stories about compassion and kindness – from people reaching out to strangers in New York, a city known for avoiding eye contact, to residents in Gander, Newfoundland, Canada, opening their homes to thousands of people stranded there for days when planes flying between Europe and the United States were ordered to the ground.

William Shakespeare famously said in *Julius Caesar*, when Mark Antony “came to bury Caesar, not to praise him”:

    | The evil that men do lives after them;  
    | The good is oft interred with their bones.

There is now a powerful memorial in New York at the site of the Twin Towers, where people cannot forget “the evil that men did” but are stirred now with pride. There is also a simple but elegant museum and memorial in that hallowed ground in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where visitors speak in respectful whispers. The evil of a few brief moments does not live in these sacred places, but the goodness that is our enduring answer.

Euripides – back in the 400s BC – had a better sense of the eternal struggle between good and evil:

    | When good men die their goodness does not perish,  
    | But lives though they are gone. As for the bad,  
    | All that was theirs dies and is buried with them.

All of this is a powerful, hopeful message about the workings of Divine Providence, always striving – through the anonymous kindnesses of millions of caring people – toward good.

    | 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. (*True Christian Religion*  
    | 457)

(BMH)

### THE CALL TO GOODNESS

Of all the examples of goodness triumphing over evil in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, one of the best known is the Tunnels2Towers Foundation, which has provided millions of dollars to families of victims for mortgages and other life-sustaining aid.

The founder is the brother of one of the firemen who was playing golf that day but rushed back to New York when he heard the news, ran two miles

through one of the tunnels closed to traffic – wearing 60 pounds of gear – and plunged into one of the burning towers. He was never seen again.

In creating this foundation with his family, that proud brother says simply that they were raised in the Franciscan ethic that our lives are a constant calling to do good. This is their way of honoring their brother and all the others who perished that day trying to do good – by simply doing good in their name.

It sounds a lot like the doctrine of use we feel called to in the church. But whether the church specific or the church universal, the Lord is calling and leading us to serve:

We are born for no purpose but to be useful to the community we live in and to our neighbor as long as we are alive in the world, and to serve at the Lord's good pleasure in the other world. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1103:2)

(BMH)

#### A RUNAWAY RECOMMENDATION MACHINE

One of the beauties of the internet is its power to recommend the best answers to our questions and issues. Whether we need to find a good lawyer in Cleveland, a good show on TV, or a good hotel in Paris, the answer is as near as our phone or computer. While we may not necessarily depend on these recommendations, and often regard them skeptically considering their sources, they are usually seen as immensely beneficial. More than that, the algorithms and inputs that drive these recommendations may be seen in some ways as directing our choices, influencing public opinion on a large scale, and touching our lives in ways that we may not fully appreciate or understand.

Fortunately for us this is a phenomenon that is discussed in the Writings at some length, and their conclusions may surprise you. People everywhere are influenced by this kind of suggestion, and the phenomenon itself is not criticized. For example, Swedenborg comments on how it works in England:

It is in the nature of the British that if they read a book that has not been recommended by someone they respect, they see in it only the words on the page and their literal meaning, and not the gist of what is being said. . . . But when they read a book that has been recommended by someone they respect, they are able to rise above the literal meaning and see the import of the work. They then apparently gain enlightenment about the topic under discussion. So the recommendation of someone they respect is needed before this enlightenment can occur. As a result, when a book is recommended, they will buy thousands of copies; if a book is not recommended,

no one buys it – almost no one whatsoever in the entire kingdom. The British are all alike in this respect. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5951; Jonathan S. Rose translation)

Seemingly as a result of this understanding, Swedenborg made efforts to have the books of the Writings reviewed by trusted writers and respected leaders. He sent them to members of the clergy and nobility. While these efforts appear to have been unsuccessful, over time there have been many testimonies about the Writings by influential English-speaking writers. The results remain unspectacular, but if we trust in the process we can be sure that in time somewhere on earth public sentiment will change.

There is no hint in this passage that there is anything inappropriate or dangerous about any of this. Swedenborg's response to it seems to have been to try to make use of it to increase the distribution of his works.

This aspect of the British character is referenced several times in the Writings.

They have a profound intellectual light. . . . They owe this light to their freedom of thought and consequent freedom of speech and writing. . . . This light is not automatically activated in them, however; it is stimulated by others, especially by those who are famous or powerful among them. As soon as people hear statements from these authorities or read something they have recommended, then this light blazes forth; it rarely happens before [such stimulation]. Because of this the British in the spiritual world are assigned governors and are given preachers renowned for their scholarship and brilliance. The people willingly obey edicts and advice from them because to do so is in their nature. (*Supplements* 40; also *True Christianity* 807)

This is a testament to the value of good leadership. When we have leaders whom we love and trust, it is in our nature, as English-speaking people, to willingly listen to them and accept their advice. Apparently, this quality has the effect of reducing the number of “demons” among us:

Few of the English are demons because in an issue at hand they depend on the authority of others apart from their own thinking, and because also they are easily influenced by the reasoning of others and the arguments understood and consequently accepted if they simply believe that a man is learned and honest and one of their countrymen. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5577)

This is saying that our tendency to go along with the thoughts of people whom we trust has a dampening effect on the qualities that make a person a



“demon” – a demon being a spirit who is driven by evil desires.

People everywhere surely have similar tendencies to be influenced by recommendations. But given that this seems to be especially true among English-speaking people, it is not surprising that we have devised efficient ways of collecting and communicating them. The internet turns out to be the perfect device for this.

Doug Terry, a technologist who has worked for Xerox, Microsoft, Samsung and Amazon, is credited with being a key developer of the technology that has turned the internet into a giant recommendation machine. He invented what is called “collaborative filtering”, a process that goes beyond the simple collection of online reviews and recommendations. It is the origin of the algorithms that cause things that are similar to ones you have chosen in the past to be presented to you on the internet almost everywhere you go. (*Runaway Recommendation Engine, Planet Money, NPR.com, May 26, 2021*)

While people often object strenuously to the way that this process manipulates both our financial decisions and our social and political opinions, it is nothing more than a new version of the social manipulation that has always existed.

There has never been a time when parents did not seek to guide their children, and to do what they could to place them in environments that would positively influence their thoughts and behaviors. Similarly, everyone, whether adult or child, is influenced, and even manipulated, by the speech and actions of those around them, whether they are aware of this or not. The Writings tell us in many passages that we do not think from ourselves but from others, both from those we associate with in this world and from our unseen spiritual connections. (*Arcana Coelestia 2886*)

Rather than objecting to this, the Writings encourage us to be aware of the power of our social environment, and to monitor it for our safety and well-being. All of us are more easily influenced than we think – for good or for ill. This is what this passage states:

Interaction with evil people (in the spiritual world) has this contagious effect, as you can clearly see from the following similar situations: As you spend time with thieves or pirates you eventually become like them. As you live among adulterous men and promiscuous women, eventually you think nothing of adultery. If you join a rebel group, eventually you think nothing of doing violence to anyone. All evils are contagious. They are like a plague you become infected with just by breathing in and out. They are like cancer and gangrene that spread and corrupt nearby areas, then more and more remote areas, until the whole body dies. The cause:

| from birth we all enjoy evil. (*True Christianity* 120)

Few people believe that they are this vulnerable. But we should be aware of how strongly we are affected by the repeated assertions and assumptions of the people that we associate with and listen to.

The influence of others, however, is a different thing than coercion. While all of us are influenced more than we know, coercion is wrong in the realm of spiritual things. We read:

The Lord in no way compels anybody. No one who is compelled to think that which is true and to do that which is good is reformed, but instead thinks all the more what is false and wills all the more what is evil. This is so with all compulsion, as may also become clear from all the experience and lessons of life, which when learned prove two things - first, that human consciences will not allow themselves to be coerced, and second, that we strive after the forbidden. [2] Furthermore everyone who is not free desires to become so, for this is his life. From this it is evident that nothing is in any way pleasing to the Lord that is not done in freedom, that is, spontaneously or willingly. For when anyone worships the Lord under circumstances in which he is not free he worships Him with nothing of himself. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1947)

There are religious systems that routinely coerce their adherents through systematic tools of social pressure. Church members are regularly examined as to their beliefs, contributions and actions. Privileges are granted or removed accordingly; and not only social standing but actual livelihoods can be threatened by the failure to do what is expected.

There is a world of difference, however, between this kind of compulsion and the natural social influences that occur in any group. Parents who seek to raise their children in a social environment that is in harmony with their beliefs, and in the child's best interests, are not at the same time guilty of manipulation or coercion. Religious schools like the Academy of the New Church do not compel belief but aim to provide an environment where the students' natural inclination to listen to the recommendations of others will have positive results.

One of the challenges in any body is to search out and cultivate leaders who are respected. According to the passages quoted above, the British, or possibly those who speak English everywhere, have a particular inclination to listen to and follow people whom they see as honest and knowledgeable. The presence of these leaders has an enlightening effect on them.

Something similar may be provided by the many sources of recommendations available on the internet and elsewhere. Some of them are

trusted more than others, and their recommendations are immensely helpful for all of us.

Still, it is up to each of us to decide who we will listen to and who we will not. Ultimately the Lord in His Word is our only teacher and guide.

(JFS)

### **WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM?**

We know that the Lord's presence and providence are in every aspect of His creation, from the unseen atom to the farthest constellation.

We see this all around us – in the miracles of nature, the innocence of the newborn, the serenity of old age. We glimpse something of God, something of heaven. But when we enlarge our perspective – through a telescope or a microscope – we witness the Lord in the far reaches of the universe and the tiniest forms of life that we cannot see with the naked eye. And we begin to appreciate His omniscience.

Start with what we call “the visible universe.” It is said to be a million-million-million-million miles across. The number of light years to the edge of the unseen universe is written not with tens of zeroes but millions. The average distance between the stars sprinkled through the sky is 20 million-million miles. Nobody knows how many stars are in just our Milky Way – somewhere between 100 billion and 400 billion. And the Milky Way is just one of some 140 billion other galaxies. Unfathomable to our minds. But all of this is kept in order by the Lord.

Then consider the single human cell – splitting to become two, then four, then eight, and within just 47 doublings there are 10 thousand trillion cells forming a human body – each carrying life, each forming a grander life.

It is all humbling but life-affirming. No matter how great or small, the Lord is present and all life matters.

Many of us fondly remember the Dr. Seuss story *Horton Hears a Who*, in which the elephant Horton saves the tiny planet Whoville – so small it exists on a speck of dust threatened by other animals. Horton hears the little voice of a Who he can't even see and decides to protect it because “a person's a person no matter how small.” It's a lesson that resonates with children – and with all of us.

A Memorable Relation in *Conjugal Love* 329 relating to this describes a group of boys following Swedenborg home after a lesson. They see something tiny scamper across a sheet of paper and ask what it is.

“It's called a mite,” he says, “and I will tell you wonderful things about it. In so small a living thing there are as many members and viscera as in a camel. There are brains, heart, pulmonary organs, organs of sense, of motion, and

of generation, a stomach, intestines, and many other things. And each one of these is woven together of fibers, nerves, blood vessels, muscles, tendons and membranes; and each of these is woven together of still purer things that lie deeply hidden beyond the reach of every eye.”

Swedenborg tells this to the boys “that you may know it is similar with every object that appears before you as one simple and least thing, as well in your actions as in your affections and thoughts.” He adds that “everything divided is more and more manifold, not more and more simple, because being divided and divided it approaches nearer and nearer to the infinite, in which all things are infinitely.”

We have all experienced a feeling of insignificance – beneath the wonder of a starry night or peering at a slide under a microscope teeming with unseen life. We echo the psalmist: “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” We gain a real appreciation that for all the reach of the Lord’s creation – from planets unseen to the lowly mite – everything is created for use, each of us is at the center of His creation and that “the kingdom of God is within you.”

(BMH)

## HEAVEN ISN'T BEYOND US

Renaissance paintings imagining heaven and hell depict heaven as clouds and halos, harps and cherubs – pretty boring. Hell looks scary enough but somehow more racy and interesting. Maybe that’s why Mark Twain said: “Heaven for climate. Hell for society.” And Woody Allen looked forward to “weekdays in heaven and weekends in hell.”

Everyone wonders. Most people – who haven’t read *Heaven and Hell* – have some basic beliefs but still look for assurances.

A new book tries to help: *Beyond – How Humankind Thinks About Heaven*. The author, Catherine Wolff, takes a scholarly and exhaustive approach, quoting intellectuals, theologians and philosophers, while examining faith traditions from Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and others. The book is praised for its scholarship. But it still comes up short because it looks to “humankind” for answers, not the one true source: revelation from the Lord.

I have not read her book, but she does indicate in her index that Emanuel Swedenborg is mentioned on page 150 and her extensive bibliography includes: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake, *The Presence of Other Worlds* by Wilson van Deusen, and one source that should have given her a taste of what she was looking for – *Afterlife: A Guided Tour of Heaven and Its Wonders*, credited to Emanuel Swedenborg and Donald Rose.

Maybe she did get something out of that because she says in her Introduction: “In rare instances of agreement, most people held that the way

we live our lives on earth affects our prospects for the life beyond, through good deeds and compassion for others.”

She also says: “The wonder of it all is that, despite not knowing where we are going or what it might be like, we keep yearning for the life beyond.”

Indeed. That is why one comment to a review in *The Wall Street Journal* said with heartfelt simplicity: “My view of heaven is seeing my son again.” And another: “For me it is my lost wife.”

Another author, praising the book, said: “I’m very, very impressed by *Beyond* – so beautifully researched, comprehensive, learned and friendly in its presentation. It’s the finest overall book on the afterlife that I have ever read.”

Well, that’s good and let’s hope it encourages others to search still further. But he – and Catherine Wolff – and any others looking to go “beyond” need to expand their reading lists.

(BMH)

### THINGS HEARD AND SEEN

Who would have guessed at the turn of this century that within just a few years videos on something called YouTube would be connecting people all over the world with the Writings, Swedenborg and the New Church? And now Netflix!?

That popular site for streaming movies and television series offered a film that became an overnight sensation in the spring – *Things Heard and Seen*, which comes from the full title of Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* – and now has people all over the world eagerly buying the book. This is the kind of thing our best planning for spreading the church just could not anticipate. But it is opening new possibilities.

The movie opens with this quote from *Spiritual Experiences* 5685: “This I can declare that things that are in heaven are more real than things that are in the world.” It revolves around a family of Swedenborgians in New York’s Hudson Valley in the 1980s. The cover of *Heaven and Hell* is shown several times and Swedenborg is dealt with respectfully. The story does get into ghosts and even a séance, although much of what is said about Swedenborg and the reality of the spiritual world is positive. (The film features paintings of George Inness, a devout follower of Swedenborg and a prominent member of the Hudson Valley River School of painting.)

The movie instantly drew a lot of interest to Swedenborg. The Swedenborg Foundation was quick to recognize the opportunity and published an excellent article – *Things Seen and Heard: Separating Swedenborg from the Story* – on its website. ([www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com)) The article provides a good background on Swedenborg and the teachings of the Writings – especially about life after death – but points out too what the movie gets wrong.

About ghosts and communicating with spirits, for instance, it notes: “This might make for a fun story, but it is not an accurate representation of Swedenborgian beliefs and practices. Although there are stories of Swedenborg communicating with spirits of the departed, Swedenborg himself described this as a result of being able to travel to the afterlife in spirit form. And as he was careful to stress, this was something that he was allowed to do only with the Lord’s permission and protection, and only so that he could bring knowledge of spiritual principles back to earth. Swedenborg actively discouraged others from attempting to do the same, warning that it would be easy for people to be deceived by what they experienced and become spiritually damaged as a result. For that reason, Swedenborgian groups tend to discourage attempts at spirit contact among their members.”

The popularity of the movie – and the interest it has aroused in Swedenborg – apparently became a “trending” discussion on the General Church ministers’ cyber council. And the Swedenborg Foundation has been responding to a lot of the interest.

Morgan Beard, Director of the Foundation, says: “We did indeed get a surge of interest when the film was first released. That opening weekend our website traffic almost tripled, then gradually fell off. We probably got an additional 7-8,000 visitors on *Swedenborg.com* over those couple of weeks, and another 1,000 or so on *offTheLeftEye.com*. Curtis Childs did a reaction video on its YouTube channel that’s gotten more than 7,500 views to date.”

She also said there were about 3,000 visits to the website page where people can download *Heaven and Hell*, and assumed a good percentage of those people did so.

She adds: “We were also really pleased to see that a number of reviews of the film had clearly visited one of our sites and used the information we provided. That’s part of what we hope for when putting information online and providing resources – that we can be a good source of information for people looking for it.”

This movie may not be an ideal introduction to Swedenborg and the Heavenly Doctrines but it is drawing attention to the reality of the spiritual world – heaven and hell – and the connection with this world. This is leaving viewers with questions that present challenges and opportunities for all of our churches – and websites – and for each of us individually, to answer their questions and lead them to the answers. We need to welcome the opportunity to respond.

And who knows what the popularity of this movie might inspire for more stories about Swedenborg and the New Church – positive or negative. The Parable of the Sower has amazing implications for spreading seeds in all kinds of soil for the potential growth of the church. Even in Netflix.

(BMH)



ADVANCEMENT

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