

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MAY/JUNE 2022



What is the New Church?

The New Church is represented in the Alpha-Omega garden at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord." The Rev. Mark Pendleton explains the value of the New Church for a world in need. (Page 35)

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 178) include:

- *Playing to the Crowd*: The temptation is always to go with the popular crowd: “Everyone wants to be on the right side of history, and to align themselves with genuine goodness. It is not always easy, though, to accept what the Word teaches in preference to what may seem to be right, or to what popular opinion dictates.”
- *Deliver Us from Evil*: We pray each day to be delivered from evil – thinking in terms of Ukraine or the horrible crimes that afflict us – but evil is more broadly defined in the Heavenly Doctrine as simply turning away from the Lord when we love ourselves and the world more than the Lord and the neighbor. So we all have a role – and an opportunity – in working with the Lord to “deliver us from evil.”

In addition to Letters to the Editors we include a separate group of letters written in response to the article by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. in the January/February *New Church Life: Standing for Marriage in Today's World*. These are introduced with a message from Bishop Buss on the many responses he personally received, along with his wishes for the Church going forward – all of us “seeking wisdom from a God of pure love.” (Page 184)

The Rev. Derek Elphick, pastor of Bryn Athyn Church, invited members of the congregation to three listening sessions where they could respond to Bishop Buss's article and listen to each other. He followed with an open letter to the congregation – a message of healing, with the hope that: “Maybe we can ‘be’ the church by doing extra listening with each other, by going back to the Lord in His Word with a humble willingness to grow in our understanding, and by loving one another as the Lord loves us.” (Page 201.)

As we anticipate and celebrate New Church Day it is good to reflect on what it means to us – as the Rev. Mark Pendleton does in a sermon: *The Value of the New Church and its Teachings*. He notes: “The greater the amount and accuracy of knowledge that we have about the Lord, the Word of God, life on this earth, and life in the other world, the more deeply we can love.” (Page 209)

With the turmoil in the church over sexuality and gender issues, and the horror playing out in Ukraine, the Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb offers a timely sermon on Making Peace. “Conflict is never a good thing,” he writes, “but we can grow from it.” And, “At some point in our lives, we will find ourselves in conflict; the question then is how do we grow through it? As individuals we have less influence over the development of the ‘greater wars’ as the Doctrine describes them, but we have complete control over our own behavior in the ‘lesser ones.’” (Page 217)

In Part II of his study – Choose for Yourselves This Day: Reflections on Divine Love and Sensing Life as Our Own – the Rev. Daniel Goodenough says: “The more we are reborn and grow spiritually, the more fully we acknowledge our dependence, and that every good and truth is from God – and the more we feel our own freedom and individuality.” (Page 223)

Writing From the Bishop’s Office, the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs considers The Beautiful Vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem that inspires us all, especially on New Church Day in June. But he also cautions with a warning that while the Holy City (heaven) is open to all and that there are 12 gates inviting everyone in, there are things we can do to keep ourselves out. Live with the dream – but heed the warning. (Page 237)

Beware “the demon in the air,” writes the Rev. Howard Thompson – a demon that test pilots and astronauts deal with at high speeds in the air. But while “we are all too happy to identify the demons that ‘live in the air,’ the question the Lord wants us to ask ourselves is: are we willing to identify the demons that live within?” (Page 242)

Scott Daum, who retires on June 30 as Assistant Director of New Church Schools, offers an update on the New Church Teacher Competencies Program, along with an impressive list of videos on distinctive aspects of New Church education. (Page 246)

Aaliya Gunther writes about the New Church Career Network, which helps young people connect with New Church professionals in various careers. She finds this “a perfect example of applying New Church teachings to provide concrete help to young adults.” This is just one program, she says, “that can help people re-center on the foundational New Church idea that religion is about how we live, not just what we understand and believe.” (Page 251)

Church News (page 255) includes:

- A report on the latest meeting of the General Church Board of Directors, including the placement of three new ministers
- The General Church Corporation elects four new Board members at its June 25 annual meeting
- A report on the latest meeting of the Academy Board of Trustees
- Plans for this summer's Jacob's Creek Family Retreat, with the theme of the Ten Commandments
- A wonderful new collection comes to the Swedenborg Library
- A rediscovered classic, *A Life of Jesus Little Known*
- More impressive work at New Christian Bible Study
- The postponed General Church Retreat rescheduled for 2024
- Church treasurers in Africa gather in Ghana

Large Print *New Church Life*

Thanks to a generous and thoughtful contribution we are able to offer large print issues of *New Church Life*. If you would like to receive your copy in large print, please contact Susan Wright, General Church Database Director: 267-502-4990 or susan.wright@anc-gc.org.

Editorials

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

PLAYING TO THE CROWD

Although New Church organizations are mostly small, large crowds are featured in many of the stories about it in the Word. The Word's pattern from its first pages is a development from a single man to countless millions. The patriarchs of Genesis are told that their descendants will be like the stars of heaven, and as the story progresses the numbers get larger and larger. In the *Book of Revelation* John is shown vast crowds of people who will make up the New Jerusalem:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (*Revelation 7:9*)

The idea is that these numbers will grow to include everyone.

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested. (*Revelation 15:4*)

Other stories, however, reveal a darker side to numbers like these:

I once heard in the world of spirits a great tumult. Thousands of spirits had gathered and were crying out, "Punish them! Punish them!"

I drew nearer and asked, "What is going on?"

Leaving that great throng, one of them said to me that they were in a white-hot rage at three priests who were going about and everywhere preaching against adulterers, saying that adulterers lack any acknowledgment of God, and that heaven was closed to them and hell opened. Also that in hell they are unclean devils, because they appear at a distance there like pigs rolling around in piles of excrement, and that the angels in heaven abhor them.

I inquired where those priests were and why there was such an outcry on that account.

He replied that the three priests were in their midst, surrounded by bodyguards, and that the gathering consisted of people who believe that adulteries are not sins and who maintain that adulterers have an acknowledgment of God just as much as those who are faithful to their wives. “They are all from the Christian world,” he said, “and when they were once visited by angels to see how many among them believed that adulteries were sins, not a hundred in a thousand were found who did.” (*Conjugal Love* 500)

It is not hard to imagine that there would be push-back in our church against ministers who insisted that people who engage in sexual immorality “lack any acknowledgment of God.” The phenomenon of large crowds in the next life seeking out and persecuting people who say things like this is recounted in several passages in the Heavenly Doctrine, such as *Conjugal Love* 79, *Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment (or Supplements)* 26, *Last Judgment Posthumous* 135, and *Spiritual Experiences* 4932.

Persecution and Shaming

Other passages describe how the majority in the world of spirits persecuted good people before the Last Judgment:

The “former heaven” that passed away consisted of those who in externals lived a moral life, and yet were merely natural and not spiritual, or who lived a sort of spiritual life merely from the love of fame, honor, glory, and gain, thus for the sake of appearance. . . . From this it came to pass that all those who were spiritual, that is, who were inwardly as well as outwardly good, not being able to be with these, withdrew from them, either voluntarily or being driven away, and wherever found they were persecuted. On this account they were concealed by the Lord and preserved in their places until the Day of Judgment, that they might constitute “the new heaven.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 392)

Americans are familiar with this kind of persecution. A review in a recent *New Yorker* magazine suggests that “shaming has become a national pastime.” According to this article:

Shame, canonically, is the sinking sensation that attends deviation from widely endorsed mores, whatever they happen to be. You can be sad or elated for any reason or for no reason, but shame requires a shared social context.¹

1 “Hang Your Head” by Becca Rothfeld, *New Yorker*, March 28, 2022

A shared social context means that some significant number of people share the same values and are therefore in a position to shame or be shamed accordingly. This article says the internet has provided a powerful and widespread platform within which people's missteps and poorly chosen words can be pointed out and repeatedly viewed or read by a larger audience. In a generation that supposedly shuns judgment this tool has proved to be a potent means of inducing shame, of bullying, and of persecuting those who deviate from the mores of the majority. Not only that, but it is an even more effective tool for communicating and spreading these popularly held mores.

The value of controversy

Persecution, however, has a surprising upside for those who find themselves holding minority views in the face of controversy. Very often people are unaware of the significance of variations in beliefs and lifestyles until it is highlighted by some controversy. Controversies reveal differences that were previously hidden. The process is described this way in *Divine Providence*:

There are evils together with falsities which, when introduced into societies, act like ferments put into meal and juice of the grape. By means of these, discordant things are separated and concordant things are united, and purity and clearness are the result. They are what are meant by these words of the Lord: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal." (*Divine Providence* 25)

That is, controversies can motivate people to think more intensely about the teachings of the Word, to clarify and organize their understanding, and to either confirm or revise their views. Persecution provides even more motivation. While these things are disruptive and harmful to a group in the short run, the long-term effect often promotes harmony by bringing together people who share beliefs and values. The following brief story shows how this is like the Parable of the Leaven and other parables:

The Lord compares the Kingdom of God to leaven, to the gathering of tares and wheat, and also to a net. All of these are presented and seen in the other life. As respects the leaven an evil spirit is sent into societies that are upon the mountains, rocks, or hills, and inspires evil desires. As a consequence of this, that whole multitude ferments, as it were. Some of them act in concert with him; some do not so act; some dissent. Those who act in concert with him, turn their faces towards him; those who do not act in concert, turn their faces away. Then, all those who turned their faces to him are gathered into one company, and sent out of the mountain, or rock.

This is the gathering of the tares into bundles. Those who are sent down from those places, appear, as it were, to be drawn in a net; and they are thus brought down to the places where they are to be.
(*Spiritual Experiences* 5222)

This illustrates the beneficial effects of bad ideas. The evil spirit here provides a bad idea, or “*inspires evil desires*,” and the effect is that some people agree, some disagree, and the nature of the group is clarified. There is no shaming, judgment or persecution, just information that enables everyone to be where they want to be.

Large crowds

No one wants to be alone, and no one wants to hold minority views. The beauty of the Word’s many scenes and prophecies of large crowds worshiping the Lord and being led by the truth is that it provides a reassuring vision of the future. Everyone wants to be on the right side of history, and to align themselves with genuine goodness. It is not always easy, though, to accept what the Word teaches in preference to what may seem to be right, or to what popular opinion dictates. But we are assured that the New Jerusalem is vast, and that it is filled with more people than we could ever imagine.

(JFS)

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

“*Deliver us from evil.*” The words echo from the prayer Jesus taught us in His Sermon on the Mount – a prayer we invoke every day.

These words acknowledge that evil exists in the world, that we are all susceptible to it, and that only the Lord can truly deliver us from its insidious power.

But why, even the faithful ask, does He allow evil in the world? Why does a loving all-powerful God permit the horror we witness in Ukraine, for instance, with Russian forces inflicting abject evil upon the innocent?

It is easy to ask – amid all that horror and heartlessness: where is God? He is unwilling – indeed unable – to interfere with our spiritual freedom. But He is always with us, lifting and leading us to heaven, if we will but follow. Consider His own ultimate test – that He did not save Himself from His own crucifixion. He allowed that evil to occur so that He – and we – could ultimately triumph.

Throughout history the issue of evil and suffering in the world has been a test of faith. We are blessed to know that evil must be seen that we may shun it and do good; that evil is never the Lord’s will and is permitted only for the sake of our freedom – and that transcendent good may come of it. We don’t always see the good arising out of evil because the Lord’s providence operates

on the spiritual plane of our lives. But even in Ukraine we have witnessed not only inspiring courage standing against evil but an outpouring of sympathy and support throughout the world. We see this in every tragedy. Remember the overwhelming response of good people to the 9/11 terrorism?

As Elisha assured his servant, who was terrified by the hordes of enemies surrounding them: “They that be with us are more than they that be with them.” It is ever so.

Evil is a strong and offensive word. We tend to reserve it for tyrants like Russia’s Putin, for abusers and murderers – the worst criminals and heartless souls whose actions are clearly abhorrent and despicable. But we all commit offenses from time to time that we regret. We may be selfish and unkind. But we don’t think of ourselves as “evil.”

However, “evil” is used throughout the Word to describe any of our wayward leanings that turn us away from God. We all do that at times – when we are loving ourselves and the world more than the Lord and the neighbor, when we are turning away from Him, however temporarily. For all the violence, crime and horrors afflicting the world, simply turning away from the Lord is the greatest threat to the world – and our own lives.

We might be inclined to forgive the Children of Israel, for instance, for simply “making mistakes” during their 40 years of trial and suffering in the wilderness; but the Word says they had “done evil in the sight of the Lord.” (*Numbers 32:13*) And we may see people as just a mix of good and bad intentions, but the Word says: “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” (*Genesis 8:21*)

The Lord commands us: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good.” (*Isaiah 1:16*)

This is a wisdom we all come to know. Viktor Frankl, whose memorable *Man’s Search for Meaning* came out of his experience with one of the greatest evils ever perpetuated – the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz – where he concluded that “turning away from God is the source of all evil.”

The great opponent of tyranny, Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn, mourning the sad decline of the Soviet Union throughout his lifetime, said it was all because “they had forgotten God.” We still witness the fallout in Ukraine.

But we know the evil we may feel in our hearts at times does not originate with us but comes from hell. Vladimir Putin may be an evil man, but the evil flows from hell; he is a more than willing conduit. We are taught that the spiritual world is the realm of causes and the natural world a theater of effects. So what must be roiling the spiritual world to cause such vile evil in Ukraine? But we are also taught that we are not powerless when we follow the Lord, and that “those that be with us are more than those that be with them.” Always.

The hells want us to feel hopeless and powerless against evil. But the Lord's mercy is constantly flowing into us, and whenever we stand against evil that mercy flows in and helps to change us and the world.

We all have a role, an opportunity and an obligation. *Arcana Coelestia* 3142:1 states it clearly: "Nothing else is asked of anyone except to 'sweep their house,' that is to reject evil desires and resulting false persuasions. If we do this we are filled with all forms of good, for good from the Lord is constantly flowing in."

Even in the face of such horror and apparent hopelessness in Ukraine, we are assured: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not of evil, to give you a future and hope." (*Jeremiah 29:11*)

Even in the midst of evil the Lord is always present – with His mercy, His love and His saving power. There is always hope that He will "deliver us from evil."

(BMH)

Responses to

Standing for Marriage in Today's World

Dear Friends:

I thank the editors of *New Church Life* for providing me an opportunity to comment on the Letters to the Editors (see below) relating to my article – *Standing for Marriage in Today's World* – in January/February 2022 issue. I see these letters as reflective of the range of feedback received from many other sources, and I thank the authors for writing.

I had my say in my article, and therefore do not wish to argue with the authors or highlight the things with which I agree. Let me instead point to one sentence in each letter that struck me in a useful way, offered as a testimony to my reading and reflecting on the messages delivered:

- Mr. Sandstrom: “The hugely important and controversial set of issues the Bishop’s article tackles needed to be addressed, as ‘today’s world’ presents significant challenges to traditional thinking, contemporary science and accepted theology.”
- Ms. Odhner: “My heart has been opened and living with an open heart is worth the risks.”
- Ms. Edwards: “That gift is a genuine love to the neighbor—an open understanding of the individual process each human being traverses in their path to a life of love for our Creator in eternal peace.”
- Mr. Howard: “Even if you believe LGBTQIA+ is not good or not ideal; speaking out against it you might believe is ‘true,’ but is it kind or good? ‘Divine peace is in goodness, but not in truth apart from goodness.’ (*Heaven and Hell* 286)”
- Ms. Raymond: “Marriage and sexuality is a topic that has become untouchable in recent years and I commend the Bishop for his courage in approaching the matter.”
- Ms. Robinson: “This is a discussion of some underlying assumptions of the argument, which seem to be a position shared by those presently interpreting doctrine of the General Church.”

I believe there is always good to be found, even in disagreements that feel intense. In the present case, I acknowledge that my article elicited strong sentiments across a wide spectrum. I consider it an imperative to take responsibility for my words. I believe also in remaining open through the feedback process. It is part of what can lead to greater wisdom.

Let me close by drawing attention to my letter and video shared with the General Church in response to the feedback I have received. I encourage you to read the letter. (If you would like a copy, please contact Communications Director Marijke Bau-Madsen: *Marijke.Bau-Madsen@newchurch.org*) I also encourage you also to read the letters that follow and thank again the authors for their submissions.

“I welcome ongoing communication that looks for solutions. I have a growing conviction that we can be a church that presents the Lord’s vision of marriage between one man and one woman and a church that welcomes all to engage. I will be working with pastors and institutional leaders to build approaches that spring from this conviction. The solutions may not look exactly the same in every case, and they may not work for all people. However, to the extent that they are grounded in the Word and work to articulate the Lord’s love, I believe He can lead us.” (Letter to the General Church, April 21, 2022)

Best wishes,
Peter M. Buss Jr.
Executive Bishop

Editors’ note: Below are all of the letters in response to this article which were sent to *New Church Life* for publication:

*The Writings, Marriage,
and the LGBTQIA+ Identity Spectrum*

To The Editors:

This is in response to the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr’s “Standing for Marriage in Today’s World: A Church Perspective” in the January/February *New Church Life*.

Common wisdom says never start with caveats. Yet, I must:

- Wading into a controversial topic (“fools rush in . . .”) inevitably invites slings and arrows, including *ad hominem* ones.
- I am not “holier than thou.” Only I know my deep flaws.
- The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. is my nephew. Does that mean I instinctively rush to his or “the establishment’s” defense? No.

- I am an octogenarian. Does that mean I am out of touch with what the bishop calls “today’s world?” I don’t think so.
- Am I a theological scholar? Absolutely not.
- Am I a conservative who automatically aligns himself (note: not “themself”) with current orthodoxy? No. Friends and detractors alike describe me as liberal or progressive, a label I wear with caution in view of my conservative roots.

I believe Bishop Buss, on behalf of the Bishop’s Office, presented a compelling set of teachings on this “hot button” topic. I don’t know any way to qualify or contradict them, nor am I inclined to look for one. I also feel the case was gently presented with love, wisdom, courage and grace. It laid down clearly what was orderly/disorderly and stressed the many important “however’s” about what we don’t know about others, the need to respect everyone, and that the Lord loves all.

I shared office space with a colleague who was openly gay back when that was much more challenging. His language was raunchy, and to me, his known private behavior was objectionable. Yet he was a warm friend and an excellent professor, performing an important use. (I know this may read as “some of my best friends are gay.”)

I introduced him to an audience as courageous, brilliant and insightful. We had frank discussions about how he “discovered” he was gay, and about me being a “PK” whose church upbringing made it uncomfortable to accept homosexuality as “normal.” When my car radio broadcast his speech at a gay/lesbian rally saying he was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS – then a death sentence – I pulled over and wept.

At his ugly, “in your face” raunchy memorial gathering I proclaimed: “I loved Victor, and I am straight” – and walked out, shaken. I remain conflicted. Yes, I happily “identify” as straight . . . but did I offer my colleague and his friends (who included his ex-wife) respect and love, the concluding words of Bishop Buss’s article.

The hugely important and controversial set of issues the Bishop’s article tackles needed to be addressed, as “today’s world” presents significant challenges to traditional thinking, contemporary science and accepted theology. However, while I’m sadly certain Bishop Buss is now functioning as a lightning rod for angry responses to the teachings he and fellow bishops presented, he did not by any means cover the full list of issues.

The February 2022 Bishop’s Newsletter opened with this: “Making life choices with intention and focus is something that most of us strive for.” That portion of the newsletter, admittedly, did not deal with LGBTQIA+ identities . . . but are all these identities *choices*?

In recent news, a state is investigating parents over alleged child abuse for assisting their teen with transgender care. Another state passed a controversial law about teaching gender identity in primary grades.

How do we, rationally and compassionately, address the complex issue of someone becoming convinced s/he is in “the wrong body?” Is the birth gender determinative? What of the infant presenting both genders at birth? *Who* decides which to keep, *when*? What if the maturing person concludes the wrong decision was made? What government at any level has a right to intervene in that decision? In my not-very-humble opinion: none. Let’s keep the Jeffersonian wall between church and state.

What about x’s and y’s getting mixed up during early embryonic stages? I am no scientist, but I know things do not always go “according to plan.” A person may be born with genetically crossed wires or a predisposition impervious to later life decision about “what am I?” Is that a disorder?

Of course. How does this person or the ones in that person’s life deal with it? How do scientists deal with it should they discover how to intervene – if they can get past taboos surrounding research into such delicate issues? Is it ethical to “do something” because it is possible? What religious guidance do we, or they, have?

In our recent Logopraxis sessions (focused on the Joseph story in *Heavenly Secrets*) our group has talked a lot about identity. In my professional life I spent much time and effort dealing with identity politics: ethnic nationalism – a group identity some (e.g., Ukrainians) defend to their death; “Who am I?” exercises with my students explored our roots and lessons of belonging we learned in our childhood and upbringing. Education in recent decades has emphasized developing a good self-concept, striving to fulfill the top three levels in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Yet as I (think I) understand the Writings, *identity is an illusion*. All that effort we expend on developing, or figuring out, our identity may be wasted – or worse, counterproductive – since our proprium is essentially trying to claim we have life of our own when the only source of life is the Lord. As *Arcana 5758* puts it in dealing with such appropriation: “The whole of this chapter has as its subject spiritual theft.”

My intent is not to inflict pain, nor to deny the harsh pain suffered by those on the LGBTQIA+ identity spectrum, whose right to love who they want is challenged. It is to introduce a note of caution as we seek to sort out the implications for all who seek to apply the truths of the Writings of the New Church in a context of today’s world, swirling as it is with controversy over that spectrum. *If identity is, indeed, a man-made construct based on a false premise*, all the energy we expend blaming and berating each other may not

only be misdirected; it might be more usefully applied to combating our own proprium. As Voltaire's *Candide* said to professor Pangloss: "We must cultivate our own garden."

I, like many others, find some teachings of the Writings, including the ones under consideration, hard to deal with. Does that mean *I* have a problem, or *the Writings*?

This ultimately boils down to a simple question: Are the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg divinely inspired? The Word of the Lord? I believe they are. Therefore, I must bend, not arrogate to myself (or my theological leader) the right to pick and choose what in the Writings I accept and what I do not.

At the risk of appearing more pious than I am, let me conclude, first, by quoting from the end of Bishop Buss's article where he stresses the need for positivity and introspection, and then with the Two Great Commandments.

"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 always look for the good, and to focus primarily on our own states of evil."

"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*)

Harald M. Sandström, PhD
Bloomfield, Connecticut

A Wedge in a Fault Line

To The Editors:

I write in reply to the article in the January/February 2022 issue of *New Church Life*, "Standing for Marriage in Today's World."

It appears that the General Church can accept people in the LGBTQIA+ community, but only if they are willing to stop, or try to stop, being the way they are. That position excludes not only those individuals, but also their allies. That's a LOT of people. The author of the article strives for a tone of compassion and respect, but that doesn't prevent people from being shocked and alienated by the message.

The story in *Genesis* of the sacrifice of Isaac has always bothered me, especially as an example of praiseworthy obedience, even though it ends well. I don't feel called upon to offer my nonbinary firstborn on the altar of dogma.

Am I meant to look on members of the LGBTQIA+ community as lesser

or damaged at best? That feels like a betrayal of people I love and admire as they are – an insult to their wholeness and dignity.

I love marriage and always have. My marriage has brought incredible blessings into my life, and I have found great joy in spreading the good news about New Church concepts of marriage and sexuality. Accepting other ways of being hasn't taken anything away from that.

What would we think about the spiritual world if we didn't know what Swedenborg said about the polygamous heavens and the celibate nuns on the outskirts of heaven?

This article from the Bishop's Office deals with sensitive issues in a way that increases pressure on people to take opposing sides and lessens their freedom to remain undecided or hold differing opinions. It acts like a wedge driven into a fault line. I don't want to argue about who is right or wrong in this scenario, but I do know which error I'd rather live with if I turn out to be mistaken. My heart's been opened and living with an open heart is worth the risks.

This is a deal-breaker. Dewey and I have decided to resign from the General Church. It's not my church anymore; I've wondered about this for a while.

I'm sorry; the whole situation is heartbreaking.

Linda Simonetti Odhner
Horsham, Pennsylvania

Appreciation

To The Editors:

I would like to thank *New Church Life* for publishing the article by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., *Standing Up for Marriage in Today's World*.

Marriage and sexuality is a topic that has become untouchable in recent years and I commend the Bishop for his courage in approaching the matter.

Throughout the article, he explored all the arguments and counter-arguments that have dominated popular thinking in recent years and he made every possible accommodation to them. Then he consistently and patiently led the reader back to the Lord and His Word.

He closed by inviting any and all to dialogue with their local pastors and with one another. "Come let us reason together" was the message.

The tone throughout the whole article was both gentle and reasonable. He made no judgment nor gave any opinion. He simply pointed to the Word.

That is what a priest ought to do, isn't it?

Fran Raymond
Member, Olivet Church
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The Missing Gift

To The Editors:

I understand Bishop Buss is attempting to lead the church through a thorny issue with his article, “Standing for Marriage in Today’s World: A Church Perspective.” This is certainly a time of determination as life around us changes. I hope this particular leading can be done with mercy – which is one of the greatest loves I feel in my Church and the Lord. Mercy, the very thing the Lord shows us every day as we each fail in our private ways.

It is with sadness that I recognize if this is to be our stance, that I no longer align with the General Church of the New Jerusalem. I have been a member of the Church since birth, and attended the Academy, as did two of my daughters. I have hosted a prolific number of traveling ministers and opened my home for church services in our community. I donated to the General Church to provide for funds for these meetings.

However, after reading the article written by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., I find the Church’s teaching leaves me bereft of the very gift the Lord, by way of the Word and the Church, has given me through thick and thin. That gift is a genuine love to the neighbor – an open understanding of the individual process each human being traverses in their path to a life of love for our Creator in eternal peace.

To be a part of a heaven made from the human race is not a goal known only to New Church congregations. We read in the Word that there are many gates that can be opened if we place the Lord at the center of our lives, love our neighbor as ourselves, and aim to learn from the Lord’s Word all that is good and true and then set out to put that good and truth to use. Again, not only is this not singular to our church, but it is not singular to those people in our church who choose marriage for their time on earth.

A quick discovery of some points:

1. “Marriage” is not “Conjugal Love.” I worked as a domestic violence advocate for years. The best way forward to conjugal love is not always marriage between one man and one woman, which frankly can be dangerous on this earth.

2. The Word (and the community of our church congregations) does not just draw our minds to eternity and matters of heaven but can (and should) be a resounding source of strength and guidance for our daily lives here on earth.

3. Not all homosexual couples are equivalent to the Old Testament people of Sodom. The very wording of those passages indicates people who have fallen into dark depths and are committing sins with no regard to the Lord's Word. When taken as to its internal meaning (if I'm reading the *Arcana* correctly) homosexuality isn't even a reference point.

Homosexual couples, many of whom have probably questioned themselves and struggled with their love for someone of their same sex, are simply two people who have found love on this earth – a love that can help them grow toward the Lord as they grow toward one another. Many of these religious and spiritual couples would undoubtedly love the Lord's teaching of appearing as one angel.

4. “. . . 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 idea that we can determine how another person should grow and regenerate based on assigning sex at birth is in essence a strong judgment of that person's state.

I've listened to people who respond to gender identity issues by saying that the Lord doesn't make mistakes, so if a person is born of a sex then that is their given sex and any attempt to change that is a sin. I agree completely that the Lord is omniscient and omnipotent, so mistakes aren't in the picture. Then why not believe the person who has pleaded since childhood that they aren't who people call them? Why not believe that it is the Lord working with this person in a different way, due to that person's path that our Heavenly Father surely knows well enough?

The Centers for Disease Control stated in a 2019 article that 35% of transgender youth had attempted suicide. A church and/or community that judges these people's spiritual states needs to grapple with these numbers – and hopefully find a way forward to address that neighbor's need for support, spiritual and religious sustenance, and acceptance for who they are where they are “at.”

I will end by saying that the most prevalent sins against the Lord mentioned in the article were those harmful to others, a point I firmly understand. What I find so disheartening is the judgment on those people who are doing no harm to others. Those people who are, in fact, assisting their communities, loving their neighbors, worshipping their Creator. I can love that person for the good in them and leave their spiritual regeneration to themselves and the Lord.

Kamela Runion Edwards
Wilmington
North Carolina

Three Essential Questions

To The Editors:

I am writing in response to the article, “Standing for Marriage in Today’s World”, by the Rt. Rev Peter Buss Jr. in the January/February 2022 edition of *New Church Life*.

I grew up in the General Church. I went to General Church schools, and even sent my son to a General Church school for a year before we moved out of state for my work. I’ve spent much of my adult life working on projects trying to grow the church. Yes, I’ve been extremely frustrated with other hard-line stances the leadership in the General Church has taken in the past, such as opposing women in the ministry (why would we oppose anyone wanting to dedicate their lives to the Lord?), but for the first time in my life, I feel like it might be time for me to walk away from the General Church.

My faith hasn’t wavered, and I will still pursue a New Church life, but I worry the General Church is making this the hill they want to die on. Recently, I worked through one of the Journey programs, “Mindful Communication,” which talks about the importance of asking yourself three questions before communicating: Is it kind? Is it true? Is it useful? For me, this article fell short on all three questions, as I hope to show.

I want to start with “is it useful?” I can’t wrap my head around why the leader of the General Church felt it was necessary to write and publish such a harsh article on this topic. What is the reason that it needed to be written and published at this time? In such a fragile and vulnerable moment in world history, we should be seeking to uplift and help heal wherever possible. To give people a sense of hope and how much the Lord loves them. Who is this article written to benefit?

I believe everyone already knows the General Church’s stance on LGBTQIA+. Those who share the interpretation of doctrine in the article will not benefit from this article. I doubt anyone who doesn’t agree with this interpretation is going to change their mind as a result. This will not encourage the LGBTQIA+ community to feel the church is a place where they can hear the Word, serve their neighbor, and be lifted up in their spiritual growth and development (as suggested by the article). I fear it will discourage them from ever considering membership.

Back in early 2004, I was living in Tucson, Arizona, and regularly attending Sunrise Chapel services. Attendance was great and there was a wonderful group of young, enthusiastic people around my age (or slightly older) attending church every week. There was a worship band made up of mostly young adults

from the church. The band leader was a woman who is transgender, who was well loved by many in the congregation, though she herself was not a member of the church.

The bishop at the time heard about this woman transitioning and forced the pastor in Tucson to fire her. As a result, the worship band quit, and overnight, nearly one third of the congregation, almost all the people under 40, left the church, never to return to this day. Unfortunately, I fear the decision to write this article will have the same effect the decision had on the Tucson congregation, only for the General Church.

Next, I want to answer the question, “is it kind?” In my time living on the West Coast, I have had the pleasure of visiting multiple churches, from many denominations. More recently, I’ve attended services at a local Unitarian Universalist Church. Almost all the congregants talk about how they are “recovering Christians.” They talk about the years of pain and judgment they felt from the Christian churches they grew up in, and the struggles they have had in their lives as a result.

It saddens me that so many Christian religions take the loving messages from Christ and use them to hurt His followers to the point that they feel they need treatment to recover – as one does when surviving abuse. I am glad that, despite the hurt, these people who still desired to be in a spiritual community with others, have groups like the Unitarian Universalists where they can find a home. Unfortunately, as the years go on, I talk to more and more people who essentially feel the same way about our church; that they are recovering members of the General Church.

Several times in the article, Bishop Buss states he doesn’t want “to judge any person, or to cast aspersions,” but proceeds to use some pretty harsh terms. I say “harsh” because the article didn’t just speak out against LGBTQIA+, it used terms like “disorder,” “abomination,” and “heinous.” It justifies the use of those terms because of the “seriousness of the underlying issue.” He goes on to say how it is important to speak out against the “harm” of LGBTQIA+, just as it is important to speak out against the harm of “child abuse, rape and the like.” Placing orientation on the same level as child abuse and rape is not only unkind, but in my view despicable.

I feel, at its core, the New Church is better than that. A church founded on New Church principles should not resort to judgment and control. It should not cast stones. There should be an understanding that the Word and the Writings exist to help us regenerate and not to hurt others; and there should be an understanding that the confusing and horrendous literal statements in the Word (especially in the Old Testament), have an inner meaning above the literal text.

Even if you believe LGBTQIA+ is not good or not ideal; speaking out

against it you might believe is “true,” but is it kind or good? “Divine peace is in goodness, but not in truth apart from goodness.” (*Heaven and Hell* 286) While I understand there was an effort to try and strike a balance, it failed for too many of us. The article didn’t have to lean into the more bigoted language and comparisons. People in the LGBTQIA+ communities are people. I believe this section of the article to be dehumanizing.

I also understand the argument that when you see someone doing something wrong, generally, the kind thing is to help them stop doing that wrong thing. But genuine change doesn’t come from external condemnation. Genuine change comes from a person choosing to let the Lord’s love into their lives. Even if you believed LGBTQIA+ is wrong (which I do not), this article doesn’t encourage people in the LGBTQIA+ community to come to the Lord, and so I’d argue it’s “truth apart from goodness,” which is not kind (assuming its premise is accurate in the first place, which I will address next).

Finally, I want to address the question, “Is it true?” Early on in our New Church education, we are taught that the Word has an internal corresponding meaning. When we read in the Word that someone is drinking water, we learn this isn’t just a story about someone sipping a glass of water. This is a story about bringing truth into our lives. We also understand that on this earth, at this time, the physical world doesn’t directly correspond to its spiritual counterpart.

If I drink water, I am not actually bringing more truth into my body. If I eat more bread, I do not have more good in my body. No matter how much water I drink or bread I eat, I am not spiritually advancing. What confuses me is that New Church people seem to agree on this, but for some reason, when it comes to references of sex, gender and sexuality, the Lord and His Word can only ever mean biological sex and sexuality.

It seems to be implied that anywhere we read in the Word “man,” we should read it as “people with biological male genitalia” and anywhere in the Word we read “woman,” we should read it as “people with biological female genitalia.” For example, the article references the following *Genesis* quote:

“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.’”

The article seems to imply we should be reading this only as a story about biological males and biological females being created and physically reproducing.

Let’s take it piece by piece. God created us in His image, but the Lord isn’t biologically male or biologically female, so it doesn’t make sense that we’d interpret that “His image” has anything to do with biological genitalia. The

sentence “male and female He created them” grammatically doesn’t say “He made some people 100% biological males and He made some people 100% biological females.” Instead, grammatically, it more closely sounds like the Lord made us all male AND female.

Another way to interpret this is that the Lord made us all with the correspondence of both male AND female; love and wisdom. We are made in His image, an image that is not biological sex, but instead good and truth, or love and wisdom. We all have good and truth/love and wisdom in us, some of us lead from love, and some of us lead from truth.

In the section on homosexuality, the article references that sex is determined at conception. But again, why is this interpreted as biological sex and not spiritual sex? Couldn’t this be interpreted as meaning what is represented by sex is determined at conception? Or in more plain terms, it is determined at conception if love or if wisdom will lead in that person’s life.

To take it a step further, conception here might not be talking about biological conception at all, but spiritual conception. Just as *Secrets of Heaven* teaches us that the seven days of creation are not a literal description of the universe being physically formed (as many churches view it) but is better interpreted as the regeneration process that creates spiritual humans.

The New Church isn’t anti-science, and so we believe the universe wasn’t physically created in the way described in Genesis. It is our belief that this is about spiritual creation. So, why wouldn’t sex being determined at conception be interpreted as spiritual conception and spiritual sex, rather than biological conception and biological sex?

When talking about homosexuality, the article also used the quote: “You shall not lie with a man as you do with a woman; it is an abomination” (*Leviticus* 18:22) and the story about the city of Sodom being destroyed because, as the article put it, “wickedness was identified with a desire by the men of the city to “know [the visiting men] carnally.” (*Genesis* 19:5)

Secrets of Heaven 2220 states “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. In the Word also the dreadful things that well up out of self-love are represented by various kinds of adultery. That ‘Sodom’ means in general every evil that stems from self-love, and ‘Gomorrhah’ every falsity derived from this.”

Why are we interpreting these stories to be stories about biological sex and intercourse, when the Writings clearly state this is a story about self-love and falsities that derive from that? Also, it’s worth mentioning that Lot’s suggestions to the Sodomites who demanded Lot release the two men he was

hiding so they can “know them carnally” was to have the Sodomites take Lot’s two virgin daughters and to “do to them as you wish.” Personally, I’m not sure we should be looking at this paragraph as moral guidance on human sexuality.

Later in the same section, the article references the quote in the Word that “a woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment.” (*Deuteronomy 22:5*) The article talks about how we should not interpret this to be talking about physical clothes but maintains the view that we *should* be thinking about “man” and “woman” only in terms of literal biological sex.

There are hundreds of examples, especially in the Old Testament, where the literal stories are physically incongruous with our understanding of the world, and we agree they should be left only to the internal meaning.

One of the things that I’ve appreciated about the New Church is that it is a church that doesn’t typically turn away from science and rationalism, like most other churches do. A lot of Christian faiths believe things like evolution are wrong, the earth is only a few thousand years old, and the Lord buried dinosaur fossils just to test our faith. This is why it frustrates me when leaders in the General Church seem to be taking a hard line against the need for a partnership between faith and science. Are articles like this essentially asking us to take a different tack? For example, consider for a moment our current scientific understanding around human biology.

A significant portion of people born are intersex (people born with ambiguous sex characteristics). Some studies show that about one out of every 1,000 babies born has some level of sex ambiguity. That means maybe as many as 385 people are born every day without a definitive/black-and-white biological sex. Even genetic markers like the sex chromosomes (XX and XY) do not biologically match the external sex characteristics of some people.

Yet the article uses a quote from the Writings to essentially disregard science by saying “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.” (*Conjugial Love* 33)

This is where my belief might differ from many in the General Church, but I also believe that this should not be taken as literal, and that the Lord does give deeper meanings to the Writings. That quote doesn’t even make sense when taken literally, and I don’t understand how you could read that without thinking about an internal meaning.

If I cut off my finger, is that a “masculine” finger sitting on the table? If I scrape a few skin cells off, are they “masculine” skin cells? If I separated out one atom from my body, is it a “masculine” atom? If I eat some food and part of that food becomes my body, is that food now “masculine” food? If I compost my waste, and grow food from the molecules that were once a part of my body, and a woman eats those molecules, did she eat food with “masculine” molecules, or are they now “feminine” molecules? What if I got a heart transplant from a woman, would it be a “feminine” heart I now have or did it become “masculine” as soon as it was sewn into my body? The literal reading of that *Conjugial Love* quote doesn’t make sense when you really break it down.

Only the Lord knows the full truth. I want to end with a question: Can the leaders in the General Church say absolutely that they know their interpretation of what the Lord means in terms of LGBTQIA+ is 100% accurate? If they are 100% certain, that goes against the tenet of the New Church that essentially states that we cannot prove on this earth anything about the Lord with 100% certainty, otherwise we wouldn’t be left in freedom. If their interpretation isn’t 100% certain, then there is room for alternative interpretations, and I would argue that means we should give people the chance to come to the Lord through the New Church in their own way.

Nathan Howard
Coupeville
Washington

Alternative Assumptions

To The Editors:

This commentary is written in response to the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss's article, *Standing for Marriage in Today's World*. There is no doubt that Bishop Buss had good intentions in writing the article, and truly sees the need to defend the institution of marriage. Despite the best intentions, however, the article appears to defend opposition to homosexuality based on its effect on marriage. But given a different set of assumptions than those used in the article, it can be seen that homosexuality does not threaten marriage.

This is a discussion of some underlying assumptions of the argument, which seem to be a position shared by those presently interpreting doctrine of the General Church. This letter offers an alternative set of assumptions, driven by a compassionate approach to truth, with an understanding of gender based upon recent science. Each assumption is stated as if it is correct.

1. Gender is obvious.

There are many things about gender that may be ambiguous. For example, some people are born with both sets of genitalia, and others may have chromosomes for both genders, or have hormones different from their genitals. Thus, we cannot necessarily tell a person's gender from their physical appearance. Additionally, gender is both physical and spiritual. It is possible that someone's physical gender may be different from their spiritual gender.

When people identify as having a gender different from their physical appearance, since we cannot know why, it seems wise to conclude that their feelings of gender derive from their internal experience of their spiritual gender. It is important to remember that there are ineffable varieties of marriages of good and truth.

From the marriage of good and truth in the heavens descend all loves. . . . There are ineffable varieties, all originating in and derived from the union of good and truth from the Lord, which union is the heavenly marriage. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2739)

2. The authority of selected texts from Leviticus from the Old Testament can be understood in their literal sense.

The rules articulated in *Leviticus* that Swedenborg says we should take seriously, we realize are primarily important for their spiritual sense. The church does not follow them on the natural plane. Why then, is one passage chosen to make an argument, when others, obviously not true in the literal sense, are not (for example, forbidding a person from participating in church

rituals who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, running sores or damaged testicles)?

Jesus never refers to homosexuality. Swedenborg tells us that the Old Testament is valuable for its symbolic content. When in the Writings he discusses the passages that address such things as Sodom and Gomorrah, or *Leviticus*, Swedenborg does not refer to homosexuality, but to the defiling of good and truth.

Swedenborg, in all the delineations of what the Bishop calls “disorders,” that I can find, never explicitly states homosexuality as a disorder, but instead, consistently refers to the spiritual sense of the Word. In contrast, adultery in marriage is addressed both in reference to the spiritual sense and in great detail, numerous times in relation to the damage to marriages.

The lack of explicit and repetitive mention of homosexuality by Jesus or Swedenborg’s Writings seems significant and suggests intent, providing in the Lord’s Providence, room to discover new understandings on this topic.

... And although the Word as to the literal sense is such that truths may be drawn out therefrom it is also such, that things not true may be confirmed by it, as is well known from the case of heresies.
(*Arcana Coelestia* 3436)

3. Homosexuality should be treated as disorderly.

Jesus’ attitude toward all the people He interacts with is one of deep love. He does not discriminate between racial or cultural groups. In fact, He sides with the underdog in every case, defending those who are discriminated against. Our Lord does not condemn people society calls “disorderly,” but consistently questions the negative judgments people make against others who are not like them.

4. Only couples of the opposite gender can prepare for conjugal love in heaven.

If two people are apparently in a loving committed relationship, whether or not they appear to be of the same gender, we should rejoice. How their relationship represents the marriage of good and truth is not ours to know and judge.

As noted above, the varieties of marriage of good and truth are myriad. Who are we to say that such a couple is not preparing for a conjugal relationship in the spiritual world?

Upon careful examination, the following text, used by the Bishop to uphold the importance of a heterosexual relationship, can be seen as mentioning gender difference (which we have already pointed out is not an obvious criterion to apply), but focusing on the union of two in a reciprocal relationship and not more than two. Rather than rejecting couples because their gender preferences appear to non-heterosexual, the church should support two people in a long-

term loving relationship for their commitment to each other, assuming that they are forming a spiritual conjugal union.

Genuine conjugal love cannot possibly exist except between two married partners, that is, in the marriage of one man (vir) with one wife, and by no means between more together, for the reason that conjugal love is mutual and reciprocal. And the life of one is in that of the other reciprocally, so that they are as if it were a one; such a union may exist between two, but not between more, as more tear that love asunder. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2740)

Julia Williams Robinson
Minneapolis, Minnesota

A Pastor's Message on Healing

(Editors' note: The Rev. Derek Elphick, Pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, offered three listening sessions for people to respond to the article, "Standing for Marriage in Today's World." Below is a slightly condensed version of his letter to the community, printed with permission.)

I write this my first pastoral letter to report on these listening sessions and to offer thoughts and reflections about how we can "be" the church for each other even when we are at odds or in disagreement.

In his article, the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr. invited people to speak to their local pastor to ask hard questions and share their thoughts they had which is what many of you have done, either by attending one of the three listening sessions held at the Cathedral, by requesting small group or individual meetings, or by writing to me. I've received a lot of feedback, which is very important to me because as your new pastor I don't wish to guess or presume to know my flock.

People have been saying that this is a conversation we've needed to have for a long time. I agree, and I appreciate the opportunity Bishop Buss's article has provided for that. It's an extremely difficult topic to discuss because it can turn volatile quickly. It's a subject that involves real, live people and is therefore not theoretical. It reaches into people's homes. It puts the spotlight on people's personal, private lives and as soon as the discussion of "right" and "wrong" commences, feelings of judgment and discrimination enter in. This is especially true when God, faith and religion are introduced into the mix, which they surely must be if we are to have this conversation in a church setting.

My listening sessions revealed that this topic is fraught with pain, confusion, hurt and anger – and deep division. There are people who feel this article has clarified the doctrines of our church, and others who feel it misrepresented the doctrines. Many people have told me they fully support the article and are glad a clear answer has been given on the topic; and many have told me they were deeply offended, hurt and saddened by what they saw as harsh, judgmental words and tone. There is anger and fear on both sides.

Those who support the article feel the bishop needed to draw attention to pertinent teachings in the Word on conjugal love, and that the church also has a duty to warn of the perceived dangers associated with LGBTQ+ issues. They felt relieved that the church took a stand because they don't feel free to talk about the marriage of one man and one woman in the church and in our schools.

They expressed deep concern that the very fabric of society hangs in the balance, and that the church cannot waver on these fundamental truths and cannot adopt the stance of today's culture which wants to champion the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. And they expressed deep concern that their children are being exposed to confusing gender issues and behaviors in our schools and wonder what the future will look like for our schools if the church accepts the cultural norms and requirements of today.

Those who were offended, hurt and saddened felt that the message lacked empathy, love and compassion, and that for a church it sends the wrong message. They felt personally attacked because they have loved ones and family members dealing with these issues or are themselves gay, lesbian or transgender. They felt that a line has been drawn in the sand, that those in the LGBTQ+ community are no longer welcome in the church. They are afraid that the tone of the article would only add to discrimination and risk to personal safety that they already face. And there is deep upset and frustration that this kind of message from the church will only accelerate the exodus of young people from the church.

A church must be free to state the hard sayings of the Word while simultaneously offering itself as a safe haven to all who fall short, because we all fall short.

My takeaway from these sessions is that this topic affects us all, deeply and personally, that there aren't any simple solutions or answers, and that staying humble is probably the best "actionable item" right now. Yes, a hard line could be taken on one side or the other so that one triumphs over the other, but that also divides us into winners and losers. Bryn Athyn Church is a big congregation that has always had diverse opinions and beliefs. I believe this congregation has benefitted from being a "big tent," leaving people in freedom to draw their own conclusions from doctrine on matters of faith and life.

So, what can we do? It's unlikely we'll find a "solution" in the sense that people suddenly abandon their point-of-view in favor of the other side. We all have reasons for believing what we do. But maybe we can tackle some of our worst fears and assumptions by cutting them down to size.

For example, in my meetings I heard many say, "Surely we can hold onto the ideals of our church while also ministering to and loving those who are struggling and hurting and need a church home." I also heard many people say: "My son or daughter or friend or loved one is part of the LGBTQ+ community. They don't want to push an agenda on anyone. They simply wish the church would be there for them as they walk this journey of life."

So maybe we can "be" the church by doing extra listening with each other, by going back to the Lord in His Word with a humble willingness to grow in our understanding, and by loving one another as the Lord loves us. The modern world and culture in which we live is constantly changing, sometimes in good ways, sometimes in frightening ways. You need only catch 10 minutes of headline news to witness the perfect storm of political

and social issues raging in our country, which has a direct bearing on how we navigate this new terrain in our church and schools. We will need to continue this conversation and tread carefully.

The Lord presents in His Word a perfect balance between goodness and truth, between judgment and mercy. Love is the end or goal, and truth is the means or method of getting there. When the Lord came to earth, He delivered the two in equal measure. He called out bad behaviors and destructive tendencies using shockingly strong, "judgmental" language (truth) and then made it clear by His actions that we nevertheless need to be "merciful" (loving) and not "walk by on the other side."

He used Himself as the example, that we love one another as He does, that we love and respect those who are different from us, and that we not shun those who are making choices different from ours. A natural reflex when under pressure, when sensing that everything we know, believe, and cherish is under attack, is to cling to a false dichotomy. We either make truth supreme or love supreme, hoping one will save us. But both are equally important. They need each other: truth needs to be tempered by love and love needs to be tempered by truth. Truth does not stand in opposition to good, and good does not stand in opposition to truth. They must work together.

Maybe we can "be" the church by doing extra listening with each other, by going back to the Lord in His Word with a humble willingness to grow in our understanding, and by loving one another as the Lord loves us.

Similarly, a church must strike a balance between goodness and truth, between judgment and mercy. It, too, must be vigilant not to create a false dichotomy by either presenting truth in such a way that the Lord's love, mercy and compassion is lost or by presenting love in such a way that a clear sense of right and wrong is lost.

A church must be free to state the hard sayings of the Word while simultaneously offering itself as a safe haven to all who fall short, because we all fall short. A church must be free to state the ideals of heaven while simultaneously acknowledging that we live in an imperfect world and that our lives don't always unfold in the way we expected or wanted.

In all this, I pray that we stay humble and open to the Lord's leading so that we may be shown a way forward in these challenging, divisive times.

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

Time, Space and Humility

To The Editors:

The articles concerning “Divine Foresight” by the Rev. Bruce Rogers and the Rev. Grant Odhner (*New Church Life*, July/August 2021 and January/February 2022) are a stimulus to our understanding of the nature of the Divine and His operation. Indeed – at least for this reader – they offer an opportunity for humility and awe as we pray to our Creator to appreciate His creation and cooperate in our salvation.

Angels have said that these matters cannot be at all comprehended unless one removes notions of space from his ideas, and that if these notions are not removed, it is inevitable that appearances give rise to misconceptions. Such misconceptions cannot occur, however, as long as one holds to the thought that God is being itself, from which springs all else. (Divine Love and Wisdom 300, Rogers)

There are many other passages that warn us not to fall into the appearances induced by space and time. (*True Christian Religion* 31.2, *Conjugial Love* 328.2, *Divine Providence* 50)

Many natural languages allow us to form sentences that can have no real meaning. For example: “What did the Lord do **before** He created space and time”?

It is impossible for us to comprehend creation and the existence of the natural world without the notion of “discrete degrees.” The Lord instantiated the spiritual and natural worlds from His Divine Love through His Divine Wisdom. In the world of causes – the spiritual world – there is no imposed (or underlying) space and time, although angels are blessed with the appearance of space and time. In the natural world – the world of effects – there is imposed

space and time which allow us to form (natural) rational thoughts and to form and use human languages so that we can think about matters of this world and the next.

As we receive it, Divine Revelation is given in natural language – otherwise we could not understand nor approach the Lord. But that very language can trip us up when we try to raise our thoughts above the natural. That is why we are told in many places in the Writings not to be limited by space/time thinking. (See *True Christian Religion* 29.2)

The Divine through the spiritual world with no basis in space or time created the natural world with its space and time. Without some knowledge of discrete degrees, we cannot begin to understand how that is.

So natively we think from and about space and time which allows us to ponder how the Lord knows the future. Mr. Rogers suggests that the all-knowing Lord cannot know what does not exist. Mr. Odhner argues that in order to provide for our happiness, the Lord does know what our choices will be. But how then can we be truly free?

My mind resorts to simple concepts such as: Whatever it means for the Lord to know the future, it does not mean He gets tomorrow's newspaper.

Charles Ebert
Lafayette
Colorado

A Lingering Question

To The Editors:

Just a short rejoinder to the Rev. Grant Odhner's *Divine Foresight: Miraculous and Wonderful* (*New Church Life*, January/February 2022, page 36):

If God foresees everyone's spiritual final destiny, in heaven or in hell, how is it that the book *True Christian Religion* tells us that: "From the foregoing it is evident that everyone was predestined to heaven, and no one to hell"? (# 490)

And the book *Heaven and Hell* tells us that "children [who die] grow up in heaven . . . [as] will be seen in the following pages." (# 4)

How can God foresee some people's destiny to be in hell when all are born destined for heaven?

The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

On Further Thought . . .

To The Editors:

Although it is unusual for the author of an article, “*The Heavenly Doctrines and the Case for and Against Evolution – At the Same Time*,” (January/February *New Church Life*) to respond to it in a letter to the editor, I have three reasons for doing so.

The first is my apology for stating that humans evolved from the apes. I know this is not true, but inadvertently stated it anyway. Apes and humans have a common ancestor yet to be discovered. In spite of that error the main points of the article are valid.

Secondly, I think that it is significant that the case for and against human evolution in the *Heavenly Doctrines* was presented in *Divine Love and Wisdom* almost a century before Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published his monumentally important and seminal work on evolutionary biology, *On the Origin of the Species*, in 1859. In short, the *Heavenly Doctrines* pointed the way to the concept of evolution long before Darwin.

Thirdly, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 318 presents the three elements of order in creation that specifically point to what Darwin much later included in its published work. The first of these is expansion:

An image of the Infinite is visible in these forms from their endeavor and power to fill every interval of space in the entire world . . . to eternity. For a single seed produces a tree, bush or plant, which occupies its own space. Every tree, bush or plant then produces more seeds – in some cases several thousand – and when these fall to the ground and sprout, they each occupy their own space. If every one of their seeds, then, were to spawn as many new progeny again and again, within years they would fill the whole world.

The second element of order in creation is continuation:

An image of the Eternal exists similarly in these forms as well. Seeds are produced anew from year to year, and new productions of them never cease.

Finally, the third element is variety:

In addition to these images of the Infinite and the Eternal, there is a further image of the Infinite and Eternal in the varieties of things, and the fact that no substance, state, or object can ever occur in the created universe that is identical to another.

As Darwin argued, if given the right environment and if seeds or the like are present, they will grow wherever they can (expansion) for as long as they can (continuation) and produce an infinite variety of results from those seeds. It is like the whole universe with its expansion, continuation and variety. And it is like heaven that is also continuously expanding and continuing, and with joy as new angels are constantly joining the heavenly societies, providing increased variety. All the angels know that their society is strengthened by increased numbers and variety.

The Rev. Prescott A. Rogers
Waxhaw, North Carolina

Correction: In a letter from Richard Linquist in the March/April issue – *Golden Rule or Silver Rule?* – a sentence read: “Further, the words Golden Rule seem to me to be an appropriate reference to the love of the neighbor.” It should have read: “inappropriate.”

The Value of the New Church and Its Teachings

A Sermon by the Rev. Mark D. Pendleton

Lessons: *Revelation 21:1-5, Heaven and Hell 1, True Christian Religion*

People sometimes ask: “What is the New Church?” There are two answers I like to give:

First: The New Church is a nondenominational Christian religion that looks for and honors the goodness and truth in all faith and cultures, including agnostic and atheist.

Second: The New Church is a Bible-based Christian religion which utilizes the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as the lens through which it views the Bible.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born on January 29, 1688; and because of the place his theological writings hold in this particular brand of Christianity, some of us in the New Church will notice that date each year. When we do, we often think nice, appreciative thoughts toward Swedenborg, and also toward the Lord, for the work he did. It’s also not unusual for us to choose a topic of interest related to Swedenborg, his work, or this particular brand of Christianity as a point of focus for the Sunday message nearest his birthday.

So who was Swedenborg? What did he accomplish? And more importantly, how can the work he did impact our lives and the lives of others around us for good?

Before we start, the first part of what I’m sharing is nothing more than an intellectual construct – a way of seeing what Swedenborg himself believed, and one that others have adopted. But it may not resonate with everyone in or around the New Church.

Swedenborg was a 17th and 18th century Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian turned revelator, who claimed that for the last 27 years of

The important question is: how can, or how does, the work that Swedenborg did impact our lives and the lives of others around us for good? What value is there in being familiar with the teachings he shared with the world?

his life the Lord opened his (what he called) spiritual eyes, allowing him to be present simultaneously and fully conscious in both the physical and spiritual worlds.

He describes this action on the Lord's part as the greatest miracle of all time, which allowed him to write down detailed information about heaven and its wonders and hell, from all that he heard and saw. His work – *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* – is a definitive book about the afterlife, the likes of which the world has not seen before or since.

Based on Swedenborg's experiences and the knowledge he

gained about the Lord, how the spiritual world works, how the Lord governs the universe that He creates, the growth and development of the human spirit and psyche, etc., Swedenborg was able to unlock the deeper, spiritual level of meaning that people have always known exists in the Bible, though they haven't been fully clear on what that meaning is.

The existence and unveiling of the deeper level of meaning in Scripture may have been no great surprise to Swedenborg. Being a scholar of the Bible, he knew the Lord's forecast and promise that He would come to earth a second time: "I have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will lead you into all truth." (*John 16:12-13*) And in the *Book of Revelation* we read that the Son of Man is "coming on clouds with power and great glory . . . He is coming with clouds . . . and every eye will see Him." (*Revelation 1:7*)

Swedenborg understood these things to mean that the Lord would come again – not physically as He did in His first advent, but in a body of truth never before known on earth: a body of truth that would dispel the cloudiness in Old and New Testament Scripture and show forth the power and great glory of the Word of God for all in the world to see, understand and benefit from.

Swedenborg believed that this revelation, given from the Lord, through heaven, and founded on the Bible, was the beginning of the Second Coming of the Lord God Jesus Christ – a coming that would play itself out and be fulfilled in individual hearts, minds and lives – and also globally in collective humanity – as the truth of that revelation became known and lived by people and nations throughout our world.

Because of these things, Swedenborg referred to his books as “The Lord’s Advent.” In a couple of giveaway copies of his work, *Brief Exposition*, he wrote in his own hand, and in Latin: “*Hic liber est adventus Domini*” – “This book is the coming of the Lord.” And in the first paragraph of his work, *Heaven and Hell*, he wrote:

Church people these days (the mid-1700s) know practically nothing about heaven and hell or their life after death. . . . In fact, many who have been born in the church deny all of this. In their hearts they ask, “Who has ever come back to tell us about it?”

To prevent this negative attitude from infecting and corrupting people of simple heart and simple faith, it has been granted me to be with angels and to talk with them person to person. I have also been enabled to see what is in heaven and in hell, a process that has been going on for [a number of] years. I am now being allowed to describe what I have heard and seen, in the hopes of shedding light where there is lack of knowledge, and of dispelling skepticism.

The reason this kind of direct revelation is taking place today is that this is what the Coming of the Lord means. (*Heaven and Hell 1*)

Is what Swedenborg believed of his theological writings true? Is it possible? Is it possible that the Lord’s Second Coming would happen in a way and in a form *different* from what most if not all Christianity has been expecting for centuries?

Most of Christianity would answer this question: “Not a chance!” After all, Jesus said: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” Elsewhere He said: “False Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” And in Revelation we read: “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him or her the plagues that are written in this book.”

The way these statements have been traditionally understood, there is no way that a set of books or information given through a man like Swedenborg could be the beginning of the Lord’s Second Coming.

But what are we to think when a statement similar to the one in *Revelation* appears in *Deuteronomy 4*: “You shall not add to the word which I command you.” And in verse 12: “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it.” Which could mean that Jesus Christ Himself broke that command when He added deeper truths to Old Testament Scripture – truths that people weren’t yet ready to assimilate in Old Testament times. There must be something different that is meant by these warnings and commands that exist in both Old and New Testament Scripture.

It's interesting: when Swedenborg was questioned by Thomas Hartley, a few weeks before his death, "whether all he had written was strictly true, or whether any part or parts should be excluded," he answered: "I have written nothing but the truth."

And when the Rev. Arvid Ferelius visited Swedenborg and offered him communion a day or two before his death, he asked: "[Mr. Swedenborg,] is it to acquire a name, or for some other reason, that you have written your various writings? If so, retract them. You are celebrated enough, and if you have spoken lies, and remain in them, you cannot be saved."

Swedenborg answered: "As you see me here before your eyes, so true is everything I have written. When you enter eternity, you will see everything, and then you and I will have much to talk about." (I wonder how many people who are familiar with Swedenborg and his Writings would respond in a similar way if invited to go back on their own belief or assessment of things.)

Another thing I've wondered about is this: what must it have been like for people of the established Hebrew faith in Israel, at the time of the Lord's first advent, when confronted by the possibility that Jesus was the promised Messiah – especially when the nature of that advent was different than what they had expected for centuries? And yet over the course of time, 2.3 billion people – that's 31% of the world's population – have come to believe that Jesus Christ was and is the promised Messiah, resulting in the largest world religion bearing His name.

By this train of thought, if you were born and raised in the New Church, what would it be like for you if you had been born and raised in another Christian faith, and you were confronted by the idea that the Lord's Second Coming may have been initiated the way Swedenborg describes? And, as happened in traditional Christianity, Swedenborg maintained that eventually the New Church – not the church organization by that name, but a new era of Christianity – will one day fill the earth, in whatever ways it will happen, and whatever forms it will take.

But so far this message has been nothing more than an intellectual exercise – serving up one particular belief or perspective of who Swedenborg was and what he accomplished. So what? The more important question is: how can, or how does, the work that Swedenborg did impact our lives and the lives of others around us for good? What value is there in being familiar with the teachings he shared with the world?

Well in one sense these aren't easy questions to answer. Perceived usefulness and perceived value are individual things – like taste in music, artwork and decor. And we know that there are different religions, faiths and cultures in our world which exist as part of the Lord's providence, appealing to different personalities, dispositions and mindsets, with each one seeking to

lead its followers toward what is good, true and useful in life.

As a general rule, we can say that you can't love what you don't know. For example, you can't love cute, cuddly koala bears unless you know they exist. And the more you know about koalas, the more you can love them. The same is true of any person or thing in your life. The more you know about mom or dad, sisters or brothers, grandparents, friends, etc. – what they love, care about, desire in life, what they stand for, hope for, and long for – the more deeply you can love them.

Likewise, the more you know about the Lord, the life after death, and what makes a human spirit tick, the more you can appreciate and love the Lord, people and heaven. The more you know about how the Lord governs and gently leads us along a spiritual pathway, the better you can be in trying to lead and guide your own children, or to influence the lives of others around you for good.

The more you know about the kind of life that leads to true happiness, the better you can embrace that life and live it yourself. The more you know about faith and how it develops, the better you can cooperate with the Lord in the growth and development of your own faith. The more you know about marriage, and what makes for a good, happy marriage relationship, the happier and more productive your marriage can be.

The more you know about the Word of God, the more deeply you can trust and embrace it as a guide for your life, and the more richly you can be blessed by it. And the more you know that is true, the less you can be misled in your thinking and life choices, and the less you can be harmed by ideas that are false.

So, what is the value in the teachings given through Emanuel Swedenborg? Let me answer that with a series of questions:

What value is there in knowing that there is but one God in heaven whom we all worship – the God of love and wisdom, who Himself came on earth with but one purpose in mind: to walk the spiritual pathway that we all walk, and to make the same spiritual choices we all have to make, so that humankind's ability to choose between good and bad, right and wrong, could be preserved for all time?

What value is there in knowing that the Lord's church on earth is universal as well as specific – meaning that it's everywhere – and that being lifted up and

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The greater the amount and accuracy of knowledge that we have about the Lord, the Word of God, life on this earth, and life in the other world, the more deeply we can love.

“saved” from the effects of evil and sin is a possibility, not just for one group of people who adopt a particular mindset, but for all people the world over who believe in God, and who pattern their lives after genuine spiritual principles of truth? Wherever there is goodness and truth in a human heart, mind and life, there the Lord is.

What value is there in knowing that there is a life after death – a heaven and also a hell – what the beauty and landscapes and plants and animals are like in heaven, and exactly what happens in a day in the life of heaven?

What value is there in knowing that a good marriage on this earth doesn't have to end in the grave, but that it can continue and deepen in the other world forever; and that those who remain single in this life will find a suitable partner and soul mate in the other world if they wish and so choose?

What value is there in knowing that children who die in this world – of whatever faith or culture, and whether baptized into the Christian faith or not – aren't excluded from any part of heaven, but rather, are raised by angels in heaven until they themselves marry and discover their own heavenly home?

What value is there in being clear that the 10 Commandments of Old and New Testament Scripture haven't gone out of spiritual style or been abrogated, but are rock-solid, timeless principles which, when known and lived in the exquisite detail now available, can lead people and relationships to every form of goodness, love, wisdom and truth in life imaginable?

What value is there in knowing that true faith isn't about accepting what you don't yet see and understand, but rather adopting what you do see and understand, and remaining open to the rest until you are able to comprehend?

What value is there in knowing that the Lord's providence is in the smallest details of our lives, that nothing good or bad is allowed to happen by the Lord that good cannot and even will not come from it, and that everything that happens to us, no matter how sad or joyful, contributes to our eternal welfare and happiness?

What value is there in knowing that ignorance of the Lord (i.e., not knowing about Him) and the ways He wants us to live excuses us spiritually; that there are diseases of mind and body, and also traumatic experiences that we can go through, which temporarily suspend our freedom to choose in spiritual matters; and that if we experience any of these things, our equilibrium will

be restored when we get to the other world, and we will be able to make the choices then that we weren't able to make here on earth?

What value is there in knowing that only the Lord knows the hearts of all people, and that we can't possibly judge the eternal state of another

human being – let alone ourselves – because in order to do so, we would need to know all of the mental, emotional and living states of that person from the time they were born, all the way through to the end of their life on this earth, and on into forever; and only the Lord is able to do that?

What value is there in knowing that repentance isn't a word that has become outdated and passé, but rather, a God given, step-by-step process that helps us make and sustain any life change that we want or need to make, on the way to realizing our fondest hopes and dreams?

What value is there in knowing that spiritual rebirth (or "regeneration") isn't about arriving at perfection; rather, it's a day-by-day process of learning and growing in the Lord, with times of setback and going forward, coming to grips with mixed motivations, and the like, to the point that we end up loving our neighbors not just as much as ourselves, but even more than ourselves; and that it's a process that doesn't end in this world, but continues – along with deepening levels of personal clarity and happiness – forever?

Well, given the sheer amount of spiritual knowledge and information given by the Lord through Swedenborg, and arising out of the Bible, we could go on and on with examples like these, quite literally, forever.

So, what is the overriding value in all of this? I believe the overriding value is love, mercy, peace and goodness in life, in relationships, and in our world. Humanity can't love what it doesn't know. We can't fully pursue a goal that hasn't been clearly or fully stated and described.

The greater the amount and accuracy of knowledge that we have about the Lord, the Word of God, life on this earth, and life in the other world, the more deeply we can love. And the greater the amount and accuracy of spiritual knowledge that we have, the less we, and relationships we care about, and all of humanity, can be harmed by ideas that are simply not true, or that aren't fully accurate. False ideas cause hurt and harm individual lives and relationships.

The purpose of all knowledge and all truth is love and goodness in life and relationships. If it doesn't point and lead to love and goodness in life and relationships, then it isn't true, or at best it's only partially true. "Know the truth," Jesus said, "and the truth will set you free."

Truth is something that the Lord has wanted to give us from the beginning

The purpose of all knowledge and all truth is love and goodness in life and relationships.

of time; but in His love and wisdom He knew that He could only deliver it to humanity in stages – first in the Old Testament, then in His First Advent and New Testament Scripture, and finally and fully in His Second Advent.

“I have many things to tell you,” He said, “but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will lead you into all truth.”

Amen.



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Making Peace

A Sermon by the Dr. Andrew M. T. Dibb

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (*Matthew 5:17,18*)

Lessons: *Psalm 133:1-3; Matthew 5:17-26; Arcana Coelestia 9293*

It would be an understatement to say that we are living in challenging times. Of course, life in this world is always challenging. The world seems difficult because we are in it and have to deal with it. In today's world we are faced with conflict: the war in Ukraine

and other places, the conflicting ideas and opinions of our fellow citizens, and at times strife in our own families. Television and social media bring these conflicts to our consciousness, and we react to them. Our tendency is to take one side against another, causing the conflicts around us to become conflicts within us.

Conflict is never a good thing, but people can grow because of it. War may bring out the worst in some people who see it as an opportunity to vent their personal cruelty or hatred. But war also brings out the best in many people, those who find the opportunity to serve others by helping or protecting them. In a war, many people, military and civilian, are willing to lay down their lives for their friends. While some people see war as an excuse to do harm, others see it as a reason to defend and protect.

During a war each person, whether a soldier or civilian, is faced with a similar question: do I slip deeper and deeper into the spheres flooding out of hell, or will I use the opportunity to overcome those hellish spheres and take the opportunity to serve? Of course, we are not personally at war. We are blessed with peace in this country.

Conflict is never a good thing, but people can grow because of it.

However, in *Divine Providence* 251 there is a startling teaching:

There are lesser and greater wars, the lesser ones between property owners and their neighbors and the greater ones between the rulers of nations and their neighbors. The only difference between the lesser and the greater ones is that the lesser ones are limited by national laws and the greater ones by international laws. There is also the fact that in both cases the participants want to violate the laws, and that the lesser ones cannot, but the greater ones can, though still not beyond the bounds of possibility.

At some point in our lives, we will find ourselves in conflict; the question then is how do we grow through it? As individuals we have less influence over the development of the “greater wars” as the Doctrine describes them, but we have complete control over our own behavior in the “lesser ones.” In these “lesser wars” we are faced with the same questions a soldier has to answer in a “greater war”: do I use our personal conflicts as an excuse to vent negative feelings, or do I overcome them and seek to serve? The Lord addresses this three times in the *Gospel of Matthew*.

A familiar passage on how to deal with others who are in conflict with us is given in *Matthew 18:15-17*:

Moreover, if your brother trespasses against you, go and tell him about his fault between you and him alone: if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican.

In these verses the Lord lays out a process of what to do when someone had done something – has trespassed – against us. We are the person wronged. Reconciliation in this kind of situation rests on the willingness of the other person to be reconciled. When a person is willing it is a simple matter, a discussion of what transpired, with the person who “trespassed against us” and disrupted the relationship. If the person hears us, the transgression can be repaired; the person in the wrong admits that they were wrong and are willing to make peace.

The Lord acknowledges that not everyone is willing to make amends and repair their relationships. People dig in their heels, especially if they think they are right, and the other person is wrong. This adds fuel to the fire of the conflict, making it harder to resolve. The Lord laid out the steps to follow as the conflict intensifies: discuss it again with witnesses who hear both sides of the story.

If this intervention does not work, then the final effort is to take the conflict to the church to try to find a solution and forgiveness in the presence of the

Lord. If such a person still refuses to be reconciled, to remedy the wrong done, then there is little else one can do. While it is important to continue to wish well to the person, and to hope for eventual reconciliation, for the sake of peace, it would be worth it to steer clear of them.

Following the Lord's instructions in this teaching can be challenging. It is often hard to confront someone with their trespass, but at the end of the exercise there is a degree of satisfaction in saying "I've done everything I can" and leaving it at that. But have we done everything we can do?

In our perception of a conflict, it is often much easier to find the other person at fault, and at times it can be pleasant to tell them what their faults are, although that feeling may not come from heaven. The obvious danger in focusing on other people's trespasses is that it deflects our minds away from our own complicity in the conflict. Conflicts are seldom one-sided; by definition they happen between two people. It is easy to ignore our part in the conflict and exaggerate the other person's contribution.

We turn to the second teaching in *Matthew*. Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 7:3-5* the Lord asked the assembled crowd:

And why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your own eye; and then you shall see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye.

If we don't pay attention to our role and our contribution to the conflict, we may overlook important factors in it. The Lord's command to cast the beam out of our own eye is timeless. We all have "beams" in our eyes: these are our own issues, attitudes, habits, ways of acting and so on, that we are often blind to. These are parts of how we feel and think – part of our definition of who we

At some point in our lives, we will find ourselves in conflict; the question then is how do we grow through it? As individuals we have less influence over the development of the "greater wars" as the Doctrine describes them, but we have complete control over our own behavior in the "lesser ones."

Making peace is not always easy. It requires honest introspection and evaluation; it requires a willingness to let go of the thing in us that is causing the problem; it requires humility to apologize for what we may have done or said, or how we did it.

are. Over time these attitudes, habits and actions may become so ingrained from such habitual use that we no longer see them.

We turn to *Matthew 5:23,24*, this time toward the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, with the Lord introducing the need for self-examination:

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

What are the “gifts” we bring to the Lord’s altar? In some ways we share the activity with the ancient Jews: they approached the altar in the Temple with their sacrifices, and we approach the altar in our form of worship. In both cases the people are worshipping the Lord, conscious of what they are doing. The motions or rituals of worship have little effect if they are merely matters of the body. The Lord looks at our internals, He sees our motives in worship, so He has a complete picture of who we are and what we bring to worship.

One thing He would notice is if we have done something to harm or offend another person who has not harmed us. When we do that, we give the other person a reason to have a grievance with us, to want to retaliate. We become the person who needs to be spoken to, and if we will not hear, spoken to in front of witnesses or in the church.

It is not unusual to do things that others can hold against us. Most of us are spiritual works in progress and have things in our makeup that need to be removed or reordered. Perhaps this is why the Lord spoke these words at the end of His explanation of the fifth Commandment: You shall not kill.

This was and is a familiar teaching, but the Lord expands on the physical act of taking someone’s life. In the Sermon on the Mount He describes this Commandment as about our own mental attitudes and feelings, often expressed in actions that create conflict with others. The difference between this teaching and the Lord’s command to speak to someone who has trespassed against us, is that this time we caused the conflict.

Most people don’t kill others in the physical sense, but killing involves

many things that may not be physical, things that are much more common: anger at another person for some reason that exists only in our heads which leads to unprovoked attacks on another person. We can kill a person by harming their reputation through gossip or accusation; we can harm others by making them appear foolish for no reason. In each of the cases the Lord described, the person is diminished in the eyes of others. This is a more subtle form of killing others. Yet many times we feel justified in the things we say or do. It is not difficult to make excuses for why we are angry, and when conflict ensues, it is easy to blame the other person as the source of our anger.

Conflict is never good, but it can be useful if it leads to growth. The Lord told the crowd gathered on the mountain to hear Him to “reconcile” with those whom we have injured in some way. We can only do this in steps. First it is important to see and acknowledge that at times we are not victims, but perpetrators. A second step is to reflect on the effect of what we said or did to others. The final step is to make peace with the person. To “reconcile” with them is the process of making peace.

Making peace is not always easy. It requires honest introspection and evaluation; it requires a willingness to let go of the thing in us that is causing the problem; it requires humility to apologize for what we may have done or said, or how we did it. If reconciliation is to be real, we may need to work at it.

You may have noticed that I have worked backwards through the *Gospel of Matthew* to find the Lord’s teachings about dealing with conflict. In chapter 18 we read the Lord’s instructions on how to act when conflict comes to us. In chapter 7 we read about the need to remove a beam from our own eyes to see clearly to remove the mote from someone else’s eye. Finally in chapter 5 we are told to look inside ourselves to see what we have done to cause another person harm. We began with the conflict outside of us and ended with ourselves as the source of conflict.

What would happen if we reversed that order? If we approach life with an effort not to give others a reason to be angry with us? If we could approach the Lord’s altar reconciled to those around us? This would take some self-

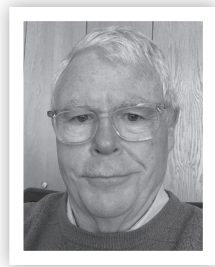
There are many conflicts that we cannot control . . . but there are conflicts we do have some control over, for we can control what we say and do, and when we harmonize our feelings, thoughts and actions with what the Lord teaches, we will eventually have peace.

examination; we would see the beam in our own eyes as a barrier to being able to work with others. As we let go of our self-concerns, so it becomes easier to interact with others, so that when someone does something to us, we do not respond with anger, but instead approach the other person with a firm intention to reconcile.

There are many conflicts in this world that we cannot control, especially the “greater wars” spoken of in *Divine Providence*. But there are conflicts, the “lesser wars,” where we do have some control, for we can control what we say and do, and when we harmonize our feelings, thoughts and actions with what the Lord teaches, we will eventually have peace and experience the words of the Psalmist:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
(The more we acknowledge that good is from God,
the more we feel we are ourselves and are free)

AMEN



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“Choose for Yourselves This Day . . .”

Reflections on Divine Love and Sensing Life as Our Own

The Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough

Part II

Spiritual rebirth and growth are slow and gradual – like a tree growing – partly because the Lord bends rather than breaks our deeply felt assumptions. For instance, He does not break

the basic attitudes a person acquires from early childhood, but bends them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1255) The Lord is never willing to destroy quickly, still less immediately, the worship implanted in someone since earliest childhood. He is unwilling to destroy it because it would be an uprooting and so a destroying of the deeply implanted feeling for what is holy . . . a feeling which the Lord never crushes but bends. (*Ibid.* 992.4)

The Lord’s bending, not breaking, is described in many passages, illustrating His merciful adaptations to personal freedom – with both good and evil people: He bends toward heaven one whom He foresees will allow himself to be led freely toward good. And He provides that

if he would not allow himself to be led in freedom toward heaven, he could still be bent toward a milder hell. (*Ibid.* 3854.2)

This preservation of freedom shows Divine love for others outside Himself, even in hell, and His desire to give them feeling and perception of life as their own – despite their frightful abuses. (For more on “intermediary stages of permission” in hell, see *Spiritual Experiences* 193-195.)

More from Scripture

Some of the clearest illustrations of the Lord's love for human freedom are found in how He dealt with the disciples' quarrels about who will be greatest in God's kingdom. Rather than sternly rebuking their self-centered arguments, He deepened their understanding of heaven. Once He simply brought a child into their midst, to show humility as great in heaven – leaving the disciples free to reflect and see the truth on their own, as of themselves. (See *Matthew 18:1-10; 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 9:46-48.*) Similarly, His counsel “*if your brother sins against you*” offers wise advice for settling human conflicts, through freedom, rationality, reflection and sensible decision-making among people who have differences. (See *Matthew 18:15-17*)

The Old and New Testaments often encourage us to make wise free decisions – sometimes dramatically, as when the prophet Elijah once asked: “How long will you falter between two opinions? *If Jehovah is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.*” (*1 Kings 18:21*) Much earlier, Moses had explained the nature of the Israelites' free choice in detail, and in a lengthy speech told them:

I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.
(*Deuteronomy 30:19*)

And Joshua told a later generation of Israel:

Now, therefore, fear Jehovah, serve Him in sincerity and in truth. . . . And if it seems evil to you to serve Jehovah, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served . . . or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.” (*Joshua 24:14-15*)

In later years Israel asked for a king. Jehovah told Samuel to show the people why this would be bad and was a rejection that God Himself “*should rule over them.*” But despite Samuel's instruction the people still wanted a king. So God told Samuel: “*Heed their voice and make them a king.*” (*1 Samuel 8*) Jehovah did not tolerate idolatry or worship of other gods, or other sins against the Ten Commandments, but in this case He allowed them their wish, “*that we may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.*”

The Lord was allowing their bad free choice, which defined the life they wanted. He was tolerating that “*they have not rejected you [Samuel], but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.*” (*1 Samuel 8:7*) As the Writings explain about the most ancient people, when a person wants to lead himself and sets his heart on his own eternal life, he “is already in evil, and it is granted.” (*Arcana Coelestia 139, 151, 161*)

The Gospels show how the Lord dealt with many human situations, including sinners and hypocrites. He certainly could sternly rebuke evil practices when this was needed: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*” (Matthew 23) And He cast the moneychangers out of the temple. (John 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; Matthew 21:12-13) Sometimes evil must be bluntly defrocked and publicly condemned if people are to be in a free state.

Often Jesus’ response was not as expected. When He was asked, as rabbi, to settle a family inheritance quarrel, He saw in the rich young man a common human desire that God speak out and settle disagreements, through some clear and direct command that everyone will accept – end of story. But Jesus said to him: *“Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”* He warned against covetousness and living for the sake of possessions, and then told the parable of the rich fool. (Luke 12:13-21) This story urges us to solve our quarrels and upsets as if of ourselves, using rationality and freedom, by reflecting and deciding wisely in light of the Lord’s teachings.

Similarly, when Martha complained to Jesus about her sister Mary, He sympathized, *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.”* And He observed: *“One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”* Then He let the harried Martha reflect. (Luke 10:38-42) If you look closely at later interactions (John 11:1-44; 12:1-8), I think you can see Martha has learned from Jesus’ words.

“Go and sin no more,” He told the woman taken in adultery. (John 8:11) Much could be said about this remarkable incident. I’ll just note that Jesus’ words seem to model a call to actual repentance, with maximum opportunity for the sinner to change. He certainly did not condemn or threaten her, but also did not say she was forgiven. We have no idea how she lived after Jesus called her to go and sin no more.

The Old and New Testaments illustrate that Divine love wishes to preserve people’s perception of life as their own, by making free decisions. Seeing this principle at work . . . shows that His love preserves the sensation of self-life, permitting even really horrible decisions, by allowing time and opportunity to reflect and choose.

After He was arrested and beaten, Jesus was blindfolded and hit in the face, and then asked to prophesy and say, “*Who is the one who struck you?*” (Luke 22:64) From *John 1:47-50* we know that He could see beyond a purely natural vision. He could have answered the guards’ challenge that He “*prophesy,*” and told who struck Him. His refusal to do so, like His refusal to stop His arrest, torture and crucifixion, illustrated His wish to protect the spiritual freedom of the guards, and of observers and bystanders. How would they have reacted to a miraculous answer from Him that demonstrated supernatural Divine power? How would Divine miracles have affected the freedom and rationality of the many different people in surrounding crowds? (See *True Christian Religion 501; Divine Providence 130, Arcana Coelestia 10751.*)

Our Lord on earth knew well the tenacious, deep-rooted persistence of evil on earth. He even warned, “*It is impossible that no offenses should come.*” (Luke 17:1) These words accept the reality of ongoing evil, and so He also gave the realistic warning:

“Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Matthew 18:7)

“ . . . but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.” (Luke 17:1-2; echoed in 22:22)

Far from suggesting that all offenses must stop immediately (or that somehow they are OK because they happen), He seriously warned any listener about the personal dangers of willfully becoming an instrument of evil against others.

And with Judas

Think especially about how He dealt with Judas Iscariot. *Please read and reflect on Matthew 26:20-25.* Hold in mind the drama of the exchange here. Judas had already agreed to betray Jesus (*Ibid. 26:14-16*), and he now saw that Jesus knew this. Probably testing Jesus, he asked Him: “*Rabbi, is it I?*”

Jesus could have replied many things, but He simply said, “*You have said it.*” What were these words saying to Judas, and how do you think Jesus looked, and spoke, as He said them? What would you have said to the traitor about to commit perhaps the greatest sin in history?

Rather than rebuking or condemning Judas to his face, or calling to mind the far-reaching good that He (Jesus) was doing, or warning him how awful the betrayal would be, or speaking about the real importance of His passion, or just ignoring the question, or any of many other possible replies, Jesus responded without anger, almost passively. In effect He simply tossed the issue

back to Judas – to let him consider if he would really do the deed, or not. “*You have said it*” sees the deed as still not done and throws back to Judas the question of going through with it. Judas still needed to decide what he would actually do or not do. Jesus didn’t even hint at how the betrayal would affect Himself.

It was evidently soon after this exchange that Jesus also said to Judas, “*What you do, do quickly.*” (John 13:27) Perhaps Jesus said this partly to keep the betrayal a short event, and less likely to grow into a violent struggle with injuries to many. I do not see clearly the full impact of these words on Judas. But like “*You have said it,*” they give the question back to Judas, to think about what he was actually going to do or not do. They are not words of outrage or threat, and again with a neutral tone they keep responsibility on Judas himself, letting him think more about what he will choose to carry out.

Why didn’t the Lord tell Judas a brief parable, as He often did for those whom He left to consider an important question? Probably because He well knew Judas’s state of mind was in no position to think rationally about some new teaching. Judas needed not more ideas, but a presence of mind to focus on essential realities, to decide if he would “*deliver*” Jesus to the chief priests.

The Old and New Testaments illustrate that Divine love wishes to preserve people’s perception of life as their own, by making free decisions. Seeing this principle at work – especially in Jesus’ interactions with people – shows that His love preserves the sensation of self-life, permitting even really horrible decisions, by allowing time and opportunity to reflect and choose.

The Lord desires to be loved by man as if it were from man himself. . . . For Divine love consists in this, that it wishes what belongs to itself should belong to a human being; and this would not be the case unless he felt and perceived that what is from the Lord is, as it were, his own. If it were not from a Divine law, that a person from sensation and perception should have no other idea than that life is in himself, a person would have no purpose for the sake of which to act; he has such a purpose, however, because the goal from which he acts seems to be in himself. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1138.5-6)

This principle separates the New Church from traditional Christian Churches.

Catholics and Protestants (also Judaism) hold up good and right living as higher goals than free decision, I believe. In general, Catholicism makes Catholic worship, works and conduct to be top religious priorities. To their credit, Catholics have become much more sensitive to individual freedom in diverse North America, than in their earlier history, when in many lands they have held a monopoly religion.

The basic use of a New Church priest is not to ensure or control proper behavior, but to foster free, informed, rational decisions by every person, through clear knowledge of the Word and the Lord's teachings about living.

Many Protestants would make faith, freely accepted or not, as the top goal. Some fundamentalists place their church's moral code above, as a higher goal than the individual's personal rational and freely chosen decision to follow the Lord. Conversion experiences are spoken of as free, yet the emotional pressures that often surround them, especially during revival meetings, appear to work against authentic free-will decision.

In their efforts to convert, Mormons often seem insensitive about preserving free, rational decisions. Under Mormonism systems are likely to be set up quietly, to watch and correct the unwanted behavior of new

converts, and to ensure full adherence to the church. As for the liberal wings of Protestantism, a broad, open tolerance and freedom for all have been growing steadily in the last century. Yet we may question if this comes from the Lord's love of human beings, or from loss of faith in Scripture and traditional moral values, and acceptance of today's idol of non-discrimination.

In contrast, the basic use of a New Church priest is not to ensure or control proper behavior, but to foster free, informed, rational decisions by every person, through clear knowledge of the Word and the Lord's teachings about living. From God's Word we must preach true repentance (the first of the church in a person, *True Christian Religion* 510), living a life of doing good, and faith as acceptance of the truth. Our goal is not to force agreement and compliance with what we see in the Word, but to encourage a person's free thought, reflection, and rational, informed decisions for life and belief.

If we focus primarily on people's actions and behavior, I ask seriously if we are loving them less as humans than as animals. Animals **do not** have life that is really their own. They cannot choose to become something different inside themselves, though they can certainly be trained and led into good behavior. They lack rationality and free will in spiritual things, and lasting life of their own. If our highest love of our neighbors is focused on people's behavior and actions, and not on their ability to will, think and make free choices, so as to enjoy a life as their own – then I think we are loving them as we love animals.

Love for animals is real and usually good, but it is a lower love than the human love of other people that the Lord wishes to instill in us. Sometimes I

wonder if people enjoy loving animals so much because animals' freedom is more restricted than human freedom. Loving human beings entails serious challenges in dealing with human free will, as we seek to love all our neighbors, including our “enemies.” (*Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27*)

So many practical questions come to mind. Let me note a few – for clergy, and also for lay men and women:

- Do we treat others with a real love for their freedom to understand and will in their own way? Do others feel we respect their questions and thinking?
- What levels of patience do we need in presenting Divine truths to those who may not now accept them – or who may lean toward believing, yet with doubts?
- Does our zeal for the Lord's truth hurt a listener's free as-of-self thinking? Did Jesus'?
- Should we assume that “New Church” people we talk with accept all the doctrines?
- Do we encourage others to reflect before accepting new ideas? (*Arcana Coelestia 7298, 7812*) Do we allow for disagreements, and listen, before responding? Do we take the time and effort to reflect sincerely on what others say to us?
- How can we encourage free response in individuals, as of themselves, as we discuss very tough personal issues with them – e.g., priests deciding whether to perform a wedding?
- How do we make freedom and thinking as-of-self a top goal in bringing up children and teens?
- Can we cooperate with people with whom we have significant differences of opinion? How serious must a disagreement be to prevent our working together? How do we judge the seriousness of different beliefs about doctrine and life as we work with others?
- How should a meeting balance the need for an efficient vote on X,Y or Z, with the group's need for a free, open, rational, well-informed interchange? How do we balance the need for decision with the value of consensus?

The more we are reborn and grow spiritually, the more fully we acknowledge our dependence, and that every good and truth is from God – and the more we feel our own freedom and individuality.

God gives us to feel self-life not just as a waystation or steppingstone until we become heavenly, and then give up living a life that we perceive and sense as our own. Indeed, regeneration is not so much an end in itself, as the means by which full perception of heavenly goodness is granted to us – sensed as our own life.

- How do we make sound church policy in controversial areas while knowing that some people may continue to disagree? In practical terms, what makes consensus? And in seeking consensus, how long should policy decisions be delayed?

Spiritual rebirth (regeneration) increases the sensation of self-life

Feeling life as our own is not just something the Lord allows as a necessity, so that we will be free to choose heavenly goodness. Actually, regeneration and a human perception of belonging to the Lord do not diminish our feeling of self-life but increase it. The more we are reborn and grow spiritually, the more fully we acknowledge our dependence, and that every good and truth is from God – **and** the more we feel our own freedom and individuality:

The more closely a person is conjoined with the Lord, the more distinctly does he appear to himself to be his own person [suus], and the more clearly does he recognize he is the Lord's. (*Divine Providence* 42)

Conjunction with the Lord causes a person to appear to himself free and so to be his own person [suus], and the closer the conjunction with the Lord, the more free he is, and so the more his own person. He appears to himself more and more distinctly to be his own person because Divine love wills what it has, to be another's, thus to be a person's or angel's. This is the nature of all spiritual love, especially Divine love. This is why the Lord never compels. (*Ibid.* 42-43)

The more distinctly a person appears to himself to be his own person, however, the more clearly does he recognize that he is the Lord's. (*Ibid.* 44)

God gives us to feel self-life not just as a waystation or steppingstone until we become heavenly, and then give up living a life that we perceive and sense as our own. Indeed, regeneration is not so much an end in itself, as **the means** by which full perception of heavenly goodness is granted to us – sensed as our own life. Truly our Lord does love us who are outside Him (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 49), and it is as non-Divine beings that He joins us closely to Himself and makes us happy from Himself. (*True Christian Religion* 43) This purpose of creation succeeds as far as we freely accept, in life and in faith, that everything good and true are from Him, and are His.

Yes, the more we acknowledge that good is from God, the more we feel we are ourselves, and are free. Although counter intuitive and paradoxical, this is true. And this answers the belief of many people (for example, both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky) that to be a good Christian, a person must seek to eliminate the self, the ego, the I, or whatever increases a human’s sense of himself. (See Appendix 4.)

In conclusion let us recall two sayings of the Lord that model non-pressured freedom, while still asking us to decide. Note both the invitation and its gentle, welcoming tone:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me. (*Revelation* 3:20)

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened. (*Luke* 1:9-10)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Background of this study

This paper (original version written in 2015 for the Council of the Clergy) grew out of a series of discussion-classes on the “Faith of the New Heaven and the New Church in its specific form.” (*True Christian Religion* 3; see also *Brief Exposition* 43, 111.3, 117; *Conjugal Love* 82, 340.3, 525.3; *Specimen & Sketch* 10):

1. God is one, in whom is the Divine trinity, and He is the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ.
2. Saving faith is to believe in Him.
3. Evils should not be done, because they are of the devil and from the devil.

4. Goods should be done because they are of God and from God.
5. Moreover, these things ought to be done by a person as of oneself; but he should believe that they are from the Lord acting with him and through him.

A recent translation of the 5th point:

We must do these things as if we ourselves were doing them, but we must believe that they come from the Lord working with us and through us. (*Jonathan S. Rose, in New Century Edition*)

These five points show both how the New Church relates to traditional Christianity and how it differs.

The 5th point especially opens up key distinctive New Church principles, centering on human freedom and the appearance that we live of ourselves. Only God truly lives, lives from Himself. We are recipients, receptacles of life from Him. Every human is continually given power

to feel and to perceive as if life were in himself; and because he is in that state, he is also in freedom, and has the faculty of acting as from himself . . .

He is constantly kept in the feeling and perception of life as if it were from himself; and also by that means he is constantly kept in the freedom of choosing the one or the other [the delight of good and truth or the delight of evil and falsity], and kept in the ability to receive the one or the other. (*Apocalypse Explained 1148.2,3*)

Note the close link – in fact the identity – between perceiving life as in oneself, and the freedom of choosing between good and evil.

What does this 5th point mean concerning God’s purposes in loving us and in allowing evil? And what does it imply about our own directions and purposes in loving different neighbors?

Appendix 2 – Could God be speaking falsely to us?

In theory, God could give us the **feeling** that life is our own, but not actually allow us free choice. He could control our life His way, still allowing us to **feel** we are free to become what we choose. Maybe He **does** do this. Is God telling us the truth?

We do feel free, and the Word says we are free, in the Old and New Testaments and in the Heavenly Doctrines. If God really overrides our free will, by not allowing choices that go against heaven and His goodness; or if in the long run God overrides our free will and determines that we shall sooner or later accept His ways, then He essentially controls and decides, determines

by Himself, everyone’s human life and destiny.

If God does this, why does human life have so much pain and hardship? And why is there awful evil in the world, and a permanent hell? Also, if God lies to us about our free will, what else does He speak falsely about? God reveals Himself as the *I AM*, the very Truth itself, but can we have trust in

what He says? If He lies to us, He cannot be the Truth. Possibly God could be some kind of love or power or intelligence, but what He tells us might be dishonest, and we would have to rely on our own intelligence to distinguish between His truths and His falsities, because nothing in any “Divine revelation” would be trustworthy.

If we are to take God’s revelations as true and not fabrications, and accept God as truthful and not a liar, then the Word speaks the truth, and we are free, truly free. We are free not in all matters, but free in our will and understanding; these are our essential life, and live forever. (*True Christian Religion 497-498*) The main reason we are free is God’s wish that we enjoy a life that we feel “belongs” to us, a life we sense as our own, by receiving His love and His wisdom in ourselves.

The more we
acknowledge that
good is from God, the
more we feel we are
ourselves, and are free.

Appendix 3 – Two important responses to God’s gift of life

Freedom applies throughout human life, and we are always free to change, improve and grow – whatever our spiritual state. At any age we can change (and likely will) – usually not suddenly or dramatically, but change is possible. May we thank God for freedom and our sensation of self-life by continuing to seek to change wisely. This is an obvious **first response** to the Divine gift of our feeling of self-life and freedom.

The Heavenly Doctrines teach a great deal about a **second response** to God’s gift of life and freedom. In summary, we are urged to acknowledge – truly believe and accept – that our free will is from the Lord, **and** that all good and truth that we feel and act from, are from Him, not from ourselves. (See **Appendix 1** above, about the 5th point in the Faith of the New Heaven and the New Church.) This truth is manifest.

So **how** can we acknowledge this in reality, not just with our lips? I have often wondered how this essential element of regeneration may become a reality inside us. I suggest:

- First: learn and think about it, understand and see it, when we read the Lord’s Word – that everything wise and loving comes from Him, not ourselves.

Of course, we need to preach the truth, and urge actual repentance and living by Divine precepts, but without forcing or insisting on immediate acceptance of our vision of truth. Respecting the lives and free decision of others is central to learning patience.

- Pray to God, with thanks, and ask for help, because we cannot do good or see truth on our own. Where else can we go for authentic love and wisdom? (*John 6:68*)
- Take part in worship and other spiritual activities, since they help us acknowledge that life and freedom are from our Creator.
- In daily life put out true effort to pursue the Lord's goodness and wisdom, repeatedly. When we purposefully make the effort to live as He wishes, it is His good that we do, and have in our lives. Deliberate on-going living from His wishes IS acknowledging all good is from Him.
- Turn away from evil and falsity, by NOT doing them – indeed FLEE from them. Rejecting evils acknowledges

that evil and falsity are from hell and do NOT belong to us. And this turns our motivations away from seeing self as our top priority, and reinforces our acceptance that everything good and true are from God.

- Enjoy the delights and happiness of goodness and give thanks to God with praise.

See **Appendix 4** on how our sense of life expands and increases as we use freedom wisely. This answers the old Christian dilemma (well expressed by Dostoevsky) that Christian teaching implies denying oneself; and this self-denial seems to negate enjoyment of our own life.

Appendix 4 – Does true discipleship diminish or increase the sensation of self-life?

Many have felt that Christianity demands a near-total diminishing of self, or even its elimination. In one sense it does, if the self is defined as centering one's life on self and pursuing goodness for self as our top goal. But *Divine Providence 42-45* and related passages show that the life we feel as ours is expanded and opened up, not restricted and shut down, by truly Christian life and faith.

Fyodor Dostoevsky expressed well a common Christian view of the need to put down and utterly reject the self. In his notebook, April 16, 1864, he wrote

shortly after the death of his first wife: “Life on earth would be meaningless” unless there is real personal life after death, with the possibility of “heavenly joy” from fulfilling God’s law, by “sacrifice” and love of others as we love ourselves.

Dostoevsky continues in his notebook:

To love your neighbor as yourself, according to Christ’s commandment, is impossible. The law of personality on earth prevents it. The I prevents it. Christ alone was able to do it, but Christ is eternal, an eternal ideal towards which man aspires and is bound to aspire according to nature’s law. And yet after Christ’s appearance as *an ideal of man in the flesh* it became as clear as daylight that the highest and last development of personality must (at the very end of its development, as the very point of achieving its goal) reach the point at which man will find out, realize and become convinced, utterly convinced, that *the greatest use a man can make of his personality, of the fullest development of his I, is in one way or another to destroy this I, to give himself up wholly to all and everyone, selflessly and wholeheartedly. And that is the greatest happiness....*

This is Christ’s heaven . . . But to attempt to achieve so great a goal is in my opinion absolutely senseless, if on the attainment of the goal everything becomes extinct and disappears, that is to say, if at the attainment of the goal there is no life for man.

Hence there is a future life in heaven . . .

Man on earth strives for an ideal which is contrary to his nature. When man does not carry out the law of striving for love for other people or another human being (Masha [his deceased wife] and I), he becomes aware of suffering and he calls this condition sin. Hence man is bound to suffer continuously and this suffering is balanced by the heavenly joy of the fulfillment of the law, that is, by sacrifice. This is where the earthly balance manifests itself. Otherwise life on earth would be meaningless. (Quoted in *Dostoevsky’s Occasional Writings*, David Magarshack translator and editor, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997, pp. 305-6)

A New Church view of this fundamental spiritual issue shows that the real spiritual growth of regeneration, acknowledging that all good and truth are God’s, actually **increases a feeling of identity and one’s own life**. (See *Divine Providence* 42-44) True Christianity does not take away life but enables it to grow and be sensed more fully as our own.

Related to this question, note how on His last night on earth the Lord did say we are totally dependent on Him for goodness and true life – yet He also showed that this dependence makes us fruitful, living, and happy – “*that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full*” –

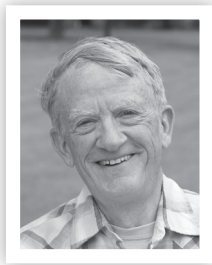
Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. . . .

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (*John 15:4-7,11*)



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

The Beautiful Vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem



The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

June is a time when New Church people around the world focus on the Second Coming of the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrine and the establishment of His New Church upon the earth.

Generations of New Church people have been inspired over the last 250 years by the beautiful vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven, as depicted by the apostle John in the book of Revelation: *“And he carried me away in the spirit on a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the Holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.”* (Revelation 21:10-11)

The description of the city's beauty includes it being made of pure gold as clear as glass, having a great wall of jasper surrounding it, a foundation of 12 precious stones, the tree of life in the midst bearing 12 kinds of fruit, a pure river of the water of life flowing through it, and 12 gates – each a giant pearl. Three gates faced east, three faced north, three faced south, and three faced west and they were always open, day and night. The vision painted is such that it makes you want to check it out and find a home there where you can live in safety and peace, and enjoy eternal happiness without any more tears and sorrow.

However, with this welcoming vision also comes a warning that we would be wise to pay attention to if we want to live in that Holy City after we leave this world. The welcoming features of the New Jerusalem are something that we all

rightly like to focus on in the New Church: those gates facing every direction, always open, and a continual invitation to come and see; but there is a warning that immediately follows which needs to be included:

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.
(*Revelation 22:14-15*)

Notice the Lord points out here that only those who do His commandments can enter through the gates into the city, but those who are actively loving and practicing evil remain outside. This connects with what the Lord consistently teaches in the vision of the New Jerusalem that He will “*give to everyone according to his work.*” (*Revelation 22:12*)

However, with this welcoming vision also comes a warning that we would be wise to pay attention to if we want to live in that Holy City after we leave this world.

Most likely there is a part in each of us, inspired by our proprium, which cries out: “this isn’t fair – it is exclusionary – it creates an ‘in-crowd’ and an ‘out-crowd!’” When Israel was complaining about suffering from the consequences of their poor choices and the idea of being responsible for their own actions, the Lord sent Ezekiel with this message: “*You say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?’*” (*Ezekiel 18:25*)

So how are the Lord’s ways fair? Why can’t everyone enter through the gates into the city? Why doesn’t everyone get to go to heaven? How is it a beautiful vision when people are excluded? These are really important questions to ask and to find satisfactory answers for ourselves, so that we will eventually want to be conjoined to the Lord because we see His compassionate love for us manifested in His system of perfect justice.

It comes down to the fact that the Lord cares about our freedom of choice and wants our choices to matter. If we all went to heaven regardless of our choices and the life we chose to live, then our choices wouldn’t really matter at all. If the Lord from pure mercy wiped out all our chosen evils against our will and dragged us into heaven, we would not be free.

We are told that “*instantaneous salvation out of mercy apart from means is the ‘fiery flying serpent’ in the church.*” (*Divine Providence 340*) This is because

it is like the dragon of faith alone, which tries to seduce us with the lie that we need merely to know the right things, but we don't actually need to live them. If we fall into the false belief that our choices don't matter, then life becomes a charade to us because we think that no matter how we choose to live it makes no difference in the end. In this construct, life would become meaningless and we would be miserable.

This is why the Lord always presents us with both sides of the story – so that we have the freedom to choose according to reason. He likes to start with an invitation and a welcome for us to come join Him and outlines all the happiness that comes from living according to His commandments and then warns us of the consequences of turning our back on Him, disobeying His commandments and bringing misery on ourselves.

Think of how He presents some of the works of His Second Coming. *Heaven and Hell* starts out with the beautiful section on heaven and its wonders and welcomes us into that life. Next comes a description of the world of spirits serving a great divide between them. And finally there is a disturbing description of hell and all its miseries. The book *Conjugal Love* starts out by describing the delights of wisdom relating to conjugal love between one man and one wife, but then finishes by outlining the horrific lusts and insanity related to scortatory love. By stark contrast, the Lord is encouraging us to choose wisely!

The same framework of learning by contrast holds true with the vision of the Holy City descending to earth. The beauty of a life in heaven is wonderfully described with the promise that it can even be like that here on earth in the New Church. The Lord warmly welcomes each one of us to enter through those open gates into the city from whatever direction we are coming from so that we may experience genuine happiness and peace – but He also warns us that just because the gates are open doesn't mean that everyone can come in and dwell there.

The city has high walls, strong foundations, and angel guards above the open gates. We're told that "by 'Jerusalem' is signified the church in respect to

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doctrine; by its 'wall,' protecting truths; by the 'gates,' introductory truths; and by the 'foundations,' the knowledges on which doctrine is based." (Apocalypse Explained 39:4) And *"that by 'angels' are meant Divine truths which are from the Lord."* (Ibid. 130:6) Further we are taught that *"the reason why by the same words are signified guards lest anyone enter into the church, unless he be in those knowledges from the Lord, is evident, because the angels were seen standing over the gates."* (Ibid. 900)

The angel guards are there for protection. Protection for the people who want to live peacefully in the city according to the Lord's laws of order without being persecuted; and protection for those who would risk entering a state of profanation by entering when they have no intention of living according to the commandments of the Lord. This is why newly arrived spirits who initially try to enter heaven have trouble breathing in that atmosphere and feel tortured and tormented.

Part of the beauty within this vision is seeing how the Lord in His mercy is looking out for the wellbeing of everyone. He extends the welcome to all people to come and see the wonders of the Holy City and invites them to enter through the open gates, while at the same time providing angel guards as watchmen to instruct them on the rules of the city and what happens to those who do not wish to follow them. As we read in *Isaiah*: *"I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace, day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."* (Isaiah 62:6-7)

We are told in the Word that *"by 'watchmen' are meant prophets and priests."* (Arcana Coelestia 8211:5) This is part of the role priests are supposed to perform in the New Church today. Telling people about the Lord, instructing them in the rules of His covenant, welcoming them to come and see the great things about the New Church, and warning them about the dangers that come from choosing to live in opposition to the Lord's commandments.

The Lord sent *Isaiah* with this warning: *"Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you."* (Isaiah 52:1) *In this passage we are told that by "Jerusalem" is meant "the spiritual church, into which what is 'uncircumcised,' that is, the 'unclean,' shall not enter."* (Arcana Coelestia 2039:5)

While on earth we don't have to be perfect, but we should want to come and investigate all the wonderful things the Lord offers to those who genuinely desire to be a part of His New Church. However, while the gates are open all the time, the Lord does give us parables, (like the five prudent and five foolish virgins), which urge us to be prepared for being conjoined to the Lord and not wait too long lest we come and find that the door has been shut.

We should have our hearts warmed by the vision of the gates being opened and facing every direction, but we would be wise to heed the warning that if we want to enter and dwell there permanently, then we must heed the laws of the Lord's kingdom and leave all our bad behaviors, evils and sins outside the walls.

Once we leave this world, we will have established our ruling loves, which is why the Lord said in giving the vision of the New Jerusalem: *"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is just, let him be justified still; and he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each according as his work shall be."* (Revelation 22:11-12)

He welcomes us with open arms and also instructs us about how we must live to dwell together in peace and harmony in heaven, and warns us of the consequences ahead of time if we use our free will to make choices against His Divine plans for us.

I pray we all can come to appreciate that the vision of the Holy City New Jerusalem is one which perfectly shows that the ways of the Lord are fair and just and that we can see His mercy shining through in every detail. May we all do our own small part in helping to establish His New Church upon the earth by heeding His warnings and eagerly accepting His invitation to come enter through the gates into the city.

The Lord says: *"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches; I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright and morning Star. And the spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' and let him who hears say, 'Come!' and let him who thirsts come; and he who wills, let him take the water of life freely."* (Revelation 22:16-17)

May we all do our own small part in helping to establish His New Church upon the earth by heeding His warnings and eagerly accepting His invitation to come enter through the gates into the city.

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A Demon in the Air

The Rev. Howard A. Thompson

If you haven't heard the term, you are at least familiar with the effects of cancel culture. One online dictionary defines cancel culture as: the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure. In this context canceling someone is the modern-day equivalent of ostracism. Of course, in the interest of maintaining proper order in society, some application of ostracism is useful even when the "offense" does not rise to the level of criminality.

There is, however, an ongoing debate these days about whether or not cancel culture has gone too far. In fact, an internet search of the question "has cancel culture gone too far?" will return enough articles, polls and studies to occupy even the fastest readers for a millennium. I will spare you a millennia of reading and simply note that too far or not, there is little question that the internet and social media have contributed substantially to the explosion of this practice. For all its benefits in communication and contributions to scientific study, the internet does seem to have a unique ability to tap into our more base inclinations.

The base inclination I am reflecting on these past weeks is that inclination the Lord so wonderfully pointed to in *Matthew 7:1-6*:

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, "Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye," when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

The Lord was pointing to our most human tendency to see as large the smallest faults in others while paying little heed to the glaring faults within

ourselves – a tendency that has only increased with the introduction of the internet and seems manifest in the phenomenon of cancel culture. The overuse of cancel culture seems also to be in stark contrast to these words concerning those in whom self-love exists and those with whom charity is present:

As a result they see in the neighbor nothing except his evil. Or if they do see anything good they either perceive it as nothing or else place a bad interpretation on it. It is altogether otherwise with those with whom charity is present. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1079)

Reflecting on the tendency to see evils in others, I was reminded of the opening scene from a favorite movie of mine. The year I graduated from high school (1983) *The Right Stuff* hit the theatres. An epic drama, *The Right Stuff* tells the story of the recruitment, training and first space flights of the first American astronauts. The opening scene, in black and white, is a pilot's view from an airplane speeding through the sky twisting and turning to avoid the clouds. Accompanying the visual images, a narrator's voice:

There was a demon that lived in the air. They said whoever challenged him would die. Their controls would freeze up, their planes would buffet wildly, and they would disintegrate. The demon lived at Mach 1 on the meter, 750 miles an hour, where the air could no longer move out of the way. He lived behind a barrier through which they said no man could ever pass. They called it the sound barrier. – Levon Helm as Jack Ridley, *The Right Stuff* (1983)

I find this opening a suitable vehicle to carry this important message about the nature of demons and (in the vernacular of the *Book of Revelation*) the dragon. The sound barrier is the large increase in aerodynamic drag an aircraft encounters when it approaches the speed of sound. Shortly after World War II, and propelled by the aeronautical advances achieved during the war, the race was on to break the sound barrier. This was, however, not without its challenges and

The Lord (points) to our most human tendency to see as large the smallest faults in others while paying little heed to the glaring faults within ourselves – a tendency that has only increased with the introduction of the internet and seems manifest in the phenomenon of cancel culture.

We are all too happy to identify demons that “live in the air.” But the question the Lord wants us to ask ourselves is: are we willing to identify the demons that live within?

more than a few men were killed flying the experimental aircraft designed to take them into uncharted territory. The danger was real, but the challenge of being the first and defeating the “demon” was intoxicating for the test pilots of the day.

Now, you may be reading this and saying: ‘No thank you. Putting my life at risk to push an unproven airplane a few kph faster than the last guy? Not for me!’ Put this challenge, however, in terms of fighting a demon, one that

lives out there, and now we jump at the chance. That’s what cancel culture is fueled by.

Most of us may be unwilling to take risks like a test pilot, but most of us are more than willing to see evil, demons and dragons in the world. More than willing to call them out and want to defeat them. It is actually quite easy to see these demons all around us if we are to be honest. Just watch the news and you will see sports stars, politicians and celebrities aplenty who seem to believe that the rules the rest of us follow just don’t apply to them. And evil is very much alive when we see young children go missing from their homes and pensioners scammed out of their nest eggs. We are all too happy to identify demons like these, demons that “live in the air.”

But the question the Lord wants us to ask ourselves is: are we willing to identify the demons that live within? You see, Swedenborg also writes of demons and dragons:

. . . dragons are reasonings that spring from self-love and love of the world, thus from desires for what is evil, which pervert not only truths but forms of good as well. These reasonings are produced by people who in their hearts repudiate the truths and forms of the good of faith, but affirm them with their lips because of their intense desire to obtain dominance and gain. (*Arcana Coelestia* 7293.5)

In the most general terms every evil in the world, every demon or dragon responsible for the evil in the world, has one source: selfishness or the love of self. And it is selfishness that embodies each of us; none of us is immune to its influence. It is the demon within, not the demon in the air, that the Lord is calling us to vanquish.

Evils cannot be set aside unless they come to light. This does not mean that we have to act out our evils in order to bring them to light but that we need to look carefully not only at our actions but also at our thoughts, at what we would do if it were not for our fear of the laws and of ill repute. We need to look especially at which evils we see as permissible in our spirit and do not regard as sins, for eventually we do them. (*Divine Providence 278a*)

I find this a most powerful passage for the two questions it asks us. First: what would I do if it were not for my fear of the laws and of ill repute? Second: which evils do I see as permissible? It is the demon within, not the demon in the air, the Lord is calling us to vanquish.

But you are not evil, you're not a bad person who seeks to do evil, to commit sins against God. And that is the point, that is the manner in which the demon operates. The demon's greatest trick is to get you to do evil, all the while thinking that you are doing good or at least thinking that you are justified in the evil you do.

As individuals we will never vanquish the evil operating in another person, "the demon in the air." But we can, with the Lord's help, vanquish the demon within.

One concluding observation: I have read enough biographies about test pilots and early astronauts to know that, to a man, they have spent considerable time vanquishing the demons within in their quest to vanquish the demon in the air. The mental aptitude, attention to detail and coolness under pressure required of these pioneers demand a high degree of internal work. While not necessarily spiritual work, it is as close as one can get without calling it such.

As individuals we will never vanquish the evil operating in another person, "the demon in the air." But we can, with the Lord's help, vanquish the demon within.



The Rev. Howard A. 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

Update on the New Church Teacher Competencies Program

R. Scott Daum
Assistant Coordinator of New Church Schools

A couple of years ago I submitted an article, *A New Project at General Church Education*. It described the beginnings of what we here at General Church Education have been calling the *New Church Teacher Competencies Program (NCTCP)*.

The original goal of the project was to create a pathway to career level status in the General Church Teacher Career System for teachers who wanted to teach in the system but were not able to attend the Bryn Athyn College's Education Division program and had not had a systematic exposure to the New Church teachings beyond the high school level. Essentially, we were hoping to provide new teachers with a robust exposure to New Church educational philosophy.

The uses of the program have since expanded. It now serves as a resource to emerging schools overseas; some of our North American school administrators are using pieces of the existing program as professional development modules with their experienced faculties; and in a few instances portions of the program have been shared with parents new to New Church education.

We started building the program by using the work people like Carol Buss, Jill Rogers, Kay Alden, Eric Carswell, and others had done in developing a plan for New Church Certification. Their efforts provided an invaluable foundation for the topics we have covered and hope to cover. So let me share with you what's been done so far, some of the things that are in the works, and thoughts about the future.

We have produced 13 videos on a variety of topics, briefly described below. In addition, Angela Rose has given us permission to share her wonderfully revised and edited version of Bishop George de Charms' *The Philosophy of New*

Church Education. We are suggesting to administrators that faculties could read this as a focal point of a group study.

While I am sharing the links to the 13 videos, I must note that these are not professionally produced pieces, especially the ones I have created myself. Because I am retiring at the end of June, I have rushed to put the ideas together without much attention to making them palatable to the viewer. (In other words they are likely to put you to sleep if you were to view them, or maybe I should simply say that they are boring.)

As I explained to the current school administrators: “I am happy to have gathered all this material into one place. So you know, I view it as raw material for an upcoming work. My hope is that you will add to the collection and ultimately refine it into a more polished and useful product.” The clock has been my key enemy along with a lack of technological skill, and as it’s turned out, I have done about three-quarters of what I had hoped to accomplish at this point. Let’s blame COVID for some of this failure.

Before I share a blurb about each of the videos, here’s one final note about the ones I produced. The ideas within each were strongly influenced by three of the best New Church educational thinkers in the organization’s history: Bruce Glenn, Bishop Willard Pendleton and Bishop George de Charms. For the most part, I am simply summarizing their thoughts.

To the description of and links to the videos:

The first two are more like prerequisites to the program. Our office suggests to administrators that they use the ideas presented when interviewing someone for a teaching position who has not attended Bryn Athyn College’s Education Division. They are presented as Parts 1 and 2 of a two-part presentation, addressed to prospective teachers or to parents new to New Church education.

The first one is an introduction to the core beliefs of the New Church. It notes that we are a Christian faith that views the Old and New Testaments and theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg as our religious authority and source of spiritual enlightenment. It covers our belief in one God, not three, and touches on the topics of the afterlife, judgment, spiritual growth, salvation, the internal sense of the Word, and marriage.

The second video is an introduction to New Church education. In describing what it is, I share three different definitions that have been popular over time, while highlighting why our church has placed such an emphasis on its brand of education.

I stress two traits of a New Church teacher. The first is that New Church teachers take an “eternal view” of education as they see every child as a potential angel. This leads them to take the development of spiritual character very seriously, with a primary goal of providing a knowledge of God and encouraging an acknowledgement of Him. The second trait is that a New

Church teacher is committed to developing a New Church or Swedenborgian lens through which they deliver their teaching.

These videos will be available on General Church Education's YouTube channel in the near future.

Part 1 **Core Beliefs of the New Church** (19 minutes)

Part 2 **Introduction to New Church Education** (24 minutes)

Introduction to the New Church Teacher Competencies Program, Part 1
(29 minutes)

The next two links are parts 1 and 2 of a series that is acting as an introduction to the program. The first part focuses on aspects of the human design that make it possible for us to be educated, particularly the will and understanding. It covers some of the trines of New Church theology, like love-wisdom-use and end-cause-effect, with some application to education, and it contrasts a secular definition of education with one from Bishop George de Charms.

Introduction to the New Church Teacher Competencies Program, Part 2
(28 minutes)

The second part briefly introduces the concepts of memory, remains, hereditary tendencies, influx and conscience, and explores passages from the Writings in which teachers are mentioned and which provides direction to the work we strive to do in the classroom. Finally, it summarizes the key points of both parts of the series.

Conscience (33 minutes)

This link connects to a video Jeremy Irwin, Principal of the Academy Boys School, created for the program. He has put together a thorough, thoughtful and delightful piece on conscience, what it is, and its important place in the framework of New Church education.

Classroom Worship (18 minutes)

This link leads to a video Rebekah Russell, Coordinator of General Church Schools, created. In it she reviews the reasons why we have classroom worship and provides resources to assist teachers in leading it. She offers tips for setting up an altar, creating a sphere of worship, along with step-by-step directions for leading an age-appropriate worship service in the classroom.

Influx, the Soul-Mind-Body Connection, and Information Processing
(59 minutes)

This link connects to a video which explores how we process information, what's going on in the mind during the learning process or in the process of making a judgment. The Writings offer some important glimpses into the spiritual dimension of these processes which involve the interplay of influx, the soul, mind and body.

Habits: A New Church Educational Perspective (53 minutes)

This link is to a video titled *Habits: A New Church Educational Perspective*. Are we creatures of habit? Is that a good or a bad thing? To what degree do our habits influence our destiny? To what degree do they affect others? This video tries to define habits and discusses how they are formed and their relevance and role in education. The thesis of the presentation is that “we are created and recreated by means of habits.”

Knowledge (33 minutes)

This link connects to a video titled *Knowledge*. Swedenborg clearly says that it's not what we know that gets us into heaven, and yet he says that nothing is more important for us than to know what is true. In this program we discuss what the Writings have to say about knowledge, focusing on its essential purposes and function. It would be best viewed after watching *Introduction to New Church Education*, the two introductory segments to the program, and the segment on *Influx, the Soul-Mind-Body Connection and Information Processing*.

Innocence (30 minutes)

This link leads to a video titled *Innocence*. Innocence has always been a key component in New Church educational philosophy. What is it? What isn't it? And why has it played such a prominent role in our system? It would be best viewed after the segment on *Knowledge*.

The Stages and States of Human Development (38 minutes)

This link is to a video titled *The Stages and States of Human Development*. It provides a general survey of what Swedenborg has to say about Infancy, Childhood, Youth, Adulthood and Old Age. It also offers a high-level review of Bishop de Charms' book *The Growth of the Mind*. It would be best viewed after the segment on *Innocence*.

How Do I Build a New Church Course or Unit? (29 minutes)

This link is to a video titled *How Do I Build a New Church Course or Unit?* In it we review Professor Bruce Glenn's definition of New Church education, how it ties with the previously discussed concept of developing and imparting a New Church lens or world view, and this in conjunction with curriculum, course and unit development. We also share a fundamental principle on curriculum development from Bishop Willard Pendleton and the Doctrinal Framework sections from three units from our curriculum database.

Discipline in the Context of Love (One hour and 22 minutes)

This final link connects to the recording of a program Dr. Saul Fisher, a highly regarded clinical psychologist, and I gave in Glenview in May of 2017. The title is *Discipline in the Context of Love*. In the video we are talking to parents, but the concepts are applicable to the classroom management. I provide a religious framework for Dr. Fisher's "Do's and Don'ts of Discipline."

That's what we have so far, and more is coming. The Rev. Eric Carswell is working on a segment which focuses on remains, and he's had thoughts about an update of Bishop de Charms' *Growth of the Mind*. I believe the Rev. Brett Buick would like to do a segment on correspondences.

Topics I had hoped to cover in the context of classroom management were freedom, responsibility, obedience, self-compulsion, as-of-self, proprium and mediate good. I may or may not get to these myself, but all the pieces are in the capable hands of Rebekah Russell, Greg Henderson, and the administrators of General Church Schools and the Academy of the New Church. I know they are making plans for next steps and look forward to seeing what unfolds.

R. Scott Daum is retiring on June 30 as Assistant Coordinator of New Church Schools. He had previously been a longtime English teacher, basketball coach and Principal in the Academy of the New Church Boys School. He and his wife, Chara (Cooper), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: Scott.Daum@newchurch.org

The New Church Career Network: Helping People Where It Matters

By Aaliya Gunther

Growing up I remember many times hearing the quote from the beginning of the *Doctrine of Life*: “All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.” This always struck a chord with me; religion isn’t just about what you know and believe, it’s about how you live.

At times, though, I felt myself losing sight of this idea between attending church and going to religion classes throughout my education. This church has a lot of vocabulary words and abstract concepts that can be hard to wrap my head around sometimes. Because of this, I often found myself associating religion more with intellectual discussion and college classroom exams than living a useful and meaningful life.

I believe this experience is shared by many of the younger people in and around our church today. It seems to me that much of this generation is looking for concrete guidance and tangible support in their lives. The good thing is that our church has many incredible teachings that can help us provide this exact kind of support, and I believe that the New Church Career Network (NCCN) is a perfect example of applying New Church teachings to provide concrete help to young adults.

For the last two years I have served as the network coordinator for the NCCN. When I came on board, we were still trying to figure out what exactly

I believe that the New Church Career Network is a perfect example of applying New Church teachings to provide concrete help to young adults.

Our mission is to facilitate meaningful connections between young adults and New Church professionals to support them as they pursue their use.

we wanted it to be. My husband helped me investigate some of the teachings the Writings give us about working and occupations. We landed on two quotes that seemed to provide the perfect foundation for this new initiative.

The first is from *True Christian Religion* 422: “Charity itself is to act justly and faithfully in the office, business and employment in which one is engaged.” This is a powerful statement. One of the most fundamental teachings we have about

how to live a heavenly life centers on simply doing one’s job.

The second passage is *Doctrine of Life* 25 which lays out a progression we are all supposed to go through where we develop an interest in something which leads us to learn more about it until it becomes a profession to which we dedicate ourselves.

These two passages make it clear that the Lord wants us to love what we do, and He wants us to be able to do our work well. This central aspect of spiritual life is what the New Church Career Network strives to support and facilitate for young adults in our church.

Our mission is to facilitate meaningful connections between young adults and New Church professionals to support them as they pursue their use. In order to accomplish this, we have worked with representatives from congregations across North America to help us build a network of New Church professionals working in a wide variety of industries.

As young adults begin to look toward their future and want to hone in on how to turn their interests into careers, they can reach out to the NCCN, and we will connect them with someone in the church who is working in their field of interest.

These connections are powerful for a few different reasons. First, they can help individuals move toward a career they love and want to dedicate themselves to. Second, they help to build community within our church. More specifically, these connections help to build trans-generational community within the church, which is incredibly important.

This means that NCCN helps young adults see that not only does the church as an organization care about them and their success, but the individual members of our church care about them too. This is an important message for young adults to receive to feel at home in the New Church.

Finally, these connections are powerful because they provide support for

people during an incredibly important time in their lives. The transition out of academia and into the workforce is scary, intimidating, and often difficult. Many people approach this point in their lives and realize that they have no idea what they actually want their career to be. They might have studied their interests and gained expertise over the course of their education, but they don't necessarily know how to translate that passion into something that can support them moving forward. Others know exactly what they want their career to be but might have no idea where to get started or how to get their foot in the door at a good company where they can grow and flourish.

The most difficult part of any journey is taking the first step, and the NCCN provides a means for the New Church to be there to love, guide and support people as they take those first steps into their use.

The issue of engaging the younger generations in the activity of the church is complicated. I don't think the NCCN will solve all of our problems or cause a massive wave of young adults to flood back into the pews of our churches, but I do think it has the ability to plant seeds. If we are able to help young people see the church as a place they can go for support and guidance during difficult or complex times in their lives, then we are doing good work. What's more, if we are finding ways to engage people and provide them with tangible support in a central area of their spiritual life, then we are absolutely doing good work. The NCCN has done and continues to do both of these things.

But the connections we facilitate don't just help the young people in our church; our members benefit greatly from these connections as well. Another key aspect of spiritual life is finding ways to share the blessings we have received with other people. By offering the kinds of advice, words of encouragement and mentorship that our members provide, they are taking what they have gained in their careers and are sharing it with the younger generation. They are connecting with people who share similar interests and are passionate about similar uses themselves. The NCCN provides a way for our members to take a more active role in the life of the church by serving others. It requires very little of their time or energy but has the potential to make a great impact.

That is why I believe the New Church Career Network is an incredibly powerful and important initiative. It is just one program that can help people

The most difficult part of any journey is taking the first step, and the NCCN provides a means for the New Church to be there to love, guide and support people as they take those first steps into their use.

(This) is just one program that can help people re-center on the foundational New Church idea that religion is about how we live, not just what we understand and believe.

like me re-center on the foundational New Church idea that religion is about how we live, not just what we understand and believe. It empowers the lay members of our church to take an active role in helping and supporting others in their spiritual lives while also helping people of different generations feel more connected to each other.

It is one way for the church to reach people at a difficult, vulnerable time in their lives and provide real, tangible support. It provides the kind of guidance that I think our younger generations are looking for. In the

greatest sense, it is a way for the people of the General Church to share the blessings they have received with others.

I wanted to share some of my own personal testimony about the NCCN because over the last two years I have seen firsthand how meaningful this initiative is and has been in the lives of our members and the young people who have come to us for help. I look forward to seeing how the NCCN grows and develops over the years to come.

My hope is that we can continue to provide the kinds of connections you have read about here and find ways to continue empowering members of our church to support each other as we all work toward finding our uses. If you are a professional who is interested in joining the NCCN to be available to connect with young adults, or if you are a young adult who would like support in getting established in a meaningful career, visit newchurchcareernetwork.org and fill out one of our forms to get connected.



AALIYA GUNTHER is the Network Coordinator for the New Church Career Network. She is a New Church educator with a Master's degree in Special Education from Bryn Athyn College. She and her husband Steven reside in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, with their three children until Steven's ordination in May, following which he will be assigned to the Oak Arbor congregation in Rochester, Michigan. Contact: aaliya.gunther@newchurch.org

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President's Report

Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr.

Bishop Buss led a discussion and answered questions about his article, *Standing for Marriage in Today's World* (*New Church Life*, January/February 2022). He sees a need to speak about the broad goals and values of the church, and that marriage is an important aspect of all this. He is aware of challenges to the concept of marriage as between one man and one woman, and reactions to this article were more negative than expected. Processing and responding to the feedback have been a huge undertaking, but “we are listening, engaging and looking to the Lord throughout.” There is a communications opportunity here to show that feedback matters and in learning how best to convey our intended message. (See a sample of responses on page 184, and a letter from Bryn Athyn Church Pastor, the **Rev. Derek Elphick**, in response to several listening sessions provided for the community, page 201.)

Communications Director **Marijke Bau-Madsen** gave an update on General Church communications, including the Bishop's Newsletter and developing quality two-way communications.

Assistant Bishops

The **Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth** reported on new pastoral assignments, following their ordination in late May:

- Steven Gunther to serve as Assistant to the Pastor in Oak Arbor, Michigan.
- Calvin Heinrichs to serve as Assistant to the Pastor in New Church Westville, South Africa.
- HyunJin Yang to serve in an assistant role within the church in South Korea, based in Seoul

The **Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs** reported on his travels supporting ministers and congregations in Canada, Benin, Ghana, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and various congregations throughout the United States. He also reported increased support for Korean, French and Zulu translations.

Executive Director

David Frazier

Financial results for the first half of FY21 include revenue of \$3.2 million (\$16,000 favorable to the budget), expenses \$2.7 million (\$168,000 favorable to the budget), and an operating surplus of almost \$385,000.

Outreach

The Rev. Pearse Frazier

Outreach is making shorter form videos, which are better suited for social media. He described Outreach efforts as pooled resources to provide guidance on how best to reach to those not in the church, and to give them support in marketing both the ideas and the life of the church. He emphasized that our members are our best salespeople and invited everyone to ask a friend or family member to attend church with them.

International Church Committee

The Rev. Jeff Smith

Statistics for the Yamoussoukro Congregation on Ivory Coast:

- Weekly church services have 59-55 attendees – up from 40 since the last report.
- Two weekly classes have 45 and 15 attendees – up from 25 and 12.
- A Thursday prayer service has 40 attendees – up from 35.
- A women's group, led by the pastor's wife, meets twice a week with 30 attendees.

French literature: With translation assistance from New Christian Bible Study, two 10-page booklets have been produced in French: *What the Bible Says About Jesus* and *What the Bible Says About Baptism*.

General Church Education (GCED)

A treasury collection of New Church children's stories is being updated for a larger, hardback book. There are also plans to update the Vineyard website and its offering, including the Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons.

Advancement

Mark Wyncoll

Dollars contributed (\$867,000) are down from last year due to several non-recurring major gifts to endowment. The number of gifts (1,360) increased by 25 over last year. The number of donors (716) is one less than the prior year.

General Church Membership

Ian Carswell

Membership communications and the New Church Career Network have shown meaningful progress. There is a need for membership activities in the strategic plan and for active support of feedback and engagement activities.

After an update from the Women's Concerns Subcommittee there was lively discussion stressing the urgency of better addressing women's roles throughout the church.

Investment

Jesse Cole

The endowment continues to perform well, yielding 25.5% for calendar year 2021 – ahead of the benchmark of 12.25%.

The New Church Investment Fund voted in favor of an increase to the payout of 7% for FY23. The payout rate was 4.68% calculated on December 31, 2021.

The endowment continues to generate net positive average annual returns (1.58% growth since 1997) after all expenses for uses and covering for inflation.

GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

The annual meeting of the General Church Corporation is scheduled for June 25, 2022, at 3 p.m., in the Pendleton Hall auditorium of Bryn Athyn College.

Six members of the Board of Directors eligible for re-election have been nominated for new terms:

- Darren Bau-Madsen**, Berthoud, Colorado
- Beth Brock**, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania
- Jesse Cole**, Glenview, Illinois
- Charlotte Gyllenhaal**, Valparaiso, Indiana
- Kirk Hasen**, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania
- David Radcliffe**, Mitchellville, Maryland

Two Board members have served the maximum of three consecutive terms and are ineligible for nomination:

- Darryl Hasen**, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania
- Brent Hyatt**, Bowie, Maryland

Two Board members are not running for re-election:

Allen Bedford, Bemidji, Minnesota

John Walko, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

The four new nominees for a three-year term are:

Craig Bostock, Treasure Island, Florida

Rhett Brown, Oslo, Norway

Grant Heinrichs, Huntsville, Alabama

Torrance Pitcairn, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Chancellor

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

The Board honored “the enormous, valued and lifetime work for the Academy” by **Dr. Erland Brock**, who passed into the spiritual world on February 6, 2022.

The Chancellor continues to work on his priorities: succession planning, defining the Chancellor’s role and mission engagement – working extensively with the College and others on mission issues.

The Bishop’s article – *Standing for Marriage in Today’s World* – in the January/February issue of *New Church Life*, addressed some of the controversial images emerging in the Church and the Academy and asks how we should align our schools with that part of the mission statement that involves marriage. With that bedrock an employment policy review is underway, which will involve balancing compliance with existing laws along with ensuring the greatest latitude permitted by court decisions and federal law.

Vice Chair

Dr. Charles Lindsay

Trustee **Isaac Smith**, architect and planner, is the new chair of the Facilities and Grounds Committee. The role of the committee is still evolving.

The “virtual visit” by the Middle States accreditation visiting team was scheduled April 3 – 6, using the College’s Self-Study, documents and interviews to evaluate whether the College is adhering to the seven accreditation standards.

Bryn Athyn College

A tuition increase of 3% for the 2022-23 academic year was approved. A new fund is available to provide financial assistance to middle income families not otherwise eligible for federal funding.

Student retention remains a challenge. Two studies that explore the evolution in reasons for students leaving are nearing completion.

A new strategic plan is being drafted which will include consideration of including STEM-related topics in current offerings.

Two faculty members received terminal degrees (**Sarah Wong** and **Angela Rose**) and two were elevated to associate professor and granted tenure (**Jonathan Kline** and **Aram Yardumian**). **Colleen Graff Prendergast** is the new Advancement/Alumni Director.

The College is replacing its student information and financial aid systems to provide better service.

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS

There has been strong progress toward achieving the Annual Fund goal of \$850,000.

A gift to launch the **Morna Hyatt Teacher Fund** included \$250,000 to be used as a 5:1 matching fund for gifts up to \$250. The Day of Giving on November 17 yielded 172 donations, totaling \$19,000, with \$4,000 in matching funds – all within 24 hours.

Recruitment efforts include an open house, campus tours, “shadow days,” invitations to participate in a church service – followed by an information program – and summer camps. Enrollment exceeded budget targets.

A Resolution of Appreciation for **Brian Llewellyn** for his longtime service to the CPO/Maintenance Department of the Academy was approved.

Glencairn Museum

The Museum will close for Phase 2 of its geothermal project. Much will be done to keep the Museum connected to its work and audience, including online programming and a loan of 18 objects to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to be displayed in a gallery entitled: *Treasures of Glencairn Museum*.

Investment Committee

Performance of the endowment in 2021 was strong – up 18% over the benchmark of 12%. Half of this performance came from private investments. The Academy is halfway to building out its private investment portfolio.

JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT

This year's retreat is scheduled for July 24 – 27 at the Laurelville Retreat Center in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania. The theme is the Ten Commandments. Attendance is being capped at 150.

Registration forms are available online at <https://www.jacobscreekfamilyretreat.org/>

For further information, “Friend” on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JacobsCreekFamilyRetreat/> or contact **Julie Uber** at 412-782-2719 or julie.uber@gmail.com to receive forms by mail or email.

This year’s pastoral staff includes the **Rev. Matthew Genzlinger**, Retreat Pastor, with the **Rev. Jared Buss**, Pastor of the Pittsburgh New Church, and the **Rev. Michael Gladish**.

Camp directors are Andrea and Bradley Cranch from Bryn Athyn and **Jamie and Julie Uber** from Pittsburgh – with the help of many dedicated volunteers.

SWEDENBORG LIBRARY

Carroll C. Odhner
Director of Swedenborgiana
and New Church Research

There is wonderful news about the Forbes Collection coming to Swedenborgiana. **James H. Forbes** was a physician who collected early Swedenborgiana and in 1874 he sold a portion of his library to the American Swedenborg Printing & Publishing Society, now the Swedenborg Foundation.



The Rev. Christopher Barber and Carroll Odhner in the Swedenborg Library

In 1991 **John Seekamp**, President of the Swedenborg Foundation, reached out to me as Director of the Swedenborg Library to offer this collection. For reasons unknown the collection was not sent. Thirty years later it is finally arriving through the efforts of the Forbes Committee chair, the **Rev. Christopher Barber**. He spent time searching our online catalog to be sure we received any books that we did not have in our collection and/or those that are extremely rare and fragile – approximately 150 books. We are so grateful for his leadership in taking steps to see this collection come to Swedenborgiana.

The last of the boxes arrived February 4 and I see priceless additions to our collection, including an early treatise by another physician, **William Spence**, 1792. In the inside and back covers are copious notes and the signature of **James Glen**, dated 1806. This Scotsman was the first to hold public meetings on the Doctrines in Philadelphia and Boston in 1784.

Other additions are a rare hymnal by the **Rev. Manoah Sibly** (1757-1840) and the **Rev. Joseph Proud’s Fifteen Sermons on Various Subjects**. Rev. Proud (1745-1826) was considered the first New Church hymnologist and an early preacher in England. We are thrilled with these donations and look forward to examining them further.

The Swedenborgiana and New Church Collections are invaluable for studying the history of the New Church and its doctrines and for illustrating Swedenborg's life and times. Please consider contributing to the Endowment for Swedenborgiana to be able to conserve, maintain and develop these unique collections and to provide research support for scholars.

To donate online go to: <https://brynathyn.edu/swedenborg-library/donate-to-swedenborgiana-and-new-church-collections.html>

A REDISCOVERED CLASSIC

Paula Roschman Niall

Recently, I reached into my bookcase and pulled out a little blue 5 x 7 booklet, *A Life of Jesus Little Known*, by the **Rev. William L. Worcester**, first printed c. 1905, current printing 1980. It was published by the Massachusetts New Church Union, Boston, Massachusetts, and the Southern Swedenborg Federation, Penney Farms, Florida.

I had picked it up some years ago, either at the Carmel Church [in her hometown of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada] or the Bryn Athyn Book Room, with the intention of reading it sometime. That “sometime” happened recently, when my fingers touched this little blue 55-page booklet, tightly squeezed between other small pamphlets, and I wondered, “What is this?”

The **Introduction** by Margaret Worcester Briggs reads:

“We can read the Gospels and feel we know the Lord. We see His strength, physical and spiritual, His unflinching love – or think we do. We take to heart what He says and know His power and influence. We know, too, that He tends to go apart and pray. We see that He suffered.

“This much a small child knows of his parents but is not mature enough to know them except as parents – to know who they really are and how they grew to be what they are. No better could the disciples know the Lord. ‘I have many things to say unto you.’ Jesus said, ‘but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.’

“Have you, in your imagination, walked with the two disciples to Emmaus on Easter afternoon, felt Jesus join them, and read: ‘And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself?’ Have you caught your breath and wondered: *what things?*

“How could He find them in Moses and the prophets? What was it about those things which made the heart of the two disciples burn within them?

“Let this little book suggest what it was, and how to search out more! This book was originally written in answer to what its author felt was a challenge.

“New Church ministers were finding out hitherto unknown things about the Lord from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg and they wondered how

these could be shared with the general public. ‘Impossible,’ they decided. One of the younger ministers, **William Worcester**, who had a knack for making deep things simple, thought he would like to try. This book is the result: *A Life of Jesus Little Known*.

“This book is being reprinted as the only simple answer yet written to the questions aroused by *Luke 24:27*. The purpose and hope is that it may open up new worlds of understanding to those who read it – a new sense of the Lord’s presence. May it bring a realization that, in this way, He has come again!”

Paula adds: “I was very much moved by this gentle and clear explanation of how important it is to see the New Testament and the Old Testament as one book, answering the question: What was the Lord’s life like before He started his ministry at 30 years of age? It inspired me to want to read the Old Testament with new eyes.

“I wonder if it might not be useful to reproduce this little booklet so that others might have a similar response? Since I only have one copy of this valued booklet, I have reproduced it word for word. When I typed it out, I did not add the list of references mentioned at the end. But if it is to be reprinted, these might be important to those who read Rev. Worcester’s challenge. I would love to learn more about him and his career as a minister. He obviously had a unique gift.”

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY

Steve David

Recent highlights of activities:

Bibles for Everyone: We’ve added a new Ukrainian Bible.

Featured articles:

- Ukraine: How Does the Bible Apply?
- God is Upstream
- *Commentaries on Luke*, chapters 18-21, by **Ray and Star Silverman**
- Visit the home page (newchristianbiblestudy.org) for topics and stories

Hubs for media and classes:

- A link to explore online classes and meetups
- A link to search videos and other things of interest
- An audio page to use while walking, jogging or driving

Translations of Swedenborg’s Theological Works

- Ukrainian: *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*
- Japanese: We’ve just added 60% of *Secrets of Heaven*
- Serbian: New translations of *Last Judgment*, *Doctrine of the Lord*, and *A Brief Exposition*
- Russian: Portions of *Arcana Coelestia plus The Inner Meaning of the Prophets and Psalms*

GENERAL CHURCH RETREAT

Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. has announced that the once-postponed and long-awaited General Church Retreat is set for June 2024.

He said in his Bishop's Newsletter: "We believe that this plan gives us the best opportunity to welcome as many members from across the world as possible, taking into account venues, event partners and travel." Watch for further details.

TREASURERS' MEETING

The Ghanaian New Church hosted an African treasurers' meeting in late March, attended by 27 people representing Ghana, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Benin, along with General Church representatives from the United States.

The sessions focused on building financial systems, attaining self-sufficiency and more. The **Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth** noted the love for the church, New Church education, and the camaraderie among women and men representing a wide range of countries and languages.

He said: "I left with a deep conviction that community formed through these lay people and priests working together reflected a beauty and strength that will stand as a model for the New Church as it grows on earth."

Life Lines

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

A CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

A CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US

Some people were surprised, some pleased, and some disheartened with the article, *Standing for Marriage in Today's World: A Church Perspective*, by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. in the January/February issue of *New Church Life*. But issues of sexuality and gender are not only dominant in our culture; they are also active in our church, our societies and our schools. We needed a statement on guiding principles from our doctrine – including the importance of compassion, tolerance, loving the neighbor and not judging others. This was not to say, “here is whatever everyone should believe,” but here are teachings for us to evaluate as we individually form and live our faith

Judging from the outpouring of response – ranging from affirmation to anger, from appreciation to bewilderment – this is an increasingly insistent issue within the church. Let us hope that all of the listening and dialogue which ensued will be useful in making us a healthier, more charitable church.

It is humbling but reassuring to see and understand that no matter where we stand we are all looking for answers. We all look to the Lord for guidance and may disagree in our interpretations, but that is all right as long as we are respectful and charitable with each other. We all are blessed with the Lord's teachings in the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine but are left free – and individually charged – to do our best to understand them and to live accordingly.

One of the true blessings – and sometimes almost a curse – of our faith is our essential freedom. An article from our executive bishop is not a “papal edict” – and is not meant to be. So it should be seen not as closing a door but opening one – to study and reflection, to our own sincere judgment, to respectful consideration and discussion, and to a call for love and compassion, free of judgment. We may not be united in our views but should be united in a spirit of tolerance and looking together to the Lord, even if we do not come to the same conclusions.

In spite of all the evident emotion, it is encouraging to see all the heartfelt and thoughtful caring for the Church and its place in our lives. We see the great value in hearing not only from the clergy on such issues but the thinking and caring of lay men and women, making their own best effort to understand and apply teachings from the Lord.

That there is conflict within the Church need not make us a fractured Church. Let us be united, at least, in looking to the Lord for guidance, as best we understand it, and share our love of the neighbor, our compassion, our kindness, and our humility. Like a family with sometimes strong and conflicting opinions and personalities, we are still a family.

In a sermon on “Making Peace” (see page 217) the Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb says: “Conflict is never a good thing, but people can grow because of it.” Let that be our prayer.

And most appropriate to this topic is Part Two of the Rev. Daniel Goodenough’s impressive study: “Choose for Yourselves This Day: Reflections on Divine Love and Sensing Life as Our Own” (page 223). In it he says:

“The basic use of a New Church priest is not to ensure or control proper behavior, but to foster free, informed, rational decisions by every person, through clear knowledge of the Word and the Lord’s teachings about living. . . . Our goal is not to force agreement and compliance with what we see in the Word, but to encourage a person’s free thought, reflection, and rational, informed decisions for life and belief.”

The General Church is our institutional church and is vital in our lives. But the Lord’s Church lives first within each of us, as we seek to understand what He is teaching and to live our faith. That is where we are called to find common ground.

(BMH)

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God saw that it was good.

In the beginning was the Garden of Eden, with its tree of life, and a river ran through it. That river of truth flows throughout the Word. At the end of the book of *Revelation*, there again is a garden, that tree, and a pure river of the water of life – a fresh flowing of spiritual truth.

In the beginning were the six days of creation that symbolize the stages of our regeneration – our re-creation as angels of heaven. This is when we are being born anew, receiving new life from the Lord – nurtured by that “water of life.”

All the while the Spirit of God is “hovering” – His constant love and mercy watching over us. And all the while, He is planting His Church in all those willing to drink of the waters.

Before regeneration we are like the void in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted; no church has yet been formed. And so He said, “Let there be light,” to drive out the darkness. And He saw that it was good.

The story of creation, in its spiritual sense, is the story of the Lord’s Church being created and living within us. It exists in God’s heavenly kingdom apart from time and space. We fix a date and time: June 19, 1770, when the Last Judgment was completed in the spiritual world and the Holy City New Jerusalem began “descending from God out of heaven.” He sees it all in a spiritual continuum – from void to destiny.

“In the beginning” is the heavenly vision of the Lord, unconstrained by space and time. And we can always go back to that beginning, free to choose to follow Him.

Behold, I make all things new.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

And God saw that it was good.

(BMH)

A PRAYER FOR DIGNITY

Anything we repeat over and over tends to become rote – including the Lord’s Prayer. Whether kneeling in church or resting in bed before drifting off to sleep we may rattle off the prayer with little thought or reflection. The Lord deserves better. So do we.

When we say the prayer in unison – as in a church service – we are often left breathless trying to keep up, as whole phrases become single words: “Thy kingdom come, our daily bread, and the power, and the glory.”

Swedenborg spoke of what a powerful experience it was for him to say – and reflect on – the Lord’s Prayer, with every phrase rich in meaning and spiritual insight. We need to pause a bit in our recitations to reflect as well on what it is that we are praying for. (“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done – as in heaven, so upon the earth.” That is a powerful aspiration for our needy

world – worthy of our heartfelt prayer.)

I remember hearing a popular singer in the big band era say that she had to learn to enunciate clearly each word of a song. When you listen to the masters, or a well-trained choir, the words flow beautifully – but you hear every word. Doesn't the Lord deserve as much?

Whether reciting the Lord's Prayer with a congregation or in the privacy of our home, let us give the words the respect, the meaning, and the dignity they deserve.

(BMH)

SHOWING YOUR WORK

“Lots of times he makes a mistake that I think would have been caught had he done the algorithm. Using mental math to solve the problems is great if you are not getting messed up. As you go higher in math there are more steps to the problem. Showing your work helps you to figure out where there is an error, if made, and also to know what step is next.”¹

Many of us remember math teachers who required us to show our work even when we knew the right answer without it. The same is true in many areas of life. We are all capable of believing that we know the answers without having a demonstrable basis for that belief. There are remedies for that, one of which is “showing your work” – just like our math teachers told us.

In math we show our work so that we don't get “messed up,” and so that if we do, we can go back to see where our mistakes are. In thinking about issues related to our moral and spiritual life we do it to overcome the tendency to biased conclusions.

Bias is an enemy of good research and well-founded conclusions. It comes in different forms, such as implicit bias, motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and others.

Implicit bias results from “the tendency to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings, even when these are contrary to one's conscious or declared beliefs.” (Dictionary.com)

Motivated reasoning is the phenomenon in cognitive science and social psychology in which emotional biases lead to justifications or decisions based on their desirability rather than an accurate reflection of the evidence. It is the tendency to find arguments in favor of conclusions we want to believe to be stronger than arguments for conclusions we do not want to believe. People can therefore draw self-serving conclusions not just because they want to but because the conclusions seemed more plausible given their beliefs and

1 <https://forums.welltrainedmind.com/topic/350788-math-why-is-it-so-important-to-show-your-work/>

expectancies.

Motivated reasoning is similar to **confirmation bias**, where evidence that confirms a belief (which might be a logical belief, rather than an emotional one) is either sought after more or given more credibility than evidence that disconfirms a belief. It stands in contrast to critical thinking where beliefs are approached in a skeptical and unbiased fashion. (Wikipedia)

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us something similar:

To be able to affirm whatever one pleases does not constitute intelligence, but only ingenuity, possible even in the worst of people: There are some very skillful debaters who do not know any truth, and yet can defend either truth or falsity. . . . In the world these people are reckoned intelligent, even though they are merely plasterers plastering a wall. Only those people are intelligent who perceive truth to be true. (*Divine Providence 318*)

This same passage even says: “There is nothing that cannot be defended, and falsity more easily than truth.” The reason that falsity can be defended more easily than truth is that false ideas are often based on appearances that confirm our implicit bias. For example, we are often reluctant to believe that things are harmful that do not seem harmful, and we are easily convinced of things that affirm our prejudices.

This comes into play especially when we are faced with controversial social, moral or spiritual topics. Bias is then often evident on all sides, and the result is confusion and frustration.

There is no easy solution to this, but there are helpful remedies suggested in the Heavenly Doctrine, some of which might be classified under the general heading of “showing your work.”

For example, one aspect of “showing your work” is to state our assumptions. In the General Church a core assumption is that the spiritual concepts taught in the Heavenly Doctrine are true as stated. A person who does not share that assumption will therefore often disagree with the resulting conclusions.

Another aspect, springing from this first one, would be to reference more than one or two passages from the Heavenly Doctrine when trying to demonstrate what they teach. It is important to compare many passages. It is also important to avoid taking them out of context or ignoring evidence about their historical meaning.

When writers and speakers follow the steps of good scholarship it helps people to see the sources of their views and come to conclusions about where mistakes and disagreements may be found. Without showing their work, however, people will often just be talking past each other – sometimes with little understanding of what the other person is even saying.

Which is not to say that showing your work will necessarily lead to agreement. In the end beliefs are about what we love. When it comes to the establishment of beliefs and spiritual principles everything depends on this. As it is put in Canons:

At this day nothing else than the self-evidencing reason of love will reestablish the church. (*Canons of the New Church 1*)

But showing your work helps too.

(JFS)

INSIGHTS AND INSPIRATION

A charming and insightful book by Peter Kreeft – *How to Destroy Western Civilization, and Other Ideas from the Cultural Abyss* – is filled with wisdom, spirituality and humor. It is a delightful and welcome read.

Dr. Kreeft is a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College and a prolific Christian author, writing many books and essays about spirituality, theology and philosophy. His style is scholarly, witty, practical and highly readable. It's easy to suspect he must have read Swedenborg though he gives no direct reference. He certainly appears open to influx.

Here are some examples from what he calls “foundational, fundamental facts of common sense”:

“We know that our most certain knowledge is divine revelation, since God alone can neither deceive nor be deceived.”

“God makes all things, even evils, work together for good for those who love Him – and this applies to cultures as well as to individuals. God blesses nations as well as individuals when they obey His will and punishes them when they disobey.”

“Spiritual warfare is real. Wars on earth always reflect wars in Heaven.”

“Man has free will. Therefore, repentance is always possible, even for societies. But repentance is easier for individuals than societies.”

“Man has free will. Therefore, ever-increasing evil is also possible, leading inevitably to self-destruction, both temporal and eternal, and both individual and collective.”

“Man has free will. Therefore, neither of these two outcomes is necessary or predictable. That is why history is a drama, not a science.”

“Freedom is for truth, not truth for freedom. Deny truth and you destroy freedom. The truth makes you free; freedom does not make you true.”

“Nations need God just as much as individuals do. They even have guardian angels. Ours needs help.”

“A few saints can change the world. History is made, not by those who try to make history, but by those who humbly but obstinately obey God's will no

matter what and let the chips fall where they may. To echo Mother Teresa, God put us in this world not to be successful but to be faithful.”

And other of Kreeft’s observations:

“No one can see God without falling in love with Him, and no one can meet a saint without meeting God in him or her. That is the good news: that in a world dedicated to the will to power, there is no power greater than that of sanctity; and that in a world dedicated to the pursuit of selfish pleasure, there is no greater pleasure than that of unselfish love of God and man. No one can ignore or refute the joy of a saint.”

Kreeft often quotes C. S. Lewis, the great Christian advocate of the mid-20th century, and says of his book *The Abolition of Man*, which he calls one of the most important books of the last few centuries: “The shocking title tells us what is at stake in this war – human nature itself. The death of God and His moral law, His Tao, necessarily entails the death of man, for man is God’s image, and someone’s image cannot long remain in a mirror after he himself disappears. This book also tells us what kind of war this is – a spiritual war – and what its main battlefield is: the mind, schools, education, textbooks.”

“Our culture war is only a footnote to the War in Heaven. The Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, told us the same thing. But Lewis’ space trilogy is more fun to read.”

“The fact that philosophy is required in fewer than 5 percent of American colleges and the fact that most philosophers in secular schools are atheists or agnostics show how clever the Enemy is in choosing his battles.”

“A world without objective moral values, without the natural law, is a world without heroes.”

“Without religion, without an infinite reality, how can you have infinite passion? And without infinite passion, how can you have heroism? If there is a Heaven and Hell, life is a battlefield. If not, life is a hot tub. There are no heroes in hot tubs.”

“Free will is obviously necessary for heroism because robots can’t be heroes. But we’ve questioned free will and embrace, instead, another kind of freedom: autonomy. That’s the adolescent’s favorite kind of freedom: ‘don’t tread on me.’ ‘get on with your own life; leave me alone.’ The two freedoms are in tension, because free will is the foundation for moral responsibility.”

“Moral relativism is the disease that C. S. Lewis said ‘will certainly damn our souls and end our species.’ It will damn our souls because salvation requires repentance, which in turn requires admission of sin, which in turn requires a real, objective moral law to sin against, which means objective values. It will end our species because it amounts to a consciencectomy, as in *Brave New World*. Those people are not humans; they are yuppies. Their bodies look like persons, but their souls look like puppies.”

“The will should obey the intellect, but the intellect also needs to be educated by the moral will. The good will tames the intellect as a woman tames man.”

“The three presuppositions of divine providence are the three most nonnegotiable premises of theism, that God is all-powerful, all-wise and all-benevolent. To judge all three logically entails the astonishing conclusion of *Romans 8:28*, that He works all things, even evils, together for our ultimate good if only we let Him by trusting Him and loving Him and entering into the bloodstream or life-stream of His will, which directs all the growth of our souls and bodies by what He judges best for us in the end.

“It is certainly difficult to believe this and to trust Him that much, as Job discovered in his own experience, but it is as necessary as it is difficult. For the alternative is to deny either His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnibenevolence, or the laws of logic – all of which are nonnegotiable. He is our perfect guru, and every event He brings into our life is a move on His chessboard against the Devil and the Devil’s pawns, which are the world and the flesh – and God does not make any wrong moves or lose any games. His judgment is perfect.”

(BMH)

Nunc Licet Scholarship Fund for New Church Education

The General Church has a new Nunc Licet Scholarship Fund available for grants to students baptized or confirmed in the General Church. These grants will apply for attending any General Church secondary or higher education institution, for students whose parents or guardians are also baptized or confirmed in the General Church.

A candidate for a scholarship grant shall submit to the Director of General Church Education:

- A letter of character support from one’s local General Church pastor or member of the General Church clergy
- An application letter articulating interest in the Heavenly Doctrines and their application to New Church education

To apply, these letters should be mailed to the Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs, Director of General Church Education, Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 or emailed to Brad.Heinrichs@newchurch.org.

Announcements

ORDINATIONS

So it is that Jesus touched little children; also that He healed the sick by touching them; and that those were healed who touched Him. That, too, is why inaugurations into the priesthood today are performed by the laying on of hands. (Conjugal Love 396:3)

Firat Degree

Saye, Patrice Hybo – At Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, April 3, 2022, Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth officiating.

Zoe, Roger Kladie – At Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, April 3, 2022, Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth officiating.

Second Degree

Loba, Patrick – At Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, April 3, 2022, Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth officiating.

BAPTISMS

Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:10,14)

Franzen, Landon Robert – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 10, 2022 (born October 12, 2021), son of Zachary and Annalisa Synnstedt Franzen, Rev. Thane Glenn officiating.

Kacou, Chance Samuel – At Yakro, Côte d’Ivoire, February 26, 2022, Rev. Moise Bab officiating.

Kouadio, Eric Kouakou – At Yakro, Côte d’Ivoire, February 26, 2022, Rev. Moise Bab officiating.

Kouadio, Joel Kouame – At Yakro, Côte d’Ivoire, February 26, 2022, Rev. Moise Bab officiating.

Kouakou, Anne Aya – At Yakro, Côte d’Ivoire, February 26, 2022, Rev. Moise Bab officiating.

Moss, Chuck – At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 15, 2022, Rev. Jared J. Buss officiating.

Nzaji, Misas Nancy – At Buccleuch, Gauteng, South Africa, March 6, 2022, Rev. Glenn G. Alden officiating.

Nzaji, Musuamba Joshua – At Buccleuch, Gauteng, South Africa, March 6, 2022 (born November 11, 2021), son of Michaux and Nancy Nzaji, Rev. Glenn G. Alden officiating.

Stryjak, Joshua Robert – At Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania, March 27, 2022, Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman officiating.

Stryjak, Levi Silverman – At Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania, March 27, 2022 (born July 28, 2016), son of Joshua and Spring Silverman Stryjak, Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman officiating.

Stryjak, River Ray – At Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania, March 27, 2022 (born October 19, 2020), son of Joshua and Spring Silverman Stryjak, Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman officiating.

West, Alice Irene – At Glenview, Illinois, March 20, 2022 (born August 26, 2021) daughter of Erick and Rachel Alden West, Rev. Mark D. Pendleton officiating.

BETROTHALS

By betrothal each is made ready for conjugal love. By betrothal the mind or spirit of one is made ready for union with the mind or spirit of the other. (Conjugal Love 302)

Buick-Cole, Bennett Robert Buick and Alison Aubrey Cole – At Fort Jackson, South Carolina, March 10, 2022, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

Frost-Granor, David Alan Frost and Kristina Dini Granor – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 13, 2022, Rev. John L. Odhner officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

Those who are in heaven are continually advancing to the spring of life, and to a spring so much more delightful and happy the more thousands of years they live, and this to eternity, with increase according to the progressions and degrees of their love, charity and faith. (Heaven and Hell 414)

Bierly, Meade Goodman – February 19, 2022, of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. 78.

Cooper, Norman Michael – March 31, 2022, of Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada. 51.

Doering, Elizabeth Amity – March 13, 2022, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 87.

Doering, Wren Hyatt – April 5, 2022, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 94.

Furry, Lois Jane Dyson – February 20, 2022, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 89.

Wenzel, Witold – February 9, 2022, of Voorhees, New Jersey. 85.



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*Not sure if you're a member? Reach out to Freya Williams,
freya.williams@newchurch.org 267-508-2124*

GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION



New Church

Contract Illustrator/Artist

General Church Education is seeking a contract/project-based artist to illustrate stories from the Word. The illustrations will be published in a hard-cover book of stories from the Word. The position is project-based, and entails researching historical garments and landscape elements relevant to each story and creating illustrations to highlight key aspects of each story.

The position requires an openness to direction and oversight by General Church Education staff and the project sponsor, as well as flexibility to incorporate requested changes to artwork.

This position will be established as an independent contractor and not an employee of the General Church. Compensation will be commensurate with experience and ability.

Interested candidates should send samples of their work that include human figures and faces, along with a cover letter and suggested contract rate (hourly or deliverable-based). Please send responses to: Rachel Glenn, Coordinator of Religious Educational Programs 267-502-4959 – rachel.glenn@newchurch.org



ADVANCEMENT

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



New Church

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