

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022



The Gift of Inspiration

From the depths and beauty of the Word to the awe of nature the Lord leads us and guides us with His gift of inspiration. The Rev. John Odhner shares that inspiration in a sermon on page 25.

NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180)

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New Church Life

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

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In This Issue

Editorials (page 5) include:

- *Change in the Mirror, Change in the Church*: The one thing we can be certain of in any new year is that there will be change – changes in our lives, change in the church. The challenge is to manage personal change for our own growth and regeneration, and for the church that it adapt to changing needs without compromising on doctrine.
- *The Book that Made Heaven Rejoice*: Swedenborg’s precursor to his crowning work, *True Christian Religion*, was the seemingly less important *Brief Exposition*, but its publication was greeted with great rejoicing in heaven. Why was that?

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., as Executive Bishop of the General Church, offers “Standing for Marriage in Today’s World: A Church Perspective.” There are many sensitive issues surrounding this topic, very much at the forefront of our faith and culture, and we are best guided – as a church and as individuals – by what the Lord teaches. As Bishop Buss notes, “From an organizational sense, when there are heated subjects affecting the life of the Church, they need to be addressed.” And they are best addressed from the Lord’s love and wisdom. (Page 15)

In a sermon on *The Gift of Inspiration*, the Rev. John Odhner describes how the Lord uses inspiration – from His creation – to teach us from the inside. “He flows into our souls with His love and enlightens us inwardly with spiritual light.” (Page 25)

We are all on a journey, says the Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick, and need to find joy and purpose in it. “We can find joy in the journey, if we seek it. We have been invited to take the journey of a lifetime – in fact the journey of an endless lifetime, by the God Who created heaven and earth, and Who Himself tread every step of this journey alone.” (Page 31)

The Rev. Grant Odhner offers a thoughtful, doctrinal response – *Divine Foresight: Miraculous and Wonderful* – to the paper by the Rev. Bruce Rogers, *Divine Foresight and Human Free Will*, published in the July/August 2021 issue of *New Church Life*. He writes: “Though I can understand the difficulty

of reconciling our notion of the Lord's foreknowledge and human freedom, I remain convinced that the Lord does indeed know the future, specifically.” (Page 36)

Among the heroes who helped to launch the New Church in England in the 18th century – whom we need to know more about and to honor – is Robert Hindmarsh. He had the courage and the calling to stand up for what he believed – separating from the prevailing church of the day – because he recognized Swedenborg's Writings as a new revelation from the Lord. Read the first of a fascinating two-part series put together by Marvin Clymer. (Page 48)

The Rev. Prescott Rogers answers a provocative question about “Where is God in evolution?” with an equally provocative article: *The Heavenly Doctrines and the Case For and Against Evolution – at the Same Time*. (Page 61)

From the depths of covid lockdown in Australia, the Rev. Howard Thompson offers a pair of hopeful reflections: *Return to Normal?* And an *Olympic Reflection*. “My prayer for each of us,” he says, “is this: Far from returning to normal, I pray each of us is becoming that new person the Lord intends us to be, an angelic image of the Lord Himself.” (page 65)

Church News (page 69) includes:

- Reports on regional clergy meetings in Europe, West Africa and South Africa, plus the dedication of a new church building in Benin
- A report from the United Kingdom on an All Age Weekend, preceding the European Clergy Meetings, and the British Academy Summer Camp
- Highlights from an Academy Board meeting in October
- Year-end report – and a look ahead – for the Church in Asia
- More exciting developments with the New Christian Bible Study website

Editorials

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

CHANGE IN THE MIRROR, CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

The one thing we can be sure about in this new year of 2022 is that it will bring change: change across our global landscape; change in the church; change in our own lives.

This is ancient wisdom. Greek philosopher Heraclitus said 2,500 years ago: “There is nothing permanent except change.” Sometimes we resist, content to drift in the comfort of avoiding new challenges and situations. But change is as useful and necessary as it is inevitable.

Growth means change and much of it we embrace: going to college, getting married, raising a family, launching a career. Some change is daunting, such as the life-long process of regeneration: Much of the change we experience is just part of living. Some of it requires action and choices, much of it is almost subconscious. Our comfort is knowing that providence is in every least particular of all the changes we experience and that the Lord is leading.

We may fall back on the old Serenity Prayer: accept what we cannot change, pray for the courage to change what we can for the better, and hope for the wisdom to know the difference. But we are guided best by the prayer we say every day: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth. . . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.”

The changes we experience and accumulate every day help us to grow and mature – hopefully not only as worldly beings but in spiritual change and progress as well. As the late, great basketball coach and philosopher John Wooten put it: “All progress is change, but not all change is progress.” Change is all around us – in our technology, in our culture – but certainly not all of it is progress, especially spiritual progress. That is our ultimate challenge – to channel change into spiritual progress.

Our best guide, of course, is the Word. From beginning to end – from Adam and Eve’s fateful choice in the Garden of Eden, through the trials and

progress of the Children of Israel, to the great drama and ultimate promise of the *Book of Revelation* – it is all about our own lives. It is all about change – how we respond to it, and how we are being led to heaven.

The Word is also about change and the church – particularly the long, slow decline of the Christian Church, the long arc of the Last Judgment, and the promise of the New Church, descending from God out of heaven. And just as we must be careful and mindful in how we respond to change in our own lives, so must we love, nurture and protect the church – including the church within us.

The winds of change are splintering the Christian Church as it succumbs to pressures to accommodate and compromise doctrine in the cause of “social gospel” in a struggle to remain relevant to disenchanting congregations. The New Church is not immune.

Our salvation is that we are not led by “learned councils” and social pressures but by Divine revelation. Our church is the Lord’s. Its uses and doctrines are prescribed by Him. It is established for the unique purpose of worshipping Him in His Divine Human – as a knowable God, visible to us. His Word teaches the life of regeneration, reform and regeneration as the way to heaven. The church in our lives stands for the good of life against evil and leads us to a life of charity and faith – ultimately to conjunction with the Lord in heaven.

We do accommodate doctrine to states – the difference, say, between a children’s talk and a sermon on the same subject. But no matter the temptations and pressures surrounding popular social issues we must never compromise or dilute doctrine just to be popular or modern or “woke.” It is the Lord who builds the church – with His truth, not ours. We change and grow in our understanding and application of that truth. Likewise, the growth and perfecting of the church is a process of change and refinement – but never compromise. The difference is that the New Church is built on eternal truths that never change. And that foundational rock of truth must always be our guide through the challenges of change.

(BMH)

THE BOOK THAT MADE HEAVEN REJOICE

This year will see the publication of a new translation of a book whose publication in 1769 was greeted with rejoicing throughout the heavens. The Rev. Kenneth Alden wrote about this two years ago in an article marking the 250th anniversary of its publication (*A Brief Exposition and the Scarlet, Flowery Skies in Heaven, New Church Life*, September/October 2019). In November, 2021, Chelsea Odhner, Curtis Childs and the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose discussed

it in two “*Inside offTheLeftEye*” podcasts (“*The Hidden Agenda of the Book that Made Heaven Rejoice*” and “*How God Sends Us Messages Through Scripture*” November 7 and 14, 2021).

The book is *Brief Exposition*, the name traditionally used for what Swedenborg titled *Summaria Expositio Doctrinae Novae Ecclesiae*. In the New Century Edition version that is scheduled to be printed in 2022 the title is shortened to *Survey*.

It may come as a surprise that this book, which is not quoted frequently in sermons or doctrinal classes, should have been the source of so much happiness in heaven. This is not something said about any other book. Here is what Swedenborg wrote:

When BRIEF EXPOSITION was published the angelic heaven, from east to west and from south to north, appeared purple colored with the loveliest flowers; this happened before my very eyes and before those of the kings of Denmark, and others; on another occasion it appeared as if it were on fire, and beautiful.

“The Coming of the Lord” was written on all the books in the spiritual world; by command I therefore wrote this in the same place in two copies (of *Brief Exposition*) in Holland.” (*Ecclesiastical History* 1)¹

When this preliminary treatise was finished, then, in the world of spirits, the whole heaven, from east to west and from south to north, was seen by me, covered with beautiful crimson roses to the admiration of all who were present there – which was the testification of the New Heaven's consent and pleasure. (Letter to Count von Hopken, November 17, 1769)

What is so special about this book?

Brief Exposition was the second-to-last book that Swedenborg published, coming right after *Conjugal Love* and *Apocalypse Revealed*, and just before *True Christian Religion*. It is actually little more than an advertisement for *True Christian Religion*, letting people know what to expect from this much larger work which was soon to be published. So how do we explain the warmth of its reception in heaven?

The answer may be in the emphasis that characterizes the majority of the

1 One of these copies has been found and is now in the British Museum. On the inside page of the wrapper which is bound up with the volume there is the following inscription in Swedenborg's own handwriting: HIC LIBER EST ADVENTUS DOMINI, SCRIPTUM EX MANDATO [This book is the Lord's Advent, written by command.]

work. It begins by briefly laying out the contents of the upcoming book (True Christian Religion). The book will be divided into three sections. The first part is to deal with the Lord, the Word, baptism, Holy Supper, heaven and hell, and several other topics. The second part is about the Consummation of the Age, the Last Judgment, the Second Coming and the New Church. The third part will then point out the “disagreements between the dogmas of the present church and those of the New Church.” (*Brief Exposition* 16)

The curious thing about this explanation is that, although the promised first and second parts of the upcoming work end up being fairly accurate descriptions of the contents of *True Christian Religion*, the third part does not appear to exist in the book at all. Interestingly, it is promised as an appendix in six places in the book. (*True Christian Religion* 15.2, 177.2-4, 343, 485, 627, 758) But this appendix is nowhere to be found. Some believe that this refers to the memorabilia between the chapters, which do dwell on the heresies and misconceptions of the church.

Another theory is that the promised third part is not there in *True Christian Religion* as a major part of the work because it was already given in *Brief Exposition*. It is clearly the main emphasis of the work. After outlining what will be presented in *True Christianity*, Swedenborg writes:

But we will dwell a little upon these (disagreements) now, because it is believed both by the clergy and laity, that the present church is in the light itself of the Gospel and in its truths, which cannot possibly be disproved, overturned, or controverted, not even by an angel if one should descend from heaven. (*Brief Exposition* 16)

By “dwelling a little upon these” Swedenborg means that this is the topic for the rest of this 100-page work. Although the Writings speak of the disagreements between the New Church and the old in every one of the books, nowhere else are the doctrines so systematically and bluntly compared and contrasted. For example:

Unless the New Church be established by the Lord, no one can be saved; and this is meant by these words, “Unless those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved. (*Matthew* 24:22) (*Brief Exposition* 91)

The opening and rejection of the dogmas of faith of the present church, and the revelation and reception of the tenets of the faith of the New Church, is meant by these words in Revelation: “He that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.” (*Ibid.* 95)

The faith of the New Church cannot by any means be together with the faith of the former church, and if they are together, such a collision and conflict will take place that everything of the Church with humanity will perish. (*Ibid.* 102)

This may explain what is so special about this book and why the heavens rejoiced. Even though the angelic heavens love everyone, and even though they look only to the good in every person, they also rejoice when clear distinctions are made between good and evil. The constant polarization of society on seemingly every issue can be demoralizing, and yet clear lines between right and wrong can have the opposite effect.

This point might be illustrated by a description of the goals of the Convention Theological School in 1967:

It seeks to move in the mainstream of Protestant thought and ministerial method. It hopes to influence the Protestant world by seeking and stressing common elements of belief and experience. It seeks to work through permeation rather than conversion. It sets small store upon Swedenborg's differences with orthodox belief, and stresses the similarities between his theological writings and Protestant thinking. It seeks to be accepted as a sectarian school within the Protestant fold. (*The Messenger*, June 1967, CLXXXVII, 85f.)

It is good to look for and stress similarities rather than differences, and as we recoil from judgment and comparisons this is a good approach. But revolutions do just the opposite, and Swedenborg takes this opposite approach in *Brief Exposition*.

Swedenborg never explains why the angels rejoiced, and why the heavens were filled with purple flowers, at its publication. But the power of making clear distinctions between right and wrong, and truth and falsity, may be the reason. "The falsities of the previous church must first be removed (before the New Church can grow). For truths cannot be accepted before then." (*Apocalypse Revealed* 547)

The New Century Edition of *Survey* is scheduled to be printed in 2022. Hopefully the translator's preface and accompanying essays will help to further explain this book's dramatic and beautiful reception in heaven.

(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

Getting it Right Side Up

To The Editors:

I always enjoy reading Martin Klein's letters in *New Church Life*, and his letter about the tendencies toward evil in babies led me to go back and find the Rev. Dan Goodenough's article in the May/June 2021 issue, which then led me on. Somewhere I recalled that the portrayal of a regenerating person's life was like turning him from being upside down to being properly right side up, and so I looked for that simile. The two places I found were in the stories about Joseph in the land of Egypt. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5613 and 5746)

When Joseph arrives in Egypt he is bought by Potiphar as a slave. So, what is spiritual, represented by Joseph, is enslaved by what is natural, represented by the Egyptian Potiphar. This is the upside-down part because in Divine order what is spiritual in any person should rule over what is natural. Potiphar is an intelligent natural, but the upshot of Joseph's stay in his house is Joseph's being put into prison and almost forgotten.

The continuation of this story shows the whole land of Egypt moving toward a disaster of starvation until Joseph is taken out of prison and put into a place of power.

This is a lesson that should be seen as a warning by any set of parents. Although the idea that their sweet baby can contain anything like evil seems so contrary to common sense, it is a warning that the parents must heed.

Of course, the baby doesn't have any actual evil in it, but it does have a proprium that is full of evil tendencies and has no built-in defenses against evil so that the parents must take pains as the baby grows older to teach it simple things about the reality of the Lord. The conscience from these teachings is the defense the child needs.

These things are summarized in the homily at the end of the baptismal service and can start out very simply and grow along with the child. If the parents don't start this early and continue, then Joseph remains forgotten in the prison, the natural that exists in the growing child will continue to rule, and the child's mind remains upside down.

We can complete this little recent circle of information from *New Church Life* with the July/August 2021 article from the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs about *Baptism and Remains*, which adds detail to the earlier mention of that service and also brings in the knowledge that the angels who are continuously with all babies are working along with those parents who recognize the situation and are trying to lead their child into the Lord's Divine order. Work with the angels; don't leave them all alone on that job.

This subject also leads me to think that mankind as a whole has this choice of considering how people are, that as a grouped picture we can believe that people are basically good or basically bad. If a section of society sees people as being basically good, then they tend to believe that evil arises only from natural conditions that cause some sort of obstruction to placid development and causes frustration to arise, so that the thing to do is remove all those negative natural things that might get in the way.

Another set of society may see people as being basically prone to evil, and so requiring upbringing and education so as to teach or somehow inculcate the knowledge of what is good in the child's mind.

In the first case the whole of education can be left to what is natural, and so allow its rule, leaving Joseph in jail. The second case is the one that I see as freeing the spiritual from jail and allowing the Lord in, to build a structure that allows the grown-up child to let the Lord turn it right side up

I can even see this split as a factor in politics and different "isms."

Joseph David
Indianapolis, Indiana

The Light of Life

To The Editors:

Light! Light is one of the strangest things, isn't it? The sun generates light, that's for sure, but other things can generate light too. It used to be that, besides the sun, you pretty well had to have some sort of fire or near-combustion to generate light, although there have always been phosphorescent sources of weak light in nature as well. But nowadays there are light-emitting diodes

which generate brighter light using less power than ever before. So, what is this stuff called light, anyway?

What about light from the sun? They say that it comes to us on earth in wavelengths, different wavelengths for each color. But don't you have to have something to wave in order to have a wave? It's easy to think about water waves and sound waves because you've got water and air to be waved. But what about light waves? What is it that vibrates so fast, travels like a bullet, yet has different wavelengths?

If light is something, it must have parts, or particles, that move rhythmically – as fast as light. These particles can be blocked entirely by just about any solid object on earth. Hold an umbrella open against the sunlight and you can see right away that the direct sunlight is stopped by the umbrella, but you can see as well that the light hitting the umbrella's surface bounces off hither and yon so that you can still see some reflected light even in the shadow made by your umbrella. Well, then, if light is particles, how come you can't save it in a bucket?

When it goes, where does light go? The moment you interrupt the generation of light, all the light that was previously generated vanishes at 186,000 miles per second. So, for light to exist it has to be constantly generated. And past light does not hang around and build up a surplus. If you flash a light inside a sealed box, why doesn't the light stay there until you let it out? Yet, once generated, light apparently goes onward forever so that we can see light generated by suns billions and billions of miles away and billions of years ago, spread all over the night sky and all in the same moment of time.

If you could travel at 187,000 miles per second, could you catch up with light that has already passed you by at 186,000?

If light does not encounter anything, can you see it? Could that be why outer space appears to be dark; does "nothing to see" eliminate light? Or is visible light invisible?

Another thing: if every color is a different wavelength, what is white light? If you combine all the wavelengths, everything turns white. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and violet all together equal white. Why not? (To prove it, shine direct sunlight through a prism of glass and all those colors will be separated out – a rainbow out of pure white!)

Hmmm. Light stands for truth; sunlight to Divine truth! Warm, summer sunlight is Divine truth joined with Divine love; and cold, winter sunlight is Divine truth conjoined with very little love. So, light (truth) is all over the place. It can be seen in our minds instantly when it bounces off things we know, while it may not be recognized if we don't know much. If we are filled with love for other people, the light we see will be as on a warm day in spring; but if we hate other people, we will be in darkness and any light that we see will

be false and faint, like the light from rotting wood in a forest.

As Divine truth is *all* truth, it can be seen in our minds as having every shade and color, and truth understood from the Word of God can be perceived as shining white.

Divine love (heat) is the basis of all creation and Divine wisdom (light) gives form to that creation. Divine love with Divine wisdom is therefore actual Substance and Form itself, and so light represents a form of substance that must have properties (so far undiscovered) that allow it to flow as waves with nearly instant penetration throughout His universe.

So, light is a substance that disappears when it is not constantly revitalized. Isn't that exactly what *life* is like: full of the recognition of truths when met, warmed when full of love, yet frigid when loveless, timeless through the ages but instantly fragile, rich in color and brilliance, vibrant, fully received by all of creation yet reflected all around with infinite ambience, essential to the sustenance of all living things? Life from the Lord our God is truly the light of the world and of the heavens above – infinite truth made visible to the eyes of our finite souls.

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, Florida

Bible Study: We Love It and It Loves Us

To The Editors:

The Bible is a spiritual guide for many. People have found there are blessings that come from reading and meditating on the readings in the Bible:

Abraham Lincoln: I am busily engaged in the study of the Bible. I believe it is God's word because it finds me where I am.

Helen Keller: The Bible gives me a deep, comforting sense that things seen are temporal, and things unseen are eternal.

General Robert E. Lee: The Bible in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength.

New Church scholar, the Rev. Dr. Hugo Lj Odhner, has much to say about the importance of how readings in the Bible help us to see more deeply into the teachings for the New Church. In his *The Divine Allegory* (Swedenborg Foundation, 1954) he writes: "Emanuel Swedenborg, in preparation for his mission as revelator, spent three years (1745-1748) in an intensive study of the Word [The Books of the Word are also in the Bible] and this despite his having already been a constant reader of the Bible since his childhood. He was first led

to search the literal sense and to see therein genuine truths of doctrine, before he could perceive the spiritual sense which he published in *Arcana Coelestia*. [*Secrets of Heaven*] And then the Heavenly Doctrine – which is at one with the internal sense of the Word – was published in a new series of volumes.”

A New Key to the Bible (Swedenborg Foundation 2018) by Bruce Henderson is a clear and useful study about the Bible. He writes: “The story of Adam and Eve reflects a pattern that we see play out throughout the Bible and sometimes in the history of the world: repeated trials, free choices and consequences, despair offset with hope, God’s constant love, and – if we choose to receive it – His help in regaining our footing and continuing our regeneration.” [Regeneration is the journey of being born again – it takes a lifetime.]

[A story in the Bible can seem to be confusing.] “As complex as the Bible can seem – repetitive, irrelevant, often obscure and arcane – Swedenborg teaches that it all comes down to the simple fundamentals of what Jesus taught to be the two greatest commandments:”

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. (*Matthew 22:37*)

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (*Mark 12:31*)

Quoting *A New Key to the Bible*: “The amazing thing about the Bible is that it was written for the people of its time; [thousands of years ago] but it is written for our time, too. It is every bit as relevant and applicable today as it was 2,000 years ago.” [The New Century Edition of the 15 volumes of *Secrets of Heaven* explains it all in a translation for our time.]

Michael A. Brown
Tucson, Arizona

FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Standing for Marriage in Today's World



A Church Perspective

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

An eternal perspective. One of the beautiful things about the Word is that it consistently draws our mind to what is eternal. For many of us, our very involvement in a church is an overt acknowledgment that we are to prepare for heaven, for our eternal welfare. There are many parts of that eternal perspective, including a perception of the Lord's providence leading consistently "toward an end that is good" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8455), and the Word itself with its timeless answers and principles that can make our lives work better.

Marriage is another part of the Lord's eternal perspective. It is designed as a foundational building block of society, and a source of tremendous happiness for a husband and wife. It is the context for the family life that most of us experience every day. Yet we know that people's experience with marriage in this world is not always straightforward. Each of us can attest to the countless challenges that exist in our world to the basic construct of "[leaving] father and mother and being joined to his wife." (*Genesis* 2:24.)

The purpose of this article is to address some of those challenges – to lay before the Church some of the relevant teachings and perspectives that bear on the goal of "standing for marriage in today's world."¹

¹ Readers of *New Church Life* are invited to review previous articles on the subject of marriage from the Bishop's Office. In the September/October 2021 issue, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth submitted an

Why are we focusing on this subject? Let me say a bit more about why this article is before you. On the positive side we know that marriage, often referred to in our church as conjugal love, is one of the gifts that we can share because of the revelation which the Lord has made. That revelation, with an entire book devoted to the subject, shows that marriage is a central building block of the Lord's will for our lives. Let me share one of the direct wishes expressed in that book, coming from the mouth of angels in heaven:

Tell the inhabitants of the earth among whom you live that there is such a thing as truly conjugal love, offering a million delights scarcely any of which are yet known to the world. But they will be discovered when the church betroths herself to her Lord and becomes His bride and wife. (*Conjugal Love* 293:6; cf. *Revelation* 21:2)

It is, I trust, a given that the Church must share these teachings as it always has. People need to know them, and when embraced, these teachings can lead to blessings in their lives.

From another perspective, we know that people are questioning some of the basic historic assumptions about marriage, including its focus on one man and one woman, and also that people are created as either masculine or feminine human beings. All too familiar to many of us are questions such as: What do we make of people who appear to have an enduring attraction for those of the same sex? What spiritual light can be shed on the testimony of some that their physical form or sex at birth does not align with their sense of their spirit's gender?

We could then bring forward the broader context within which these challenging questions come up, where religion is seen as less helpful, scientific studies are interpreted without the primacy of spiritual principle as a guide, and sentiments around tolerance and compassion are expected of us all. This can lead to a further question: Why can't the Church be more accepting and understanding of people instead of coming across as judgmental?

Add further the fact that we *are* a church, leading some others to worry that we are losing our ability to stand for what the Word teaches and acknowledge

article, "From the Bishop's Office: Marriage, Doctrine and Dialogue." That issue also included a sermon from Bishop Lindrooth on "Conjugal Love: A Most Precious Gem of the New Church," as well as a study and presentation by the Rev. Christopher Barber on "What the Heavenly Doctrines Say About Sex and Gender." The next issue included an article by the Rt. Rev. Brad Heinrichs, "From the Bishop's Office: Musings on Mercy and 'Hard' Truths," in which he intentionally set the stage for the article that is before you here, on the need to address "Supporting Marriage in Today's World" from a church perspective. Also available is a paper prepared by Bishop Heinrichs, "Promoting Marriage While Speaking to Disorders." To obtain, please contact Bishop Heinrichs directly (see email address at the end of the article).

some of the things that the Lord clearly warns against. This leads some to ask: Why can't we declare clearly that we stand for the Lord's vision of marriage and against some of the things that the Word so clearly teaches against? Because we are a church, founded on the premise of Divine Revelation as our guide, the discussion turns to how to hold those teachings and which ones apply. And so the debate goes, often turning into divisive argumentation, leading to dissatisfaction in the exchange, hurt, people talking past one another, and polarization.

From an organizational perspective, when there are heated subjects affecting the life of the Church they need to be addressed, and that is the reason for this article. It's not that I or the Bishop's Office is going to share with you "the right answer" and solve everything, nor is it to imply that this is the only thing we should be focused on as a church. Rather the aim is to set before you some of the teachings that we believe apply, inviting your consideration of the source material to which we turn as our authority. The hope is to speak into the debate in helpful ways, and to clarify a stance on a controversial subject. It is also to provide credible evidence of the balance of love and wisdom that we all strive for, and that can truly help the people in our lives.

Holding to a vision of marriage. In an article published several years ago in *New Church Life*, after the United States changed its laws relating to same-sex marriage, I shared a concept of figuratively holding onto two ropes. One was the love rope and the other was the wisdom rope.² Here I would bring forward the concept of "ropes" to hold onto, inviting people to hold fast to the marriage-as-the-Lord-describes-it rope. However we personally may feel about gender and sexuality and people we love who may be identifying differently, I pray that we can all remain open and affirmative to the vision of marriage that the Lord offers us in the pages of His Word.

Let me set before you two quotes from the Word that speak volumes in terms of that vision. One comes from the first chapter of *Genesis*, showing the Lord's aim in creation:

And God created human beings in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply: fill the earth and subdue it.'" (*Genesis* 1:27-28; cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 54; *Apocalypse Explained* 725)

From this we can draw the message that the Lord's end in creating male

2 "The Marriage of Love and Wisdom—A Response to the Same-sex Marriage Ruling in the United States" (September/October 2015).

and female human beings was for the sake of marriage and for the sake of the children born of those marriages, thus for the propagation of the heavens. (See *Conjugal Love* 68, 156; *Arcana Coelestia* 7038:2) As a pastor I know that this passage, for all its goodness, can land with people in a hard way, for not everyone is able to marry and not everyone can have children. But I pray that everyone can see it as a big picture testimony to the Lord's end in creation.

The second teaching is a promise made in *Conjugal Love*:

Following His Advent, the Lord will revive conjugal love, such as it was among ancient peoples. For conjugal love comes only from the Lord, and it is found in people who are made spiritual by Him through His Word. (*Conjugal Love* 81.5)

What this passage says to me is that the Lord is at work to reestablish a vision of marriage in this world and has provided that His church, with the revelation given to it, is a means to that end. As a group of people aspiring to be a part of that church it is imperative that we embrace the responsibility and opportunity to work with the Lord to the end that a vision of marriage may be known.

There is much more we could say about the ideals, and the vision of marriage that we are privileged to promote by means of our church. Most of us resonate with the invitation to experience a happy marriage based on shared values, deep trust, companionship, humor and shared friendship in all that life brings our way. It's a vision experienced by fallible people such as ourselves, even though we fall short of the ideal. But the vision is there. Many of us have experienced tastes of it, and others are rightly invited to strive for it.

What about disorders? I acknowledge that even stating that something is a "disorder" implies a negative on some human being whose life is intertwined in some way with what is named as a disorder in the Word. The intention is not to judge any person, or to cast aspersion.

But isn't it true that the Lord's Word deals with disorders to which all of us can fall prey? The first of charity is to shun evils. (See *True Christian Religion* 435; *Doctrine of Charity* 208) For all of us, repentance is a necessary gauntlet through which we must pass if we are to grow into the people we were born to be, primarily oriented towards the Lord and others.

The Church has, when we reflect on it, taught in many eras about disorders related to marriage. Adultery, in the classic sense of sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse, is forbidden (see *Exodus* 20:14, *Doctrine of Life* 74, *True Christian Religion* 313, and many other places). Most people get that the Church is expected to teach against it. The same could be said about

pornography³, and about promiscuity before marriage⁴.

It may be true that these things are held differently by more people today than in days gone by; yet it is still the Church's responsibility to point to the teachings that say that these actions are disorderly. They are not to be embraced as the Lord's will for our lives. They can bring great harm to marriages and to people's spiritual state. We could go further into the awful and easily rejected situations of child abuse⁵, rape⁶ and the like. We know these things are evil and we expect the Church to take a firm stand against them.

This does not mean that the Church hasn't striven to message mercifully. There is the truth that the path is always open to receive the Lord's forgiveness and redemption. There's the fact that the Lord understands all the mitigating circumstances in our lives that might factor into the outcome – prior abuse, ignorance, being seduced by others, heredity, physiology, and so on.

He gives us concepts of “the torn,” which means “evil for which people are not blameworthy” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4171).⁷ He requires that we look for the good and place a good interpretation on what evil we may notice. (*Ibid.* 1079) He forbids us to make spiritual judgments or to condemn. (*Conjugal Love* 523) He instructs us to check anything in ourselves that is “quick to find fault and makes no allowances” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1949:2), and reminds us that we cannot know all that is going on with people.⁸

He also teaches about levels or degrees of people's embracing or rejection of evil, which is an incredibly helpful construct in this whole topic: with adultery,

3 While “pornography” isn't referenced in the Word, “lusts and fantasies” are (*Arcana Coelestia* 3747:3), as are “doing things that are obscene” (*True Christian Religion* 313). Also mentioned are “manifest obscenities” which some see as applicable (*Conjugal Love* 468). Then there is *Matthew* 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

4 “. . . abstaining from indiscriminate fornication” (*Conjugal Love* 105), “. . . unrestrained and excessive fornications resulting in the loss of conjugal love” (*Ibid.* 456), “. . . not lawful for them to be joined physically” (*Ibid.* 305), “the lust for variety” (*Ibid.* 506).

5 See *Matthew* 18:6: “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” The chapter on “Seducing States of Innocence” also applies, even though it focuses on a broader range of seduction, in adults as well. (*Conjugal Love* 513ff)

6 “Moreover it is a burning desire to violate any women whatever who absolutely refuse and vehemently resist, whether they are virgins, widows or wives.” (*Conjugal Love* 511)

7 Note that this passage lays out examples, including “heredity passed down,” “evil which they receive from others” or at the hands of others.

8 “From this now proceeds the following conclusion, that one ought not to take the appearances in marriages or the appearances in acts of licentiousness and infer from them of someone that he has conjugal love or not. Therefore, ‘Judge not, that you be not condemned’ (*Matthew* 7:1).” (*Conjugal Love* 531)

according to this passage, its effects are grievous or less grievous depending on our level of regret for momentary times of weakness, or our embracing of adulteries as allowable.⁹

Suffice it to say that the Lord perfectly balances love and wisdom in His guidance, with a constant goal that “the conjugal may be preserved.”¹⁰ He leads all of us toward a fulfillment of His vision of marriage in our lives, whenever that can happen. He asks us to strive for the same.

What about the LGBTQIA+ identity spectrum? I offer the thought that the very same construct that we just went through applies. We are to hold onto the Lord’s vision of marriage, recognizing that many of the things under this identity construct do not fit with that vision. At the same time, we are to recognize that the Lord knows the states of every human being utilizing that spectrum to speak to something they’re dealing with; He loves them and understands any of a myriad of mitigating circumstances that stand as a contributing factor.

It is true that He provides clear teachings that relate to many of the states of life in evidence there, placing some of them seemingly forcefully in the forbidden category. But He also provides a way forward for those willing to walk down His pathways. He offers that same construct of various degrees of severity. He bends rather than breaks. He instructs us to look for the good. He reminds us to hold ourselves accountable for forbidden judgments. He keeps His eye on the eternal, exhibiting incredible patience with us as we figure life out (see, for example, the parable of the wheat and tares. (*Matthew 13:24-30*)) He expects of all of us our best efforts to lead a good and useful life, and to interact charitably with others.

All that being said, the Church cannot go further than the Word itself allows, namely to treat as acceptable what the Lord teaches against. Let us,

9 “Adulteries of the first degree are adulteries of ignorance, which are committed by people who are not yet able to or cannot consult the intellect and so prevent them. Adulteries committed by such people are mild. Adulteries of the second degree are adulteries of lust, which are committed by people who are indeed able to consult the intellect, but for reasons of circumstance at the moment cannot. Adulteries committed by such people are imputable to them according as their intellect afterwards sanctions them or does not sanction them. Adulteries of the third degree are adulteries of the reason, which are committed by people who intellectually persuade themselves that they are not sinful evils. Adulteries committed by such people are grave and are imputed to them in accordance with their persuasions. Adulteries of the fourth degree are adulteries of the will, which are committed by people who make them allowable and pleasurable, and not of sufficient consequence to merit consulting the intellect in regard to them.” (*Conjugal Love 478*)

10 This quote comes from *Conjugal Love 459* about the disorder of taking a woman as a mistress before marriage, showing the extent to which the Lord is willing to work with people toward an eternal end of chaste marriage with one.

therefore, place a few of those teachings from the Lord's Word before ourselves, which speak to some of the states of life contained within the LGBTQIA+ identity spectrum. As you read them, I invite you to consider why they are given as they are.

Does the Lord speak to same-sex relationships? The answer is yes. In graphic terms we hear such things as: "You shall not lie with a man as you do with a woman; it is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22; cf. 20:13) These are confirmed as parts of today's laws for us by means of the Heavenly Doctrines. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4434, 6348)¹¹ These are further linked with "profanation"¹² and with "adultery."¹³

There are many passages relating to "Sodom," a city destroyed in the Word because of its wickedness.¹⁴ That wickedness was identified with a desire by the men of the city to "know [the visiting men] carnally." (*Genesis* 19:5) It is true that the evil indicated there is particularly heinous and hard to read, as is a similar story in *Judges* 19:22ff. While degrees of evil do indeed apply and we must be careful to look at the context, the many other places in the Word where "Sodom" and "Sodomites" are mentioned provide a consistent theme of a forbidden union.¹⁵

What about gender and gender change? Here I would refer again to the article published in the September/October 2021 issue of *New Church Life*

11 Note that the emphasis is on the sexual act, which, parallel to adultery, is emblematic of the relationship that goes along with it. Note also the caveat that same sex friendship is described in positive terms in *Conjugal Love* 55:6, but is very specifically talking about relationships that do not mimic marriage and do not progress to a sexual relationship.

12 "The general categories of profanation correspond to 'the degrees of forbidden relations,' listed in the Word (*Leviticus* 18:6-24)" (*Heavenly Doctrine* 172).

13 All adulteries (of which many kinds are enumerated in *Leviticus*. 18:6-23) correspond to the adulterations of good and truth (*Apocalypse Explained* 434:16, cf. 410:11).

14 Here are several of the references to Sodom elsewhere in the Word: *Deuteronomy* 23:17; *1 Kings* 14:22, 15:12; *2 Kings* 23:7; *Isaiah* 3:9; *Apocalypse Explained* 1006:2, *Arcana Coelestia* 2220:1, 2322, *De Conjugio* 86 *Spiritual Experiences* 1977, 2675, 3768, 5939, 6096; *True Christian Religion*, additions 9.12.

15 It is clear that the authors in the Bishop's Office believe that these passages about Sodom apply to subject at hand. It may be useful, however, to note some of the debate around this controversial topic. Some have argued that the sin of Sodom relates only to gang rape, and not to a more consensual form of sexual expression between men—which does not appear to take into account all the other mentions of Sodom in the Word. Some people also reference *Ezekiel* 16:49-50 which identifies the underlying cause of the sin of Sodom with "pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness," but also points to the abominations committed. There is also debate about a passage in the Heavenly Doctrine, *Arcana Coelestia* 2220, which says, "That 'Sodom' is every evil that stems from self-love is clear from the meaning of 'Sodom' in the Word. Although in the next chapter it seems as if Sodom means the evil that consists in the worst form of adultery, nevertheless nothing else is meant by it in the internal sense than evil that stems from self-love." The passage goes on to say, "In the Word also the dreadful things that well up out of self-love are represented by various kinds of adultery," indicating a correspondential connection between self-love and forbidden sexual expressions.

by the Rev. Christopher Barber on “What the Heavenly Doctrines Say about Sex and Gender.” It includes an impressive array of quotes from the Heavenly Doctrines that fall under various headings, including: “Sex is determined from conception (creation),” “Sex is ideally experienced as a distinct binary (either male or female) and all aspects of a person are impacted by this,” “One sex cannot by any means be spiritually converted into being the other,” and “All of this is in order to provide for procreations, which ensures more people can be born for the purpose of fulfilling the Lord’s mission of building a heaven from the human race” (p. 375).

To that study I would add a few teachings which deserve our consideration, namely a Biblical prohibition in *Deuteronomy* that “a woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment” (22:5). It’s not the particulars of clothing that are at issue, but rather the intention to appear as the other sex. Again, the strong word of “abomination” is used and the seriousness of the underlying issue is explained: “. . . unless they were distinct, the sexes would be confounded, and there would be no marriage.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 555:13) Regarding those sexes and their distinction, we could bring forward the foundational reality described for us in *Conjugal Love*: “Masculinity in the male is masculine in every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of his thought, and in every bit of his affection. So, too, with femininity in the female.” (*Conjugal Love* 33)

I would note here an unfortunate reality about the LGBTQIA+ identity spectrum, in that many human states are lumped together that are likely more healthily considered separately.¹⁶ The T part of the spectrum, designating “transgender” is a case in point. The teachings just quoted lead away from an attempt to change one’s gender, and they are important for all of us to consider. But they carry a different weight and set of implications than do the teachings that apply to the L or G or B parts of the spectrum.

We may also consider the difference between someone wrestling with their gender identity separately from any sexual expression or attraction, as opposed to when those things are joined. And of course we can be invited to consider an array of reasons that people are choosing as they do, from distorted expectations around masculinity or femininity, to a set of physiological cards that people may have been dealt, to trauma in their past, and any number of other factors. Perhaps all this could be another way of looking for the good, and holding different human states as distinct – another expression of wisdom married to love.

16 For clarity, the letters in that spectrum are as follows: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual.

A Church Perspective. The purpose in bringing these teachings forward is to invite reasoning from the Word on states of life that are around us, and on a debate that is causing polarization within the Church. There is no desire to hurt or judge or make anyone's life harder than it might already be. Instead, the intention is to bring the many strands of light from the Word into the things that so many of us are struggling with.

When it comes to adultery, promiscuity, pornography and other things, it is relatively easy to see that the Church must take a stand against them and be a source of encouragement to steer clear of these things. Even then the Church can work with people as they struggle through the many temptations of this world.

It is harder for many people to hear that there are things captured in the LGBTQIA+ identity spectrum that are off limits and not a part of His vision for marriage. It is useful for those of us lucky enough not to struggle with some of those things to hold in a supportive place those who do. Nevertheless, the Church does need to be clear on what it can and cannot support.

Even with an emphasis on love and understanding, the Church cannot embrace same-sex marriage – on earth or in heaven. It cannot support a concept of gender fluidity. It cannot embrace variety of sexual expression implied in a bisexual identity. It should be a place where people can hear directly from the Word about the Lord's vision of marriage and receive encouragement to reach for their experience of it.

Organizationally, the Church has a responsibility to make policies about what the priesthood can and cannot do around these matters, and what is expected of employees who have signed on to represent the beliefs of the New Church in their professional and private conduct. We must strive to align ourselves organizationally with what the Word teaches, and where we find ourselves out of alignment to work diligently to change.

The teachings included in this article are, understandably, hard for many people to read and reflect on, especially when someone we know and love is identifying differently. We may well ask why the Lord phrased things the way He did, and we are wise to remain open to the implications of His seemingly stern guidance. It will help to be reminded that the Lord is a God of love. Love is infused into every one of His teachings. Even the hard teachings are given to us so that in the long run we can better accept His love.

We can count on the fact that love is extended to every human being. It is apparent in the ways He leads us to consider any and all extenuating circumstances, to recognize there is much about others that we don't know, to always look for the good, and to focus primarily on our own states of evil rather than those that others may be dealing with. This is also a perspective that the Church should foster and embrace.

Since these topics meet so many of us where we live in a powerful and poignant way, I would encourage further discussion and exchange on them. One way to engage is to talk to the pastors of the church you know best. It might help to know that they have been engaged in deep exploration of these matters, and have offered many helpful perspectives into it. They desire to teach what the Word says, even if they sometimes emphasize different parts of it. They desire to work with people as compassionate pastors.

I invite you to talk to them and ask them the hard questions. I pray that you will discover their wisdom, even as they will acknowledge their own limited understanding. I pray that you will also discover their heart and the pastoral ways in which they approach people. I, too, am open to dialogue on all of this, as are my colleagues in the Bishop's Office, Brad Heinrichs and David Lindrooth.¹⁷

In closing I draw your attention to one final passage from the Lord's Word that can be seen as a banner for our Church. The Lord said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (*Mark 2:17*)

When the Lord called sinners to repentance, He was calling them to come to Him so that He could love them and help them. All of us are in need of the Lord's healing, and the Church can be a place of welcome to all who seek the Lord. There are so many messages about our spiritual lives that we can hear from the Church, and so many ways that engagement with a spiritual community can be a force for good for us.

The Church can encourage us all to change for the better. It can strengthen us in the journey toward heaven. It can bring us before our God in worship. It can help us to be increasingly wise, loving and useful human beings. It can also help us hold to the Lord's vision of marriage even as we seek to approach all with respect and love.

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Lead Us and Guide Us, Lord: The Gift of Inspiration

A Sermon by the Rev. John L. Odhner

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.”

(Ezekiel 36:26)

Some people have no trouble believing that God is at work in this world. They see the beauty and order of nature, the waterfall, the sunrise, and the bird in flight. They see the magnificence of the heavens – a hundred billion galaxies with a hundred billion stars in each. They see the ability of the human mind to transcend selfishness, show compassion, discover truth and create beauty. In all of these they see God at work.

Other people wonder whether God is actually at work in this world. They may see nature as blind and mechanical, operating from chance or necessity, but without any purpose or intelligence. They may ask: “If God is working in the universe, where is the evidence? Is there anything that happens anywhere in the universe that can’t be explained better by science than by the myths of ancient religions?”

Many Christians will point to the Bible as God’s Word for us. In the Bible God teaches us what we cannot learn from science. As it is God’s truth, there is no need to question but only to believe. Now the Lord’s Word truly teaches us things beyond time and space, beyond the realm of science and physical sensation. It teaches us of love, compassion, wisdom and justice. It teaches us of heaven and eternal life. It teaches of the Lord’s struggles against the hells and His infinite love and mercy. We cannot learn any of these things from science and nature.

Yes, when we take the Bible on a literal level without its deeper meaning, it is dead. Think of someone wearing clothes. As the person runs, works and dances, the clothes move with the body, flowing gracefully, purposefully.

The Lord's Word teaches us things beyond time and space, beyond the realm of science and physical sensation. It teaches us of love, compassion, wisdom and justice. It teaches us of heaven and eternal life. . . . We cannot learn any of these things from science and nature.

When the person puts off the clothes, they lie lifeless on the floor or hanger. As the clothes are to the body, the body is to the soul. While the soul animates the body, it runs, works and dances; the eyes sparkle, the lungs breathe and the heart beats. When the soul leaves the body, it falls back lifeless, pallid and opaque.

It is the same with the letter and the spirit of the Bible. When we see the spirit within the Bible it comes alive. It flows and dances through our lives, bringing inspiration, motivation and clarity. When we miss the spirit and argue over the literal meaning it becomes flat and hard; it dies. Jesus said: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are

life." (*John 6:63*) Paul wrote: "We should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." (*Romans 7:6*) "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life." (*2 Corinthians 3:6*)

We might argue about whether the creation story accurately describes natural history. We might question whether Noah could have fit so many species on his boat for a whole year, or whether Moses actually could have divided the Red Sea with his rod. But these are just questions of scientific fact, not of eternal truth. If we rely on purely literal stories of the Bible to defend our faith, it is like collecting military uniforms and hanging a general's uniform in front of them, then imagining that the empty uniforms will defend us, while the general's uniform leads them all in battle. And then we brag to our enemies: "You will never defeat us! Look how many uniforms we have!"

If we believe in miracles but feel contempt and resentment toward others, have we grasped even the most fundamental truths of Scripture? If our faith is selfish and spiteful, it has no truth in it at all, no matter how much we think the Bible gives us the truth. We have the dead letter, but we do not have the spirit.

If, on the other hand, we use science to disprove the miracles in the Bible we still have missed the truth. Challenging the literal meaning of the Bible without seeing its spirit is like hanging up a garment, shooting it full of holes, and then believing that you have killed the owner because the garment is full of holes. It's just shooting down straw men. This battle rages across our culture

today, with literalists setting out their interpretations like so many uniforms, and atheists shooting them full of holes. They are all just looking at the literal meaning and missing the real truth and spirit.

Jesus said that the whole Bible teaches love for God and love for others. (*Matthew 22:40*) “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (*Ibid.* 7:12)

When we go to the Bible not to prove others wrong but to find out how to love others better, we begin to see the spirit within the letter. The Bible comes alive and the Lord is present in it, leading us and teaching us – not as an empty uniform but as a living and breathing person. For the Spirit within the Bible is not simply abstract teachings about love, but “the Lord is the Spirit.” (*2 Corinthians 3:17*) The Lord is present in His Word with infinite Divine Love and Wisdom.

To understand how the Lord is working in our world we need to understand how He teaches and leads us. Literalism focuses on the written Word, thinking that the Lord teaches and leads us by writing down exactly what we should believe and do, so that all we need to do is follow the recipe, recite the creed and heed the rules.

The teachings for the New Church offer a different perspective on the Lord’s leading: “The Lord leads us by inflowing and teaches us by enlightenment.” (*Divine Providence* 165) That is, the Lord teaches us from the *inside*. He flows into our souls with His love and enlightens us inwardly with spiritual light.

If we try to find God in the world around us, through scientific observation or verified miracles, we completely miss the main arena of His work. “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed the kingdom of God is within you.” (*Luke 17:20-21*)

The Lord’s primary work is to change us inwardly. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” (*Ezekiel 36:26-27*) So if we want to have any understanding of how God works in the world, we have to understand how He works in our hearts and spirits.

When we listen to a radio or watch TV, we don’t pay much attention to the radio or TV itself but to the music or message that is coming in. A message is widely broadcast and the radio waves that carry it are all around us, and

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even go right through us, but they are invisible and inaudible until they are picked up by a receiver. If you were to go on a search for those radio waves without an antenna you would find no evidence that they exist. Yet through the antenna, tuner and amplifier in the radio we can hear the message clearly.

Since the message comes into the receiver invisibly it seems as if it is coming from the radio or TV itself.

Someone who does not understand radio waves may have no comprehension that every sound and image is coming from somewhere far away.

The Lord is constantly broadcasting messages to all people. Like radio waves, those spiritual influencers are invisible. We can't see, hear or touch them. We may have no idea they are even there. Yet our minds are receivers and when we pick up those messages they show up in us as thoughts and feelings.

These thoughts and feelings flow in from the Lord through heaven and hell, through angels and spirits, and sometimes the messages are distorted along the way. So, we have good thoughts that flow in through heaven and bad thoughts that flow in through hell. The desires, feelings and thoughts that flow in make up our whole life, just as the messages that come by radio waves constitute all the life that appears in the radio or on TV.

The Lord's Word is like the tuner for the radio. The tuner allows the radio to focus on a particular frequency so that it can make sense of the incoming radio waves. When we search the Word with a sincere desire to understand and follow the Lord's leading, the truths we live by tune our minds to a frequency that can receive the Lord's messages. If we believe the Bible literally, but we are not open to the spirit within, we are like a radio that has a tuner but does not have an antenna, so it doesn't pick up any signal. We are not paying attention to the spirit.

On the other hand, if we reject the Bible completely we can't tune our thoughts to heavenly frequencies. We won't be able to recognize and amplify the messages that are coming from the Lord and instead we are tuned in to messages that have been distorted by selfishness, materialism and literalism.

The Lord gave us His commandments to help us tune in to the best frequencies. If we focus on the Golden Rule, doing for others what we want done for us (*Matthew* 7:12), then that message of love will guide us in understanding the Bible correctly. As Jesus said, all of Scripture is about love for the Lord and love for the neighbor. (*Ibid.* 22:40) When a scribe recognized this truth Jesus told him: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (*Mark* 12:34)

We find the same truth mentioned in the Ten Commandments. One table teaches us to love the Lord and the other teaches us to love (and not harm) our neighbor. These commandments are central because obeying them tunes our minds to the Lord's "channel" and allows Him to work in us. And the Lord's teaching and leading involves not just the literal statements of the Bible but all the feelings, thoughts and ideas, all the music, voices and images that flow in through the tuner.

This is one reason why it is hard for some people to see how the Lord is working in their world. They aren't looking for the inflow of love and the light of wisdom but are looking for physical evidence or miraculous interventions. It's like looking for signs of life in an empty garment, or taking apart a radio tuner to find the messages inside it.

Since the commandments are what get us tuned in to the Lord's leading, they are the first and most central part of the Lord's Word to the people of Israel. The ultimate goal of the journey from Egypt was to enjoy freedom and prosperity in the promised land. The first destination on the journey was to reach Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. There they would build an ark and tabernacle to house the commandments, and later it would be the Ten Commandments that divided the waters of the Jordan River and brought down the walls of Jericho and the idol Dagon.

The commandments were very important, but it would be foolish to think that the tables of stone in the ark of the covenant had some intrinsic magical power as portrayed in popular movies like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

The power and magic of the commandments lie in the way they open up a channel for the Lord's love to flow into our lives. When we make a covenant to follow the Lord's commands, then He flows into us with good intentions and true thoughts. That is how He teaches and leads, and that is how He works miracles.

Jesus' disciples were amazed at His miracles but He told them: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to My Father." (*John 14:12*)

The Lord is constantly broadcasting messages to all people. Like radio waves, those spiritual influencers are invisible. We can't see, hear or touch them. Yet our minds are receivers and when we pick up those messages they show up in us as thoughts and feelings.

The gift of inspiration is that the Lord is working on us from the inside and the outside at the same time, leading our feelings and intentions, and enlightening our understanding so that we can see Him mentally, feel Him in our hearts, and experience the miracle of a new heart and a new spirit.

Jesus controlled the weather and raised the dead, yet He is telling us that if we believe in Him we can do greater works. Many have imitated Christ and tried to work miracles but they never seem to be “greater” than the ones Jesus did. I see “miracle workers” performing at conferences and revivals, on the street and on television, usually starting with people who are basically healthy and convincing them that after prayer and laying on of hands they actually feel better. I have never seen them do miracles greater than what Jesus did.

We can do greater works, but greater does not mean more impressive outward signs. The miracles that Jesus did were physical acts that symbolized spiritual ones. Giving sight to a blind person helps him or her to have a happier, more useful life to eternity.

Helen Keller said that worse than being born blind would be being able to see but not having vision.

Jesus fed 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes, and they were satisfied for a day and then became hungry again. The miracle that the Lord asks us to participate in today is to share the Lord’s love for all people. This is a greater work because it feeds people for much more than a day. It feeds people’s souls with the bread of heaven that gives eternal life.

The gift of inspiration is that the Lord is working on us from the inside. He is always working on us from the inside and the outside at the same time, leading our feelings and intentions, and enlightening our understanding so that we can see Him mentally, feel Him in our hearts, and experience the miracle of a new heart and a new spirit. Amen.



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Joy in the Journey

A Sermon by the Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick

Lessons: *1 Kings 19:1-18; Heaven and Hell 533*

[So Elijah said], "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." (*1 Kings 19:14*)

Elijah, one of Israel's greatest prophets, on the run from the queen who had vowed to take his life, complained to Jehovah that his life's work was in vain. Despite his warnings, Israel had continued to violate its covenant with Jehovah their God. He had failed to lead the people back to the One True God. And now, fearing for his life and hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb, in shame he confronted the God he had failed to serve.

What was Jehovah's response? He gave Elijah a new mission: crown new kings over Syria and Israel, and anoint Elisha as a prophet in your place; for there were still some in Israel who faithfully followed Jehovah and needed a prophet to lead them. Despite Elijah's shame and sense of defeat, Jehovah had faith in him, and sent him out to serve the remnant of the faithful.

Now anyone who honestly tries to follow the Lord and become a more loving and wise person will, at some time, feel the same deep despair as Elijah. Despite their best efforts, they will fall short. Selfish habits will be hard to break; evil thoughts will come uninvited; strong emotions will overwhelm their best efforts to flee from evil intentions. Self-examination will reveal a never-ending stream of failed attempts to repent. Failure will seem inevitable. In shame will they stand alone before their God, feeling utterly despised and worthless.

Expecting condemnation, they cry out to God for mercy. In response they receive not condemnation or rebuke, but renewal. The message is: carry on. Continue the struggle, for I am with you.

Now it is a sad fact that in our church there has been an extensive emphasis on the seemingly negative aspects of our journey toward the kingdom of

To an unbiased observer it might seem that as New Churchmen we are doomed to carry a heavy spiritual burden throughout our lives here on earth, with little respite and certainly no joy. The narrow path leading to the pearly gates seems long and steep, lined with hidden pits and slippery passages. It is a difficult journey.

heaven. Repeated emphasis on the spiritual struggle and combat required to shed the deadening cloak of hereditary and actual evils has been a major theme of much teaching. To an unbiased observer it might seem that as New Churchmen we are doomed to carry a heavy spiritual burden throughout our lives here on earth, with little respite and certainly no joy. The narrow path leading to the pearly gates seems long and steep, lined with hidden pits and slippery passages. It is a difficult journey.

In so teaching we may have unconsciously played into the hands of the devil's own crew, who seek at every moment to convince us that the journey is not worth the effort. We are not good enough or strong enough to successfully complete the journey. We should give up now and just enjoy what this world has to offer. What God promises you isn't within your reach

anyway There is no joy in the journey.

And if we stay with the idea that our journey will be difficult and perhaps even in vain, we will miss the purpose of the journey. We will give up before we know the blessings we might receive, both during and after our earthly journey is complete.

Let us take another perspective. While we cannot deny the fact that the journey will involve some difficult struggles, there is much more to our planned journey than obstacles, struggle and despair.

The purpose of our journey is to join one day in the eternal delights and myriad uses of heaven. For this we were created, and our presence there will add to its never-ending perfection. From His Infinite Love Our Heavenly Father wills to draw us as close to Himself and as we will allow. There is no blessing He would withhold from us. So He invites us to leave the land of our heredity and travel to a better place – a spiritual promised land. He knows the journey for us will not be easy. He has already walked every step Himself, preparing the way for us. All we need to do is to consciously and consistently choose to follow Him – instead of our own will – as He leads us along the

pathway of life.

Along the way there will be obstacles. Steep hills of self love that we must climb and conquer. Roaring rivers of rushing falsity that we must traverse. Wild beasts of lust, hatred, revenge and contempt that we must avoid or overcome. And strong winds and violent storms of evil emotions and intentions that will detain or delay us.

But there will also be glorious glowing sunrises of enlightenment, when we see our path clearly. Bright blue skies where we see new truths that can help us make progress in moving away from the evil thoughts and intentions that plague us. Glorious golden sunsets of contentment, peace and comfort, when we are resting from the effort of our journey and reflecting on our progress. And at night, sheets of sparkling stars overhead to guide us ever deeper into the spiritual secrets that lie hidden within the Word He has given us.

And we are not alone on our journey. Friends who share our desire to seek the kingdom of heaven will join us on this journey, encouraging us to carry on, renewing our inspiration and determination. Spouses and partners who jointly look to an eternal life together can strengthen us and at times carry us when we are too weak to walk by ourselves. And all the while our Heavenly Father watches over us, driving out from before us the corrupt forces of the devil, guiding us to wells of renewing truth, confounding our spiritual enemies, and lighting our pathway both day and night.

As the journey is long, we will need food to sustain us. Our spirit will feed on the bread of heaven, heavenly affections secretly implanted deep within our minds that lead us to seek the truths that should guide our steps and to recognize them when we find them. We will drink the blood of the covenant, the spiritual wine of genuine truths that comfort our spirit and light our way. And we will rejoice in the evening sacrifice of shared spiritual support that binds us closer to our neighbor and sustains our strength.

And how will we measure our progress?

If we are truly doing the work necessary to look to our Lord and shun the evils He reveals to us, we will find the glowing sunrises of enlightenment lasting longer, shining with a strong golden light. We will find that wicked thoughts are more easily driven away, lustful emotions more easily scared off.

The hills ahead of us will not deter us, but instead inspire us to stride more rapidly up their inclines. The slippery passages and the strong river currents we encounter will be no match for our now mature spiritual skills, allowing us opportunities to demonstrate our spiritual prowess in overcoming each and every one of them. And toward the end of our journey, when we have conquered many of the obstacles and enemies that once hindered our progress, we will see in ever clearer light the wise love and loving wisdom we have acquired, and how our spirit has been polished to a glistening shine by all

We can find joy in the journey, if we seek it. We have been invited to take the journey of a lifetime – in fact the journey of an endless lifetime, by the God Who created heaven and earth, and Who Himself tread every step of this journey alone.

the trials we have faced and overcome. We will sense that, despite our flaws, we are nearing the promised kingdom.

The evil thoughts and perverted lusts that once infected our spirit now stand aside, subdued through our consistent efforts to defeat them. And the light of truth that once shone only dimly now beams like the midday sun. We are ready for our final crossing to that land flowing with loving wisdom and sweet delights that endure to all eternity.

We can find joy in the journey, if we seek it. We have been invited to take the journey of a lifetime – in fact the journey of an endless lifetime, by the God Who created heaven and earth, and Who Himself tread every step of

this journey alone. And He Who invites us to travel this path will also lead us and strengthen our every step. His guidance is true and will not fail. His arm is strong and always extended. His love is infinite and irresistible. His promise is true.

Our Lord never promises that our journey will be without difficulty. He knows – and teaches – that left to ourselves we would not be able to choose the pathway of eternal life. So He provides the map, the guidance and the constant support for each one of us to successfully walk the pathway that leads ever upward toward His eternal realm.

His love seeks to make us happy not just today, or tomorrow, or for this year, but forever. And our willingness to persevere in traveling the pathway He has prepared for us – however difficult – is itself a positive sign that we are committed to keeping our part of His covenant with us.

We journey in the strength of His ceaseless love, guided by the light of His infinite wisdom. We are the apple of His eye, and He holds each and every one of us gently and firmly in the palms of His hands. And as we progress along the pathway He has shown us, He rains His blessings down upon us, and lovingly watches over us in our struggles and rejoices with us in our progress.

So let us step confidently forward along this pathway, knowing that both joy and despair will accompany us. And let us not focus solely on the difficulties facing us, but also on the blessings promised us throughout the journey, and the great reward that lies at its end. For the purpose of our journey

is not suffering but joy – joy at being redeemed from the deadening weight of evil, for the opportunity to be born anew in the image of Him Who created us and to dwell in His care forever.

Step by step, day by day, state by state, do we progress from the finite realm of the body and its limited senses to a realm unfettered by time and space, where delights exceeding anything we can imagine await us in a life of everlasting usefulness?

Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The everlasting God, the LORD,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the weak,
And to those who have no might
He increases strength.
Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
(Isaiah 40: 28-31)

Amen.



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So let us step confidently forward along this pathway, knowing that both joy and despair will accompany us. And let us not focus solely on the difficulties facing us, but also on the blessings promised us throughout the journey, and the great reward that lies at its end.

Divine Foresight: Miraculous and Wonderful

By the Rev. Grant H. Odhner

(This is a response to the paper, *Divine Foresight and Human Free Will*, by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers.¹ It was published in the July/August 2021 issue of *New Church Life*.)

In the past I've been impatient with the thesis that the Lord does not know specific events in the future, given the very clear body of teaching stating that this is the case. However, it has been useful to read Mr. Rogers' paper. I appreciate the power of his logic, if one accepts his assumptions. And I appreciate that for some people his solution enables a rational acceptance of the Lord's omniscience in the face of the need to understand human freedom.

Mr. Rogers' argument hinges partly on an analysis of time. In the natural universe 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. (p. 2)

All we actually have is now. This alone exists and can be known. Mr. Rogers adds that the Lord, as a "knowing Being," can only know

what is knowable, what has been previously knowable, and whatever may possibly be knowable in the future. But [He] cannot know what does not exist and so is not knowable; [He] cannot know what previously has not existed or occurred and so is not knowable; and [He] 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,

¹ Offered to the General Church Council of the Clergy in 2019 for the 2020 meetings (which did not take place)

present or future. The limitation lies in what can be known, and does not imply any limitation on the power of Divine sight. (p. 3)

Mr. Rogers' concern (reflected in his title) is that if the Lord were to know the future, that future would have to exist already and thus be determined. Thus, we would not be free. So, rather than knowing the future, the Lord only has a perfect idea of what we could possibly do and provides for it as we are making our choices.

The “Traditional View”

Mr. Rogers concedes that the Writings sometimes speak according to what he calls the “traditional view” that the Lord knows exactly what will happen in the future. Yet he believes that if we enter more deeply into Swedenborg's thought, we can see that his statements do not need to be taken literally. I will address that later.

Some statements bearing on the Lord's knowledge of the future lend themselves to Mr. Rogers' interpretation more easily than others.

Knowing from eternity to eternity

"[K]nowing," when predicated of God, [means] foresight and providence. For it cannot be said of God that He takes knowledge of a thing, because He knows all things from Himself, and the faculty of taking knowledge in man is from Him. Therefore in God "to know" is to foresee and to provide: to foresee is to know from eternity to eternity, and to provide is to do this. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5309)²

One can quibble about what knowing “from eternity to eternity” means in human terms. Eternity is not a matter of time, and we live in time. This kind of statement is, perhaps, easier to cast in terms of a foresight that works only from things known in past and present.

How are present and future in the Lord related?

Some passages speak of the past and future (or *future* things) being present to the Lord. (*Divine Providence* 59; *Apocalypse Revealed* 13; *Arcana Coelestia* 9787, 9849) One way to read this is that our future is not yet a reality either for us or for the Lord. Yet because He is wise and knows the past, the Lord can anticipate the future with its many *possibilities*, and can perfectly provide for what is eternal. Nevertheless, only in this sense is “the future” present to the Lord (“future *things*” referring only to possibilities). Other passages do imply

2 Knowing from eternity: *Arcana Coelestia* 10428, 10431, 10562; *Spiritual Experiences* 2718.

more clearly that the Lord's view of future *realities* is there in our present.

With those who are being regenerated the interior and exterior things are set in order by the Lord for all the following states, insomuch that things present involve things future, and *when things future become present* they do the same, and this to eternity; for the Lord foresees all, and provides all, and His foresight and providence are to eternity, thus are eternal. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10048.2)³

How could future things “become present” if they were non-existent and were not known already by the Lord?! Ah, but even here, *general* statements about the future could be taken as reflecting possibilities rather than actualities.

The Lord knows things to come

But there are more compelling statements of the Writings which indicate, at least when taken literally, that the Lord sees specific outcomes in the future, not just possibilities.

Evil cannot be hidden from Him who sees *things that are to come* and lie concealed. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5781)

I have had various conversations with angels, concerning the state of the church hereafter. They said that they know not things to come, for the knowledge of *things to come (ventura)* belongs to the Lord alone. (*Last Judgment* 74)

Jehovah does not ever repent, since He foresees and makes provision for all things from eternity. Repentance is a reaction that can take place only in someone who has no knowledge of the future and who sees, as events unfold, that he has made a mistake. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10441)

How the Lord can be present with all who are in heaven and throughout the whole earth, and can *know all things*, even the most particular things connected with them, *both present and future*, can be comprehended only by means of the following truths. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1217.3)

The Lord not only knows what is to come; it is possible for Him to reveal it

Angels do not know what is to come (*ventura*); the Lord alone knows, and he to whom He thinks worthy to reveal it. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2271)

3 All emphasis in quotations is mine.

The revelation of things that are hidden and the disclosure of things to come belong to God alone. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5331)

The Lord's Divine foresight is the source of foretellings of things to come. The fact that the foretellings of events which are out of the ordinary and cannot therefore be foreseen have no other origin becomes clear from the Word. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3698)

More dramatically...

The Lord knows our character and place after death

[O]ne 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. . . . Consequently, the Lord foresees a person's state after death and provides for it from his birth even to the end of his life. . . . The Lord foresees the states of all people after death, and also foresees the places in hell of those who do not wish to be saved, and the places in heaven of those who do. (*Divine Providence* 333.1-2)

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 since the Lord foresaw from eternity *what would be a person's quality*, and *what it would be to eternity*, it is evident that His providence is in the veriest singulars, and . . . governs and bends the person *to such a quality*; and this by a continual moderating of his freedom. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3854:2,3)

The Lord foresees *what kind of a life* a man is going to lead, and *how* he is going to suffer himself to be led by the Lord; and because all things are foreseen both in general and in particular – nay, the veriest singulars – they are also provided. (*Ibid.* 4136.2)

(More passages on this point: *Divine Providence* 67, 203; *Arcana Coelestia* 587, 1048, 3116, 4383; cf. *Spiritual Experiences* 3114, 5003; *Arcana Coelestia* 3869 sees that the [future] case is so)

Other specific outcomes known to the Lord

Victories [in war] seem to occur on the side of prudence and not always on the side of justice because a person judges in accordance with the appearance and favors one side more than the other, and whatever he favors he is able with reasonings to justify. Nor does he know that the justice of a cause is, in heaven, a spiritual justice, and in the world a natural one, . . . and that the two are joined together

by the chain of past events and at the same time of future ones, which are known to the Lord alone. (*Divine Providence* 252)

This next one is my favorite.

In the internal sense of the Word the Lord's whole life is described, such as it was to be in the world, *even as to the perceptions and thoughts*, for these were foreseen and provided because from the Divine. This was done for the additional reason that *all these things might be set forth at that time as present to the angels*, who perceive the Word according to the internal sense; and that so the Lord might be before them, and at the same time how by successive steps He put off the human and put on the Divine. Unless these things *had been as if present to the angels*, through the Word, . . . the Lord would have been obliged to come into the world immediately after the fall of the Most Ancient Church. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2523)

How could the Old Testament, at the time it was written, describe the Lord's "whole life . . . such as it was to be in the world, *even as to the perceptions and thoughts*," unless the Lord knew the future?! (And I would note that thoughts "in the world" are generated from within and from without. "From without" – that is, from space-time occasions, resting ultimately on sensory engagement.⁴)

Along the same lines we read:

The "third day" signifies completeness, and at the same time the beginning of sanctification. . . . The reason of this signification is that when the Lord had fulfilled all things He would rise again on the third day; *for the things . . . that would be done* by the Lord when He lived in the world, were in the representatives of the church as if already done (as also they were in the internal sense of the Word); *for in God to be and to become are the same; indeed all eternity is present to Him*. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2788; cf. 730.5)

In the internal sense [the tribe of Judah] is described as to how it lapsed into falsity, and thence into evil, and at last into mere idolatry. This is indeed described in the internal sense *before that tribe was separated from the rest, and before it so came to pass*; but what is in the internal sense is Divine, and *to the Divine future things are present*. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4815.4)

“Enter more deeply?”

4 cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 2520.2, 2553, 2557.2, 3310.4, 5477.2, 9995.3.

On a certain occasion angels detected traditional notions of Persons in the Trinity in Swedenborg's thought, and they assumed he was thinking falsely. His response was, "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) Mr. Rogers suggests that this is what is at play when Swedenborg speaks of the Lord as knowing details in the future. That is the traditional idea, but it's not really what Swedenborg is thinking. Are these two things comparable?

I would say, no. If traditional ideas of the Trinity of Persons are in Swedenborg's mind, they certainly are not in his many statements in the Writings. He is clear and consistent in what he says and teaches about the Trinity (unlike in his pre-*Arcana* period).

Similarly, Swedenborg is consistent in granting the Lord knowledge of all things, and being in all time apart from time – past, present, and future. He never qualifies it in any way. He never suggests that there is any conflict between foreknowledge and human freedom. Despite statements that seem to create problems for our natural mind, or ones that appear to obviate human freedom,⁵ Swedenborg always insists that we are free in our spiritual choices, and that there is no predestination.

Does exact foreknowledge obviate human freedom?

Though I can understand the difficulty of reconciling our notion of the Lord's foreknowledge and human freedom, I remain convinced that the Lord does indeed know the future, specifically. And rather than compromising our freedom, I think it is, in fact, *necessary* to our freedom. This is what passages such as the following are getting at:

After this the same spirit was taken back into the state of his early childhood. The Lord showed the angels what that state had been like, and also *what his future life was foreseen to be like*. It was shown that every specific detail of his life had been subject to the Lord's guidance, and that if it had not been he would have thrown himself

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5 *Spiritual Experiences* 2628-2630, 2464-2467, 3114, 4652.

headlong into an utterly horrible hell, that is, if there had been the smallest lapse in the constant watch kept by the Lord's Providence. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6484.2)

[Foresight and Providence do not exist one without the other.] For 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. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5195)

It was perceived, and I said to angels, that every most minute moment of a man's life has a series of consequences to eternity, and, unless all of them were over-ruled by the Lord, in the smallest moments, man would never have any salvation; and that, hence, it may be evident, that the Lord's eternity, or *foresight* and Providence to eternity, is from the Lord; and so, that man is over-ruled in every one of his smallest moments. Without such Providence, in the minutest particulars of all things, no one could have any salvation – for, of himself, man rushes to hell, every moment – nor [would there be] any *foretelling of the future*, nor general civil love of country, nor state of the Church, nor Kingdom of the Lord. Hence, also, it may be evident, that man is led of the Lord by continuous constraints to *foreseen ends*; and, yet, by means of his freedom. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4652)

Providence is as when one walks in dark forests, the exit out of which one does not know; but upon discovering it, attributes the find to his own wisdom; whereas providence is like someone in a tower who is watching the person's vagaries, and leads him without his knowledge to *the exit (ad exitum)*. The reason he attributes it to his own wisdom if he is prompted to observe something of the path, or to coincidence or chance, is that he looks at things present, not at far off *goals (fines)*, of which he sees nothing at all, not even seeing anything of goals in the world, still less in the other life. This was illustrated and confirmed by the angels. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4393)

If the Lord didn't see the exit, He couldn't lead us through the thick forest. (Though, as we'll see in the next section, "seeing the exit" needs some qualification.)

Divine Omniscience

Mr. Rogers says:

Omniscience . . . is a complete knowledge of everything true, and not of anything without actual existence, whether in the past, or the present, or the future. (p. 3)

I readily acknowledge that what the Lord sees and knows needs qualification. *Divine Providence* 53 notes that the Lord can regard (*specto*) *only what is Divine, what is infinite and eternal* in the finite. He sees what we receive of Him, and by contrast what we do not receive. *True Christian Religion* 59 puts it this way: “God is omniscient, that is, He perceives, sees, and knows each thing and all things, even to the most minute, *that take place according to order*, and from these the things also that take place contrary to order.”

Further, the Lord is not looking at a moment of time (which is finite), but only at what is timeless in that moment. *Arcana Coelestia* 5264 says:

[Providence], being from the Divine, has within it what is eternal and infinite – what is eternal, because *it does not look to any terminus from which, nor to any terminus to which*, it proceeds; and what is infinite, because it simultaneously regards what is infinite in every singular, and every singular in what is universal.

So, in the illustration of the Lord’s leading “every least moment” in *Divine Providence* 202 (and 333): “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” – it is not the target that the Lord is focused on, or even some particular terminus beyond it, it is our eternal *state*. He regards the *mental state* of reception which we are choosing *as something that will never end*.⁶

The language that finite minds must use is misleading, if not understood as framed in appearances. “Fore” implies time. And “sight” implies a terminus from which a thing is viewed and terminal objects which are seen. None of these apply to an infinite and eternal Being.

Now, I don’t know about you, but these teachings about the Lord’s omniscience are really beyond my comprehension. I don’t think it’s possible for the finite mind to grasp this kind of sight or foresight. We can grasp that it must be so; but we cannot grasp *how it is so*. (cf. *Divine Providence* 46) The Lord’s foresight is inscrutable to us. The Writings make this point specifically:

6 One might say that our “place” in heaven is a terminus, but even here we cannot conceive of the way in which the Greatest Human will develop to eternity, and how our “place”/use will shift as countless more human beings enter. The Lord is seeing beyond anything we can imagine.

The Providence of the Lord is not only unfathomable, but even sees simultaneously things to come to eternity, and thus the chain of all intermediate events: portrayed by things in nature (heading)

It has been shown before [2477-9] that the things that are the Lord's in the innermost and very inward regions are inscrutable, and that they are portrayed in the human being when conceived, formed in the ovum, in the womb, later when born and growing up, by the fact that all, even the very least of those phases, are contained in the seed together with all those wonderful changes the person undergoes when first conceived, and then one after another. These are all most wonderful series of things that are to follow together with their continual changes within, and yet all of these phases, that is, series of potential events, are contained in the first inconspicuous seed, so that nothing whatever is lacking of the whole chain. Therefore, since such a series is obvious and well known within the realm of nature, and such a providence or series of events in succession, it follows clearly that in them is reflected not only the fact that the things from the Lord in the innermost and very inward regions are unfathomable, but that *He views all things that are to come from beginning to end down to the very least in their own uninterrupted series, even to the last*. For every such event is as it were an image of the providence and foresight of the Lord; besides which [He views] what comes from the character of every parent in all posterity. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2483-2484)

Swedenborg is quite clear here that the Lord sees “things to come” (*ventura*) at the same time as He sees what is happening now, and all things in between. And this is unfathomable! He goes on:

So nature, if we investigate it properly, can teach us that this is so, if we are viewing matters from truth, thus from things we can see. But then from those things [of nature] we ought by no means to make declarations regarding truths and explore them in this way, but from truths revealed by the Lord we ought to see those things as confirmations. In this way one is enlightened, while proceeding in the reverse order, one is obscured, confused, one doubts, and denies. 1748, 2 July. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2484)

We can find things in nature that image the Lord's foresight – like the way one lineament anticipates something yet to come in the formation of the embryo.⁷ But we should not discount clear teachings in the Word (which admit

⁷ This illustration from *Spiritual Experiences* 2483f appears later in *Arcana Coelestia* 6491

that they are inscrutable) by drawing our mind to the natural level where we are bound by notions of time. This strikes me as the wrong way to go.

Thought from time

The Divine does not exist in time. Consequently, all future events are present to it. Moreover, because that is the nature of the Divine, it follows that each and every thing that it does has eternity in it. (*Divine Providence* 59)

The Lord is not in time. Rather, He is in *all* time *apart from* time. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 73ff; *True Christian Religion* 30) And “time” evidently includes future time, as amazing as that seems to our natural thought.

The Writings counsel us to remove our ideas from time and space, and to think from state. I find that when I do this, I have no trouble accepting that the Lord has perfect knowledge of what is future to me. He must because of *who He is*, and *what He loves*, and *what He is bringing about with infinite wisdom*. (These things being timeless and eternal.)

The following passage is from a treatment on Omnipresence and Omniscience (*Apocalypse Explained* 1216-1228). It addresses the difficulty of conceiving of omniscience, counsels against thinking from time, and has some advice for “the simple person.”

(2) *Spaces and times must be removed from the ideas before the Lord's omnipresence with all and with each individual, and His omniscience of things present and future, can be comprehended. But inasmuch as spaces and times cannot easily be removed from the ideas of the thoughts of the natural person, it is better for a simple person not to think of the Divine omnipresence and omniscience from any reasoning of the understanding. It is enough for him to believe in them simply from his religion. And if he thinks from reason, let him say to himself that they exist because they pertain to God, and God is everywhere and infinite, also because they are taught in the Word. And if he thinks of them from nature and from its spaces and times, let him say to himself that they are miraculously brought about.*

The Writings counsel us to remove our ideas from time and space, and to think from state. I find that when I do this, I have no trouble accepting that the Lord has perfect knowledge

But inasmuch as the church is at present almost overwhelmed by naturalism, and this can be shaken off only by means of rational considerations which enable a person to see what is true, it will be well to draw forth these Divine attributes out of the darkness that nature induces into the light by means of such consideration. And this can be done because, as has been said, the understanding with which a human being is endowed is capable of being raised up into the interior light of heaven if only a person desires from love to know truths.

All naturalism arises from thinking about Divine things in accord with what is proper to nature, that is, matter, space, and time. The mind that clings to these, and is unwilling to believe anything that it does not understand, cannot do otherwise than make blind its understanding, and from the dense darkness in which it is immersed, deny that there is any Divine providence, and thus deny the Divine omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience, although these are just what religion teaches both within nature and above nature. And yet these cannot be comprehended by the understanding unless spaces and times are separated from the ideas of its thought; for these are in some way present in every idea of thought, and unless they are separated a person cannot think otherwise than that nature is everything, that it is from itself, and consequently that the inmost of nature is what is called God, and that all beyond it is merely ideal. And such, I know, will wonder how anything can possibly exist where there is no time or space; and that the Divine itself is without them. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1220.2 I have introduced some paragraphs in this passage for easier reading.)

Note that the Lord says that in this treatment He will “draw forth these Divine attributes [i.e. omnipresence and omniscience] out of the darkness that nature induces into the light” by means of “rational considerations.” Yet in what follows we find nothing that would lead us to understand the Lord’s “omniscience of things present and future” in any other way than as plainly stated in Scripture and in the Writings.

“Against Blind Acceptance”

Bruce Rogers wrote a sermon with the above title, which I have always appreciated and shared with students.⁸ The sermon is informed in part by *Arcana Coelestia* 3394, which points out that (some?) spiritual people, because

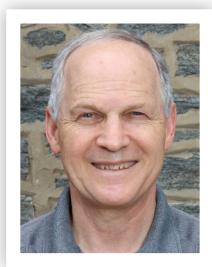
⁸ *New Church Life* 81:188ff.

they lack perception, are suspicious of the idea that Divine truth can also be grasped rationally. If it is Divine, it must therefore “have nothing in common with the rational.” The passage goes on:

Such persons are desirous that *the things of faith should be believed in simplicity, without any mental view of them on the part of the rational*, not being aware that not anything of faith, not even its deepest secret, is comprehended by any person without some rational idea, and also a natural one, but of what quality he does not know (n. 3310). By this [attitude] they may indeed protect themselves against those who reason about everything from what is negative as to whether it is so (n. 2568, 2588). But to those who are in the affirmative concerning the Word (namely, that it is to be believed) *such a position is hurtful, as they may thus take away from anyone his freedom of thought*, and even bind the conscience to that which is in the highest degree heretical by in this way dominating both the internal and the external things of a person. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3394.3)

I want to be clear that I am not trying to stop people from coming to a rational understanding of the Lord’s omniscience and foresight. It is quite apparent to me that many sincere students of the Writings have held a position about the Divine foresight that is not what I see. Yet, in my opinion:

- It is a satisfying rational position to accept that there are things about the Divine that are incomprehensible to the natural mind, and “miraculously brought about”
- Any effort to remove knowledge of future details from the Lord is (for me) a product of thinking from time and from our natural mindset (I am not accusing anyone else of coming from a place of deliberate “naturalism”)
- The threefold Word is clear that the Lord sees details in the future so that He can provide for our freedom and for His “ends in view”
- This does not hinder the spiritual freedom that He provides and protects in every human being



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Finding the New Jerusalem: Robert Hindmarsh¹

Compiled by Marvin B. Clymer

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Priesthood of the LORD'S New Church contains no name more worthy of remembrance than that of Robert Hindmarsh. The founder of the first organization of the Church, the first receiver of her Baptism, the first ordainer of her Priesthood, the unwearied translator and publisher of her Doctrines, a hero of Michael defending her Faith against the Dragon, the deepest and soundest of her early theologians, in short, the high-priest of the Church for half a century; in all these lights Robert Hindmarsh stands forth preeminent in the early annals of the New Church.

The present sketch is the first attempt that has been made to give a connected outline of the life and work of Robert Hindmarsh. Viewed as a whole, that life and work may be said to represent the principle of the ultimatum of the Heavenly Doctrines in the organized form of the visible Church. Of all that is distinctively of the New Church,



¹ This article was selectively taken from *Robert Hindmarsh, A Biography*, by Carl Th. Odhner, first printed serially in *New Church Life* from April – December of 1894 and published as a book in 1895. Excerpts from *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church* by Robert Hindmarsh have also been added.

Robert Hindmarsh was the great exponent and defender. May the lesson of his life tend to promote that heavenly use which he himself so deeply loved and so faithfully served, the establishment of the New Jerusalem, distinct from the Old, on every plane of life.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Robert Hindmarsh was born at Alnwick, in Northumberland, England, on November 8th, in the year 1759. His father, James Hindmarsh, who had formerly been writing master at the Methodist seminary called Kingswood School, near Bristol, at that time was an itinerant preacher in John Wesley's newly-founded sect, but became, at a later period, the first public preacher of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem. Brought up by this religious father, Robert Hindmarsh was early imbued with love for the Word of God and for the spiritual things of the Church.

His education was continued at the Kingswood School. Here the young boy soon became conspicuous for a remarkable degree of "clear-headedness," an ardent love of knowledge, and an extraordinary facility for acquiring and retaining it. So great was his progress that when, at the early age of 14 years, he was taken out of school, he was regarded by his masters as one of the principal ornaments of the institution. He had then acquired an elementary knowledge of the sciences, and great proficiency in the Greek and Latin languages, particularly in the latter, which he could read and write with facility and correctness. His studies did not cease with his short school life, but in the course of time, by a wide and systematic reading, he acquired extensive and well-balanced learning.

The Word of God continued the favorite subject of his attention, and in order to gain a correct understanding of its teachings he began an independent study of Hebrew, and in time acquired a high degree of proficiency in that sacred tongue.

After leaving school he was placed by his parents with a printer in London, where he learned the printer's trade. While yet a very young man, he established a printing office of his own, and conducted this business successfully for many years. In the year 1787 he received an honorary appointment as "Printer to His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales."

Though born and bred in the very focus of Methodism he never formed any attachment to the doctrines and discipline of this sect, but searched diligently for a religion that would appeal to his understanding rather than to unreasoning sentiments. He early discerned the divisions and the doctrinal confusion in the Christian Church. The dogma of the three persons in the Godhead was especially offensive to him. He states that by examining the

Sacred Scriptures he arrived at the conclusion – obscurely seen at first – that the LORD JESUS CHRIST could be the only Divine Person, who as Creator is called "Father," as Redeemer, "Son," and as Comforter and Regenerator, "Holy Spirit." Thus he was prepared by the Divine Providence to receive the heavenly light which was soon to shine upon him out of the Writings of the New Church, and to take up the sacred work of publishing these through the press.

RECEPTION OF THE DOCTRINES

He first heard of Swedenborg's name in the year 1778, when the work *Heaven and Hell*, translated by the Rev. Thomas Hartley and Mr. William Cookworthy, was being printed in London at the office of Mr. James Phillips. Robert Hindmarsh was at that time an apprentice in a printing house connected with that of Mr. Phillips, and he thus came to hear of the very curious book that was to be published, and about the extraordinary author, "Baron" Emanuel Swedenborg.

Though his curiosity was then greatly excited to learn something definite about the state of man after death, the current reports about Swedenborg's unsoundness of mind discouraged him from investigating the book for himself. But his interest had been aroused, and he was led to continue his inquiries on the subject of eternal life. Thus it came to pass that on the first of January, in the year 1782, while on a visit to his father, then stationed in Canterbury, the conversation turned to the subject of Swedenborg and his Writings.

On inquiring where these books could be obtained, the young man was referred to Mr. George Keen, a Quaker then residing in the same town, who was said to possess some of them. Calling the following day upon this gentleman, who subsequently became a member of the New Church, Hindmarsh was favored with the loan of the works *Heaven and Hell* and *The Intercourse between the Soul and the Body*.

[Hindmarsh later wrote,]

These works I read with the utmost avidity, and instantly perceived their contents to be of heavenly origin. I therefore as naturally embraced and delighted in them, as the eye embraces and delights in objects that reflect the golden rays of the rising sun. The same day that introduced me to a knowledge of these Writings, introduced me also to the first interview with the young lady, who, on the 7th of May following, became my wife, and with whom I had the happiness of living in much harmony and affection nearly 51 years. . . . Thus I found myself doubly blessed by the events of the before-mentioned day.²

² *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church* by Robert Hindmarsh, p. 10-11.

At that time but few of the Writings were translated into the English tongue, and Hindmarsh, therefore, speedily procured a full collection of these Writings in the original Latin, which he now began to study with ever-increasing delight. Business cares demanding most of his attention in the daytime, he borrowed from the night many an hour for his favorite studies, even taking the books to bed with him, and reading until sleep overtook him.

[He continued:]

From that time I began to search out other readers of the same Writings in London, in order to form a Society for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of the great truths contained in them. I expected at first, that almost every person of sound judgment, or even of common sense, would receive them with the same facility as I did myself, and would rejoice with me, that so great a treasure had at length been found in the Church. But I was mistaken: and such was the prejudice in the minds of men of apparent candor in other respects, that so far from congratulating me, and their own good fortune, in the acquisition of such spiritual information, I was absolutely laughed at, and set down by them as a mere simpleton, an infatuated youth, and little better than a madman, led away by the reveries of an old enthusiast and impostor.

I heard these vituperations with surprise, and could not help thinking, in return, that the accusers were themselves mad, or at least under the influence of a strong delusion. One in particular, a great professor of religion, whom I had hitherto regarded as a friend, and a sincere follower of Jesus Christ, declared, that it would give him pleasure to see the Writings of Swedenborg consumed by fire, and me on the top of the pile. He was a Predestinarian, or rigid Calvinist, who perhaps thought he might do his God a service by burning his adversaries, or by blotting them out of the map of existence. I smiled at his zeal, and recommended him to consider "what manner of spirit he was of," as our Lord on another occasion advised his disciples James and John, Luke x. 54, 55.

Another, a bookseller, by whom I was employed to print periodical and other publications, was much offended by the zeal which I displayed in favor of the truths of the New Church. He plied me both with promises and threatenings; by promises of wealth and riches from the abundance of employment, with which he would supply me, if I would but decline the printing of Swedenborg's Writings, and attend to his interests only; and by threatenings, that, if I persevered in the propagation of such idle notions as I had adopted,

he would withdraw his support from me, and give his patronage to another. To this I answered, that I felt grateful for all his favors, but that I could not conscientiously accede to his proposal. He then said, in allusion to the doctrine of the Divine Trinity, which, among other things, he understood Swedenborg dwelt so much upon, "What does it signify to you or to me how many Divine Persons, or how many Gods, there are? Let them settle the matter between themselves: that is their business, not ours!"

Some few individuals listened for a time with apparent attention to the report, which I had to make of the Writings; but on hearing the Author's account of the state of man after death, as the result of his own personal observation, they soon went off as it were in a tangent, and I lost sight of them forever.

Even my own father at this time, and for two or three years after my reception of the new doctrines, cautioned me to beware how I gave way to them, lest I should be seduced by mere flights of imagination, and estranged from the common faith of professing Christians. As I knew his heart to be good, (of which I had had many proofs in the course of my education,) I gave him full credit for the sincerity of his advice, being well assured that he, as well as myself, was desirous of truth for the sake of truth, and that he was incapable of giving countenance to any system, which he did not in his conscience believe to be true. He already approved of some of the fundamental doctrines taught by Swedenborg, particularly that of the Divine Trinity. But he did not as yet see, that that doctrine, rightly understood, and permitted to branch out into all its consequences, involved every truth of the New Church, and negated, yea nullified, every doctrine of the Old Church.

He did not as yet see, that the doctrine of atonement, as generally taught, is altogether inconsistent with the Divine Unity and the Divine Mercy. . . . He did not as yet see, that the consummation of the age, or end of the Church, as predicted by the Lord in the Gospels, had already taken place. . . . But he was, what every upright man ought to be, open to conviction. After diligent application to the Writings of Swedenborg, particularly to the work, entitled, True Christian Religion, containing the Universal Theology of the New Church, and a renewed examination of the Scriptures, he at length became a full convert to the new doctrines.³

3 *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church* by Robert Hindmarsh, p. 11-13.

[But, in the meanwhile,] Robert Hindmarsh and his young wife, who shared in his convictions, thus found themselves alone, in the great world of London, in their faith in the LORD at His Second Advent.

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW CHURCH

After a year had thus passed he at last found three other readers of the Writings, Mr. Peter Provo, a surgeon, Mr. William Bonington, a clock-case manufacturer, and John Augustus Tulk, Esq., a gentleman of wealth. In the year 1783 these persons were invited by Robert Hindmarsh to meet regularly for reading the Writings, at his house in Clerkenwell Close, not far from the spot of Swedenborg's last residence on earth.

After these meetings had continued for a time, the friends agreed to call a public meeting of all readers and friends of the new doctrines who were definitely known as such. This meeting was accordingly held on the fifth of December, 1783, at five o'clock in the afternoon, at the "London Coffee House" on Ludgate Hill. Five persons were present at this meeting, the only addition to the former number being Mr. William Spence, a surgeon. The repeated occurrence of the number five in connection with this, the first public meeting of the New Church, was remarked upon as significant of the fact that the New Church was to begin among a few.

From lack of a secluded apartment at the Coffee House the meeting was immediately adjourned to the neighboring "Queen's Arms Tavern," where, among other things, it was agreed to meet again on the following Thursday for further consultation.

Robert Hindmarsh thus describes the sphere of this meeting, which was so pregnant with the most important consequences:

"To hear the story of each other's first reception of the doctrines, and to observe the animation that sparkled in the eye and brightened up the countenance of each speaker as it came to his turn to relate the particulars of that, by him, never to-be-forgotten event, was itself a little heaven Our spirits were elated by the meeting. Three or four hours passed swiftly away; and soon after nine o'clock we adjourned, highly gratified with this first public interview of congenial minds, and determined to prosecute our plan of holding up to the view of the world a Light, which could no longer be concealed in a secret place, nor hid under a bed or a bushel."

During the following week a room was engaged at the "Inner Temple," near Fleet Street, and an advertisement was inserted in some of the London journals, extending a general invitation to all readers of the Writings to meet together for the purpose of joining in an effort to promulgate a knowledge of the New Church. In accordance with this invitation a second meeting was held

on December 12th, when the five gentlemen mentioned above, were joined by two zealous and intelligent receivers of the Doctrines, Mr. Henry Peckitt, a retired and wealthy surgeon, who had been an interested reader since the year 1777, and Mr. James Glen, a Scotsman, of eccentric manners but of profound insight into the Heavenly Doctrines.

These and successively others, who joined the meetings, brought increased strength and impetus to this circle of Newchurchmen who, in January, 1784, organized into a society with the designation:

"The Theosophical Society, instituted for the purpose of promoting the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, by translating, printing and publishing the Theological Writings of the Honorable Emanuel Swedenborg." Of this society, Robert Hindmarsh was Secretary, and his name appears as such at the close of the first printed document of the society, a circular address "To the Christian World at large, but more especially to the Clergy," explaining the nature and intentions of the institution, and inviting the co-operation of all who sympathized with the undertaking. This was dated January 15th, 1784.

The news of the formation of the "Theosophical Society" now spread rapidly in London, and the membership increased greatly within the period of the following three or four years. A number of gentlemen of talents, distinction, or means associated themselves with the new movement. Meetings were held not only on Thursdays, but also on Sunday evenings, at which the Writings were read and discussed, and measures were considered for the promotion of the heavenly uses of the society.

At these meetings Robert Hindmarsh acted as Reader. Among the earliest additions to the membership the following were the most noteworthy: Benedict Chastanier, a French surgeon, resident in London, and one of the most active of the members; Augustus Nordenskjold and his brother Carl Frederic, two Swedish noblemen, both well-known in the history of the Church; Charles Bernhard Wadstrom, a learned Swede, who is famous as the first agitator against the African slave-trade; Henry Servante, distinguished for his zeal, intelligence, and activity; Manoah Sibly, bookseller, and afterward one of the foremost ministers of the Church; James Hindmarsh, who, through his son, had become thoroughly convinced of the truth of the Heavenly Doctrines; F. H. Barthelemon, musical preceptor to the Royal Family, who made the first efforts to develop music in adaptation to the truths of the Church; John Flaxman, the celebrated sculptor, whose work bears distinctive traces of New Church influence; and Lieutenant-General Rainsford, afterward Governor of Gibraltar, besides a number of others.

The proposed work of translating and publishing the Writings was begun in the year 1784. The first work to be published was *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, translated by Mr. Provo and Robert Hindmarsh, and

published at the joint expense of the "Theosophical Society" in London, and the "Manchester Printing Society," which, at this time, was being formed through the influence of the Rev. John Clowes, Rector of St. John's, in Manchester.⁴ In the same year Robert Hindmarsh edited and published, at his own expense, the first Latin edition (4to), of *Summaria Expositio Sensus Interni*, the manuscript of which had been brought to London by the Nordenskjold brothers.

In the following year, 1785, Robert Hindmarsh, in conjunction with four other gentlemen, undertook the great work of editing and publishing, at their joint expense, the first Latin edition of *Apocalypsis Explicata*, which was among the manuscripts brought from Stockholm by the Nordenskjolds. This work was published in four volumes, extending over a period of four years.

During the publication the following striking incident took place: Mr. Henry Peckitt, as one of the editors, had in his possession the manuscript of the second volume. One night a fire broke out in his neighborhood, which soon laid his own home in ashes. Mr. Peckitt himself narrowly escaped with his life, and in the excitement forgot the precious manuscript in his possession until the fire had consumed his valuable library of several thousand volumes. Next morning, while he was despairingly searching amongst the ruins, a neighbor informed him that some books had been picked up in the street, where they had been thrown at random by a fireman.

What was his joy in finding among these books the priceless manuscript, preserved from injury in every respect? A few days afterward, while the "Theosophical Society" was holding its usual meeting, Mr. Peckitt entered with the manuscript under his arm. Bursting into tears he placed it on the table, exclaiming: "There, the greatest treasure which I had in my house is preserved in safety, and for the sake of that I willingly submit to my great loss."

Robert Hindmarsh, at this period, performed another important service to the Church, by obtaining from Mr. Richard Shearsmith, in whose house Swedenborg had expired, a legally sworn affidavit, emphatically denying the current report that Swedenborg, a few hours before he died, had retracted all his theological writings.

Many of the members of the "Theosophical Society" at this period attended the Sunday services conducted at the "London Asylum for Female Orphans," by the Rev. Jacob Duche. This eloquent preacher is famous in American history as having read the opening prayer in the First Congress of the United States, held in Philadelphia in the year 1776. Later, being suspected of sympathy with the English, he was forced to leave this country, and settled temporarily in London. . . . He had embraced the Doctrines of the New Church, and now incorporated these in his sermons, though with the greatest caution of expression.

4 See The Story of John Clowes, *New Church Life*, September/October 2021, p. 404-413.

From the teachings and example of him, and of the Rev. John Clowes, in Manchester, many of the early receivers of the Doctrines were led to hope that the truths of the New Church would gradually find their way into the Established Church, thereby effecting a general reformation, and rendering unnecessary, nay, disorderly, any separate establishment of distinctively New Church worship. But Robert Hindmarsh and some other more clear-sighted students of the Doctrines were not deceived by this seductive hope – which the subsequent history of the New Church proved to be most delusive. To them the reformation of a dead Church seemed impossible, while, on the other hand, they heard the Divine Voice calling "Come out of her, My people."

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

Led by the ever resolute and fearless Robert Hindmarsh, some of the members of the Society resolved to lay before their brethren the proposal to open a place for the distinct public worship of the LORD JESUS CHRIST in His Divine Human.

This momentous proposition was submitted to the Society at a meeting held on April 19th, in the year 1787, but was negatived by a small majority of the members, some of whom were altogether opposed to any separation from the Old Church, while others did not think that the proper time for such a step had yet arrived.

But though the Rev. John Clowes came to London for the single purpose of dissuading the minority from their expressed purpose, the latter were not convinced by his arguments, nor persuaded by his appeals for "charitable" sentiments toward the Old Church. The votes of a majority could not outweigh the dictate of their conscience, and hence, on the 7th of May of the same year, they organized a new and separate Society, which they styled "The Society for Promoting the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Church."

They still continued in friendly relations with the remaining members of the "Theosophical Society," which latter did not dissolve until some years afterward. Thenceforth, however, the readers of the Writings were divided into two distinct and sometimes opposing parties, "separationists" and "non-separationists."

At the first meeting of this new Society it was resolved to engage, at the first opportunity, a chapel for the meetings and the public worship of the New Church, but as no such opportunity offered itself for some time, the members continued to meet at private houses. "Rules and Regulations" for the Society were adopted at a meeting held on July 2d, and a declaration of "Principles" at a select meeting held on July 29th, 1787.

In this latter interesting document, which was drawn up by Mr. James

Glen, it is declared, among other things, that

- "The Truths of the New Church are alone contained in the Word and the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg."
- "Introduction into the New Church is solely through the Spiritual Correspondence, Baptism, performed in that Church."
- "Conjunction with the LORD and consociation with the angels of the New Heavens are effected by the Holy Supper taken in the New Church, according to its Heavenly and Divine Correspondences."

The first establishment of the New Church in an external form was finally completed when, on July 31st, 1787, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper for the first time were administered according to the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem.

At this solemn meeting "it was determined by lot that Mr. James Hindmarsh should officiate in the room of a priest." First, the Holy Supper was administered to 11 persons, and afterward the Sacrament of Baptism to five others.

Of these, Robert Hindmarsh was the first to take up the ensign of the New Church, and thus to enter through the universal gateway into the Holy City.

Soon after this occasion the first Liturgy of the New Church, entitled *The Order of Worship for the New Church* signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation, was drawn up by Robert Hindmarsh and adopted by the society.

On November 5th of the same year the Society met for the first time in a chapel in Great East Cheap, which had been hired by Mr. Hindmarsh and two other members for the uses of the Church. This chapel was opened for the public worship of the New Church on the LORD'S Day, January 27th, 1788. Mr. James Hindmarsh, who had been chosen the first minister of the Church, on this occasion preached a sermon on the text, "Praise ye the LORD."

In view of the purely ecclesiastical form which the Society had now assumed, it was resolved, at a meeting on May 5th, 1788, to adopt the scriptural and doctrinal designation, "The New Church, signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation," instead of the former secular name.

At this time the necessity for a regularly appointed and ordained Priesthood began to be recognized, and many meetings were held for the consideration of this important subject. The question arose: Whence should the Priesthood of the New Church derive its authority and ordination? From the authorities of the Old Church?

Manifestly not, for the New Church was to be as distinct from it as was the first Christian Church from the preceding dispensation. Should, then, the ordaining power proceed from the members of the New Church themselves through a direct majority vote? The Society did not think they possessed such

an inherent, original power. Such a course would make the priestly office a merely human institution.

To whom, then, should they look for light on this question, to which the Heavenly Doctrine appeared to give no specific answer, and which human prudence could not solve? To whom but to the LORD alone, the High-Priest, and the only Priest of His Church? With unquestioning trust in the Divine Providence the members of the New Church determined to seek for indications of the Divine Will, by means of the drawing of lots.

To this step they were led, not by the pressure of necessity alone, but also, and especially, by the example of the Apostles in choosing Matthias as one of their number to fill the vacant place of Judas; and by the teaching in *True Christian Religion* 696, concerning the immediate guidance of the Divine Providence in the drawing of lots. (See also *Spiritual Diary* 4008.)

Two of the members, James Hindmarsh and Samuel Smith, had been in the preaching office before their conversion to the New Church, and were unanimously considered by the others to be well qualified and called by the LORD to continue in this use. The drawing of lots was only to determine who should act as the LORD'S instruments in conferring upon these two the powers of ordination.

These conclusions having been reached to the satisfaction of all, it was unanimously agreed, at a meeting held on June 1st, 1788, to ordain James Hindmarsh and Samuel Smith as priests and ministers of the New Church. Twelve of the male members, representing the Church as a whole, with all its goods and truths, were then chosen by lot to lay their right hands upon the candidates for ordination, while Robert Hindmarsh, as one of these twelve, was unanimously requested to read the service of ordination, which he had prepared for the occasion.

In his history of the *Rise and Progress of the New Church* Hindmarsh adds to his account of the above ceremony the following information:

"Being desirous, for my own private satisfaction, to ascertain which of the twelve to be selected by lot it might please the LORD to appoint to read or perform the ceremony, I wrote, unknown to the rest of the Society, upon one of the twelve tickets thus marked with a cross, the word ORDAIN. I then put the 16 tickets into a receiver, when a prayer went up from my heart that the LORD would show whom He had chosen for the office of ordination. The members being properly arranged, I went round to them all; and each one took a ticket out of the receiver, leaving me the last ticket, on which was written, as before stated, the word ORDAIN. Still the other members were not aware of what I had done; and when the twelve were separated from the rest, after consulting

together a few moments, they unanimously requested, that I should read and perform the ceremony of ordination. Whereupon James Hindmarsh was first ordained by me, and immediately afterward, Samuel Smith."

Robert Hindmarsh, in consequence, considered himself doubly chosen, by the LORD Himself as well as by the Church, to act as the principal ordainer, and that he himself, in fact, and by virtue of this double choice, was ordained a priest of the New Jerusalem. Though he never claimed recognition as such from his brethren, yet the Church itself, at the Conference held at Derby, in the year 1818, by a unanimous resolution, placed his name at the head of its list of ordained ministers, together with the addendum, "ordained by the Divine Auspices of the LORD."

During this period Hindmarsh was not less active in the literary work of the Church than in the work of her organization. He translated from the Latin, and published at his own expense, the works on *The Last Judgment*, *The White Horse*, *The Intercourse between the Soul and the Body*, and *A Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church*. In the same year (1788), in his capacity as Secretary of the Great East Cheap Society, he wrote a small work entitled *Reasons for Separating from the Old Church*.

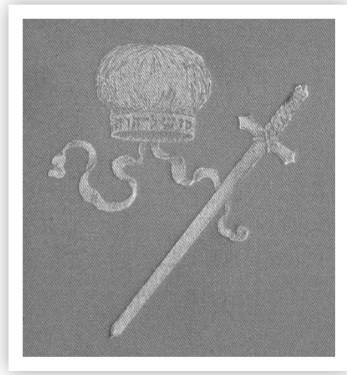
This was written in answer to a letter addressed to the Society by the Rev. John Clowes and his friends, in Manchester, who still hoped to persuade their London brethren to give up their separate establishment. So completely did Hindmarsh silence the objections raised to the separation, and so luminous and convincing were his arguments, that a majority of Mr. Clowes' own followers soon afterward separated from the Old Church, and established the prosperous Society in Peter Street, Manchester. Nothing stronger has ever been written on this important subject than this little pamphlet by Robert Hindmarsh.

On the invitation of the Society at Great East Cheap, the friends of the separate establishment of the New Church assembled in London for a "General Conference," on April 13- 17, 1789. This first general meeting of the Church was truly representative and universal in character, being attended not only by members from various parts of England, but also from Sweden, France and America.

Among the many resolutions which were passed at this memorable meeting, which was opened with an earnest address by Robert Hindmarsh, the following, the very first of the series, is of special interest, as showing that the recognition of the Divine Authority of the Writings was the very cornerstone upon which these early builders of the Church endeavored to erect the holy Temple of the LORD:

"I. Resolved, unanimously, That it is the opinion of this Conference that the Theological works of the Hon. EMANUEL SWEDENBORG are perfectly consistent with the Holy Word, being at the same time explanatory of its internal sense in so wonderful a manner that nothing short of a Divine Revelation seems adequate thereto. That they also contain the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church, signified by The New Jerusalem in the Revelation; which Doctrines he was enabled by the LORD alone to draw from the Holy Word, while under the Inspiration and Illumination of His Holy Spirit."

The sphere at this first general meeting of the LORD'S New Church is described as having been most delightful. Perfect unanimity reigned throughout all the proceedings, and it seemed to all the members as if the loving brotherhood of primitive Christianity had been restored upon earth. It was, indeed, a moment in the infancy of the Church when innocence and peace prevailed, and eternal remains of both good and truth were sown for its future life.



[To be Continued]

NOTES

The portrait of Robert Hindmarsh was printed in *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church* in England, America and Other Parts by Robert Hindmarsh. It was published in 1861.

For more stories about early champions of the New Church, explore the New Church Digital Collections at www.swedenborglibrary.org/digital and select: *Archives*> *New Church History*> *Early New Church People*> *In America* or *In England*.



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The Heavenly Doctrines and the Case For and Against Evolution – at the Same Time

The Rev. Prescott A. Rogers

A couple of years ago my wife, Jill, and a friend in her garden club were discussing evolution, among other things. The friend is a conservative Christian who does not believe in evolution. She asked Jill if our religion supported the theory of evolution. Jill answered that the church does not have an official position, but that she and probably almost everyone else in the church believed in it. To this the friend asked: “Where is God in evolution?” Jill responded that He is in every step of the way.

This article attempts to explain how the Lord is in every aspect of evolution, but with a significant point that differentiates the Heavenly Doctrines’ teachings from that of science and all other religions. This explanation requires two teachings about creation and order.

The Lord, who is love itself and so life itself, created this world with certain inherent endeavors or strivings (or strong efforts and tendencies). The first is the *endeavor to life*. Since the Lord is life itself and since He is the ultimate essence of every created thing, everything is a receiving vessel of the influx or inflowing of the Lord’s life. Without this inflowing, the thing would not exist. It simply would not be. This is why wherever there can be life, whether plants or animals, there is life, even in what we would consider the harshest conditions, such as in the greatest depths of the ocean or in the hottest geyser.

This endeavor to life also has as an essential element: the endeavor to increased life that causes an elevation of life. In terms of natural creation at first only the mineral kingdom existed. As the mineral kingdom cooled and adapted, the vegetable kingdom arose from it. *Divine Love and Wisdom* 58 asserts that minerals are alive because they receive the Lord and He is life itself. But, of course, plants are more alive. The animal kingdom arose from the vegetable kingdom and animals are more alive than are plants. Most of

all, humans receive the most life from the Lord and so are the most alive. And of course, humans came into existence after the three kingdoms were well established.

This endeavor to the elevation of life can be seen within each of the kingdoms, where some things in the mineral kingdom (especially soil) are more “alive” than are other things. When the development of the vegetable kingdom is examined, a person can see that higher plant forms were created after lower forms (especially named are fruit trees). And the same is true for the animal kingdom, especially for apes which came into existence after lower order animals. This is the endeavor to increased life.

The second of the three endeavors is the *endeavor to use*, or more specifically to forms of use. Since use is the expression of love, which is life, and since all things have been created from the Lord’s love, everything created by the Lord that exists in order is a form of use. And every part and aspect of the created thing serves a use for that thing so that it can serve a use to others. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 310) This elevation of the endeavor to use is interrelated to the elevation of the endeavor to life. (*Ibid.* 61)

Simply put, the more alive something is, the more useful it is. Minerals have the least life and so are more limited in their uses, essential though they may be. The primary use of the mineral kingdom is to serve the vegetable kingdom, providing carbon dioxide, water and nutrition. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 310) This is why, along with gold and precious stones, soil has the greatest representation in the mineral kingdom. In turn the vegetable kingdom, by and large, serves the animal kingdom in the provision of nutrition. (See *Ibid.* 62) Also, together, the mineral and the vegetable kingdoms provide other things necessary for animals such as shelter (or dietary minerals and vitamins).

Finally, the primary use of the animal kingdom is to serve humans. In fact, the greatest use for all three kingdoms is the service of humans. The highest uses belong to humans who alone can serve the neighbor and the Lord in the performance of uses. (*Ibid.* 65)

As with the endeavor to life, the endeavor to use and the forms of use are also elevated within each kingdom. For example, *Divine Love and Wisdom* declares that there are three categories of animals according to how much life they have and according to how useful they are. (No. 66) The higher order animals were created after the lower order animals were created.

The final endeavor inherent in creation is the *endeavor to the human form* as the highest form of use. (*Ibid.* 400) The human form enables people to perform uses to others and to the Lord. *Divine Love and Wisdom* states that this teaching about the human form is difficult to see in the mineral kingdom, but is easier to see in the vegetable kingdom, and is easiest to see in the animal

kingdom (61:3). Plants, for example, grow from seeds and offshoots. Animals procreate, move about, do some thinking or at least some responding to a change in environment. Again, as with the other two endeavors, there is an elevation of the human form within each kingdom. As perhaps the greatest example, higher order animals have appendages, and do lower-level thinking such as problem solving.

It is interesting that one passage (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 66) seems to place humans in the animal kingdom, as science does. This seems to support the idea that humans evolved from the higher order animals, notably apes. But this is not the whole story. To be human, a person must be human in essence as well as form. But until now, this article has been discussing the human form, not essence. To put it another way, the discussion has been explaining how the human body came into existence – as a result of the endeavor to life, the endeavor to use, and the endeavor to the human form. It is in this way that humans belong to the animal kingdom.

It is important to note that the Heavenly Doctrines teach that humans have two minds (translated from the Latin terms *animus* and *mens*). The *animus* is the mind that humans share with the higher order animals. (In fact, the term “animal” comes from *animus*.) We associate this mind with “fight or flight,” and with lower order and purely natural thinking. The *mens* is what enables a person to be rational and so do higher order thinking. It is amazing what some higher order animals can do, such as apes or dolphins, but no animal can ever think as a human can. (The term “mental” comes from *mens*.)

Probably the *animus* evolved through the ascension in creation as the human body did. But the *mens* could never have evolved because it is spiritual, and nothing purely natural (that is, having to do with this world), could ever become spiritual. The *mens* came into existence as a result of two events – the evolution of the human body and the influx of human life.

The first law of influx states that what flows in does so as a result of what flows out. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5828:3) For example, as a person shows love to others (outflowing), love from the Lord flows in (inflowing) in greater abundance. This explains how there has been an elevation among the three kingdoms and within each kingdom. For as each category of minerals, plants or animals performed uses, the more useful it became until it evolved into a higher order category, finally resulting in humans as the crown of creation.

The second law of influx is essential for our understanding of how the full human mind came into existence. This law states that what flows in does so in accordance with the vessel that receives it. (*Conjugal Love* 86) As the receiving vessel of apes became more and more human-like (sharing most of the same DNA), there came a time in history when the human form was so

complete that the Lord was then able to implant in it the *mens* – the truly human mind. The influx of human life was able to occur because the human form had evolved. So, whereas the human body did evolve from the apes, the human mind did not.



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Reflections on the Past Year: Return to Normal?

The Rev. Howard A. Thompson

As I write this the whole of New South Wales (Australia) is in varying degrees of lockdown in a governmental effort to stem the tide of the Delta variant of COVID-19. The Greater Sydney Area, including Roseville, is under the strictest of restrictions characterized by stay-at-home orders. I am certain that I am not alone in wishing things would just return to normal. And it is this idea of returning to normal that I have been ruminating on recently. I have been reflecting on other examples from history that may have elicited a similar yearning for normalcy in the hearts of those who lived through them.

As I get older, I come to appreciate more and more the arc of history. Of course, the Bible puts it best:

That which has been is what will be,
That which is done is what will be done,
And there is nothing new under the sun.
(*Ecclesiastes 1:9*, emphasis added)

Reflecting on the gravity of the current situation I am drawn to reflect on big historical events. The first to come to mind is World War II. I'm certain there were many millions of people who just wanted things to return to normal throughout that conflict. And when it was all over, in what way did things go back to normal?

You don't have to have lived through it to be familiar with the iconic images of the end of World War II. Of course, pictures rarely tell the whole story. A moment of elation captured in these images did not mean that things returned to normal after the war. In fact, if "the way things were" is how we see "normal" in this context then things will never be "normal" again.

In the wake of World War II international borders were redrawn, nations

My prayer for each of us is this: Far from returning to normal, I pray each of us is becoming that new person the Lord intends us to be, an angelic image of the Lord Himself.

ceased to exist and new nations were born. Over the course of the war (1939-1945) approximately 75 million people were killed; only 20 million of those were military casualties. With that statistic alone, it is easy to see that there is simply no return to normal. But maybe, what most of us are desiring is a return to a state of peace and prosperity.

In the context of our current situation “peace and prosperity” would mean we no longer feel under threat from COVID, our economy would be humming along with full employment, and many people would be enjoying

economic prosperity.

Looking back on the end of World War II we have much to learn. Most importantly, celebrations aside, there is a good deal of work to do in order to recover from such upheaval and more than a few adjustments to be made. The war in Europe may have ended with VE Day on May 8, 1945, but in the United Kingdom the rationing of fuel, sugar, meat and other staples continued into the 1950s until the last of the rationing was lifted in 1954, nearly 10 years after the end of hostilities.

How will things change for us after two years of dealing with COVID-19 and doing what we need to do in order to protect and defend ourselves, our families and friends, our community and our country? I have no answers, other than to say that things will be different. For each of us some things will return to normal but the reality of life in this world is that few things will ever be the same. And that is a good thing. It’s a good thing because the only things that never change are things that have no life in them to begin with.

Life is a series of struggles and challenges to be overcome. Some of these challenges and struggles are personal and some are societal. Even within the societal struggles are personal issues. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: “The arc of a moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” He could also have said that the arc of a person’s life is long and bumpy, but it bends toward regeneration.

My prayer for each of us is this: Far from returning to normal, I pray each of us is becoming that new person the Lord intends us to be, an angelic image of the Lord Himself. For it is with that intention that He created each of us.

Without change and variation, life would be monotonous and consequently lifeless. There would be no recognition or differentiation of goodness and truth, let alone any awareness of them. (*Secrets of Heaven* 37)

Olympic Reflection

I know that one of the more difficult things to do these days is to find some good that comes out of the lockdowns affecting most of us, to one degree or another. From suffering and death caused by the virus to the heavy burden responding to it is placing on households, our government, our country, our newspapers, televisions and computer screens seem to offer an endless stream of reasons to feel hopeless. But, of course, all is not hopeless and even under our current situation good can be found in many corners. One good thing that I enjoyed, at least for two weeks of this lockdown, was the Tokyo Olympics.

How nice it was to be able to watch an Olympics in nearly the same time zone when usually I am left to watch an overly edited and scripted two-hour broadcast of the “popular” events each evening. Of course, like so many large-scale and public events in 2020 and 2021 this was not a typical Olympics. There was even a good bit of talk and some protests calling for cancelling them entirely. But the Tokyo organizers pressed on and held the event, albeit one year later and with no spectators apart from the few coaches, team officials and other athletes.

It was, undoubtedly, a different Olympic experience for the competitors, but compete they did and I think that is the point. In spite of the challenges, athletes and teams who had worked and trained hard for years – decades even – were given the opportunity to compete. Win or lose, they each got on the field, the court, the road and the water to give the best of themselves.

This was not the first Olympics to be held under difficult international circumstances. I am thinking specifically of the 1920 and 1948 Olympics held in Antwerp and London, respectively. Imagine the challenge facing organizers of Olympics following the devastation of World Wars I and II. Consider the transportation, housing and provisioning logistics involved in holding such an event in a war-torn region of the world.

On a deeper level, imagine the emotional challenge many of those athletes felt reflecting on teammates and competitors who would have been competing but for being among the casualties of the wars. But in the face of all these obstacles the host cities invited the athletes of the world and they came, in the spirit of competition.

The discipline required and the suffering endured to compete at the highest levels in any sport mirror and even support that discipline required and suffering endured in our reformation and regeneration.

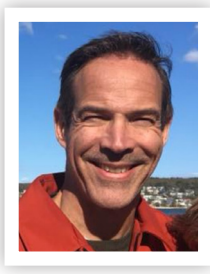
They did so because in sports – in the words of American football player Malcolm Jenkins – there is “something that transcends generations, transcends backgrounds, cultures, races. And so the power of sport is real.” The discipline required and the suffering endured to compete at the highest levels in any sport mirror and even support that discipline required and suffering endured in our reformation and regeneration.

Of course, we often focus on the medal winners but in so many respects they are only a small part of the story. The larger part is how the training and competition have changed them, the lessons they have learned and how

those lessons have shaped who they are as people. This is the true Olympic spirit, the “why” of bringing all these athletes together.

This idea was best expressed by Baron de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympic Games: “The important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle; the essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.”

I think this captures well an underlying theme of the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Spiritually, the Lord does not require that we complete our regeneration, nor even be victorious in all of our spiritual battles. But He calls us to “get in the game,” to acknowledge the field of play and to fully engage in the struggle. And when we do, when we “have fought well,” He can deliver for us the victory – not, of course, in medals, but in a heavenly life.



The Rev. Howard Thompson is pastor of the Society for the New Church in Australia, based in Sydney, where he lives with his wife, Debra. He has previously been pastor in Colchester, England, and served on the Bryn Athyn Church pastoral staff. Contact: revhathompson@gmail.com

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

OVERSEAS REGIONAL CLERGY MEETINGS

Europe and West Africa

The Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth

In the months of October and November 2021 three sets of regional clergy meetings happened outside of North America. All three meetings included significant time to allow the episcopal team to gather counsel on important leadership issues from our pastors around the church.

The meetings for Europe took place at the Purley Chase Conference Retreat Center in Atherstone, England. The West Africa meetings were in Accra, Ghana, and the South Africa meetings in Durban. All three bishops attended the meetings in England and Ghana. **Bishop Brad Heinrichs** attended the meetings in Durban.

The first theme, led by **Bishop Peter Buss Jr.**, was on using our many teachings about living a heavenly life as a theme for general leadership of the church over the next few years. These teachings can contribute to a renewed conviction that the purpose of the Word is ultimately to help people grow in ways that help them be more useful in the Lord's eyes.

We know that the Lord is present through charity and love toward the neighbor. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1150) The purpose of the truths of the Word is to inform us how the Lord wishes us to serve and to give us the guidance and support we need to configure our lives so that we are able to serve His kingdom.

The second theme, led by Bishop Heinrichs, addressed fundamental teachings about gender and marriage. His session offered discourse about the Lord's definitions of gender contained in the Word and how gender forms the basic building block of a marriage that can last to eternity in heaven.

The session considered difference between teachings found in the Word and common perceptions about gender and homosexuality that contrast with those teachings. There was significant dialogue in all three sessions on our need to be merciful in difficult situations where people seem to be living lives

that are out of alignment with the Word's teachings.

We live in a world where our values regarding marriage as being between one man and one woman are being challenged. We recognize the importance of continuing to voice the clear teachings that come from the Lord's Word. But we also recognize the need to do so in ways that are tied to the Lord's mercy and that seek to help rather than to harm. We can see that the conversation will be ongoing.

The third theme, led by **Bishop David Lindrooth**, dialogued about clergy trust issues. We recognize that there are underlying forces from hell that tempt us all with acting in ways that bring division to the church and thereby cause it to stumble. (*True Christian Religion* 362, 363) With that in mind, it is helpful to cultivate communication tactics that are clear, open, kind, respectful, compassionate and designed to be useful, rather than to be negative. We all recognize that this takes work, particularly in a world media climate where there is so much division.

In addition to these themes, we discussed strategic planning, vision and tactics geared around the specific cultures and needs of the local regions that were represented in the meetings. One key strategic item of note is that we have been able to establish the **Rev. Martin Gyamfi** as a full-time regional pastor serving all of West Africa. Our West African meetings were useful in clarifying that position and allowing Rev. Gyamfi time to articulate his vision for the region.

Benin Dedication and South African Travels

The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

Before I traveled to Ghana for the West African clergy meetings, I was privileged to visit Benin to dedicate their church building to the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was assisted in the service by the **Revs. Guillaume Anato and Martin Ahotosse**. Guillaume is the Pastor of the congregation, and he translated the service into French for them. Martin serves as his Assistant Pastor, and he translated the service into Fon, which is one of the native languages in Benin. The service lasted about three hours, well filled with singing, dancing and praising the Lord.

In *Isaiah* 66:1, the Lord asked His people: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?" This is one of the reasons we build houses of worship dedicated solely to the worship of the Lord. It is a sacred space where we can go to feel especially near to the Lord as we turn to Him in prayer.

We are told that "every person on his part ought to draw near to God; and as far as a person does draw near, God on His part enters into him. It is the

same as with a temple, which first must be built, and this is done by the hands of men; afterwards it must be dedicated; and finally, prayer must be made for God to be present and there unite Himself with the church.” (*True Christian Religion* 126)

The congregation in Benin has been working on completing its church building for a long time so it was wonderful to be a part of such an enthusiastic celebration. They have named their sanctuary Temple Bethel as a reminder that this is a House of God and that all activities that take place within its walls should be focused on the Lord. The service concluded with this poignant reminder from the Word: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” (*Psalms* 127:1)

In South Africa, I was able to attend their regional set of clergy meetings in Westville. **The Rev. Glenn Alden** drove down from Buccleuch, the **Rev. Mandla Stole** flew in from Alex (near Johannesburg), and the **Rev. Protus Mkhize** came over from Impaphala. The local ministers included the **Revs. Malcolm Smith, Joel Glenn and Bheki Dube**. We also had the **Rev. Patrick Mbali** attend online as he was unable to travel.

We discussed the **Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.’s** paper on *Living a Heavenly Life*. We also talked a lot about the future of South Africa, which is facing numerous changes. While I was there, the congregation unanimously called the **Rev. Joel Glenn** to become their Head Pastor, once Malcolm Smith leaves in June to serve as Assistant Pastor in Bryn Athyn. **Calvin Heinrichs**, pending successful completion of Theological School, will serve as Joel’s assistant after he has been ordained.

On my final Sunday in Westville, I preached on the importance of New Church education and afterward we had a heartfelt celebration of **Jane Edmund’s** 31 years of service to Kainon School.

She admirably did everything from teaching in a multi-grade classroom, to becoming Head Teacher, eventually taking over as Headmistress, and finally becoming the fulltime Principal of the whole school, including both the elementary school and the pre-primary.

Over the years she touched so many students’ lives, and it was evident how much they loved and respected her leadership. Jane is thrilled now to be entering the next phase of her life where she will be dedicating much of her incredible energy to grandparenting.

“Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!” (*Matthew* 25:21)

(One more set of clergy meetings in Asia is upcoming. See pages 79 and 80 for photos of the United Kingdom and Africa meetings.)

FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

(Excerpted from the Newsletter of the General Church in Great Britain)



Photo by Andrew Bruell

The first All Age Weekend since Covid – held at Purley Chase – was an amazing success and a wonderful opportunity to catch up with friends we hadn't seen for ages.

We were extremely fortunate to have the **Revs. Erik Buss and Grant Odhner, the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs, and Executive Bishop Peter Buss** attending too. Their presence was most welcome and their guidance, wisdom and calming nature was appreciated by all.

The lessons were thought provoking and totally relevant to the world we live in and life in general. Trust in the Lord, moving forward as a church, and understanding the Ten Commandments were among the topics discussed. We all enjoyed getting to know the ministers, who were also very complimentary about how the young people's level of engagement and enthusiasm shone through.

Mark and Kerry Burniston were wonderful hosts and organizers. The next All Age Weekend is scheduled for May 13-15.

British Academy Summer Camp

(From a report by the Rev. Fred Elphick)

In the British Academy we think a lot about the coming generations of young people. We can't replace the parents' role in passing on the timeless truths we have in the New Church, but we try to support them in their efforts through a

great variety of activities. Recently, many of these have been virtual.

Last year we had the news that we were about to lose both our pastors at a stroke – but before we got too discouraged we had the good news that both were to be replaced and we have since welcomed the Rev. Grant Odhner, who took on the chair for the British Academy, and the Rev. Erik Buss.

In April a virtual event was organized for young people as a test run for a virtual British Academy Summer Camp in July and nine young people took part, including five from Scotland.

Another virtual event was a BASS reunion on the weekend before the main event, which attracted 11 students from four countries: Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States.

The in-person BASS at Purley Chase was held July 26-30, with the Rev. Odhner presiding. The seven United Kingdom students were treated to four topics: Love is the Life of Man (Grant Odhner); Becoming Human (Rev. Erik Buss); Laws of the Universe (**Andrew Bruell**); Emanuel Swedenborg and His Passion to Serve (**Sarah Odhner**).

2021 ASIA NEW CHURCH REPORT

The Rev. John Jin, Regional Pastor for Asia

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

Our mission in Asia has the goal of “becoming a happy human being by understanding and living the Lord’s teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine and being part of the Lord’s heavenly community to share it with our neighbors.” In the meantime, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you who have given endless trust and support for helping the project run without any difficulties with volunteer donations, prayers and encouragements that were sent even though there was no public fund raising due to the pandemic. May the Lord bless and keep you and your family in this Christmas and New Year season.

WHAT’S NEW

Asia New Church Revival Project

After a preparation period in 2020, this year The Asia New Church took a new direction to “establish a Lord-centered heavenly community.” To achieve this, the following detailed goals were set.

1. Make the church's role model be the heaven in heaven and hell, such as, an individual member who lives a heavenly life or a community where loving each other is practiced by His love and His truth of love.
2. To be His New Church, the crown of all the churches.
3. A heavenly community (church) devoted to the study of living the Word and Heavenly Doctrines that can be applied to real life and have a good influence on one's neighbor. For this, ministers and church members research and develop the model together.
4. A heavenly community is to be a "visiting" church rather than a "sitting and waiting" church (or Sunday church). This is because the tendency of today's generation prefers individual activities and their interests are highly individualized, and also Covid changed our lifestyle. To get the attention of this generation and other people the church sends the daily bread and reflection material to people who are seekers and members, such as video, audio, the manga (graphic novels), blogs, etc.
5. Build cell communities that have the characteristics of the New Church – groups centered on lay people with no external pressure.
6. A heavenly community overflowing with young people and gentiles (remnants).

The Korea New Church

A designation of a model church for Asia New Church revival project – Seoul New Church (the **Rev. Soon C. Lee**) for devotion to the study of the living Word and Heavenly Doctrines

The Theological School – Open a second class for minister and lay leadership training.

Translation – With the goal of translating the entire body of the Heavenly Doctrines by 2035, the church decided to use two teams – for team translation and individual translation. This year Korean New Church translated *Apocalypse Explained* volume 2, *Arcana Coelestia* volume 1, *Apocalypse Revealed* (revised) and also secondary books such as *The Human Mind*, *Proprium*, and commentaries.

Develop outreach material – Video, audio, live stream, blogs, etc.

Young people's mission – The Korean New Church deeply recognized the importance of a young people's mission and began to take the first step to develop this field.

After 13 years of dedication for development of Korea New Church, pastor **Jong Ui Lee**, the only one who completed New Church Theological School, moved to Toronto this year. So there was a gap in theological leadership. Fortunately, **HyunJin Yang**, who is a candidate, has completed the practicum in Korea and decided to devote himself to Korea New Church after being ordained. I sincerely thank the Lord and the Dean of the Theological School for guiding this.

The Japan New Church

Designation of a model church for Asia New Church revival project – Tokyo New Church (**Rev. Shiro Matsumoto**) will develop a heavenly community to be a visiting church rather than a sitting and waiting church (or Sunday church).

Tokyo New Church worship is held offline and online, and daily bread and mangas (regarding the pastor's sermon) are continuously being sent to New Church members or those who are interested in New Church teachings.

Build cell communities that have the characteristics of the New Church – A group centered on lay people with no external pressure. In January, **Rev. Sakae Seich** and John Jin started to develop an online community for members who are disappointed with the church and left, or those who attend other churches and are interested in the New Church. They meet once a month through GoToMeeting to study the Word and are contemplating how to apply it in real life. So far, things have been going well in a very free atmosphere.

The China New Church

Physical Church – After repeating the process of starting and closing the church for various reasons several times, **Rev. Tim** started to develop the New Church in Shanghai. He and his team have a preparation time to establish the Lord-centered Chinese Church that fits the teachings of the New Church.

The Theological School - Currently, four people are studying in the ministry course and one in the lay leadership course. They are translating the textbooks of Bryn Athyn Theological School. One of them was accepted into that Theological School and applied for a visa, but the visa was not issued by the consulate. Therefore, he expects to come next year. And one is preparing to receive a correspondence course at the New Church College in Australia.

Translation – Finished *Arcana Coelestia* volume 7-10 by Liu and *Heaven and Hell* by Tao, *Bible Study Notes and Commentary on Matthew*.

Develop outreach material– Video (10), audio (*Heaven and Hell* and 17 episodes of *Apocalypse Revealed*), live stream (20), blogs (280 episodes, and others), cartoons (the *Spiritual World*, 2 volumes, which is translated by Japanese manga (comic)).

Online Meeting – Wednesday class (20 -30 people in Canada and China); Sunday class (*Arcana Coelestia* class, 20-50); Another Wednesday class (15 people in Australia).

A heavenly community with young people and gentiles (remnants) – Three young computer experts and I meet twice a month and we are working hard on how to develop our community for young people and gentiles. It is not easy but we have developed very much. Probably we can share about it in next year's report.

I thank the Lord for making all of these achievements possible and once again I sincerely thank donors for helping us financially to make it possible. Although the Asia Mission faces many challenges, we are growing step by step with hope under the Divine mercy of the Lord. I'd like to make one request: Our New Church members in China are especially in a very difficult situation as you know from the world news. Please pray for them.

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

(Highlights from October 2021 meeting)

Chancellor

The **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.** listed four goals for the current fiscal year:

1. Succession planning for future changes in leadership
2. Defining and honing the Chancellor's role
3. Mission and message clarification
4. Assisting in the strategic planning aspects of Bryn Athyn College's ongoing accreditation

Vice Chair

Dr. Charles Lindsay is focused on three goals:

1. Mission: the importance of maintaining a New Church focus
2. Succession planning: development of specific programs and processes, with board involvement
3. Better predicting future enrollment

Theological School

The faculty consists of six clergy (core faculty of five), plus three lay persons. There was one graduate in 2021 (**Justin Schorran**). There are three candidates this academic year (**Steven Gunther, Calvin Heinrichs and HyunJin Yang**). Three other students are distance learning.

Bryn Athyn College

For the third year in a row, the College will hit its budget deficit reduction target (\$1.4 million). Looking ahead to FY23, satisfying that target will depend heavily on recruitment and enrollment.

Three financial initiatives are planned: scholarship assessment, international New Church scholarships, and endowing department chairs (beginning with the Religion Department). Other programs are underway to improve revenue.

COVID had a broad negative impact on educational delivery, enrollment, finances and campus life. It brought declines in academic performance, plus a loss of connection and student retention.

The College Board Committee is helping the President and the College on governance issues. Recruitment of students has been refocused on “mission fit” students, with marketing consultants strongly urging the College to embrace its spirituality message and being clear, proud advocates for it.

Academy Secondary Schools

Enrollment is better than budgeted, including in the dormitories. New Church affiliated students make up 64% of the enrollment. There has been a near-normal return to operations since the pandemic began.

A summer retreat focused on purpose, mission and core values was very useful and productive. **David Keith's Ten Commandments Project** and the **Rev. Barry Halterman's Tree of Life** drawing/diagram are being used in orientation and education programs.

Treasurer

The Academy is a financially strong institution, primarily because of recent very generous gifts. Endowment payout remains above the desired 5% -- at approximately \$2 million per year. A move toward private equities has been rewarding and may need to be stepped up to meet the goal of 25% in the portfolio.

Glencairn Awards

After being paused for several years to fund the Employee Milestone Program, the Glencairn Awards Program will return to its original purpose, with a

special awards committee giving awards to individuals for exceptional past achievements in specified fields. The Chancellor is forming a special awards committee for this purpose.

Committee Reports

The Finance Committee approved a Pitcairn Company stock redemption; a 3% tuition increase for the Secondary Schools for FY23; and the Bryn Athyn College budget for FY23.

The Investment Committee reported improved benchmark performance of the endowment. The Advancement Committee is focusing on smaller donors, with three fund-raising programs planned.

CHARTER DAY WRAP-UP

The annual scholarship golf outing at Huntingdon Valley Country Club attracted 142 golfers and raised more than \$40,000 for the scholarship fund. Over the past 27 years the tournament has raised more than \$640,000 for scholarship aid.

Class reunions were more lightly attended than usual, due to the pandemic, but various class gifts were received for the Student Scholarship Fund, Teacher Professional Development, the Science Department and the Arts.

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY

Steve David reports that the New Christian Bible Study website (newchristianbiblestudy.org) has just deployed a “video hub” page with more than 1,000 entries so far – and more on the way. This is a clearinghouse for New Christian video productions, creating at least these three positive effects:

1. Visitors to the site (six million a year currently) will be able to search a large set of videos in one place, opening a wider window to explore New Christian thought. It will also increase overall traffic to the videos.
2. There is the ability to crosslink these videos to passages from the Bible and the Writings, plus the topics they refer to, and link to them from related pages. This will also enhance the studying experience and boost overall traffic.
3. It will be a go-to place for thought leaders – teachers, ministers, group leaders, friends – and a convenient hub for resources to help any seeker.

To support these and the overall efforts of this outreach project, visit the website: www.newchristianbiblestudy.org.

DEDICATION OF TEMPLE BETHEL IN BENIN, WEST AFRICA



The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs presiding, with the Rev. Guillaume Anato, pastor in Benin



Rev. Anato, Bishop Heinrichs and Rev. Ahotasse



Bishop Heinrichs with church leaders in Benin



Left to right, Revs. Ahotasse and Anato and Bishop Heinrichs



The new Temple Bethel sanctuary in Benin



Bishop Heinrichs with the Rev. Anato, his wife, Stella, and their family



The altar in the new Temple Bethel



Left to right, Bishop Heinrichs, Rev. Anato and the Rev. Martin Ahotasse, assistant pastor in Benin

VISIT TO WESTVILLE, SOUTH AFRICA



The Kainon School, visited by Bishop Heinrichs for the clergy meetings in Westville, South Africa

KEMPTON OFFERINGS

The Heavenly Doctrine Publishing Foundation has copies of the Kempton translation of the Word for sale through the Kempton Project website, www.thesacredscripture.org/theWord. The website accepts a credit card or PayPal account and offers a choice between cloth or leather binding. No postage is necessary for pickups in Bryn Athyn or Kempton.

Also available for the first time is the classic Ager translation of *Divine Love and Wisdom*, which can be ordered and shipped anywhere in the United States via the Lulu print-on-demand website: tinyurl.com/dlw-ager. The Foundation is hoping to get more of the classic translations onto the Lulu site in the near future, as most are out of print.

The Foundation also offers used copies of these translations for the cost of postage (or a friendly ride from Kempton), and has most of the Swedenborg Foundation standard versions, plus many of the Swedenborg Society books as well – many like new. Anyone interested may contact **Gideon and Loretta Alden** at algoose2@verizon.net or write to them at 287 Hawk Mountain Road, Kempton, PA 19529.

From the short outline, *An Ecclesiastical History of the New Church*, written by Emanuel Swedenborg 250 years ago: “On all the books in the spiritual world was inscribed, The Advent of the Lord.” These books of the Heavenly Doctrine constitute the Lord’s Second Coming. Through these books we can understand just how marvelous and essential the first Advent of the Lord into the world was, just a little over 2,000 years ago.

INTRODUCING SWEDENBORG

The Swedenborg Society in London has published *Introducing Swedenborg*, by **Peter Ackroyd** – a broadcaster, essayist and one of the foremost biographers and novelists in the United Kingdom. This is the first in a series of pocket introductions “providing accessible essays on the thought and influence of Emanuel Swedenborg.”

Ackroyd has written nearly 40 works of non-fiction, including studies of William Blake, T S Eliot and Isaac Newton, and nearly 20 works of fiction. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1984. For information or for ordering the book: www.swedenborg.org.uk/bookshop

Life Lines

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

IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES

January 29 marks the 334th birthday of Emanuel Swedenborg. Obviously, if he came back to Earth he would be both amazed and disappointed. He would be amazed at much of the progress, from technology (the flight he anticipated with his early airplane model, the ease of instant communications) and in medicine, with so much progress from his prescient studies in anatomy. He would be happy to see the church devoted to the revelation he transcribed taking hold in the world, but disappointed that it is still so small in a world so much in need.

But Swedenborg's faith in the New Church would not be shaken. He knew that he was prepared to be the Lord's revelator in a time of spiritual darkness – that still lingers. There is this revealing quote in *Posthumous Theological Works* from a letter to his good friend Dr. Beyer about the publication of his *Brief Exposition* – a prelude to the crowning *True Christian Religion* to follow two years later, just before his death:

This little preliminary treatise has been spread throughout the whole of Christendom, Sweden excepted, because theology is now in its wintry state, and here in the north the night lasts longer than in the southern parts; wherefore they in their darkness may be supposed to kick against everything in the New Church which belongs to the understanding or to reason. Still there are those in the ecclesiastic order who are exceptions to this rule. I apply also to myself what the Lord has said in *Matthew* 10:16: "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves."

Swedenborg must have been excited to bring this saving revelation to the world, but he had no illusions about how it would be received. He knew that the Last Judgment was not instantaneous – that it would take a long time for the falsities taking hold of Christianity to be removed so that the New Church could flourish. He knew there would be resistance, even hostility, and that the

world would only gradually be open to this New Church. He knew that the Lord just needed a remnant for the church to take hold in the world – and that it truly is destined to be “the crown of all churches that have hitherto existed in the world.”

In the realm of heaven, free of the limitations of time and space, Swedenborg would be a lot more patient than we tend to be, supremely confident that “in His good time” the descent of “the Holy City New Jerusalem” will fulfill its promise. We just need to keep faith with that faith.

(BMH)

MODESTY, HUMILITY, GENEROSITY

Marvin Clymer, Digital Collections Supervisor for the Swedenborg Library at Bryn Athyn College, passed along a lengthy advertisement for the publication of an English translation of the second volume of *Arcana Coelestia*, published by John Lewis in London in 1750. Below are some excerpts, testifying not only to the quality of the work but the humility and generosity of Emanuel Swedenborg.

“Be it known unto all the learned and curious that this day is published the First Number of *Arcana Coelestia*, or Heavenly Secrets, which are in the Sacred Scripture, or Word of the Lord, laid open.

“This Work is intended to be such an exposition of the whole Bible, as was never attempted in any language before. The author is a learned foreigner, who wrote and printed the first volume of the same work last year, all in Latin, which may be seen at my shop. And now the second volume is printing both in Latin and English; to be published in cheap Numbers, that the public may have it in an easier manner, in either tongue.

“It must be confessed that this nation abounds with a variety of commentaries and expositions on the Holy Bible; yet when we consider what an inexhaustible fund of knowledge the Sacred Scripture contains, the importance of the subjects it treats of, and the vast concern every man has in those things they relate and recommend, we may cease to wonder that so many ingenious pens have been employed in sounding the depths of this vast ocean. And he must be a very dull writer indeed who does not find a pretty large number of readers of any work he may publish of this kind.

“I would be far from depreciating the merit of any man’s performance; nay, I will allow, that it is owing to the labors of learned and pious men, in their disquisitions after truth in the Bible, that we of this kingdom have been enabled to discern truth from error, and to know more of the mind and will of God in His Word, than the priests of Rome were willing we should. Yet give me leave to add that these Sacred Writings are capable of speaking to the heart

and understanding of man by more ways than have been thought of or put in practice. And he who can discover new treasures in these Sacred Mines, and produce from them such rich jewels as were never yet seen by the eye of man, will undoubtedly challenge our strictest attention, and deserve encouragement in his pious labors.

“This then may be said of our Author: He hath struck out a new path through this deep abyss, which no man ever trod before; he has left all the commentators and expositors to stand on their own footing; he neither meddles nor interferes with any of them; his thoughts are all his own; and the ingenious and sublime turn he has given to everything in the Scripture, he has copied from no man; and therefore he hath some title to the regard of the ingenious and learned world.

“The Author has a depth, which, if once fathomed – and it is not unfathomable – will yield the noblest repast to a pious mind. . . . Nothing recommends a book more effectually to the public than the eminence and credit of its Author.

“Though the Author of *Arcana Coelestia* is undoubtedly a very learned and great man, and his works highly esteemed by the literati, yet he is no less distinguished for his modesty than his great talents; so that he will not suffer his name to be made public. . . . I do aver that this gentleman, with indefatigable pains and labor, spent one whole year in studying and writing the first volume of *Arcana Coelestia*, was at the expense of 200 pounds to print it, and also advanced 200 pounds more for the printing of this second volume.

“When he had done this, he gave express orders that all the money that should arise in the sale of this large work should be given toward the charge of the propagation of the gospel. He is so far from desiring to make a gain of his labors that he will not receive one farthing back of the 400 pounds he hath expended; and for that reason his works will come exceeding cheap to the public.

“Any one of small judgment may guess at the cheapness of the Work, when he finds that 640 pages in Latin of the first volume are sold for no more than six shillings unbound. But this second volume, now publishing in Latin and English, will be unaccountably cheap . . . for the bare postage of this first Number cost no less than 12 shillings. . . . But it is the generous Author’s absolute command that it should be so, who, it is plain, wants neither purse nor spirit to carry on his laudable undertaking.

“Those who are so happy as to be well acquainted with the Latin tongue, will be highly delighted with the Author’s elegant and sublime language.”

(BMH)

SUSPENSE

There is great value in the uncertainty of our lives. It is actually a law of Divine Providence:

It is a Law of Divine Providence That a Person Not Perceive or Sense Anything of the Operation of Divine Providence. (*Divine Providence* 175)

That is, we don't know what is going to happen in this new year, we don't see the Lord's hand guiding us, and we naturally spend time wondering about it. We don't just wonder, we look for signs, make guesses, and base plans on our conclusions. This is said to be "reason's essential delight" (*Divine Providence* 178). But the Lord keeps us in suspense.

The unknown is inherently interesting. There are two kinds of travel into the unknown that people long for, and that are commonly found in science fiction and films: 1) space travel to inhabited planets, and 2) time travel.

As you probably know, neither one of these is possible, and probably never will be.

Everyone knows that time travel is impossible. But not everyone realizes that travel to the nearest star would take 20,000 years at what is considered to be the fastest theoretically possible speed. It does not seem likely that humanity will ever overcome these limits of time and space.

Fortunately, there is a satisfying spiritual solution to both of these travel issues. In the spiritual world there is no time or space. This means that a few years from now, or a few more if you are very young, every one of us will be in the spiritual world and will be able to visit people from anywhere in the universe. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 9440; *Heaven and Hell* 192, 417) That is an easy answer to the problem of space travel.

Time travel is more complicated. We'll never be able to travel through time. The closest thing to it for us is that it is common for people, after death, to be brought back to significant times in their life and re-experience them in the spiritual world, as part of their preparation for heaven. (See *Spiritual Experiences* 3146).

But the Lord does travel through time. He is outside of both space and time. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 73) He does know the future. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10441, *Last Judgment* 74, *Spiritual Experiences* 2271) For our benefit, He occasionally travels forward in time, takes things from the future, and depicts them, or describes them, in the present. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2523) The purpose of this is to preserve the connection between heaven and earth by basing it on a future peace on earth, even when peace is lacking in the present. The most dramatic examples of this are the Old Testament miracles, in which the future defeat of evil and the coming of peace to this world are depicted in

Israel's miraculous victories over the idolatrous nations that attacked them. The power of this future reality gave Samson the strength to overcome every opponent.

These stories and teachings are meant to support our confidence in the Lord, but it is still important and useful for there to be uncertainty in our lives. We don't necessarily enjoy our states of uncertainty, but they are helpful to us in surprising ways.

One way that they are helpful is that uncertainty continually seeks resolution. The resulting feelings of curiosity and suspense, and then often surprise at what happens, have a unique ability to affect our beliefs, and therefore the course of our lives. In his 2021 book, *The Power of Surprise: How Your Brain Secretly Changes Your Beliefs*, Michael Rousell argues that surprises change our beliefs because they stimulate our curiosity and suggest resolutions to our feelings of uncertainty in ways that we then try to confirm or refute.

People have an insatiable appetite for suspense and surprise. We have a great interest in situations where the outcome is uncertain, and an even greater interest in situations where the outcome is not the expected one but is surprising. The news, politics, gossip and sports, not to mention fiction in its many forms, are common sources of these kinds of situations. People are almost universally drawn to them. These situations challenge people's beliefs in ways that often result in changes to those beliefs.

This is one reason why fiction, and even anecdote, are so powerful in their ability to affect people's sympathies and viewpoint. The suspenseful and surprising stories of the Old Testament, for example, incline us to accept their central premise and the precepts taught there. Any situation that attracts our interest, whether it is a news story, a personal story, or an athletic event, arouses our curiosity about what has happened and what will happen, raises expectations and beliefs about the outcome, and then eventually resolves them with a conclusion – a conclusion that may or may not surprise us. This simple process is continually at work, and it plays a significant role in shaping our understanding and beliefs about life.

The law of Providence that states that the Lord's guidance is invisible means that life itself is an uncertain situation, where the outcome is unknown to us. Our daily lives are full of suspense, and often surprise, and this provides us with an environment where our beliefs are continually encouraged to change. How they change, and what we eventually believe and act on, depends on our individual response, entirely in accord with our freedom.

We don't know what will happen this year, and it is good that we don't. But it is also good for us to wonder about it, to try to figure it out, to form opinions and hypotheses about it, to try to make good things happen, and to try to prevent bad ones from happening. At the end of the year we will be surprised,

or not, about what actually takes place. We may also be happy or unhappy about it, and then go on to speculate and work for improvements in the future.

This is the value of uncertainty. What fun would life be without suspense and surprises?

(JFS)

ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the sad aftereffects of COVID-19 is a pandemic of intolerance, anger and lack of charity. We see this playing out throughout a world grown weary of masks and lockdowns, contradictory information and restrictions, surging impatience and frustration. Much of this is understandable. The hostility it breeds is not.

We see this playing out in our own church. School administrators at all levels say this has been one of the most difficult years they've ever experienced – not only because of the adjustments still lingering from COVID but the open contempt and incivility flowing through social media. Church leaders struggling with virtual platforms and requiring masks at live services are experiencing similar outbursts.

This phenomenon of people expressing themselves with outrageous excess seems to have become all too common on social media – people expressing things in texts and email they would not say in person. Technology provides cover but no excuse – especially in a church grounded in charity. It is understandable for people to be frustrated and upset. But we should always be willing and able to express ourselves with charity and respect.

Two quotes to keep near our devices and in our hearts:

It is a principle of goodwill that people should act justly and faithfully toward everyone with whom they have any business or interaction. (*True Christianity* 432)

Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. (*Ephesians* 4:29)

(BMH)

MISSING PERSON

A popular book in recent years has been *Red China Blues* by Jan Wong. She is a Canadian of Chinese descent who went to China as a true-believer Maoist at the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1972. She gloried in the grunt work of sweaty farms, filthy pig styes and gritty factories, convincing herself that this made her worthy of a “workers’ paradise.”

It took years for her to grow disillusioned by the harsh realities of communist life – for her blind faith to come to see that the ruling class was protected and privileged, while everyone else was subjected to suffering, suspicion and absolute control.

Jan Wong left with the husband and two children she acquired in China, only to return as a foreign correspondent years later – for *The New York Times* and the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. With much clearer eyes she witnessed a new, more affluent but no less terrifying China rising from the horror of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

The book is a well-documented portrait of the old and new China – its brutal politics, its absolute control of the people, its national and global ambitions, its inscrutable culture. But it is telling that in almost 400 carefully written pages, one word – one person – is missing: God.

Whatever China was and is and is becoming, it remains not only a godless country but brutally hostile to all religion. There are furtive, underground cells of Christian churches. They are brave, but fearful and oppressed people. Among them is a small group of New Church followers whose brave minister we can identify only by his first name in the Directory of General Church Clergy.

Red China remains a hostile menace in a nervous world. The “blues” will give way to hope only when God becomes a part of its future, echoing the invocation: “Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord.” (*Psalms* 33:12)

(BMH)

HOLY GROUND

The Rev. Solomon Keal preached a sermon in Bryn Athyn recently on “Holy Ground,” based on the familiar story of Moses and the burning bush, where he is told to “take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” (*Exodus* 3:5)

“Wherever we find the Lord’s love and wisdom,” he said, “we find holy ground.” But that means – symbolically – taking off our shoes.

Our shoes “are a symbol for the lowest levels of our minds that think primarily from our five senses – our sense impressions.” Our five senses, of course, are a gift from the Lord, allowing us to experience the world on the natural plane, much as shoes do. Symbolically taking off the barrier of our shoes helps us to get in touch with the Lord and what He is teaching us.

The miracle of the burning bush, which was not consumed by the fire, is a powerful image but beyond our personal experience. That does not make it irrelevant to our lives. As the Rev. Keal noted:

We can imagine that after the Lord spoke with Moses at the burning bush, that Moses put his shoes back on to return to his life in the world. And as long as we are in this physical world, we too will always need to put our shoes back on and walk through the world wearing our five senses and the thinking that comes from that. We might also at times need to put on new shoes, when our old shoes have worn out, and we come to understand things in a new way. But I think the Lord's invitation always stands, that when we can remember to remove our shoes – to step out of our sensory impressions and natural ways of thinking – that we will find ourselves, wherever we go, standing on holy ground. **Whenever we take a stand for love, compassion, forgiveness, humility, respect and usefulness, then the place where we stand is holy ground.**

That's as good a New Year's resolution as we could ever hope to live up to: seek always the holy ground.

(BMH)



ADVANCEMENT

A Planned Gift is a special way to support the uses of the Academy and the General Church.

A planned gift to the **General Church**, your local society, the **Academy Secondary Schools** or **Bryn Athyn College** can help for generations to come. These kinds of planned gifts are simple to arrange and often return benefits back to you.

For example:

- » Using your **will**, make a gift today that costs you nothing during your lifetime.
- » With a **Charitable Gift Annuity**, receive guaranteed payments for life in return for this gift.
- » Save money on your taxes and avoid capital gains by giving appreciated stocks, bonds, mutual funds or real estate.
- » Make a gift from your **IRA** and minimize your taxes.

Best of all, you are making sure the uses you love will flourish.

Interested?
Contact us today.

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nc.plannedgiving.org

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



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