

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019



Read the Word, Change the World

What can we do to make the world a better place? Simply reading the Word and living in its light, says the Rev. Alan Cowley, can have a powerful effect – for us and the world. (Page 19)

Note: There is no extra cost for the use of color on the front page.

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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 3) include:

- *The Gift of an Understanding Heart*: We are clearly warned, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” But there are times when we must make judgments, and times when we must not. How can we know the difference?
- *Does God Know the Future?* Of course He does. “God is in all time apart from time, and in all space apart from space.” He knows everything about our past and everything about our future, but guarantees our freedom. And we live with the assurance: “I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

In his Memorial Address for the Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton II (page 11) the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr. says: “In remembering his life on earth, the core teaching in the New Church about the life of use, or active charity, seems to stand out. He was tireless in his work for others, full of energy of every kind in trying to solve their problems or provide leadership towards happiness.” (See some tributes to Alfred Acton also in Life Lines, page 84.)

How do we change the world for the better? It’s as simple as reading the Word every day says the Rev. Alan M. Cowley: “By simply reading the Word and coming to know the Lord through it, you can become as important to your community as your heart and lungs are to your body.” (Page 19)

Vastation. It’s an intimidating term, especially since we all face some form of vastation in the world of spirits as we are prepared for heaven. But we can do a lot now to determine if those vastations are severe or slight. In a sermon based on teachings from *Jeremiah – A Yoke on the Neck: Vastation for the Sake of Good* – the Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh says: “We always have the option to be a new lump of clay that our Divine Potter can start over with. We always have the option to replace our own yoke of wood or iron with the Lord’s [easy] yoke.” (Page 23)

A church is said to be only as strong as the next generation and in a sermon on “The Next Generation of the Church” the Rev. Brett D. Buick says: “We can have hope that if we fulfil our duty to do the best we can to pass on what we have been given, then the Lord in His Providence will secretly work to guide the Church toward an even better future.” (Page 31)

In a paper to the Council of the Clergy last June the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith asked, “Just What is the Lord Up To?” and assures: “From our life itself, to

thinking and feeling, regeneration and joy, the Lord is the Source of it all. He is there in the greatest and least, actively engaged with us, leading us, and doing more than we could ever imagine in the journey of life.” (Page 37)

In this month when we celebrate the birthday of Emanuel Swedenborg we are happy to reprint from 1949 an “interview” the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson conducted with Swedenborg for the Carmel New Church congregation in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. (Page 56)

The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein reviews a new book by the Rev. Prescott A. Rogers: *A Companion to Divine Love and Wisdom*. This is a slim volume of the Writings, “but it is like a small green bud waiting to open into a large and beautiful flower as the reader’s understanding of it grows.” And this book “will serve as an excellent aid in comprehending the ‘angelic wisdom’ revealed in that sublime work.” (Page 68)

Church News (page 73) includes:

- The nomination of two new assistant bishops
- A report on the Church in Asia for 2018
- A new pastor nominated in Kempton, Pennsylvania
- An episcopal visit to Nigeria by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.
- The Theta Alpha International Laws of Life essay contest
- The dedication of a new grand piano in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral

SAVE THE DATE: GENERAL CHURCH ASSEMBLY 2020

To the Members and Friends of the General Church:

It gives me great pleasure to invite you to attend the 36th General Assembly of the General Church, which will take place in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, on June 18-21, 2020. I am grateful to the staff and members of Bryn Athyn Church for their willingness to host this event.

The date for this Assembly is significant. Many of us know the statement at the end of *True Christian Religion* describing how the Lord gathered His twelve disciples in the next life and “sent them forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns.” (n. 791) This took place on June 19, 1770. This Assembly marks the 250th anniversary of this momentous event.

More information about this Assembly, its theme, and the programs that will be offered will be published in the coming months. For now I ask that you mark it on your calendars, and think affirmatively of attending.

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

Editorials

THE GIFT OF AN UNDERSTANDING HEART

The warning in the Sermon on the Mount is direct enough to make us squirm: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (*Matthew 7:1,2*)

Every day we make judgments. Some are good and necessary. Some are not. The wisest judgment we can make is knowing the difference and living by it.

As citizens we are asked to judge candidates – not only their qualifications and views on government but also their values and character. Those who hire employees make necessary judgments. In choosing a spouse and friends, we judge their compatibility with our own nature.

But we are asked to make “righteous judgments” that look to good, and to judge only what we see – and definitely not to make spiritual judgments of others.

“Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is within him.” (*Deuteronomy 1:16*)

“Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates . . . and they shall judge the people with just judgment.” (*Ibid.* 16:18)

Our culture is rampant with the kind of judgment that is often tempting but destructive: mocking our leaders; looking down on others with contempt and intolerance; indulging in negativity, criticism and judgment in place of charity and kindness.

The model, of course, is Solomon, who was daunted by the prospect of succeeding his father David on the throne of Israel. But the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked what He could give to him. Solomon did not request long life or riches but famously asked: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (*I Kings 3:9*)

But as we take care in judging others we need also to be concerned with how we ourselves will be judged. The warning, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” resonates because of the haunting prospect in the spiritual world of

facing up to all that is recorded in our Book of Life.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were open: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of these things which were written in the books, according to their works.” (*Revelation 20:12*)

“Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be made known and come abroad.” (*Luke 8:17*)

But we also have the merciful teaching that we will not be judged by the Lord or His angels but ultimately by ourselves. And it will be a “righteous judgment” because it will be determined by the quality of the love that guides our lives.

“Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is within me.” (*Psalms 7:8*)

The way to make it easier on ourselves, of course, is to resist the temptation to judge unrighteously and to strive to be like the angels: “Those who are guided by kindness hardly even notice evil in another but pay attention instead to everything good and true in the person. When they do find anything bad or wrong they put a good interpretation on it.” (*Arcana Coelestia 1079*)

(BMH)

DOES GOD KNOW THE FUTURE?

This question is similar to the one about what God was doing before He created the universe, and it is similarly flawed because space and time are properties of the natural world, while God is infinite and eternal. “God is in all time apart from time, and in all space apart from space.” (*True Christian Religion 280*)

Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
A thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night. (*Psalms 90:1,2,4*)

The Writings tell us that Divine Providence is operating in every moment and least detail of our lives, and they explain very fully how it operates. We can be confident that God is never caught by surprise and has to improvise on the spur of the moment.

God is omniscient, and therefore knows everything that can be known. There is certainly nothing needed for the accomplishment of our life's essential purpose, which is preparation for eternal life, that would be beyond the scope of God's knowledge.

It is vain to speculate about what God knows, and more likely to result

in confusion than enlightenment. God is Being itself, and thus the source of whatever there is that is real; in other words, all things about which there can be any actual knowledge. God knows everything because everything exists from Him. God is the sum, and more than the sum, of all that ever was and ever will be.

As for our own lives, there is nothing about anyone that the Lord does not know because it is He who lives in us and gives us life every moment. Time corresponds to states, that is, the spiritual conditions of a person's life. Our natural existence is measured in times: minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, seasons and years. But inwardly, our life consists of a series of spiritual states. And the quality of every state we go through is determined by our relationship with the Lord, just as the times of day and seasons of the year are determined by the earth's position in relation to the sun.

O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.
 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
 You understand my thought afar off.
 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
 And are acquainted with all my ways.
 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
 My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
 In your book were written
 all the days that were formed for me,
 when none of them as yet existed. (*Psalm 139:1-3, 14-16*)

The outward circumstances and events of our earthly existence are of less importance than how we *respond* to them. Sad and painful experiences can contribute to our regeneration as well as happy ones, and often more so. The real question is not whether the Lord knows ahead of time what is going to happen to us, but how well prepared we will be to receive His help when our time of need is at hand. He will be with us, but will we be with Him? The more we get in the habit of praying for the Lord's guidance, meditating on His Word, and living the life of religion, the more there will be in us for the Lord to work with when we need His help.

The Lord told His disciples: "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." (*Matthew 7:11*) And He told them not to worry about what they would say when questioned by the authorities: "For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (*Luke 12:11*) And again: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own

things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (*Matthew 7:34*)

The past is gone and the "future" is a time yet to come. But things don't exist in the past or the future, they exist in the present. In heaven, there is an appearance of time and space, but the reality is an eternal present. Even in this world, we can occasionally be lifted out of time and given an experience of the eternal. It is not uncommon for a newly married couple to be given a foretaste of the eternal happiness that awaits them in heaven. For a brief moment they are in eternity. In that moment they know their future.

"The ultimate purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race." (see *Divine Providence* 27, 323, 332) In the Lord's Divine Providence, everything in creation exists to serve that end. This is because God is Love, and love seeks others outside itself to be joined together with and make happy.

Heaven is a kingdom of uses, for it is in use that we find satisfaction and happiness. And the supreme use, of which all the forms of use in nature are subsidiaries, is the creation of a heaven from the human race, and thus the salvation of our souls. All of creation is ordered toward this end.

God is Order itself because God is Love itself and it is love that orders all things. The constant endeavor of Divine Love to order all things so that they lead toward heaven is the source of the *conatus* (the pervasive force, the purposeful energy, the striving) within all things to bring forth uses serviceable to human life.

We see then that the same order of life out of which the natural universe evolved and which governs it, governs each of our lives in it. The mysterious order we detect in the macrocosm (the universe as a whole) is present in the microcosm (each individual human life) as well.

And that order of life is circular. The Writings illustrate it by the life cycle of a tree: it begins with a seed, which sprouts and sends forth shoots, then forms a trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit in which there are new seeds "that provide for its endless future. . . . Every least thing involved in this process is constantly and wonderfully moving from its purpose to its goal according to the laws of its design. Why should the primary purpose, a heaven from the human race, be any different?" (*Divine Providence* 332)

The God who created the world into which we were born is the same God whose presence makes the heaven into which we are destined to be born again. The innocence and peace that surrounded us at the very beginning of our lives, but which receded during our tumultuous journey through this world, will return in the end and last forever. "The operation of Divine Providence to save a person begins at the person's birth and continues to the end of his life, and afterward to eternity." (*Ibid.*)

Does God know the future? God *is* the future!

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and

the Last." "Before Abraham was, I AM."

"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."

"In Him we live, and move, and have our being." (*Revelation 22:13; John 8:58; John 15:5; Acts 17:28*)

And finally, the Lord's promise to His disciples about their future (and ours): "I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." (*Matthew 28:20*)

(WEO)

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

SPIRITUAL

This word occurs in many compound terms and phrases, but it always has reference to the love of truth for its own sake or for the sake of the good to which it leads. It is sometimes used as inclusive of everything that is below the Divine and above the natural. In all other instances it relates to faith and truth.

According to the context it may refer to love toward the neighbor; the second heaven, which is in that love; the middle degree of the human mind, which receives the activity of the second heaven; or the entire human race after the Fall, which has been regenerated by the influx of truth into the separated understanding and the implementation of a new will in that understanding.

The compound term, spiritual celestial, is used of affections of truth in which is the affection of good; and that part of the natural heaven which is the external of the spiritual kingdom, and which is in obedience or the good of faith, is called the spiritual-natural heaven. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 880, 4675, 5238, 5639)

Letter To The Editors

Well, Who Is My God?

To The Editors:

Editors' note: This letter is in response to *Pursuing Faith* by Allen Bedford PhD (*New Church Life*, July/August 2018, page 308, and September/October, page 406.)

When we truly “get the picture,” the Writings by Emanuel Swedenborg are like a clean and refreshing shower. Their construct is so strong, and the ramparts so unshakable, that you feel safe and at home within their walls!

I have grown up knowing that: “God is *the* Almighty, and no doubt about it!” In proving the existence of God by means of sticks-and-bricks-logic, it seems the best we have come up with so far is Pascal’s conclusion that a belief in God is probably the smartest (most personally and socially beneficial) choice.

Surely any person may start at any time to be saved through study, prayer and beginning to apply his or her perception of God’s truths to daily life. But what are the *core essentials* of belief in the New Church? If you do not believe in your heart’s soul that Jesus Christ is the Divinely Human Lord, the Infinite God of heaven and earth, the Almighty; and if you do not likewise believe that His Personal *Word* is embodied in the two Testaments and the Writings (after his call) of His servant, Emanuel Swedenborg, can you, in truth, consider yourself to be a New Church person?

If you don’t buy into those two things, aren’t you left with relying entirely on your own personal self-intelligence to fabricate your own, man-made, faith boundaries? That is the very thing that the Lord, through Swedenborg, warns us not to do. Picking and choosing a life-doctrine that is pleasing to one’s self but is not necessarily bound by Divine revelation, sounds like what Swedenborg might have identified as “love of self-intelligence,” which he told us does not lead to heaven. For instance, check out this excerpt from the *Arcana*:

From these considerations it is evident that the Lord wills that man may not only know the truths of His church, but also understand them; not however from natural light separated from spiritual light for natural light separated from spiritual light in the things of heaven or spiritual things is not light but thick darkness. For from

natural light thus separated man looks at the things of the church from himself, and not from the Lord; he therefore cannot see them otherwise than from appearances and fallacies, and to see them thus is to see falsities for truths and evils for good. The fire which propagates and also enkindles that light is the love of self and the conceit therefrom of his own intelligence. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 846 in its entirety.)

When we finally realize that the Human Lord, God, is really the One in charge, then at last we can know that we have found a home in the Church of the New Jerusalem.

“And he said, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.'” (*Luke 16:31*)

Thinking of Swedenborg's theology as if it were the product of one man's brilliant mind, is, I believe, a fundamental bar to acceptance that the God of heaven and earth is speaking to all mankind through Swedenborg's Writings. While Swedenborg may have been the crown prince of news anchors, the news that he witnessed was from the Lord and was not of his own creation, as he repeatedly testified. If we don't accept that concept can we really accept the doctrine of the New Church? It seems to be crucial.

I am personally convinced, (have faith), that Swedenborg's Writings are an *infinite* revelation by God, accommodated and filtered through the *finite* understanding of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Can God's existence be proven? I don't know. But I like to consider the word “discover.” Discovery of this or that is so common in our thought and language that scarcely anyone pays attention to the essential foundation of discovery, which is that something must exist before it can be “discovered.” Right. So, *all* of our technology and discoveries must have come from something that already existed. Otherwise, how did it get there, waiting to be discovered?

Or consider another word: “order.” The periodic table comes to mind. That graphic “discovery” shows that all the elements of creation, from hydrogen to uranium and beyond, are not only related to each other in a precisely ordered way, but also it can be used to help show that the same elements exist throughout the universe. And speaking of the universe (that we have all seen through the eyes of the Hubble telescope), it appears to be one gigantic, orderly enchilada. Who could order such an amazing enchilada? Who indeed?

How about our own bodies? Could any kind of interdependent, orderly association of parts and functions have been so assembled and sustained out of accidental chaos? I have witnessed many an accident but none of them has been orderly. No doubt we could all go on for hours citing one orderly, interacting example after another. The point is that, as Emanuel Swedenborg has reported: the Lord is *Order* itself. If God doesn't exist, then I guess we don't exist either. Observed, universal order seems fairly convincing.

As I recall, Swedenborg tells that the Lord created mankind so that there

might be people (uses) to receive life and happiness from His enormous love, and also that, as images of Him, we should perceive the delight of our life from Him as if it were our very own! As I understand it, all of us are gifted with the ability to discern right from wrong, truth from falsity, good from evil; it is our piece of God with us. The human condition is that He keeps us totally free to own our eternal choice: *God* love, or *self* love.

Does all that “prove” the existence of God or verify the testimony of Emanuel Swedenborg? Perhaps not. But, it does the trick for me!

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach
Florida

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STATE

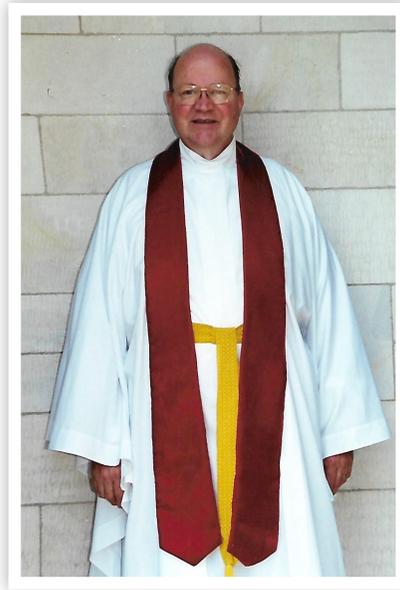
State is predicated of life, love, wisdom, affections and joys, and in general of good and truth. These are all substantial, and by states are meant various qualities of those substances. Note that states are always finite, in angels as in men. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 16; *True Christian Religion* 30)

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

The Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton II

By the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.

(Bryn Athyn Cathedral – November 3, 2018)



The Lord creates each one of us with unique talents and abilities, loves and interests, and He leads us through life to develop them for the benefit of those around us. We are here to celebrate the very many special abilities, and the love and intelligence which put them to use, in the life of Alfred Acton. It will not be easy, because Alfred had interests and abilities in so many different arenas.

The Lord says that we are not born to live for ourselves, but for others: to live a life of useful service. We do this by acting sincerely, justly and faithfully

Alfred was privileged to touch many, many lives in this country and around the world, and in so doing to help people with their natural and spiritual concerns, and to feed their faith in the Lord's Second Coming and the Word that founded it.

in our jobs and with those with whom we have any dealings. Alfred was privileged to touch many, many lives in this country and around the world, and in so doing to help people with their natural and spiritual concerns, and to feed their faith in the Lord's Second Coming and the Word that founded it.

Alfred was an only son, with five sisters. They thought he was spoiled because of this. Both his grandfathers – Carl Theophilus Odhner and Alfred Acton I – were intellectual giants in the Church, and Alfred was very much affected by their influence and the history that surrounded their contributions to New Church thought.

Of course, his sisters have stories about his childhood. Early on he had

a mind that was versatile and most active. He would develop games, which he wanted the girls to play with him. He had a bird feeder, which he had on a pulley so the squirrels couldn't get to it. (They did anyway.) Their home was perfect for the many games they played.

A friend in Glenview once said that Alfred could have been a building monk in the Catholic Church, because he loved to build. As a child he put in ceiling tiles to hide the pipes in the basement, and (in the days before vinyl tiling) tiles on the floor. His sister Doris says, "We had to heat the tiles in the kitchen oven and then rush them down the basement stairs to Alfred, who put them in place before they cooled off and wouldn't be pliable." Lisa and I benefitted from this passion of his, because we moved into two houses which he had renovated, and they were immaculate.

Maybe it was later that he finished renovating the basement, with a bar, and called it "Uncle Kek's Place" in honor of his father, and it was a site for many parties.

In high school at the Academy, Alfred was named Sigma President and Social Representative. Both offices put him on Student Council. After he graduated the faculty decided to allow a student to hold only one such office, so they could spread the accolades. The Rev. Karl R. Alden promised a grade of 100 to any student who could memorize the whole Sermon on the Mount – three chapters. Of course, Alfred could not resist the challenge and did it. And over the years he became an excellent bridge and darts player.

After two years at ANC College, he went to Haverford College to major in Latin, a subject in which he excelled throughout his life, often leading translation committees. It was then that a certain “Southern belle” came to the college, and the two became fast friends. But then she returned to South Carolina. His sisters hoped that when he enlisted in the Army he would be stationed in the South, and Providence obliged. He was able to hitchhike the 100 miles to the Gourdins' house. Henrietta said he returned often because her mother's home cooking was so good for a man on Army fare. They were engaged about two months after the first visit.

Their first home after their marriage in 1960 was in Fort Riley, Kansas, where Alfred was stationed. They returned to Bryn Athyn and in 1962 Alfred re-entered Theological School. On his graduation in 1964, he was sent to the Sharon Church in Chicago. Here is a news note from that church in 1965:

Mr. Acton has had a busy year. Church, teaching in Glenview, and making some trips to other areas. In addition, he has taken on a number of other jobs as they came along: for example, initiating a Science Fair in the Immanuel Church School, taking part in an operetta, and wielding a paint brush now and then. At our first service in September, after a short summer recess, we found that the church kitchen and the kneeling stools and rails had been freshly painted; and that Mrs. Acton, who is very creative, had made new bright curtains for the kitchen. So, you can see that the Actons have not only given us spiritual nourishment, they have also brightened our natural surroundings.

Later they went to Glenview with Alfred as the assistant pastor, and in 1973 as pastor. Glenview was at its peak in those days, with 147 students in the school, and nearly 300 in church on an average Sunday. Alfred's energy was a great asset.

Alfred loved babies. He would gravitate to a baby and play with it for a long time. He and Henrietta wanted children, and after 14 years of marriage Kesniel was born. The whole congregation was thrilled with this event, especially since the Actons had arranged for Henrietta's Mom to hang a blue flag out of the manse window to announce that the baby was a boy.

Kesniel's birth was a source of such happiness to both of them. Kesniel said that his Dad was very insightful in helping him to develop into a man, both as to external characteristics and spiritually. In elementary school Kesniel wasn't very keen on sports, but he loved action figures – He-Man toys. His Dad promised him a figure each time he played a sport in elementary school, and it worked. He felt that his Dad both spoiled him and showed amazing perception in helping him through his childhood days. This love that Alfred had of children went out to his extended family, who tell many stories about their time with “Uncle Alf.”

Abigail Roscoe writes: “I remember when Uncle Alf would come to visit Bryn Athyn. It was a big event. At 6' 4” he was a giant in my eyes. He used

Alfred was totally devoted to the vision of the New Church and spent his life promoting it. He believed firmly that the Lord had made His Second Coming in the Word given through Emanuel Swedenborg and was a deep student of these teachings.

his life promoting it. He believed firmly that the Lord had made His Second Coming in the Word given through Emanuel Swedenborg and was a deep student of these teachings. He loved to study the controversies that arose early in the church's history.

His commitment to the New Church and his love of children showed in all forms of education. In Glenview he was tireless in working with the school. A friend in the personnel field once did an interest analysis of Alfred and said that his caring level was extremely high – off the charts. It showed in how he dealt with everyone, but especially, perhaps, with students.

In the rebellious '60s and '70s he could work with them through their problems or their sorrows, and keep their respect because they knew how much he was trying to help them. He would go out of his way to connect with them, while at the same time setting boundaries. Later, when he became President of the Academy, the students dedicated their yearbook to him – a first and last for a president. They felt so clearly that he was there for them and trying his hardest to make their lives in the school as good as it could be.

One of Alfred's amazing talents was his ability to present truths to people in creative, new and challenging ways. He had a very clear vision of the big picture in life, but he found small points that colored the ideas he was presenting. He could take a simple teaching that we hadn't noticed and show how it was a key to the big picture.

I well remember when I came to Glenview as pastor elect, to follow

to lift me over his head and gently tap my head on the ceiling of my grandmother's dining room. I don't know why but I thought this was the greatest thing ever."

And of his consideration for others, she writes: "When Aunt Rowena had to move from her home on Alnwick Road to Cairnwood Village he took pictures of how she had her things set up and carefully replicated the new apartment to be much like her home on Alnwick Road." Apparently it made a big difference when she walked into her new home and saw her things carefully laid out as they had been in her old home.

Alfred was totally devoted to the vision of the New Church and spent

Alfred. He used to have evening study groups, one on Tuesday, and two on Wednesday evening – one at eight the other at nine. At the nine o'clock meeting, with nearly 30 people in their 30s and 40s studying *Heaven and Hell*, he presented, with a straight face, an outrageous interpretation of the subject under discussion.

I have never been at a discussion group that was so successful. The room was alive with discussion, arguments, ideas. Not only did the people study the subject to argue with him, they ended up fully understanding what he had wanted them to see. The “heresy” was a tool to engage their interest.

Perhaps it was as pastor that he was at his height, because of his keen interest in each person, his willingness to find ways to help them, his amazing grasp of the doctrines and how they lead us, and his great enjoyment of all aspects of the congregation's life. (Incidentally, he also embraced the Acton Rule that “no sinners were saved by sermons longer than 20 minutes,” which went down very well in Glenview.)

Alfred called himself “Marrying Sam” because he did so many weddings. Among the tributes to him are comments on how special those services were:

Malcolm Acton: “The charge he gave at our wedding has been a guiding light in our marriage and I am forever grateful to him and Aunt Henrietta for being such wonderful examples of family love and devotion.”

Leah Smith published a picture of the charge given at her wedding and added: “This photo is a framed copy of the charge he gave to Garrett and me when he performed our marriage ceremony. I keep it on my dresser. Whenever I read it I can hear Uncle Alfred's voice blessing us with his thoughtful, eloquent and loving words. He didn't just marry us but continued to support our union through annual anniversary cards. How cool is that?!”

Edward Simons: “Uncle Alf was a special influence in my life. He baptized Scott and Freya and did our home dedication in Mitchellville. He always said, ‘nice to see you,’ with a smile and a firm handshake and he always meant it. I look forward to sharing remembrances and celebrating his life with all of you!” (How many of us remember those words, “Nice to see you”? They were copied

His commitment to the New Church and his love of children showed in all forms of education. A friend in the personnel field once did an interest analysis of Alfred and said that his caring level was extremely high – off the charts. It showed in how he dealt with everyone, but especially, perhaps, with students.

by mimics often too, as was the little bow that often went with them – perhaps because he was much taller than those he greeted.)

Martin Klein wrote a tribute to Alfred, some of which is quoted here:

“The old Teacher’s Lounge at the [Glenview] school had been usurped and the lounge had been shifted to the space behind the stage of the Assembly Hall. The new lounge was comfortable enough, but it had no running water. The cost to install proper plumbing was entirely out of sight and the teachers were pretty unhappy. Days passed. Arguments heated up. Tempers flared. Then, one bright and sunny morning, lo there was magically running water in the Teacher’s Lounge! Examination revealed that a garden hose, attached to the nearby Pendleton Hall outdoor spigot, mysteriously went underground. And, running into the basement window under the church stage area, a similarly colored garden hose was seen, coming up from the ground and snaking through that window.

“The manse bathroom was leaking, but while the cost of repairs was still out for bids, Alfie fixed it all up, no charge.

“And so went the days of his life. That was Alf – not so much concerned with bureaucracy but gang busters at getting stuff done! That got him into trouble sometimes – but we would not have had it any other way. A great, good man has blessed our lives, and we thank the Lord for his lifetime with us.”

In 1976 he came to the Academy as President. I’ve already noted how well he was appreciated by the students. Alfred was a change artist. All his life he tried to find better ways of presenting the truth or conducting business. That was not always welcomed by everyone because change is not always easy. For example, he separated the departments in the high school from the divisions in the College. It was a bold step, and many resisted it. But its vital result was that it gave the college its own identity. No longer was it an adjunct to the Secondary Schools, it was an institution of higher learning, and had he not done this and followed through on the development of the College it would have been very hard indeed for it to become the vibrant educational institution it is today. He rationalized the teaching assignments so that everyone had a fair teaching load – something that was sorely needed.

These were only two of the changes he introduced on the administrative level, but many others bore fruit as well.

Alfred loved studying the various issues the church wrestled with. He studied the dispute about the bodies of spirits and angels (an esoteric subject to many, but a fascinating fight while it lasted) and was convinced that he could demonstrate to his grandfather Acton and to Dr. Hugo Odhner, two combatants in this debate, that he had found a happy resolution to their disagreements. (One wonders if they will discuss it in the next world.) He loved discussions about doctrinal subjects and was willing at the drop of a hat

to engage in doctrinal arguments, often presenting some little-known teaching to give a new view of the subject.

In 1999 I was looking for a successor, but the clergy was not ready to make that decision. After discussion the majority supported my decision to ask Alfred to be assistant to the Executive Bishop, which the Board unanimously and enthusiastically approved. As a bishop Alfred was tireless. He traveled the world inspiring congregations, helping ministers, and in his inimitable way finding imaginative solutions to problems.

Then our sister body “across the Pennypack” faced severe challenges: a leadership group was taking control and refusing to report on expenses even to the board. Opposition caused them to take reprisals. The members asked Alfred if he would help them, and in his spare time he did. (He said with a big smile that “even Alfred the Great – his grandfather -- wasn’t a bishop of two churches!”)

He found a way to challenge the leadership through the courts, and initially the court ruled against the membership. They thought they had lost, but Alfred insisted that at the very worst they would “go down fighting.” A superior court reversed the decision and the membership got its church back.

In retirement Alfred and Henrietta moved to Pineville, South Carolina, where they built their dream house. Alfred continued to offer his services to the church group in the greater Charleston area, preaching on a bimonthly basis.

It is almost impossible to imagine which of Alfred’s many loves and interests will be uppermost in his life to eternity. Certainly, his love of the truth will guide him most of all. One can certainly imagine his amazing intellect, magnified a thousand-fold in the spiritual world, causing him to embark on many ways in which to help those entering that world, or, indeed, those in heaven. Surely his sphere will be devoted to the spread of the New Church here on earth. The amazingly caring spirit he had on earth will be put to use to all eternity.

We can imagine him exploring the world of spirits. Alfred loved the subject of the correspondence of natural things with spiritual realities, so whatever he sees he will look deeper to find out what it represents. One can imagine him waking up each morning, thrilled at the opportunity to experience every

He loved discussions about doctrinal subjects and was willing at the drop of a hat to engage in doctrinal arguments, often presenting some little-known teaching to give a new view of the subject.

In remembering his life on earth, the core teaching in the New Church about the life of use, or active charity, seems to stand out. He was tireless in his work for others, full of energy of every kind in trying to solve their problems or provide leadership towards happiness.

seems to stand out. He was tireless in his work for others, full of energy of every kind in trying to solve their problems or provide leadership towards happiness. One cannot help but feel sure that the passage on true charity read as a lesson applied to him.

“The good things that a charitable person does are the goods of useful service, which he does every day, and which, when he is not doing, he thinks of doing. There is a deep affection which inwardly remains and desires it. Hence it is that he is perpetually in the good of useful service, from morning to evening, from year to year, from his earliest age to the end of his life.” (*Doctrine of Charity* 158)

And that life goes on, with increasing vigor and usefulness.



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aspect of spiritual life.

He will, however, miss Henrietta a great deal after 58 years of marriage as she will miss him, and our hearts go out to her. Henrietta has one reservation about his temporary stay in that world without her actual presence. She says he is not allowed to “try to build” their home in heaven before she gets there, because she has definite ideas about what it should be like. She knows his tendency to “get on with things.” She says this with her tongue in her cheek, because of course the Lord Himself creates their home out of their loves; and anyway, the love of the wife is the core of their heavenly life, so she need have no fear.

In remembering his life on earth, the core teaching in the New Church about the life of use, or active charity,

Read the Word, Change the World

The Rev. Alan M. Cowley

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Human beings like to complain, and in general, we like to complain a lot more than we like to offer solutions or do our part to work toward those solutions. This isn't to say that there are not a lot of good people who want things to change, to be better, to create a happier and safer world to live in. But there is a lot more complaining than concrete action, don't you think? Do you want the world to change? Do you want it to be a better, safer, happier place to live? I do.

So, you may have noticed that I already gave the punchline to this article in the title. The most effective solution that will work toward positive change is if all of us read the Word more. Not just more, but EVERY DAY! Don't believe me? Then I challenge you to try it. You can't knock it until you try it.

Here are three major reasons why reading the Lord's Word every day would change the world for the better:

1. Heaven would be more connected to our lives.

Heaven and earth, and so angels and people, are connected to each other and to the Lord by means of the Word. Consider the following passage from the Heavenly Doctrine under the heading: "The Word even serves to enlighten people who are outside the church and do not possess the Word."

There can be no link with heaven unless somewhere on earth there is a church, which possesses the Word, and so the Lord is known because the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, and without Him salvation is impossible. A link with the Lord is established by means of the Word, and so is an association with angels. It is enough if there is a church which possesses the Word, even though it is composed of relatively few people. The Lord is still present by its means throughout the world, for the Word effects a link between heaven and the human race. (*True Christian Religion* 267)

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A similar passage in the work *De Verbo* 17 goes on to explain further that the church on earth, by means of the Word, operates as the heart and lungs of the body, and that through the corresponding means of breathing and circulation, the Lord's love and wisdom is spread throughout the rest of the body, the human race, sustaining its existence.

So, we can say that the church, through its possession and reception of the Word, sustains the whole human race. What does that mean for you as an individual "church" and the effect you could have on your community? By simply reading the Word and coming to know the Lord through it, you can become as important to your community as your heart and lungs are to your body! On top of all of that, since the Word is our primary connection to heaven and the angels there, by reading the Word and trying to live it, we can bring a little bit of heaven down on to the earth!

2. Your spiritual environment would change.

Our environment has a huge effect on the lives we live. There is our natural environment which, along with many other things, provides sunny days and rainy ones, and can influence whether we do certain activities or not. There are our social and cultural environments, which can have a huge effect on the way we are raised and how we behave around others. And there is our spiritual environment which, though we may not notice it much during our earthly lives, has perhaps the most eternal effects regarding our salvation.

You may wonder what a "spiritual environment" is. Read the following passage, keeping in mind that the words "fruits" and "flowers" mean the uses we receive and perform from the Lord and the delights which spring from those uses:

The Word is like a garden, which may be called the heavenly paradise, containing dainties and delights of every kind. The dainties are composed of fruits, the delights of flowers, and in their midst are the trees of life growing hard by springs of living water; and the garden is surrounded by woodland trees. A person who through doctrine has possession of Divine truths is in the middle of this garden, where the trees of life are, and in fact he enjoys the dainties and delights. (*True Christian Religion* 259)

Just thinking about such an environment helps melt some of the stress and

frustration of this imperfect natural world. And if just thinking about that beautiful garden helps, what would it be like to spiritually live in that garden? You can! The more we read the Word and seek within it the fruits and flowers of life, the more our spirit will be present there.

3. Changing ourselves can change the world.

We are each one of the billions of people living in the world, and as such, we contribute to the overall health or sickness of society at large. “The whole is only as good as the sum of its parts.” We cannot and never will be able to change other people. And we should not expect others to change if we are not willing to do so ourselves.

One of the main reasons the Word was given to us is because it is the greatest agent for change in human life. In fact, the Lord teaches us in the Heavenly Doctrine that the Word is the ONLY thing that can teach us what is truly good and what is truly evil. A knowledge necessary to know what we should change to better ourselves, and by extension change society.

- The Word is the one and only teacher of how a person should live in the world to be happy forevermore. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8939, 8944)
- Without the knowledge of truth and good from the Word no one can know anything about the Lord, the angelic heaven, or charity and faith. (*Apocalypse Explained* 112:3, 963:2)
- A person does not know what spiritual good is, or what amounts to the same, what Christian good is, except through truth, that is, through learning from the Word. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5804)

Reading the Word every day also helps to keep us intellectually humble. It is very easy to start thinking that we know how society should operate, and what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. But unless we are getting our information from the Lord through the Word our minds become cluttered with very temporal matters, and so our judgment of what is good and true may only lead to temporary good or good that appears to be good, when in fact it may be harmful in the long run. Only the Lord knows eternal consequences, and only the Lord can teach us how to live with eternal concerns in mind.

So, if you, like most of the people I know, want the world to be a better

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place, start with reading the Lord's Word every day. It will have a greater impact on the world than anything else we can do. I know it is hard to form good habits, but perhaps a little challenge will help to remind us. How about every time you start wanting to complain about something, you add five minutes to your daily reading?



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This is a universal love which is neither good nor evil but becomes one or the other. It exists from the love of the Lord as the Father and of the inmost heaven as a mother for all men; inflows from general influx from the Lord; is received by woman and transferred from her to man; and is aroused by the innocence of infancy. Under ordinary conditions it ceases as children grow up in order that they may be free, but emerges again with the birth of grandchildren. (See *True Christian Religion* 431)

A Yoke on the Neck: Vastation for the Sake of Good

A Sermon by the Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh

The work *Heaven and Hell* describes a sequence of steps, after death, in the world of spirits, through which we will progress on our way to heaven, if heaven is what our eternal home will be.

There is the first state of outward or external things, a kind of recognizable continuation of life in the natural world. (*Heaven and Hell* 491-498)

The second state is where the focus moves to inward things, where we are led to see the thoughts and intentions that we have made part of our lives. In this second state of internals, it becomes plain whether we have led a life that leads to hell or to heaven. (*Ibid.* 499-511)

The third state is called the “state of instruction” and is only for those on their way to heaven (because those entering hell, it is said, “cannot be taught”). (*Ibid.* 512-519)

It is under the heading of this third state of preparatory instruction that an additional element is described, needed by some in their being-made-ready for life in heaven. This element is called “vastation” from the Latin *vastatio* – a laying waste or a desolation. A newer translation of *Heaven and Hell* calls it a “shattering experience.”

We are taught in *Arcana Coelestia* 7122 about the need for vastation:

After death there cling to a person, and there are in their memories, everything of their thought in the world, [everything] of their intention, [everything] of their will, [everything] of their speech, and [everything] of their action, for nothing is obliterated. And this being so, it must needs be that there cling to them things foul and filthy, and also evil and false, from their life in the world.

“There cling to them things foul and filthy, evil and false.” This description is not the indictment of an obviously evil person. Rather, it is a matter-of-fact statement of what it is for all of us to pass into the spiritual world from out of this flawed and often disordered natural world. Even if at heart we are truly good people, still the likelihood is that “things foul and filthy, evil and false” will be clinging to us. Fortunately, in the Lord’s mercy and providence, these

Even if at heart we are truly good people, still the likelihood is that “things foul and filthy, evil and false” will be clinging to us. Fortunately, in the Lord’s mercy and providence, these things can be separated from a heaven-bound person, separated thoroughly and completely. This is the eternally beneficial “laying waste” of vastation a person undergoes in the world of spirits.

things can be separated from a heaven-bound person, separated thoroughly and completely. This is the eternally beneficial “laying waste” of vastation a person undergoes in the world of spirits.

Jeremiah of Anathoth, in Benjamin, served the Lord as a prophet in Jerusalem during the reign of the last five kings of Judah, up to and including the time Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians broke through the city walls, burned the temple and carried away captive most of the tribe of Judah. Like other prophets, Jeremiah is known for delivering, by turns, words that were harsh in their judgment and hopeful in their encouragement.

In addition to the words of Jeremiah, though, there are also several narrative sections of his prophecy, stories of his interactions and confrontations with the kings and the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Maybe more than any other prophet, we see Jeremiah out among the people, exhorting them to turn to the Lord. “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,” the Lord said to Jeremiah,

“See now and know . . . if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth.” (*Jeremiah* 5:1)

Jeremiah had been called by the Lord as a prophet during the reign of King Josiah, which was a brief time of reformation in what otherwise were decades of horrific descent into wickedness and often unspeakable evils. There was one episode from the streets of Jerusalem when the Lord sent Jeremiah down to a potter’s shop, to watch the potter at work. (*Jeremiah* 18) As Jeremiah watched, the potter mishandled the clay and a defect was introduced into the vessel he was making. So, as any potter would, he took the same clay and started over.

The Lord then sent Jeremiah to the people with this message: “As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! . . . Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”

(*Ibid.* vv.6,11)

The merciful God was offering His people still another chance. And their reply? “There is no hope: but we will walk after our own thoughts, and we will, everyone, do the imagination of their evil heart.” (*Ibid.* v.12)

It wasn't hopeless; the Lord said that it wasn't hopeless; but the people had decided that it was and within about a generation the kingdom of Judah fell and Jerusalem and the temple were overrun by a conquering enemy.

Before the end, though, there were other instructions that the Lord gave to Jeremiah, all for the purpose of giving the people every chance to turn back to His – the Lord's – will. In another account, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to make bonds and yokes and to put them on his neck, symbolic of the yoke of Babylonian dominion that (the Lord also said) the Judean kingdom should willingly put themselves under.

This symbolic gesture came with a warning: “It shall be, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,” says the LORD, ‘with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence.’” This is the account we read in *Jeremiah*, chapter 27.

In chapter 28, we see the following episode where another prophet, Hananiah, made a prophecy of his own about the yoke of the Babylonian king and punctuated that prophecy by taking the wooden yoke off of Jeremiah's neck and smashing it on the ground.

Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years before the people of Judah would be allowed to return to their homeland; Hananiah said it would be only two. But Hananiah's prophecy was a false prophecy and, far from being good news, it only made things worse. The Lord sent Jeremiah to say to Hananiah: “You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made in their place yokes of iron.” (v.13)

The Lord had led and protected with special care the ancestors of the people of Judah for at least a thousand years. Over and over, He had given them victories over seemingly unconquerable enemies. Why was the Lord now, in these last days, insisting that they surrender to the Babylonians and put themselves under the yoke of servitude to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar?

The answer to this question brings us back to the subject of vastation – the state undergone by an individual who is being prepared for a life in heaven. What was happening in the time of Jeremiah was a vastation of the whole country. Not just one individual, but the kingdom of Judah, and in a sense the land itself was being vastated in the oppression, conquest and captivity at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 1029:16)

The vastation happening at that time and place was a vastation, a desolation,

of the goods and truths of religion, and the kings and people of Judah were doing it to themselves. Because they had the Law of the Lord and because the temple still stood at the center of their capital city, Jerusalem, everything needed to make the goods and truths of religion actual in the world was in place. But going back hundreds of years, at least to the time of Solomon, those goods and truths had been perverted more and more as detestable practices were added to their worship and life.

This was the vastation happening for them at that time and it is the specific reason why Jeremiah was commanded to wear the symbolic yoke on his neck. The neck represents the communication and joining together of things higher and things lower; the things of heaven, for example, communicating and joined together with things of the world. So putting a yoke on the neck represents the disruption of that communication.

Because they had the Word and the Divinely designed temple, the people of Judah had everything they needed to serve as a kind of “neck” between heaven and the world. Instead, because of their evil practices, any goodness and truth with them was being laid waste, and to represent that that was happening, Jeremiah wore a yoke on his neck. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3542)

This is an account of vastation from long ago. What light might an understanding of this historical case shed on our understanding of the vastation any of us on the road to heaven will likely undergo before we are prepared fully for a heavenly state? To conclude, we will briefly examine four principles of vastation which are illustrated in this story of Jeremiah.

Although we’ve so far emphasized the usefulness of vastation, in preparing a person for heaven, or in preventing grievous profanations in the Holy Land, vastation in itself can be a difficult and unpleasant experience, as the sometimes brutal stories of Babylonian conquest and captivity illustrate. *Heaven and Hell* describes our vastations in preparation for heaven taking place in what is called “the lower earth, where some suffer severely.” (No. 513)

We also find words used in the *Arcana Coelestia* like these: “inward pain” (No. 1109); “despair” (No. 2694); “torment” (No. 699); “fear” (No. 4942). There’s also a description of some in a state of vastation obsessively chopping wood in a futile effort to earn a place in heaven on their own; maybe not the depths of misery, but certainly not joyful either. (No. 1110)

But total suffering on our part is not required when going through the vastation of evil and falsity. There is this teaching:

There are some who are very willing to be vastated and thus get rid of the false principles which they have brought with them from the world. . . . [They] are kept by the Lord in the hope of deliverance, and in the thought of the end in view, which is that they may be amended and prepared to receive heavenly happiness. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1107)

This articulates the first two of the four principles of vastation to be seen in the Jeremiah story: one is that vastation, while probably always a struggle, can also be an experience containing hope and even the expectation of joy. The other principle is that our own willingness to undergo vastation is the difference-making variable that will determine its quality as a human experience. How insistently do we hold on to attitudes and opinions, to preferences and prejudices that we probably know are not part of a heavenly life? The answer to that question is an indication of how vastation will go for us in the world of spirits.

How insistently do we hold on to attitudes and opinions, to preferences and prejudices that we probably know are not part of a heavenly life? The answer to that question is an indication of how vastation will go for us in the world of spirits.

We can also see this willingness (or lack of willingness) in the stories of Jeremiah. After he went to the potter's shop, the people showed themselves unwilling to turn back to the Lord and insisted on their own way: "We will walk after our own thoughts." The unwillingness also shows up in the actions of the prophet Hananiah. When Hananiah predicted that the Babylonian exile would last only two years instead of Jeremiah's predicted 70, it's as if he was saying that things were only 2.8% as bad as they were in Jeremiah's version.

To prove his (ultimately false) point, Hananiah took it upon himself to take the wooden yoke off of Jeremiah's neck and smash it on the ground. It's as if he were saying: "Look, I broke it. It's not a big deal. We don't need to consider our part in the trouble we are in. It's a small matter and Jehovah will fix it soon."

Considering this episode, we might ask ourselves: Are there things in our own lives that we should be willing to take 100% seriously as harmful to heavenly life, that we instead give ourselves a deep discount on? And recall the Lord's words through Jeremiah to Hananiah after he had broken the yoke: "You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made in their place yokes of iron."

Going back to when the Lord first commanded Jeremiah to wear his yoke, the Lord also had warned about false prophets like Hananiah. "Thus says Jehovah: 'Do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, "Behold, the vessels of Jehovah's house will now shortly be brought

Four principles of vastation: It can be a hopeful experience. Our own willingness to let go of what clings to us directly affects the experience. We need to be honest with ourselves about our own spiritual state. Keep in mind that vastation is something done for our benefit (for our life in heaven!) under the mercy and providence of the Lord.

back from Babylon”; for they prophesy a lie to you.” (*Jeremiah 27: 16*)

This points to the third of the four principles, that we need astuteness and clear-eyed honesty in the way we identify evils within ourselves. A cheery story about our own thoughts and intentions might be the easiest to believe, but that doesn’t make it the correct story.

We do want to believe good news; even Jeremiah’s first words after Hananiah’s prophecy were these: “Amen! Jehovah do so; Jehovah perform the words which you have prophesied.” It’s certainly OK to hope that the rosier picture is the true one, but Jeremiah also modeled for us an appropriate level of skepticism: “As for the prophet who prophesies of peace,” he said to Hananiah, “when the word of the prophet comes to pass, [then] the prophet will be known as one whom Jehovah has truly sent.” A story in our own favor will always sound good, but

an honest appraisal requires evidence.

First principle: Vastation can be a hopeful experience.

Second principle: Our own willingness to let go of what clings to us directly affects the experience.

Third principle: We need to be honest with ourselves about our own spiritual state.

The fourth principle is to keep in mind that vastation is something done for our benefit (for our life in heaven!) under the mercy and providence of the Lord.

The first time Babylon is mentioned in Jeremiah’s prophecy is in chapter 20 where the Lord says: “I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword.” (*Ibid.* 20: 4) An intimidating picture, maybe in the same way that the general idea of vastation can be intimidating to us. But then, by the time of the story of Jeremiah’s yoke, note carefully what it means and what the result is to willingly come under the yoke of Babylon: “Bring your necks under the yoke

of the king of Babylon,” the Lord told them, “and serve him and his people, and live!” (*Ibid.* 27: 12)

The sign of a yoke on the neck was a sign of the vastation of good and truth happening at that time in Judah, a sign of the grave damage being done to the goodness and truth the Lord desired to be established in the world. But for those who actually did willingly take on that figurative yoke of servitude to the king of Babylon, the promise the Lord made to them is that they would live – and this promise is seen to be borne out in the text.

The one Judean king, Jehoiachim, who did surrender was eventually released and treated well in Babylon by the successor to Nebuchadnezzar. The captivity was 70 years and not the falsely prophesied two, but the end did come and the opportunity to return to Judah and to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem was given to those who had been carried away captive.

How it all happened is not the way anyone would have preferred. And over the course of the history of Israel and Judah, this particular outcome was not the only necessary one. But by the time Jeremiah had become a prophet of the Lord, the way of the yoke on the neck had become the Lord’s way for the people of Judah, not to punish them but to let them live, to protect and preserve any goodness and truth that still may have been with them.

There was nothing pleasant about the oppression of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Neither is the state of vastation in the world of spirits (or vastation-like states we might experience in this world) provided for our short-term comfort. But the Lord is with us. And maybe we can realize that any heaviness in the yoke that we carry is from ourselves. The way that leads to heaven can be difficult. Any and everything that goes against the life of heaven must be separated from us, one way or another, and that can be difficult.

But we always have the option to be a new lump of clay that our Divine Potter can start over with. We always have the option to replace our own yoke of wood or iron with the Lord’s yoke. “It is evident,” we read in *Heaven and Hell*, “that to enter upon the way to heaven is not so difficult as many believe. The sole difficulty lies in being able to resist the love of self and the love the world, and to prevent their becoming dominant; for this is the source of all

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evils. That this is not so difficult as is believed is meant by these words of the Lord: ‘Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls; for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’” (*Heaven and Hell* 359)



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OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

SUBSTANCE

Meaning literally “to stand under,” this term carries as well the idea of that from which there is subsistence. Thus the Divine is substance itself as that from which all things subsist; everything that stands under the spiritual sun and above the natural is spiritual substance; and everything under the sun of nature is natural substance.

In essence, Divine substance is love, spiritual substance is conatus, natural substance is motion. Spiritual substance is both organic and an essence, existing by influx from the Lord, yet inflowing into the natural. Spiritual substance is living because its essence is love; natural substance is dead because its essence is pure fire, wherefore it does not originate anything, but reacts. (See *True Christian Religion* 52)

The Next Generation of the Church

A Sermon by the Rev. Brett D. Buick

Lessons: Psalm 78:1-8, 70-72; Deuteronomy 4:1-10; Apocalypse Explained 641.4

This morning we are going to look at the importance of passing on what the New Church offers to a new generation. The obligation to share what means so much to us with potential New Church men and women of the future is communicated clearly and repeatedly in the Sacred Scripture. We read in *Psalm 78*:

And [Jehovah] raised up a testimony in Jacob,
And set a law in Israel;
Which He commanded our fathers,
To make them known to their sons;
In order that they might know,
A later generation, the sons who should be born;
That they might arise
And recount to their sons;
And set their credence in God, and not forget the acts of God,
But might observe His commandments. (*Psalm 78:5-7*)

Psalm 145 has a similar message: “And I will praise [the] name [of Jehovah] to eternity and forever. . . . Generation to generation shall extol Thy deeds, and of Thy mighty acts they shall tell.” (*Psalm 145:1-4*)

In *Deuteronomy* chapter 4 the Lord simply and powerfully reminds us to pass on what we have been given by Him saying, “Make [it] known to thy sons, and to the sons of thy sons . . . and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the ground, and that they may teach their sons.” (*Deuteronomy 4:9-10*)

And finally, the Lord gives us this well-known command:

Hear, O Israel; Jehovah is our God; Jehovah is one. And thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy forces. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy sons. (*Ibid.* 6:4-7).

In the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church we learn that teaching the next generation about the Lord, about His testimonies and laws, about His mighty acts, is actually a duty of charity.

do not limit this duty to just one generation teaching the next. The passages indicate a responsibility beyond just one's children, but to one's grandchildren too: "Make [these things] known to thy sons, and to the sons of thy sons." (*Deuteronomy 4:9*)

But the Lord does not stop there either. In *Matthew* Jesus had an extended dialogue with His disciples about children. He explained the responsibility that all adults have – a responsibility to support the passing on of the blessings of the church to the little ones in our midst.

Jesus said: "Whoever shall cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is expedient for him that an ass's millstone should be hung about his neck, and he should be sunk in the deep of the sea." He continued: "See that you not despise one of these little ones." Then He concluded: "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in the heavens, that one of these little ones should perish." (*Matthew 18:6, 10, 14*)

As individual families, as extended families, and as a New Church society,

As individual families, as extended families, and as a New Church society, we all have a responsibility to bring the church to our little ones as best we can, in whatever circumstances we are in.

we all have a responsibility to bring the church to our little ones as best we can, in whatever circumstances we are in. This use can take many forms. The daily work of parenthood may be the most obvious. It can include making the time for family worship, which can be as simple as reading the Word together as a family. Or it can include saying the prayer at bedtime and blessings at meals. It can include the encouragement to keep the Lord's presence forefront in the mind in other ways too. We can point out the Divine order present in a blooming flower, or the power of the Lord evident in the splendor of a sunset. But most of all we can teach that we love the Lord best by obeying His commandments. As parents we can always be looking for ways to confirm with our children that what the Lord says is true and that what He teaches is for our happiness because He loves us so much.

But in addition to the daily work of parenting, education in its many forms can be another opportunity to bring the church to the next generation. Whether a child's education is conducted primarily by the parents or facilitated by teachers, every subject can be learned in a way that comes from the Word and is confirmed in the world.

Reading and writing can include a focus on the most important words ever written, the ones offered by the Lord Himself in His Sacred Scripture. Math and science can be viewed in a way that confirms the science of correspondences and recognizes the order in creation resulting from the influx of the Lord's Divine love and wisdom.

Literature can help students learn how to make choices for themselves by evaluating the decisions and actions of characters in every book they read.

Social studies can help students recognize the infinite variety of heaven by learning about the beautiful variety in the human race. And history can help confirm the continual presence of the Lord in His Divine Providence.

This is just a glimpse at how education in light of New Church doctrine can help teach a new generation about the wonderful Divine truths of the New Church.

But beyond what parents and teachers can do to teach a new generation about the truths of the church, the influence of every adult in a New Church society can make a difference too. This part of bringing the church to our children should not be overlooked. Friendly faces at church can help build

But beyond what parents and teachers can do to teach a new generation about the truths of the church, the influence of every adult in a New Church society can make a difference too.

Every generation has its struggles and will benefit from a continued effort by previous generations to help. The best help may very well come from the most senior generations in the church.

affections in the next generation. Just getting accustomed to seeing adults commit to being in church on Sundays can have a lasting effect on a potential member of the next generation of the church.

Even more, adults taking an interest in the future of each child in the church gives a young person growing up in a church society a sense of being part of a religious community. Looking for opportunities to affirmatively discuss the teachings of the church with the next generation strengthens, supports and confirms the vital importance of the church.

For a younger or a newer person in the church, a religious community full of people who love him, and want to help him and encourage him in the church can have a powerful effect. If the person chooses the church for himself, he will already be familiar with and have affection for this wonderful obligation to pass the church on to the next generation, having already experienced it firsthand.

Perhaps each of us can see how much we have benefitted from parents or grandparents or other members of the church who have taken us under their wing and helped us to see the mighty acts of the Lord as it says in the *Psalms*. This commitment to teaching a new generation can continue to the end of our lives as we look for ways to support each other in a life of charity from the testimonies and law of the Lord.

Every generation has its struggles and will benefit from a continued effort by previous generations to help. The best help may very well come from the most senior generations in the church. The Heavenly Doctrine describes that there is a state of innocence in wisdom, which generally begins in the 60th year. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10225)

But in addition to the clear guidance of the Lord in the Sacred Scripture and the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church to teach a new generation, the Lord also explains the effects of passing the church on to the next generation.

The next generation can do even better than the generation that preceded them. This opportunity is made painfully obvious in *Psalms* 78. It says the next generation “will not be as their fathers, a defiant and rebellious generation; a generation who prepared not its heart; and whose spirit was not faithful with God.” (Verse 8)

While we should not take this statement too far in condemning ourselves as part of any particular generation, we can certainly see that every generation in the church has its strengths and weaknesses and that every subsequent generation has an opportunity to improve upon the weakness and build on the strengths. In fact, this opportunity for continual improvement with future generations of the New Church is a new development in church history. Churches have declined over time, not improved. We read in the Heavenly Doctrine:

Every church, in process of time, decreases, by receding from the good of love and the truths of faith, until there is nothing of them left; and this takes place by the successive increase of evil and falsity; and when there is no longer any good of love and faith, then there is nothing but evil and falsity; and when this is the case, there is an end of the church. (*Apocalypse Explained* 658)

But the future of the New Church is different. We read in the Heavenly Doctrine that “the four churches of this earth . . . have undergone these changes of state . . . [but] the church truly Christian, which succeeds those four at the present day, will never undergo consummation.” (*Coronis* 24)

Despite the collapse of previous churches, the Lord teaches us in the Heavenly Doctrine that we are now in the midst of an era of perpetual improvement. “The successive states of the church after the end of the Jewish Church, or from the time of the Lord even to the present day, have been like a man increasing in intelligence and wisdom, or becoming regenerate.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 641)

As the Lord has revealed increasingly interior truths of the Word, first directly from His own mouth while He was on earth and then through His Second Coming in the Doctrine of the New Church, He has given the world what it needs to get better and better spiritually:

For this end the interior things of the Word, of the church, and of worship, were revealed by the Lord when He was in the world; and now again, things still more interior are revealed; and in the measure that things interior are revealed can man become wiser; for to become interior is to become wiser, and to become wiser is to become interior. (*Ibid.*)

Now this does not mean that we will see things getting better before our

We can have hope that if we fulfil our duty to do the best we can to pass on what we have been given, then the Lord in His Providence will secretly work to guide the church toward an even better future.

very eyes. On any given day it may look just the opposite, just as there have been horrific chapters of history in the midst of this upward trend described in the Heavenly Doctrine. And as more and more evils come out into the open things will be worse in some ways before they are better. But we can have hope. We can have hope that if we fulfil our duty to do the best we can to pass on what we have been given, then the Lord in His Providence will secretly work to guide the church toward an even better future.

Psalm 78 ends with words to this effect. It ends with the comforting picture of the Divine shepherd guiding His flock with the very palms of His hands: “And he pastured them according to the integrity of his heart; and led them by the understanding of the palms of his hands.” (*Psalm 78:72*)



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TEMPTATION

As used in the Writings, this term does not mean an impulse to do wrong. It refers to an assault upon man's ruling love which tries and tests him – an inner conflict in which his free reaction both shows and builds his character. According to the quality of his love, temptation is celestial, spiritual or natural; in which last instance it is not really temptation, although it may prepare for it. Temptation, also, is as to intellectual and voluntary things, the latter being more severe. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 741, 847, 2927, 4249, 8567)

Just What is the Lord Up To?

Council of the Clergy 2018

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

We teach a great deal about regeneration – what we need to do to find the way to heaven. This is as it should be. The salvation of souls is our focus and purpose. We certainly talk about the Lord, most notably at Christmas and Easter. Yet, the Lord can sometimes fade into the background as we deal with the challenges of life. We have so much that we have to do, both naturally and spiritually, that we can lose sight of what the Lord is doing.

Also, we know there is the intricate interplay between the Lord's providence and human choices. His providence acts from His will at one end of the spectrum and His permission at the other, and everything in between. Yet it can seem from this that much of providence is reactive to human choice: we make the choices and the Lord responds, almost as if we are entirely in charge of our lives. In one sense we are. Only we can make the eternally significant decision. And because the Lord will not openly show us His hand we cannot see what He is doing, in the world and in our lives. These factors can result in us inadvertently relegating the Lord to almost a bystander. We have to do the work of regeneration, He is not openly present, so it appears He is not there at all.

In this paper I'd like to switch the focus – from what we do to what the *Lord* does. There is an array of teachings that indicate how the Lord is actively present in this world and in our lives. How He is not occasionally here, or only intervening periodically. In fact, His active involvement in this world and our lives is incessant and all pervasive. And even when it seems like we are masters of our ships, it is astonishing how much the Lord is actually the unseen current that guides us, and, at times, the gale force winds that drive us to His intended shores.

Old and New Testament Examples

The Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of the Lord's active role in human history.

Consider the tragic story of Shechem and Dinah found in *Genesis* 34. Shechem lies with Dinah and wants to marry her. His father, Hamor, proposes an intermixing of their tribes through their union. The sons of Jacob, her brothers, announce this cannot happen unless Shechem and his tribe are circumcised. They agree and,

it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi . . . each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. (*Genesis* 34:25)

The story ends there. No moral comes out of it. Other than disapproval from Jacob there does not seem to be any negative consequence for these actions. The *Arcana Coelestia* provides a spiritual explanation – the reason why it was recorded in the Word. And on this occasion we are also given a natural explanation for the slaughter.

Shechem and his tribe were descendants of the Most Ancient Church, who could not intermingle with the sons of Jacob without spiritual catastrophe:

Hamor and Shechem could not accede to externals and accept those among the sons of Jacob without their internals being closed; thus causing their eternal destruction. This is the secret reason why Hamor and Shechem with their families were slain, which otherwise would not have been permitted. . . . All the evil which the evil intend and do to the good is turned by the Lord into good, as in the present instance, in that Hamor and Shechem with their families were saved. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4493:5, 6)

This is a fascinating example of the interplay of human action and Divine ruling providence, even in its permissions. Although it appears that all action is done by people through their choice, the Lord is operating behind the scenes, only allowing a hellish impulse to result in murder to spiritually save an entire tribe.

This is not to say that permissions are ever good in themselves. The Lord would much prefer to lead by His will, where people are striving to do what is right – like steering a car is easier when the wheels are in alignment and one does not have to fight against them. And it certainly is better for us to avoid permissions, since even if the Lord can bring good out of them, there is the damage permissions cause for innocent parties. The Lord can bring about the same or greater good by actions of His will.

Returning to Scripture, consider also Balaam – the prophet of the Lord who accepted a commission from King Balak to prophecy for him. (*Numbers* 22-24) Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Lord in hopes of preventing the Children of Israel from marching through his land. But every time Balaam opened his mouth, a blessing rather than a curse poured forth. This was not Balaam's choice. We are taught:

Since there was in the people Israel much that was wicked, idolatrous and filthy,

the Lord was not willing that such things should be discovered by Balaam, and that they should thus be indicted. For since it was true that they were of this nature, they would have been damned. This the Lord prevented. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2354)

Is the Lord's direct intervention in these cases an exception to His normal gentle but unseen leading? Or are these stories indicators of how the Lord regularly functions, and we are only given an explanation for a few of these Biblical episodes?

There are other examples. The grandsons of Jacob were all born prior to going down to Egypt. (The lone exceptions were the two sons of Joseph, who were already in Egypt.) Why did the other 11 sons not produce any children after leaving Canaan?

No son was born to Jacob's sons in Egypt when they came there, though they were still young men; all their sons were born in the land of Canaan . . . and this was for a particular reason that the Lord in His Divine Providence had in view, which was that aspects of the Church might be represented by them from when they were born. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6025)

So even some births were dictated not by what we might have thought were natural processes, but by the Lord's need for the church to be represented in the Word!

Divine intervention is also seen in the Lord's leadership of the church. The process by which spiritual knowledges were lost with the descending naturalistic spiral since the end of the Most Ancient Church also illustrates this:

When in process of time the representative things of the church, which were correspondences, were converted into things idolatrous and also into magic, then of the Lord's Divine Providence the knowledge of correspondences was gradually blotted out of remembrance, and among the Israelitish and Jewish people was altogether lost and annihilated. (*Sacred Scripture* 22; see also *De Verbo* 7)

While evil with the people led them to corrupt the truths of the most ancients, the Lord actively "blotted out of remembrance" the sacred ideas for their protection. They did not "just forget." The Lord removed the information from them.

The Lord's actions also preserved the Hebrew Word. Because the Jewish nation had such a reverence for the Old Testament and its traditions,

and inasmuch as it was foreseen that Christians would almost reject this Word, and would likewise defile its internal things with things profane, therefore that nation has been preserved until this time. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3479:3)

What's more,

The Jewish people have been preserved to this day and have been scattered throughout the Christian world, in order that the Word may be maintained in its sanctity through correspondences. (*Last Judgment Posthumous* 251; see also *Divine*

Providence 261:3; Apocalypse Revealed 350:2)

One might argue that the Lord was especially active in the Old Testament and ancient times due to the need for His direct oversight of the church, and for Biblical history with its record – to provide for the written Word. But why would the Lord not be just as active in the lives of all people in the world, whatever their formal religion?

Or, one might argue that with the cessation of representatives at the Lord's advent such direct intervention has also ceased. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1361:3, 1850:3, 4835:4; *Apocalypse Explained* 54, 401:31, 876:3; *Apocalypse Revealed* 863) But my understanding is that what ceased was the power of representatives to not only depict but also cause a connection with the spiritual world, as the ritualistic behaviors of the ancient Jews. The underlying forces of causation from the spiritual world from the Lord would not be affected by this.

But there is more evidence. Consider also the Lord's direct intervention beyond pre-advent times. The Lord ensured that the teachings of Paul were considered part of the New Testament in the first Christian Church:

The Epistles of Paul have not an internal sense . . . but it is permitted that they may be in the Church, lest those who are of the Church should work evil to the Word of the Lord, in which is the internal sense. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4824)

This is direct Divine action after representatives have ceased. And the Lord is using a permission of providence to preserve a higher good, the holiness of the Gospels. He is active even in what appears to be decisions and achievements of the human mind.

Consider also all the miracles done in both testaments. They seem to bend, if not break, all the normal rules of science. Yet we are told that “Divine miracles proceed from Divine truth and advance according to order, the effects in ultimates being miracles when it pleases the Lord that they be presented in this form.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7337)

The miracles done in Egypt and the healings performed by the Lord, for example, seem extraordinary. Yet they are the “normal” Divine process. This is described in the Word as the “finger of God” – the Lord acting directly, as noted by Pharaoh's magicians when Moses could do greater miracles than they (*Exodus* 8:15), and the Lord asserting this is how He cast out demons. (*Luke* 11:20; see also *True Christian Religion* add 1; *Miracles and Signs* 3; *Spiritual Experiences* 655)

Our incredible advances in science and medicine are truly amazing. But they can only describe a portion of what is going on. The rest is the Lord's activity in the world – His normal processes that appear miraculous to us.

If the Lord intervenes in these ways should we not expect that He will also be intervening in all things of life? Yes, these examples are drawn from long

ago and recorded in the Book that the Lord needed to perfectly reflect His Divine truths. But why would the Lord not be equally causative in everything else in dealing with the human race? Granted, He always operates in a way that provides for our freedom of choice. But that does not mean that He sits by idly awaiting our decisions, or is merely reactive to us, or does not at times overrule us.

Global Interventions

The Lord is also present and active in universal things.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (*Genesis*1:1)

I have made the earth,
 And created man on it.
 I – My hands – stretched out the heavens,
 And all their host I have commanded. (*Isaiah* 45:12)

Or, “The Divine is substance in itself or the one and only substance, so it is the substance from which each and all things have been created, thus that God is the all in all things of the universe.” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 198) What’s more, “subsistence is a perpetual coming into existence, thus preservation is perpetual creation.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6482)

You are worthy, O Lord,
 To receive glory and honor and power;
 For You created all things,
 And by Your will they exist and were created. (*Revelation* 4:11)

And, “In this creation He is constantly present by means of His Divine Providence.” (*Divine Providence* 202)

These sweeping statements are foundational to our understanding of the universe, our place in it, and the Lord’s engagement with us. Not only has He created the universe, He is constantly re-creating it every moment of every moment. And He is constantly present with us in His providence, so not even a sparrow “falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.” (*Matthew* 10:29)

This is further emphasized by the teaching that “the Lord governs and disposes all and everything in the universe, even evil itself, punishments, and temptations.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 245) The Lord is active in all degrees of

(The Lord) always operates in a way that provides for our freedom of choice. But that does not mean that He sits by idly awaiting our decisions, or is merely reactive to us, or does not at times overrule us.

Considering how adept the human race is at turning inwards and selfishly looking at the world around it, it is astonishing how the Lord has made sure that there is always a pathway and light directing people above themselves.

providence. Even when He permits unspeakable evils, He is still there, ensuring they do not spin out of His control and providing for the good that will come. He does not govern dictatorially, or by issuing orders to be obeyed upon pain of death. Rather, His government is the flow of the Divine providence. It is the overall leading of us throughout our lives, and the management of all the events of our lives. Yes, we exercise our freedom and rationality. And a portion of providence can be described as reactive to it. But the Lord is also managing our choices, influencing us at all times, and permitting nothing unless good can

and does come out of it. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489; *Spiritual Experiences* 1088, 2151, 3030)

The main point here is that the Lord really is in charge of everything as the Divine governor. His governance covers every least thing. Nothing can happen that He has not envisioned, planned for, and immediately responds to, creating good.

Not surprisingly, as the Lord has created all things, “the life of everyone . . . flows in solely from the Lord, who is life itself.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2888) “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.” (*John* 15:5)

This is literally true; without the Lord we cannot do anything. Even in the most private recesses of our minds, what we think of so passionately and intimately as ours alone, flows in from the Lord. He provides that we feel life as our own, for we could not function without that, but in essence it is an ongoing gift from our personal Creator.

The Lord has also ensured that His creation could respond to His love through religion:

It is provided by the Lord that there should be a religion everywhere; and that in every religion there should be the two essentials of salvation, namely, to acknowledge God and to refrain from evil because it is against God. (*Divine Providence* 328:8)

Considering how adept the human race is at turning inwards and selfishly looking at the world around it, it is astonishing how the Lord has made sure

that there is always a pathway and light directing people above themselves.

Even when an entire church falls, the Lord simply finds another way for people to be saved:

[T]he Lord provides that there will always be on this earth a church where the Word is read. That is why, when the Word was almost cast aside by Roman Catholics, of the Lord's Divine providence the Reformation took place in which the Word was again received. (*De Verbo* 17:3; see also *Sacred Scripture* 110; *Apocalypse Revealed* 759:2; *True Christian Religion* 270; *Invitation to the New Church* 24)

The Reformation is widely attributed to Martin Luther's vision and actions, or to the general disgruntlement by Germans and others over the oppressive "Roman" Church. Luther was instrumental in the Reformation. But it was the Lord inspiring Luther and the receptive mind set of people in general. So it can be truly said the Lord caused it to happen.

The Lord was active in the Christian Church in other ways. As that church disregarded the Word, and effectively kept it away from the laity, so the Lord responded. "For this reason also it has of the Lord's Divine Providence come to pass that in the Holy Supper the bread is given, which is 'the flesh;' and not the wine, which is 'the blood.'" (*Arcana Coelestia* 10040) There must have been extensive doctrinal discussion in the church leadership leading to withholding the wine. Yet, we are taught it was less their decision than the Lord's.

And the Lord is active beyond Christianity. Islam,

was raised up of the Lord's Divine providence and accommodated . . . to the native characters of eastern peoples, in order to put an end to the idolatries of so many nations, and to provide them with some awareness of the Lord before they came into the spiritual world. (*Divine Providence* 255:4; see also *Conjugal Love* 342:3; *True Christian Religion* 833)

Could we consider that this is the cause of all the religions that exist on earth? To salvage what the human race could not on its own? And in spite of cultural diversity and corruptions of the Ancient Church, the Lord in effect overruled all of that to ensure everyone can get to heaven?

An endlessly debated topic in historical studies is the issue of causation. Numerous theories are posited as to why certain events, such as wars, turned out the way they did. While religious people often presume a Divine hand in the outcomes, especially if the outcomes are viewed as favorable from their viewpoint (or perhaps as punishment if viewed unfavorably), the Writings indicate that the Lord is most immediately present in warfare also.

Divine providence, which people call luck, is active in the least particulars of things, even in trivial ones. If you acknowledge Divine providence in these, you must certainly acknowledge it in the circumstances of war. The successes and favorable outcomes of war are also called in common parlance the fortunes of war, and this is Divine providence, especially in the strategies and plans of the military commander, even though he attributes all of this then and afterward to his own prudence.

(Divine Providence 251:6)

Two examples from World War II could be examples of this. Why did the overwhelming power of the German army pause when the British army was trapped at Dunkirk – pressed against the sea with no apparent means of escape? The Germans could have easily captured or killed virtually the entire British army, but they delayed and the miraculous flotilla of small ships saved the British.

Various explanations by historians have been proffered, from the German's exhaustion at having raced across Europe, or miscommunication among the German generals. But could the real cause have been the Lord sowing confusion so the British army could be saved, thus giving England the ability to carry on against Nazism when no other country in the world stood against them?

Or in the battle for Midway Island, what led the Japanese admirals to make the fatal decision to switch out the bombs on their carrier decks so they were exposed, just as the American planes, which had been fruitlessly searching for them for hours, finally discovered them, and destroyed most of their carriers? This was perhaps the most significant turning point in the war in the Pacific, as the Japanese armed forces were thereafter on the defensive. Chance?

Or, consider an example that is harder, at least from a Western World perspective, to understand. When Lenin's revolution was just beginning, it was so fragile that it could have been stopped at several points with very little effort. Why did the Lord allow it to succeed, and the following reign of Lenin's henchman Stalin that resulted in the deaths of probably 20 million people? Was there some worse fate that might have happened to the people of the Soviet Union? Or is there some good coming out of it that we cannot yet see?

We can speculate endlessly about the spiritual causes for these and other events. While we can never be certain what the Lord is doing, whether operating from will or permission, or what good He is bringing out of His permissions, we can know that He was doing something, directly intervening and altering the world in which we live.

The Lord's Glorification – He Did it Himself

It would be presumptuous and foolish to think that any human being glorified the Lord. Of course, He glorified Himself. It's self-evident. But what has always struck me is how much emphasis the Writings place on this teaching.

The Lord came into the world. The virgin birth could be nothing more than Divine agency. And there are many statements declaring how everything from Mary was put off in the glorification process. Her role was important,

essential, but it was not personal to her. It could probably have been any number of women. And nothing derived from her was Divine, or became Divine. What came via Mary enabled the Lord to glorify the Human Essence. He took nothing from her or any human being.

From birth, the Lord acquired remains, remnants, as everyone does. They are instilled by the angels, mothers and other care givers. Yet, remains are fundamentally from the Lord. In the Lord's case we are taught that His remains were "Divine goods that He procured for Himself by His own power, and by means of which He united the Human Essence to the Divine Essence." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1988:2)

Notice He procured them for Himself, almost as if He was the only one involved in the process. Is this perhaps why we are told virtually nothing about His early natural life – so we do not focus on the means rather than what the Lord was doing, which is now revealed in the Writings?

And throughout His life in this world, the inflowing of the celestial and spiritual, via the angels, was coming from Himself: "But with the Lord when He was in the world, the inflowing was from Himself, because the Divine was in Him." (*Arcana Coelestia* 4980; cf. 4592:2, 3) So, everything He received came from Himself, and nothing from others.

Thus, it is not surprising that we find the statement:

That the Lord made His Human Divine by His own power, *thus without the aid of anyone*, may be seen from the fact that because He was conceived of Jehovah, the Divine was in Him, and thus the Divine was His; and therefore when He was in the world, and made the Human in Himself Divine, He did this from His own Divine, or from Himself. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5005, emphasis added; see also 3043:3, 3927:2, passim)

This "without the aid of anyone" is especially seen in His temptations. From the very beginning He was in charge of the process. He prepared Himself to enter them: "The Lord from His Divine could induce upon Himself whatever states He pleased, and that He prepared Himself for temptations by inducing many states." (*Arcana Coelestia* 2786) He prepared the way for the hells to assault Him by associating with each of the hellish affections and falsities in turn, so their fury and hatred could be directed at Him that He might overcome their venom and their devastating effect upon the human race.

The Lord's wrestling or fighting with them was His alone. "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people no one was with Me. And from the peoples no one was with Me." (*Isaiah* 63:3; cf. *Apocalypse Explained* 922:5) Or, "He fought alone and by His own power against the whole of hell." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1444, 1573:4, 1692, 1921, passim)

This does not mean that the Lord was alone in the process. He engaged

angels in this use, yet it was only from Him that they could function. Two passages highlight this:

That there were angels with the Lord when He fought against the hells, is evident from the Word; as also from the consideration that when He was in the combats of temptations, it could not be otherwise than that angels should be present, to whom the Lord from His own power gave strength, and as it were power, to fight together with Him, for all the power that the angels have is from the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1752)

When the Lord made the human in Himself Divine, He too had around Him societies of spirits and angels, for He willed that all things should be done according to order; but He summoned to Himself such as might be of service, and changed them at His good pleasure; yet He did not take from them and apply to Himself anything of good and truth, but only from the Divine. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4075; see entire passage for examples)

It thus appeared to the angels that they assisted the Lord. And in one sense they did. Yet their participation was not one of an equal partnership. For even the power that the angels had to be involved came from the Lord. Yes, they had to exercise their judgment in how to help the Lord, but they could not have done even that without the Lord being present with them and, in a sense, determining the outcome.

And we know that the angels were “indignant” when they had served their purposes and the Lord associated others with Himself:

The societies do not easily recede from him with whom they have been; but when he with whom they are recedes, they are indignant, and behave themselves in like manner as did Laban here toward Jacob; nay, if they perceive that any good has come to the person through their means, they say that it came to him from them; for in their indignation they speak from evil. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4077)

It is thus not surprising that eventually the Lord had to wrestle with the angels themselves, whose efforts to help Him got in the way of His glorification. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4287:2, 4592:5, 4307e; see the Rev. Dan Pendleton’s seminal paper on this topic, *New Church Life* 1958: 103-115)

Explaining the phenomenon of the Lord employing people in the glorification process, we are taught:

It is one thing to acquire something from a means, and another to acquire it by a means. The Lord acquired good by a means, because He was born a man, and derived from the mother an hereditary which was to be expelled; but He did not acquire good from a means, because He was conceived of Jehovah, from whom He had the Divine; and He therefore gave Himself all the goods and truths which He made Divine. For the Divine Itself has need of none, not even of that mediate good; except that He willed that all things should be done according to order. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4065)

In one sense, passages such as these make it seem as if the Lord was

operating completely on His own. People were an ancillary and apparently an unnecessary part of the process. That allowing people to participate in any way was simply a token for them. Yet, stating that it was “according to order” points to the importance of the Lord involving them. It is sort of a quandary – the Lord did it all on His own, yet He invited Mary, the disciples, angels, etc. to join with Him in the process.

Surely it was beneficial to them, as it is for the angels today to be present with and affect the human race, as it is for each of us to be a positive influence on others. Yet, even as we have a role to play, it is actually the Lord who enables us to do this – giving us the inspiration and ability to fulfill these roles, and leading in the directions He wants.

Could Mary have rejected Gabriel’s invitation? Could the disciples have refused to follow the Lord? Could the scribes and Pharisees have not opposed the Lord and prevented the crucifixion? The wonder of the Lord’s providence is that He could use all these people who were acting from their own rationality and liberty, but it was the Lord’s will being done. The Lord was doing it all!

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The Lord’s Presence in Smaller Things

The Lord’s presence, and the operation of His providence, goes far beyond the global forces of the world and His glorification. For “all things, nay, the leasts of all things, down to the leasts of the leasts, are directed by the Providence of the Lord, even as to the very steps.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6493; *Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2)

Take two basic examples, money and chance:

The Lord provides for the good, who receive His mercy in time, such things as contribute to the happiness of their eternal life; riches and honors for those to whom they are not hurtful; and no riches and honors for those to whom they would be hurtful. Nevertheless, to these latter He gives in time, in the place of honors and riches, to be glad with a few things, and to be more content than the rich and honored. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8717:3; see also 7007:3)

How much advice is given on how to become rich, or at least financially secure? Certainly, we are meant to use prudence in support of providence, to make sensible decisions regarding our incomes and purchases. And yet, why

is it that some become wealthy and others not? Economists can point to many reasons – a college education, long-term investing, starting a business, etc. And people can make decisions that virtually ensure they will have a hard time financially – being a poor employee, not taking advantage of learning new skills, running up large credit card debt. While there are individual choices here, there is also the Lord patiently influencing and causing outcomes. So, if someone wonders why others always win the lottery . . .

And this well-known passage on chance or fortune also points to the Lord's involvement in ways that we would never be able to see:

For a number of years I have carefully observed whether fortune is anything, and I have found that it is, and that sagacity then availed nothing. Moreover, all who have long reflected on this subject, know and confess this, but they do not know whence it is: scarcely anyone knows that it is from the spiritual world, when yet this is the source of it. I once played in company a common game of chance with dice, and the spirits who were with me spoke to me about fortune in games, and said that what is fortunate was represented to them by a bright cloud, and what is unfortunate by a dusky cloud; and that when a dusky cloud appeared with me, it was impossible for me to win; moreover by this sign they predicted to me the turns of fortune in that game. From this it was given me to know that what is attributed to fortune, even in games, is from the spiritual world; much more that which befalls a person in relation to the vicissitudes in the course of his life; and that what is called fortune is from the influx of Providence in the ultimates of order, where it so comes forth; thus that Providence is in the veriest singulars of all things, according to the Lord's words, that not even a hair falls from the head without the will of God. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6494)

Perhaps we are willing to grant the Lord a larger role in games where, while some judgment is required, the roll of the dice or the cards we are dealt seem to be a greater factor in the outcomes than skill itself. Or where there are forces that seem out of our control, such as the weather, or traffic accidents from other motorists' poor decisions. But even here, and in our carefully managed lives, the Lord is present and leading – our very steps. Yes, His leading will vary depending upon our reception, our choices, but the Lord is still there, constantly uplifting and guiding, for “the Lord rules everyone, not only in the universal, but also in the veriest singulars, and this immediately from Himself.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6058, 2706)

The Extent of the Lord's Presence in the Details of Life

Turning to the Lord's involvement in the various aspects of our lives, we have an impressive array of teachings about how the Lord is active and influences, if not causes, much to happen.

While we have rationality and liberty, and need to fully exercise them to become human, we are not alone in their operation. For “it is only from the Lord that a person can think, speak and reason; for he has this power

from the two faculties, liberty and rationality, and these faculties a person has from the Lord alone.” (*Divine Providence* 219:3) And beyond just thinking, the “Lord continually flows into all people with light that enlightens, and with the affection of knowing and understanding truths, also for willing and doing them.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 701)

So our affections and willing flow in from the Lord also. Granted, the Lord does not flow in in a way that compels belief or forces us to embrace any particular feeling. But He is always encouraging and bending us to achieve His goals.

One area that we might think is personal to us alone is what we believe. Yes, we recognize the universal influx into everyone “that there is a God, and that He is one.” (*True Christian Religion* 8; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 1308; *Heaven and Hell* 82; *Sacred Scripture* 58; *Divine Providence* 329; *Apocalypse Explained* 52, 151:2, 954, 955:5, 1097:2, 1118:2) But surely we make the decision what to accept as true! Yet, consider this teaching:

For the Lord does not openly teach anyone truths, but through good leads to the thinking of what is true, and unknown to the person He also inspires the perception and *consequent choice* that such a thing is true because the Word so declares, and because it accords therewith. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5952, emphasis added)

So even as we wrestle with what to accept as guiding principles in our lives, ideals and truths to lay out a path forward, the Lord is inspiring us with choices of belief that will enable Him to lead us to heaven.

What’s more, our rationality and liberty, as much as they are essential for our spiritual lives, are not necessarily determinative in what happens. For there are at least times when the Lord will overrule what we want. Consider this teaching:

Be it known, however, that some persons think they are not in good when they are, and some that they are in good when they are not. The reason why some think they are not in good when they are, is that when they reflect upon the good in themselves, it is at once insinuated by the angels in whose society they are, that they are not in good, lest they should attribute the good to themselves, and lest their thought should be turned to their own merit, and thereby to the setting up of themselves above others. Without this guardianship they would fall into temptations.

As regards some supposing themselves to be in good when they are not, the cause of this is that when they reflect upon it, it is immediately insinuated by the evil genii and spirits in whose companionship they are, that they are in good (for the evil believe delight to be good), and it is suggested that whatever good they have done to others for the sake of the love of self and of the world is good that is to be recompensed even in the other life; thus that they have merit above others, whom they despise in comparison with themselves, and indeed esteem them as of no account. And, wonderful to say, *if they were to think differently they would fall into*

temptations, in which they would yield. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2380:4, 5 emphasis added; see also 1043:3)

The Lord will even cause us to completely misunderstand our own motives and loves if it is necessary for our salvation!

And as we strive to walk in the Lord's way, repenting and trying to reform our lives, it is really the Lord who is doing it. We are taught that "no one can be reformed by himself by means of his own prudence, but only by the Lord by means of His Divine Providence." (*Divine Providence* 202:2) And that "the Lord creates a person anew, or regenerates him." (*Arcana Coelestia* 10047:3, *passim*) The oft repeated teaching is that we cannot regenerate ourselves. (cf. *True Christian Religion* 71:2, 73:2; *Apocalypse Revealed* 224:9; *Brief Exposition* 69:3) But it goes beyond the Lord having the Divine power to save, or just influencing us in some general way.

In a person's regeneration, however, the Lord draws out every single thing in its proper order, separating them all from one another and arranging them so that they may be turned in the direction of truths and goods and may be joined to them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 675)

Think of all the teachings in the *Arcana Coelestia* about the development of the mind – how the Lord touches each individual affection and thought, leading people from one state into another. This is an intimate, personalized, kind of leading that creates heaven within. "He fashions their hearts individually." (*Psalms* 33:15) Or, as it is put in *Isaiah*:

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called *you* by your name;
You are Mine." (43:1)

We are indeed the Lord's. He is connected to every least aspect of our lives and is actively affecting everything within us for our eternal welfare.

What's more, the Lord even deals with our less-than-ideal states, regenerating us in stages and to the extent that we allow Him.

[W]hen a person is being born anew by the Lord, he is led by various affections of good and truth which are not affections of genuine good and truth, but are of use merely to enable us to apprehend these, and then to enable us to become imbued with them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3982:2)

Even in our imperfect understandings and less-than-pure motivations, the Lord is there. He can even be present and use our imperfections as a means to lead us. In a sense, He saves us in spite of ourselves.

The Lord also protects us from what might cause harm – spiritual harm. We know that there are terrible evils He permits which bring pain and suffering. It is probably impossible for anyone to be in this world for any length of time

without tragedy or hurt. We bring it on ourselves, others impose it on us, and natural circumstances can be cruel. Yet,

When you pass through the waters, I *will* be with you;
 And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
 When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
 Nor shall the flame scorch you. (*Isaiah* 43:2)

The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD,
 And He delights in his way.
 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
 For the LORD upholds *him* with His hand. (*Psalms* 37:23, 24)

What the Lord protects us from is being “cast down,” spiritual harm that would take away our freedom to go to heaven, as was seen in the case of Shechem and his tribe. “[U]nless the Lord preserved all every instant, they would perish.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 694, 2410) “Unless the Divine acted against [the hells], they would rush in like a vast ocean, one hell after another, for the resisting of which a person is not of the slightest avail.” (*Ibid.* 8175) Regardless of what may happen to us naturally, or what we might bring upon ourselves, our freedom is inviolate. The Lord will always preserve our ability to be saved. For without the Lord protecting us against the hells, the human race would rapidly cease to exist.

And even when the Lord does not entirely stop the hells from affecting us, He moderates and changes how they affect us to minimize the damage. (*Spiritual Experiences* 617; *Arcana Coelestia* 6481, 6489) He never allows them to destroy our rationality and liberty. He softens their impact on our lives, and He ensures that whatever harm occurs that He can enable us to develop from there and even be strengthened by the experience.

And we should also think of the Lord providing an external protection against at least some of the vicissitudes of this life. Consider this teaching:

When I was on the street, I very often noticed that they wanted to cast me under the wheels of the carriage, so that this desire had become habitual with them. Today I observed once more that they had the constant urge to do so, for I was enabled to sense it when they were trying the same thing, and indeed, that the aura of their endeavors is constantly of this character, and is their very life, and I realized that the Lord is constantly preserving mankind, and blocking their efforts. This shows that unless the Lord at every moment, even the very least, keeps us, even our least step, we would at once perish, for such is the effort of the world of spirits. (*Spiritual Experiences* 3821; see also 3893 and 4630 – the Lord being able to prevent misfortunes if it were good for us.)

Even in sleep, we have a special protection from the Lord against the hells. “Evil spirits most vehemently desire and burn to infest and attack a person when he is sleeping, but a person is then especially guarded by the Lord, for

love does not sleep.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1983) “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

A few highlights from the Lord’s presence with us in our temptations also illumines His incessant and overriding care for us. The Lord leads us and prepares us so that when temptations occur we are ready and can overcome in them. “[T]hrough angels the Lord guards a person, and restrains the evil spirits and genii from ranging beyond bounds and inundating the person beyond what he is able to bear.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 741)

While it is certainly possibly to succumb in temptations, or we can be overwhelmed temporarily by situations in life, He ensures that we are never spiritually destroyed. This is not the same as the trite statement, “the Lord never gives us more than we can handle.” In one sense this is perfectly true. The Lord does not do this. But it can happen. And if it does, the Lord ensures that we are preserved through it and brought out well on the other side – perhaps not as quickly as we may like, or the way in which we may like, but He nonetheless does bring us out.

The Lord is also the one wrestling with the hells alongside or with us.

[I]t is the Lord alone who fights in a person against his evils, and that it only appears to the person that he fights of himself, and also that the Lord wills that it should so appear to him, because without this appearance no combat takes place and therefore no reformation. (*Doctrine of Life* 96)

We do have our role to play and the feeling, appearance of self-life, enables us to do it. But the Lord is invisibly sustaining us so we can do this. What’s more, even in our efforts the Lord is holding our hands and enabling us to resist the hells. “The Lord keeps him in hope and trust, which are the forces of combat from within whereby he resists.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6097) This is unseen and unfelt, but it is the Lord directly intervening so we can weather the storms of temptations.

The Lord is also the one who removes evils. “The lusts of evil that constitute the interiors of a person from his birth can be removed by the Lord alone.” (*Doctrine of Life* 110) Since the Lord regenerates us, this teaching is not surprising. But it does lift the burden off of us. We do not have to make the evil go away. We only have to shun it; the Lord then removes it. This may not happen in a short time and because of the complexity and depth of evil. But the Lord works in concert with us – as we flee evil, He pushes it further and further away from the core of our lives.

The Lord is also active in how much truth and good we can acquire in our lives. “[T]he Lord admits a person interiorly into the truths of wisdom and at the same time into the goods of love only so far as he can be kept in them even to the end of his life.” (*Divine Providence* 232) Here the Lord ensures that we cannot embrace spiritual things unless we have the ability to hold on to

them eternally. Profanation can still happen. But only by a choice that we do not have to make. Such foresight gives us a protection and assurance that whatever we come to see as true and live as good, the Lord can maintain it.

And our happiness and joy in life is not a product of our own creation. We cannot make ourselves happy. But we can receive happiness from the Lord:

But to be led to happiness in heaven is known and perceived not to be of a person's own sagacity, because it is from the Lord, and is effected from his Divine providence by disposing and continually leading to good.
(*Arcana Coelestia* 10779)

We need to take actions that allow happiness to flow in. And we are told that “angelic happiness is in use, from use, and according to use” – indicating how active they are. (*Ibid.* 454) But the Lord is always the source of the happiness and joy.

Along these lines, “from the marriage of good and truth flowing in from the Lord comes ... conjugal love.” (*Conjugal Love* 92) Nor is marriage and the joy in marriage self-originating. It, like all else that is worthwhile and good, comes to us from the Lord.

So we are taught that “all marriages of love truly conjugal are provided by the Lord.” (*Ibid.* 229) The passage continues after this general principle with the illustration of couples being prepared and led to find each other in heaven, “thinking to themselves as from a kind of inner dictate, the young man, ‘she is mine,’ and the young woman, ‘he is mine.’”

While we may discount this as too angelic for us, especially mistrusting the “love at first sight” feeling some young people have, it holds a vital truth: when couples approach the altar they should think that it is from the Lord's will that they are with each other. That they have been prepared for each other from birth. And it has been the Lord's gentle leading that has brought about their glimpse of such heavenly happiness. It is His will. (And, of course, they should continue to think that at every anniversary and especially when they are experiencing challenges in their relationship.)

All this simply confirms this general truth:

From our life itself, to thinking and feeling, regeneration and joy, the Lord is the Source of it all. He is there in the greatest and least, actively engaged with us, leading us, and doing more than we could ever imagine in the journey of life.

What this means for us is that we do not have to be anxious about the future, or our imperfect efforts to improve – we just have to do a little, and the Lord does the rest.

[A]ll love, and consequently all life – which is of love alone – and thus all happiness, come solely from the Lord, and that they have not the least of love, of life, or of happiness, from themselves. (*Arcana Coelestia* 32:2; see also 597:3, 2706, 5847, 6467, 8497)

From our life itself, to thinking and feeling, regeneration and joy, the Lord is the Source of it all. He is there in the greatest and least, actively engaged with us, leading us, and doing more than we could ever imagine in the journey of life.

Wrap Up

So, what is the Lord up to? An awful lot! Far more than we could ever imagine. These and other teachings, particularly in the details of how the Lord is active in our regeneration, point to His immediate and constant presence, and active leading in all aspects of our lives. He is engaged in the world and in our lives in countless ways. And in ways that we would resist if we had even a glimmering of what He was doing.

We can stand in awe of these teachings; actually, in awe of the Lord – His love and immediate care for us in all things. And it can humble us as we realize how much He is constantly doing in our lives and the world to bring about good. Thus when we are praised, it should be easy for us to realize that it really was the Lord's doing.

However, there can be a risk in emphasizing these teachings of falling prey to “standing with hands hanging limp, mouth open, and eyes closed, holding his breath and awaiting influx.” (*Divine Providence* 210) After all, if the Lord is doing that much, why not let Him do it all? There is a perpetual give-and-take between us and the Lord. We do have to search for evils, repent and start a new life. No one can do it for us. Yet, the Lord is doing so much more than we do!

An image illustrates the appearance that we are fully in charge of our lives, and yet the Lord is still leading us:

Providence is as when one walks in thick forests, the exit out of which he does not know; but when he finds it, he attributes the discovery to himself, whereas Providence meantime is as one who stands in a tower, sees the wanderings of such a person, and leads him without his knowing it to the place of exit. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4393)

There is also a risk in thinking that our decisions do not matter since the Lord will determine all outcomes. While “man proposes and God disposes”

can appear to be the case at times, and it does have some truth in it since He can determine an event rather than us, the Lord protects our freedom and will not impose heaven upon us if we absolutely refuse it. Yes, we can go to hell. In spite of the Lord's unceasing efforts, if we repeatedly reject His leading, we can become eternally mired in a self or worldly focus.

But the Lord really is in charge – of the big picture and of the smallest details of life. There is nothing meaningless to Him! He is actively present in whatever happens, regardless of whether it is His will or permission.

What this means for us is that we do not have to be anxious about the future, or our imperfect efforts to improve – we just have to do a little, and the Lord does the rest. Consider this:

And when a person has made a beginning the Lord does all that is good in him, and causes him not only to see evils to be evils, but also to refrain from willing them, and finally to turn away from them. This is meant by the Lord's words, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (*Matthew 11:30; Heaven and Hell 533, see also 359; Arcana Coelestia 905*)

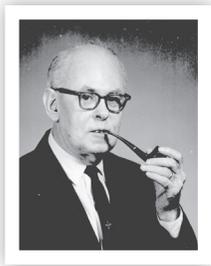
We just have to make a beginning. We are never alone. We are never without the Divine support of the Lord's gentle guiding and leading. We can do nothing that will drive Him away, nor cause Him to even look at us with a stern expression. (*True Christian Religion 332*) And He constantly acts on our behalf. He does not sit back and watch. He is never uninvolved or waiting for us. He acts silently and in ways that we can only speculate on as we look back on our lives. But we should know that He is there. And He is always bringing about what is good.



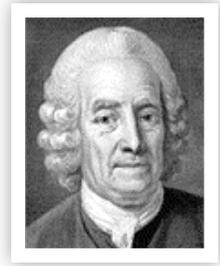
The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith is Executive Bishop and General Pastor of the General Church, Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church, and President of the General Church in Canada, the General Church in South Africa, and of the General Church International, Incorporated. He will retire as Executive Bishop at the end of June. He lives with his wife, Gretchen (Umberger), in Bryn Athyn. Contact: Brian.Keith@newchurch.org

Interviewing the Revelator

The Rev. W. Cairns Henderson



Note: These “interviews” with Emanuel Swedenborg were written by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson as pastor of the Carmel New Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, 1946-1950. Questions were put by the interviewer and answers supplied by Swedenborg, gathered from the Writings, letters and other documents. This was presented by two speakers at a Swedenborg Birthday Celebration and published in the



January 1949 issue of *New Church Life*. NewSearch notes that a tape of this presentation was played in 1973 at the Hurstville, Australia, Society – where Rev. Henderson had earlier served – in celebration of Swedenborg’s birthday. Our thanks to Marvin B. Clymer, Digital Collections Supervisor for the Swedenborg Library in Bryn Athyn, for this find.

FIRST INTERVIEW

Interviewer: Good evening, Herr Assessor. There are so many things we want to ask you that it is difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps you would tell us first just a little about the mission that makes your life and work so interesting to the Church?

Swedenborg: I have been called to a holy office by the Lord Himself, who most mercifully appeared before me, His servant, in the year 1743, when He opened my sight into the spiritual world, and enabled me to speak with angels and spirits. (*Letter to Rev. Thomas Hartley*)

I: Now what exactly was that office? Why did it please the Lord to appear before you?

S: “It has pleased the Lord to manifest Himself to me, and to send me to teach those things which will belong to the New Church, which is meant by the New Jerusalem.” (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 1)

I: I wonder if you would care to enlarge on that?

S: “As the Lord cannot manifest Himself in Person, and yet He has foretold

that He will come and found a New Church which is the New Jerusalem, it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who can not only receive the doctrines of this Church with his understanding, but can also make them public by the press." (*True Christian Religion* 779)

I: I see. And you, Herr Assessor, were that man?

S: "That the Lord manifested Himself before me, His servant, sent me on this duty, and afterwards opened the sight of my spirit, and thus introduced me into the spiritual world, I testify in truth." (*Ibid.* 779)

I: And that testimony, sir, we accept without question. But tell me: why was it necessary for the Lord to open the sight of a man's spirit, granting that He could not come in Person?

S: "Who in the Christian world would have known anything of heaven or hell if it had not pleased the Lord to open in someone the sight of his spirit. and to show and teach?" (*True Christian Religion* 851e)

I: There was, then, no other way in which this knowledge could be given. Is that it?

S: "As it is impossible for any angel of heaven to descend, or for any spirit of hell to ascend, and speak with any man, except with those who have the interiors of the mind opened by the Lord: and as this cannot be done fully, except with those who have been prepared by the Lord to receive the things which are of spiritual wisdom; therefore it has pleased the Lord to do this to me, to the end that the state of heaven and hell, and the state of men after death, may not be unknown." (*Conjugal Love* 39)

I: That is both clear and convincing, sir. Would you, to round it off, say why it was necessary that this be done to you?

S: "As with most of the church at this day there is no faith in the life after death, and scarcely any in heaven, nor in the Lord as being the God of heaven and earth, therefore the interiors which are of my spirit have been opened by the Lord, so that I may, while I am in the body, be at the same time with the angels in heaven, and not only speak with them, but also see there amazing things, and describe them, lest hereafter also people should say, Who has come to us from heaven and has told us that it exists, and of the things which are there?" (*Arcana Coelestia* 9439)

I: I think we can all see how necessary it was. And now, before we leave this particular subject, we can take it definitely, then, that you were commissioned by the Lord Himself?

S: "Our Savior visibly revealed Himself before me, and commanded me to

do what I have done. . . . If any doubt should still remain, I am ready to testify with the most solemn oath that this is the whole truth and a reality." (*Letter to the King of Sweden*)

I: That, sir, will not be necessary here. But perhaps we may ask, for the sake of the record, whether your spiritual experiences were in any way given on your own account?

S: "Our Savior permits me to experience this, not on my own account, but for the sake of a sublime interest which concerns the eternal welfare of all Christians." (*Ibid*)

I: Thank you! Now, Herr Assessor, here is a question in which we are much interested. The doctrines of a church are theological matters. So why did the Lord reveal the doctrines of the New Church through you, a layman, instead of one of the clergy?

S: "Such is the Lord's good pleasure, who prepared me for this office from my earliest years. But I will ask you in return: Why did the Lord, when in the world, choose fishermen for His disciples, and not some of the lawyers, scribes, priests or rabbis?" (*True Christian Religion* 850)

I: That scarcely needs answering, does it, sir? The professional orders to which these men belonged had changed the meaning of the Word to suit their evils. If the disciples were not learned in the Law, neither were they trained and confirmed in the false interpretations taught in the schools. But I see another question here. In 1743 you were, let me see, in your 56th year, and your whole life had been devoted to study of science and philosophy. How, then, from being a philosopher, did you become a theologian?

S: "In the same manner that fishermen were made disciples and apostles by the Lord. I also had from early youth been a spiritual fisherman." (*Invitation to the New Church* 20)

I: And what, sir, is that?

S: "A fisherman, in the Word in its spiritual sense, signifies a man who investigates and teaches natural truths, and afterwards spiritual truths in a rational manner." (*Ibid*)

I: Thank you! And you became an investigator of spiritual truths because they are founded on natural truths?

S: "The cause has been that the spiritual things now being revealed may be taught and understood naturally and rationally; for spiritual truths have a correspondence with natural truths For this reason I was introduced by the Lord first into the natural sciences, and thus prepared; and, in fact, from

the year 1710 to the year 1744, when heaven was opened to me. The Lord has further granted me to love truths in a spiritual manner, that is, for the sake of truths themselves; for he who loves truths for the sake of truth sees them from the Lord." (*Letter to Oetinger*)

I: I can assure you, sir, that this is all most interesting. And what you have just said opens up another line of inquiry. But time is running on, and we had better leave that for a little.

SECOND INTERVIEW

I: In our first interview, Herr Assessor, you mentioned your preparation. I want to ask you about that. But first, a question arising from one of your earlier replies. Your explanation of why you, a layman, were chosen had an obvious implication. Would I be correct in assuming that you had not studied theology?

S: "I was forbidden to read writers on dogmatic and systematic theology before heaven was opened to me, because unfounded opinions and inventions might easily have insinuated themselves, which afterwards could have been removed with difficulty: and therefore, when heaven was opened to me, I read the Word of God over many times; and as God's Word is the source from which all theology must be derived, I was thereby enabled to receive instruction from the Lord." (*Letter to Beyer*)

I: Now if I might digress for a moment, why did you use the terminology of the Christian Church in your earlier works?

S: "It could have been written no otherwise, because the whole Christian world believes no otherwise." (*Spiritual Experiences* 3217)

I: I see. It was not that you believed as they did, but that you addressed your readers in the only language they could understand; just as a man who knows that the earth revolves round the sun might speak of it as rising and setting to those who know no otherwise. But what of your own thought before your spiritual eyes were opened, your thought about the Trinity, for example?

S: "From my infancy I have not been able to admit into my mind any other idea than that of one God." (*True Christian Religion* 16) "My natural thought concerning a Trinity and Unity of Persons, and concerning the birth of a Son of God from eternity, I had from the doctrine of faith which has its name from Athanasius; and that doctrine is just and right, provided that by a Trinity of Persons there be understood a Trinity of Person, which exists solely in the Lord Jesus Christ." (*Apocalypse Revealed* 961) "By three Persons I understood three proceeding Divine attributes, which are Creation, Salvation, and Reformation,

and are attributes of the one God." (*Ibid*)

I: Thank you, sir. That surely puts the matter beyond all doubt. Your case was, I see, just like that of the man who thinks naturally, and speaks according to the appearance that the sun rises and sets, although in his rational mind he is well aware that the earth revolves on its axis and around the sun. However, that was a digression. What I wanted to ask was about your preparation. You said, I think, that you had been prepared from an early age?

S: "It pleased the Lord to prepare me from my earliest youth to receive the Word." (*Invitation to the New Church* 55)

I: And that being the case, your whole life, up to 1743, must have been guided by the Divine Providence?

S: "All things in my preceding life have been governed by the Lord." (*Spiritual Experiences* 3177) "The tenor of the Divine Providence has governed the acts of my life from adolescence itself, so that at last I arrived at this end, that I could at last understand through the knowledges of natural things, and could thus, of the Divine mercy of God Messiah, serve as an instrument for opening the things which lie inmostly concealed in the Word of God." (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 2/839)

I: So your coming into these inmost things was entirely by Divine leading, and in no way of your own seeking?

S: "As these things are so dangerous, namely, to scrutinize and explore spiritual and celestial things by means of natural knowledges, it has been granted me by the Divine mercy of God Messiah that I dare not do it of myself, but by the inspiration of God Messiah." (*Ibid.* 2/1281, 2)

I: That refutes clearly some of the foolish things said about you. Now, Herr Assessor, you have told me that your office required you to be in the natural and spiritual worlds at the same time. And you have shown us that by investigating nature from a spiritual love of truth you were able to arrive at a rational philosophy, and so had your mind formed by rational truths. But was there not another side to your preparation? Surely there was a physiological basis for your introduction into the spiritual world?

S: "My respiration was so formed by the Lord that I could breathe inwardly for a considerable time, without the aid of external air; so that my breathing was so directed inwardly that the external senses still remained in their vigor. . . I was also instructed that the breathing is so directed, while I am ignorant of it, that I may be with spirits and speak with them." (*Spiritual Experiences* 3317)

I: That is most interesting. Now, when did this breathing begin, and how

would you say it was developed?

S: "I was first accustomed so to breathe in my early childhood, when saying my morning and evening prayers, and occasionally afterwards when exploring the harmonies of the lungs and heart, and especially when deeply engaged in writing the works that have been published. . . . I was thus, during many years, introduced into such breathings from the period of childhood, especially by means of absorbing speculations, in which the breathing seems to become quiescent; in no other way is an intense speculation into truth possible. Afterwards, when heaven was opened to me, I sometimes scarcely breathed by inspiration at all for the space of a short hour, drawing only enough air to keep up thinking." (*Ibid.* 3464)

I: Thank you! You have certainly shown us how fully and wonderfully you were prepared by the Lord. I wonder if I might ask now about your introduction into the spiritual world. How, for instance, was heaven first shown to you?

S: "The kingdom of God was first shown to me in the repose of sleep, but afterwards sometimes in the middle of the day, or in a time of wakefulness." (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 541)

I: And how fully, sir, were you admitted among spirits?

S: "It has been granted me to be among spirits with every sense, and to perceive their nature by an interior sense." (*Ibid.* 130)

I: Just to complete that, could you tell us, in a general way, how your introduction into the spiritual world was effected?

S: "Mankind has been so created that they can speak with spirits and angels, . . . which also, of the mercy of the Lord, has been the case with me; and indeed so that while I was in intercourse with men, I have not differed one whit from myself, as I was before. But when I was with spirits I was then as it were separated from the body, but yet was at the same time conjoined with it, because my spirit was then with spirits." (*Spiritual Experiences* 722)

I: And may I ask, sir, whether you ever had any premonitions of your introduction into the spiritual world?

S: "Not only were there dreams for several years, which informed me concerning those things which were being written, but there were also changes of state while I was writing, and a certain extraordinary light in the things which were being written. Afterwards also there were a number of visions with closed eyes; light was given miraculously; and spirits sensibly inflowed. It was as manifest to the sense as are the corporeal senses. Many times there were infestations in various ways by evil spirits in temptations. . . . Fiery lights were

seen. Speech in the early morning. Besides many other things, until at last a spirit spoke to me in a few words." (*Ibid.* 2951)

I: And were you surprised?

S: "I was very much surprised that he perceived my thoughts." (*Ibid.*)

I: Thank you, sir. I shall have some more questions to ask you later.

THIRD INTERVIEW

I: This time, Herr Assessor, I would like to ask about your inspiration. But before we come to that, what was the first thing you had to do after being called?

S: "When heaven was opened to me, I had first to learn the Hebrew language, as well as the correspondences according to which the whole Bible is composed, which led me to read the Word of God over many times." (*Documents Concerning Swedenborg* 234)

I: Unlike most self-styled revelators, you did not burst into print at once. But when you did begin to write, you said before, sir, that your office was to teach the doctrines of the New Church. From whom did you receive those doctrines after your call?

S: "From the first day of that call I have not received anything that pertains to the doctrines of that Church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I read the Word." (*True Christian Religion* 779)

I: You were not allowed to take anything from others?

S: "I have not been allowed to take anything from the mouth of any spirit, nor from the mouth of any angel, but from the mouth of the Lord alone." (*De Verbo* 13e)

I: And did spirits and angels ever attempt to teach you?

S: "No spirit has dared, and no angel has wanted, to say anything to me, and still less to instruct me, about anything in the Word, or about anything doctrinal from the Word." (*Divine Providence* 135)

I: But tell me, sir, how could you discriminate between what came from the Lord and what from the angels?

S: "Those who are in a spiritual affection of truth are raised up into the light of heaven, even so as to be able to perceive the enlightenment. Thus it has been given me to perceive what came from the Lord and what from the angels." (*Apocalypse Explained* 1183: 2)

I: And only what came from the Lord has been written?

S: "What has come from the Lord has been written; what has come from the angels has not." (*Ibid*)

I: Now here is an interesting point you could clear up for us, if you will, Herr Assessor. How are we to square with this the fact that you learned much in conversation with angels?

S: "The things which I have learned in speech with spirits and angels are solely from the Lord. Whenever there has been speech, I have been held interiorly and inmosty in reflection upon it, thus as to what I might learn. Thus have I been instructed, consequently by no spirit or angel, but by the Lord alone, from whom is everything true and good." (*Spiritual Experiences* 1647)

I: I see. You were instructed, not by what angels and spirits said, but by that reflection; and as that was from the Lord, it was He who taught you. I suppose the same thing applies to what you learned through evil spirits?

S: "Evil spirits are kept to speaking those things which are to be observed by me, but they are unaware of it. . . . A perception was also then given me as to what was to be observed, from which it was evident that the things also which I have learned through evil spirits I have learned from the Lord alone." (*Ibid.* 4034)

I: So, just to clinch the matter, we should not believe that anything came from any other source than the Lord?

S: "Do not believe that I have taken anything from myself, nor from any angel, but from the Lord alone." (*Apocalypse Revealed* 4)

I: It would, in fact, be a very serious thing to attribute to you yourself what has been written?

S: "If anyone should attribute to me one iota of the things written, which are truths, he inflicts so great an injury on God Messiah that only He Himself can forgive it." (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 2/1654)

I: That solemn statement has, I am sure, deeply impressed us. And now, sir, would you mind telling us how you are inspired?

S: "When I think of what I am about to write, and while I am in the act of writing, I enjoy a perfect inspiration, for otherwise it would be my own." (*Documents Concerning Swedenborg II*, 402)

I: So you did not, as it were, take dictation, but were inspired as to your thought. Is that it?

S: "All thoughts are ruled by the Lord. There was an influx like a most gentle and almost imperceptible stream, the current of which is not apparent, but which still leads and draws. In this manner that which flowed in from the Lord led all the series of my thoughts into consequences, and although gently, yet powerfully, insomuch that I could not wander into any other thoughts, which was even allowed me to attempt, but to no purpose." (*Spiritual Experiences* 6474)

I: Now tell me, sir, was your writing, shall I say, conditioned by your states?

S: "My writing was according to the affection and obscurity with me." (*Ibid.* 4820)

I: I asked that question because in your MSS. we find passages crossed out and rewritten. Well, Herr Assessor, I think you have shown clearly that you were fully inspired by the Lord, and that while you could not err in your final expression of it, you had to work hard as if of yourself to formulate the Heavenly Doctrine in natural language. And now, before time is up, what are your opinions about the ways in which these books written by the Lord through you will be received?

S: "Some will be content with saying that they have the Word, and that there is no need of a revelation, thus rejecting these things which come from heaven." (*Ibid.* 1464)

I: Will there be others, though, who will read them, but still persist in their false ideas?

S: "There are such persons as will indeed read these Writings, but still remain in their own opinions, and interpret things according to their own phantasies." (*Ibid.* 1389)

I: And what reasons would you give for this?

S: "There are some who do not care for such things; some who care little; some who are in worldly pursuits, which they prefer; some who attend churches only from habit; and there are very few who receive anything from heaven." (*Ibid.* 5931)

I: Now, just to tie all this together, could you make a comprehensive statement on this subject?

S: "There are five kinds of reception. First, those who wholly reject, who are in another persuasion, and who are enemies of the faith. These reject, for it cannot be received by them, since it cannot penetrate their minds. Another class, who receive these things as scientifics, are delighted with them as scientifics and as curious things. There is a third class which receives intellectually, so that

they receive with sufficient alacrity, but still remain in respect to life as before. A fourth class receives persuasively, so that it penetrates to the improvement of their lives; they recur to these in certain states, and make use of them. And there is a fifth class, who receive with joy, and are confirmed." (*Ibid.* 2955)

I: Thank you, sir. Your answers just now bring other questions to mind – questions on what might be called your attitude to your office, to the things written, to certain criticisms that have been made of some of these things. But with your permission, I shall leave these for our next, and last, interview.

FOURTH INTERVIEW

I: To go on from just where we left off: In what way, Herr Assessor, would you define your attitude to your office?

S: "It is not my work, but the Lord's, who wished to reveal the nature of heaven and hell, and the nature of man after death, and concerning the last judgment." (*Ibid.* 6101)

I: And did it seem quite a normal thing to you to make public the amazing things that were disclosed to you?

S: "As, by the Divine mercy of the Lord, it has been given me to be at the same time in heaven as a spirit, and on earth as a man, and thence to speak with angels, I cannot do otherwise than open those things of the Word which are called arcana." (*Arcana Coelestia* 4923)

I: Yet you must be aware, sir, that many will dispute your claim to that privilege. What do you say to that?

S: "Many will say that no one can speak with spirits and angels, that it is phantasy. . . . But I am not deterred; for I have seen, I have heard, I have felt." (*Arcana Coelestia* 68)

I: On the same grounds, you must know that many will question the Memorable Relations inserted in some of the Writings?

S: "I foresee that many who read the Relations will believe that they are inventions of the imagination. . . . But I assert in truth that they were truly seen and heard, and not in any state of a dozing mind, but in a state of full wakefulness." (*True Christian Religion* 851)

I: And you had no alternative but to include them?

S: "I was commanded by the Lord to write and publish them. Do not suppose that, without such a positive order, I should have thought of publishing things which I well knew many would regard as falsehoods." (*Documents Concerning Swedenborg II.* 416)

I: Thank you! And now, Herr Assessor, to bring these interviews to a close I would like to ask a few questions more or less at random about your spiritual experiences. That is, if you have no objections?

S: "As it has been granted me to be in the spiritual world and in the natural world, and thus to see both worlds, I am obliged by my conscience to make manifest these things." (*Influx* 18)

I: Very good, sir. Then I would like to ask you, first, whether your introduction into the spiritual world differed from that of others who spoke with angels in earlier times?

S: "This has not been granted to anyone in the same way as to me since creation. The men of the Golden Age did indeed speak with angels, but it was not granted them to be in any other light than natural light, but to me to be in both spiritual and natural light at the same time. By this means it has been granted me to see the marvels of heaven, to be among the angels as one of them, and at the same time to imbibe truths in the light, and thus to perceive and teach them." (*Invitation to the New Church* 52)

I: I see. And I take it you mean by this, sir, that the Most Ancients saw spiritual things only as represented in natural light, but that you were able to reflect and ponder over what you saw, to weigh and judge them in your natural-rational thought, and so to describe them; presumably because your mind had been prepared by the sciences, whereas theirs had not. But what was the effect on spirits and angels of your introduction among them?

S: "When my interior sight was first opened, and through my eyes they saw the world, spirits and angels were so amazed that they said it was a miracle of miracles, and they were affected with a new joy. This delight lasted for months, but it afterwards became familiar." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1880)

I: Did you speak with angels in their own language?

S: "When I have been in company with the angels, and in a like state with them, I have spoken with them in their own language, and did not know anything about my own." (*Heaven and Hell* 255)

I: And were you, sir, able to be of service to angels?

S: "It has been granted me to instruct the angels, because it has been granted me to be in the two worlds by turns, and from one to explore the other." (*De Verbo* 3: 10)

I: Now here is something we should very much like to know. Why did you so often speak with evil spirits?

S: "Because they have the faculty of understanding, and I speak with that,

and consequently with the Lord. . . . In this way I was instructed that the faculty of understanding in men and spirits is the Lord's." (*Spiritual Experiences* 3094) "It has been permitted, also, that I might know their quality." (*Arcana Coelestia* 7479) "It has been allowed me to speak with even the worst devils, because they can do me no injury, since I am protected by the Lord; and therefore it has never been forbidden me to speak with devils, if they want to speak with me; for this reason also, that I might know the quality' of their life. A further reason is that by my conversing with them they know their own quality. Besides, they are rather to be pitied than that anything evil should be done to them; for if I were not to speak, or if I spoke hard things, sufferings would be added to them, which would be contrary to mercy and charity; for it is Christian to wish well even to them." (*Spiritual Experiences* 1246)

I: You have told us some most interesting things, Herr Assessor, and if there are no more questions it is only because time is up. But, in closing, I would like to ask you just one thing more. Should your introduction into the spiritual world be regarded as a miracle?

S: "It is more than miracles that I speak in the spiritual world with angels and spirits. This intercourse has been granted by the Lord to no one previously." (*Invitation to the New Church* 39) "The manifestation of the Lord in Person, and introduction into the spiritual world by the Lord, is better than all miracles." (*Ibid* 43) "In addition, the spiritual sense of the Word has been disclosed by the Lord through me. This surpasses all the revelations that have ever been since the creation of the world." (*Ibid* 44)

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TRUTH

Knowledge and truth are not synonymous. Truth is defined as the form of good and as that which qualifies good. We may think of it also as power or law. All things that are done in both worlds are done by the power of truth. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2954; *Apocalypse Explained* 136; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 411)

BOOK REVIEW

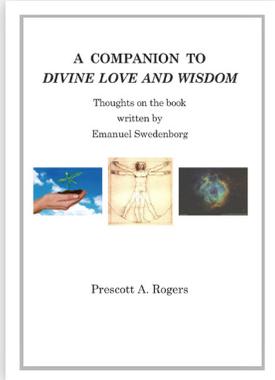
A Companion to Divine Love and Wisdom

By the Rev. Prescott A. Rogers

Reviewed by the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

Divine Love and Wisdom is one of the shorter theological works published by Emanuel Swedenborg, but the truth it contains is expansive and profound. Enfolded within its cover is an amazing panorama of the cosmos, beginning with the Creator as Divinely Human, then the process whereby He created the heavens and the earth, and concluding with the deepest explanation imaginable of what it means to be human.

Along the way we learn what *life* actually is (love); *why* the world was (and perpetually is being) created; what *creation* means (it is not out of nothing, but is a process of transforming spiritual emanations of the Divine into the natural substances out of which the earth is composed); and finally, a spiritual view of the human *mind, brain and body*, and how they are related.



Divine Love and Wisdom is a slim volume, but it is like a small green bud waiting to open into a large and beautiful flower as the reader's understanding of it grows. And the new *Companion to Divine Love and Wisdom* by the Rev. Prescott Rogers will serve as an excellent aid in comprehending the "angelic wisdom" revealed in that sublime work.

Mr. Rogers' *Companion* is scholarly and clear, well organized and easy to read, as we would expect from this author, who for many years

taught a much-loved course on the subject at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church.

"I have long loved and appreciated *Divine Love and Wisdom*, but it was in my endeavor to accommodate this wonderful book to college students that I came to understand it and its importance more fully." And so he dedicates the *Companion* to "every student" who took the course with him.

Divine Love and Wisdom is a one-term course in our college now, but when Mr. Rogers taught it there were two terms – Religion 105 covered the first half of the book, Religion 106 the second half. I also had the privilege of teaching those courses for 17 years following Mr. Rogers and can testify that the topics are so essential and interesting that the material is really inexhaustible.

In the *Companion*, Mr. Rogers does a masterful job of explaining and making clear the order and organization of this challenging and deeply rewarding book. Of course the text itself is very well ordered (divinely, in fact), but the subjects are deep, abstract and arcane, so having a guidebook is very helpful. I'm surprised that this is the first full-length book about *Divine Love and Wisdom* (as far as I know), although various scholars have published notes for readers over the years, some quite extensive.

Mr. Rogers begins with a brief Foreword on the science and art of translation. Then there is a Preface in which he tells of a realization he had while taking a course on religion in graduate school at Temple University, namely, that "in every attempt to explain God, humanity and creation there were weaknesses – at least with every religion other than the New Church."

In the Introduction, Mr. Rogers explains that Swedenborg used a key doctrine to explain the particular subject covered in each chapter of *Divine Love and Wisdom*. He calls these "tool doctrines" (listed on page 9). They are the doctrines concerning *Order*, *Influx*, *Degrees*, *Forms* and *Correspondence*. So the "tool" doctrine underlying the teachings in chapter 3, for example, is the doctrine of degrees.

The main text of the *Companion* consists of a general Introduction and then five chapters – one for each of the five sections in *Divine Love and Wisdom*, the subjects of which are:

Divine Love and Wisdom is a slim volume, but it is like a small green bud waiting to open into a large and beautiful flower as the reader's understanding of it grows.

1. God as the Creator and as the Source of Creation
2. The Spiritual Sun as the Means of Creation
3. The Spiritual and Natural Worlds as the Products of Creation
4. Creation within the Spiritual and Natural Worlds and the Process of Creation
5. Humans as the Purpose and so the Crown of Creation

Each chapter of the *Companion* has an introduction to the corresponding section of *Divine Love and Wisdom*; a summary of its teachings in that section; further thoughts by Mr. Rogers on various particulars of the teachings; and at the end of the chapter, a few paragraphs about the "tool" doctrine that Swedenborg used to explain the subject. In addition to being useful aids in navigating the book, these paragraphs about each of those five fundamental "tool" doctrines should be of interest to readers of any book of New Church theology.

The *Companion* features a number of diagrams illustrating the order of creation and the various abstract concepts it involves. These diagrams are very helpful in explaining discrete and continuous degrees, especially in the third chapter in which they are the focus. A knowledge of "discrete degrees" (distinct levels of existence), and how they differ from the "continuous degrees" (gradations present on each level), is essential to understanding the nature of the universe and avoiding such errors as pantheism. The *Companion* provides a good guide to the *Divine Love and Wisdom* teaching on the subject.

I also liked like the way Mr. Rogers gives definitions throughout the *Companion* for the terms he uses. In addition to technical philosophical terms, it is good to have even some familiar words defined in order to make their meaning clear in the context of the subject being addressed. For example, in describing Swedenborg's *analytical* approach to presenting ideas, Mr. Rogers notes that "analysis" means literally "breaking into pieces."

"Correspondence" is defined as "a vital relationship in which what is essential gives life to what is formal and what is formal gives a necessary support so that what is essential can exist. Essence and form need each other." (p. 17) "Influx" is distinguished from "emanation," which is defined as describing "what comes out of a source," as a scent emanates from a rose. (p. 45)

One other example of many that could be cited of Mr. Rogers' attention to the precise meaning of terms is seen in his comments on *Divine Love and Wisdom* 233, which he says "may well be the most important passage in all of the Heavenly Doctrines." In that number we are told that before the Lord's birth in the world and glorification, He had a Divine Celestial and a Divine Spiritual *actually*, but the Divine Natural existed *potentially*.

In commenting on this difficult concept Mr. Rogers carefully defines

"actually" and "potentially," noting that when No. 233 says that the Divine Natural existed potentially, that does not mean it did not exist. "The term 'potential' is from the Latin word *potentia*, which means 'power.' For something to have power, it has to have existence." (p. 93)

In the Preface, Mr. Rogers lists **five deep questions** that he says have not been satisfactorily answered throughout the history of religion:

- How did creation come into existence?
- What is the life force that causes seeds to sprout or animals to produce offspring?
- What is the origin of evil, and is God to blame for it?
- And how are spiritual experiences explained?

Those four are answered in *Divine Love and Wisdom*. The fifth question – Why does a righteous person suffer? – is explained in *Divine Providence*, the sequel to *Divine Love and Wisdom*.

These are mysteries that every thinking person throughout the ages has wrestled with. They may not be "practical" subjects, but the human spirit longs for knowledge that transcends the material, and the human mind is capable of comprehending such knowledge, for the mind has a faculty for abstract and spiritual thought as well as natural.

Young people, especially, need to broaden their mental horizon and contemplate the Divine origin of the universe as well as the natural causes operating in it. Their minds need to expand spiritually at the same time they are expanding naturally. They have an inherent love of discussing deep philosophical and theological questions that should be stimulated, not stifled.

There is more to be gained from college than preparing for a career in this world, important as that is. Students in college should also be preparing for their *spiritual* life's work. It is a time for them to begin "entering with understanding into the mysteries of faith." And on that journey, they need wise and experienced guides.

Prescott Rogers was born to teach, and continues to do so in his retirement years, as his latest book illustrates. It will be a most helpful companion and guide for many years to come as new generations of students, as well as older readers, seek to enter with understanding into the fascinating mysteries of

Young people, especially, need to broaden their mental horizon and contemplate the Divine origin of the universe as well as the natural causes operating in it.

faith set forth in *Divine Love and Wisdom*.

In his conclusion Mr. Rogers' writes: "*Divine Love and Wisdom* is philosophical in nature and strives to explain deep and important matters. But it is not meant to be a book for intellectual interest and satisfaction alone. The Lord does want an enlightened intellect, but He wants an enlivened will more. . . . Before people can love something truly, they need to appreciate its value. This appreciation can only come from an accurate understanding of that thing, and that understanding depends upon how much people know about the thing."

"In North Carolina in the 18th century three children found a large and heavy rock in a creek. They took it home where their father used it as a doorstep. A jeweler came by, saw the rock, and offered \$3.50 for it, which the father accepted, apparently with excitement. The father did not know that he had sold a gold nugget worth hundreds of dollars in the currency of his day, which would be a small fortune today."

With that little story in mind, I'll conclude this review by saying that within *Divine Love and Wisdom* there is a treasure worth more than much fine gold, and Prescott Rogers' new *Companion* will be a great help to spiritual prospectors who seek that treasure.

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OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

UNDERSTANDING

The understanding is defined in the Writings as the sight of the mind. One of the two mental faculties with which man is endowed, it is that in which the will is unfolded and it is formed by the will. Note that the understanding does not lead the will; it only instructs it. Note also that only the spiritual man truly has understanding; in its place the natural man has fantasy. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4985, 9165)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

ASSISTANT BISHOP NOMINATIONS

(Note: This message was emailed to the General Church membership on November 15 by Executive Bishop-elect Peter M. Buss Jr. It is reprinted – and updated -- here as part of the official record of the Church.)

Dear Friends:

I write to announce that I have nominated the Rev. David H. Lindrooth (below, left) and the Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs to serve with me as Assistant Bishops when I take office as Executive Bishop in July. This decision comes after a great deal of consultation with clergy colleagues, and extensive interviews with the candidates themselves. I have also taken time to reflect and pray about it.



Two Assistants. If affirmed, Dave and Brad will serve in a split-time capacity. Brad would oversee General Church Education with about half of his time and assist me with the other half. Dave would continue to oversee General Church Outreach, although his position would be reconfigured to allow him to assist me with half of his time.

Effectively, then, we would get the equivalent energy of two full-time people in the Episcopal Office, as well as oversight of our two central office

departments by bishops. We also get the benefit of two minds and perspectives, as well as more options for travel and delegated functions. I believe this model can effectively serve the General Church in its next phase.

It should be noted that there is an affirmation process underway. My intention is for these two people to serve as Assistant Bishops, rather than the appointed position of Assistant to the Bishop. For that to happen, the Clergy, the General Church Board, and the General Church membership would need to affirm them, similar to what happened with the Executive Bishop process. So far, the Clergy has had a chance to weigh in and has agreed to this dual-nomination. [Addendum: The General Church Board met on November 19 in special session to respond to the nominations. After deliberations with me they voted to affirm, with an 80% majority supporting. The next and final step in this process is to take the nomination to the General Church membership for affirmation. This will most likely happen in the February/March 2019 timeframe.]

I am grateful to Dave and Brad for their willingness to serve with me and with each other. Both bring strong credentials and experience, as well as deep devotion to the Word. The job at hand is to determine anew what we stand for and where we are headed. I believe that this three-bishop team is well-positioned to support that process.

Contact: *Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org*

2018 ASIA NEW CHURCH REPORT

Rev. John Jin, Regional Pastor for Asia

More than 100 years ago, the **Rev. C. T. Odhner** wrote in *New Church Life*: “So now, the New Church will be transferred to the gentiles.” Now, in 2018, this dream is becoming true. Last June, the **Rev. John Odhner** and I presented a paper to the Council of the Clergy: “All Nations.” It focused on our missionary efforts with the people of China who do not have access to the Word and have little knowledge of the Lord.

What’s New?

China Mission Conference

In October, 13 ministers and lay people gathered for a *China Mission Conference* to discuss ways to go forward with the New Church Mission in China. We concluded with recognizing the need to shift from a mission driven by one person’s efforts alone to a systematic, sustainable, organized effort, initially focusing on young people and those without any Christian background.

EPISCOPAL VISIT TO NIGERIA
The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., November 2018



Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr., center, with one of the congregations he visited in Nigeria



Bishop Buss ordains the Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta, the first General Church priest in Nigeria



Yenagoa, one of the two congregations visited by Bishop Buss, is in the southern area of Bayelsa



Celebrating the ordination, the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr. with the Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta with his family

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS PRODUCTION OF ANNIE
(Photos courtesy of Bruce Cronlund)



Daddy Warbuck's assistant Grace Farrell (Camryn Buss) rescues Annie from the orphanage



Annie and Sandy



Miss Hannigan manipulates Annie



The orphans (Annie front row, right) bemoan "It's a Hard-Knock Life"



Daddy Warbucks, Annie, Sandy and company take a curtain call



Bradley Robinson as Daddy Warbucks



Grace (Camryn Buss) dancing with Daddy Warbucks (Bradley Robinson)



Miss Hannigan (Serena Boyesen), Lily (Nicole McCurdy) and Rooster (Hayden Hoffman) with their eyes on "Easy Street"



Daddy Warbucks and Annie celebrate her adoption at Christmas



Madison Zagorski as Annie



Serena Boyesen as the orphanage villain, Miss Hannigan



Zach Lambertus as President Franklin Roosevelt



Camryn Buss as Grace Farrell

SCENES FROM AROUND THE GENERAL CHURCH



Pastor David Roth talking with children in Boulder, Colorado



The Children's Christmas Pageant in Ivyland, Pennsylvania



Social time after church in the Olivet Church, Toronto, Canada



Pay it Forward Crew Cook Day in Bryn Athyn



The chancel of the Glenview (Illinois) New Church



The Children's Circle ready for "Godly Play" in the New Church Westville, Republic of South Africa



The New Church Buccleuch, Johannesburg, South Africa

Spiritual Leaders' Training

New Church Theological School: For the last two years, the **Revs. John Jin** and **Andy Dibb** have been working on plans to open a theological school in 2019. The curriculum will include 16 courses in four years of study: nine courses on the major doctrines taught by the theological school staff, and seven on practical theology, taught by Rev. John Jin and others. In preparation for this, seven theologians have been studying *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* and *True Christian Religion* with Rev. Jin.

The Heavenly Doctrine Discussion Group: This discussion group, led by **Rev. Tim** with the spiritual leaders, provides a more thorough exploration of the teachings in Chinese. Now that they have finished *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, they are studying *Arcana Coelestia*.

Seminar for New Church people: Since autumn of 2015, we have been holding New Church seminars in various cities in China. We are planning to hold two more in 2019.

Translations

In 2018, we completed the translation of the following books of the Writings from English to Chinese: *Conjugal Love*, *Arcana Coelestia* Vol. 1, and *Divine Love and Wisdom*. Our current focus is on *Arcana Coelestia* Vol. 2, *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* (revised), and *True Christian Religion* (revised).

Spiritual Communities

Online Community: Our *Real Life Group* involves lay people gathering every other week for an internet video conference to discuss the applications of New Church teachings to life and better ways of supporting one another.

Rev. Tim is continuing to develop small groups by visiting areas where there is potential for people to gather together. This includes a small group in the southern area of China that is being led by Rev. Tim and his supporters.

The Swedenborg Research Center

This Center includes a website (swedenborgstudies.org) with an online library, a forum, and live video for our current members and newcomers. We plan to promote the website with advertising.

Books cannot currently be published in China, so publication will be done in Taiwan or Hong Kong and e-books will be created.

Other News

Korea

The New Church in Korea is moving toward a self-supporting system through the *Korean Project*. We had hoped to see a new building including

a church sanctuary in May of 2018, but there have been several unexpected delays. We hope to have a dedication service in January 2019 however! This is a significant milestone toward a system of self-support for the New Church in Asia.

The Korean New Church continues to grow in various ways, including translation work as well as the training of ministers through the theological school. In translation, *Apocalypse Explained 2* and *Arcana Coelestia 1* will be published by the end of March 2019. We will continue to do translation work. In the theological school, three ministers' courses and one missionary course are taught twice a week.

Japan

Although membership is not growing, current members in Japan are working diligently and sincerely to develop the New Church. **Rev. Matsumoto** has been holding regular worship services once a month in Kyoto, and has also started to hold two monthly worship services in Tokyo.

Mr. Suzuki and others continue as volunteers to work on new translations.

USA and Dominican Republic

The Philadelphia Korean New Church continues to worship with Rev. Jin. They also support New Church-related charitable institutions and do translation work.

The California group (with missionary **Jea Chung** as the lead) keeps growing. They meet every other week to worship and to study the Heavenly Doctrines.

Both groups are diligently discussing "how they can live according to the Heavenly Doctrines, and try to share with others."

The Dominican Republic group: the **Rev. Dea Kim**, a Pentecostal minister, has been studying the Heavenly Doctrines for many years. This year he was baptized, has become a New Church member, and is taking courses with the Korean Theological School. However, it is clear he needs more extensive training in order to become a minister or a missionary in the New Church.

PASTOR NOMINATED FOR KEMPTON

This past December 11 Executive Bishop **Brian W. Keith** sent the following letter to members of the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church:

"Upon the unanimous recommendation of the Search Committee, I am pleased to nominate the **Rev. Brett Buick** as your next pastor. [Brett has been serving as assistant pastor.] The committee took extensive counsel and considered all options before reaching this conclusion. Brett is well known

there, but I would like to note that in the discussions his doctrinal integrity, pastoral care for all members and friends, and teaching and support for the school stood out as making him ideally suited to serve in this role.

“I would also like to note the **Rev. Lawson Smith’s** long term and very useful service as pastor. He has done an outstanding job. I’m sure you will want to celebrate this with him as he approaches stepping down in June.

“Although not part of the charge of the committee, they received and considered counsel regarding the assistant pastor position. Brett will take further counsel in the society about this, look at the financial realities and available clergy, and then make a proposal to the congregation.

“Assuming an affirmative vote by the congregation at a special meeting [scheduled for January 11, 2019], Brett will assume office on July 1, 2019. Supported by his wonderful wife, **Karla**, and the rest of the family, I’m sure Brett will continue in the long line of effective pastors for the Kempton congregations.”

EPISCOPAL VISIT TO NIGERIA

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. visited the General Church congregation in Yenagoa, Nigeria, this past November, where he was welcomed with songs. He also visited a congregation in Okolobiri that day. (Nigeria is in Western Africa, adjoining Benin, and near Togo, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, where there are also General Church congregations.)

The next day – Saturday – he gave a presentation on “The Second Coming” to about 100 people, conducted a baptism service, with approximately 35 baptized, and performed a wedding service.

On Sunday he conducted a worship service which included an ordination, the Holy Supper, and another 10 baptisms. Ordained was the **Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta**, the first General Church priest in Nigeria. “Overall,” says Bishop Buss, “the energy and receptivity around the weekend were fabulous.”

See photos on page 75.

LAWS OF LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

All high school sophomore (or 15-16-year-old) girls world-wide are eligible to enter this contest. This essay is an opportunity to write about what YOU think is important in life. This is your chance to be heard – to write from the heart about one, or more, of your personal laws of life.

Essays are to be in English. (Google Translate can be used for this purpose.) No name or identification can be on the paper itself to allow impartial judging but have your name and address in the envelope or email. You can see last year’s winning essays printed in the *Theta Alpha Journal*. Winners receive a

certificate and a check: 1st Place: \$100 USD; 2nd Place \$75 USD; 3rd Place \$50 USD. Essays are printed in the Journal with writers' permission and as room permits. The essay guidelines are:

- “The Laws of Life” are a set of rules, ideals or principles by which one should live:
- What do you value most in life?
- What is important to you?
- What ideals do you hold deep in your heart?

Think about the people and experiences that have helped you form these laws.

Pick a topic to write about:

- A personal experience/lesson learned that affects how you live/view your life now
- An aphorism or quote that inspires or guides you.

You can use an analogy, a quotation or a story or parable. Please, no personal romantic relationships!

Submissions are to be sent to Theta Alpha International, PO Box 154, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, USA. Or email to ANCdaughters@gmail.com. Must be received by March 8, 2019.

CATHEDRAL NOTES

A renowned Blüthner grand piano was installed in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral in a special dedication service on November 18, 2018. Program notes for the service included:

“This piano was given to the Cathedral by **Aida Epstein**, who has taught, played and coached in the Bryn Athyn area for many years. One of her students, **Peter Dugan**, is a rising star, earning accolades as a concert and chamber pianist, and we are grateful for the offering of his talent and skill as part of this service. Ms. Epstein is glad to know that her beloved instrument will serve a use in its new home, and we thank her from the bottom of our hearts for a class instrument that has already added to our services.

“Christian sacred music is tied to the pipe organ – which sustains by continuously feeding the sound as a wind instrument; so it is a change to hear repertoire that is designed for the piano, a percussive string instrument where the note is loudest just as it is struck and fades thereafter.

“The Writings for the New Church contain many references to the representational significance of music. It reads in *Apocalypse Revealed* 792: ‘For the instruments whose sounds are discrete, as stringed instruments,

pertain to the class of spiritual affections; and the instruments whose sounds are continuous, as wind instruments, pertain to the class of celestial affections.' We are richer for having the presence of both in our worship music."

It was also noted: "Ms. Epstein grew up in Buenos Aires, and the inclusion of a piece by her countryman Alberto Ginastera is a reference to this heritage. The music played by Peter Dugan is offered in memory of those who lost their lives in the recent shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. May music and religion bring people together in the quest for what is good and true, rather than driving us apart."

BOYNTON BEACH RETREAT

The popular Boynton Beach Retreat, January 27-31, featured presentations by the **Rev. Eric H. Carswell**, the **Rev. Dr. Ray and Star Silverman**, and the **Rev. Jeremy F. Simons**. We expect to publish a complete report in the March/April issue of *New Church Life*.

CORRECTION

In the Annual Report of the Secretary of the General Church of the New Jerusalem (November/December 2018 *New Church Life*) there was an unfortunate error.

The report begins with total membership as of July 1, 2017 (5,427). After listing new members, resignations and deceased members, the membership total is given for June 30, 2018 (5,513). However, the year appeared as 2017.

We checked the copy that went to the printer, which said 2018, so this seems to be one of those "gremlin glitches" that defy explanation. However, apologies are due to **Anita Halterman**, General Church Secretary, who labors diligently to make sure this report is correct throughout.

Life Lines

THE ALFRED ACTON "LIBRARY"

There's a saying that when person of long life dies a library closes. When the Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton II passed into the spiritual world in October at age 84 a huge New Church library closed. But the stories and the legend live on.

After his passing many of our ministers shared warm memories of what he meant in their own lives and to the Church. The Rev. Geoffrey Howard, who has led a New Church group in Charleston, South Carolina, with Alfred in their retirement, shared this insight with the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.:

"If you could see the spacious study in his home you would have known immediately that you were in a New Church dwelling of a student of the doctrines. Three of its four walls were lined with bookshelves housing New Church books numbering in the thousands, and memorabilia. There was no doubt as to where the prime focus of his interest lay."

These books speak volumes about Alfred's own life and use. He had a reputation as something of a "walking New Search" guide to the Writings. Any issue you wondered about, he could guide you to relevant passages and engage you in discussion.

He demonstrated as much when he was one of the presenters at the Boynton Beach Retreat in 2012 and arrived with a list of topical issues. He invited attendees to pick whatever interested them – or choose others – and he would fill in the doctrinal teachings.

The write-up of that presentation in the March/April 2012 issue of *New Church Life* began: "Bishop Acton spoke about a number of current issues in the light of the doctrines as a guide to understanding and dealing with the world we live in. Some of this was admittedly 'grisly stuff' – abortion, adultery, suicide – but he said it is good for us to know what the Writings say about such issues so that we can cope and understand them better. The Writings help us to see how the teachings apply to our own lives, as well as to specific issues. And it's a good perspective for us: look to the good in others, don't judge them spiritually, and help them to heal."

Among the many topics Alfred touched on were: the death of babies; young girls misled into prostitution; depression and suicide; when human life begins; how the soul is formed; marriage, adultery, "trial marriages" and re-

marriage – all within the context of what the Writings teach.

Indeed, there is a lot in the Heavenly Doctrine to help guide our thinking and our values for the troubling issues that confront us.

In his Memorial Address (page 11) Bishop Buss notes: “One of Alfred’s amazing talents was his ability to present truths to people in creative, new and challenging ways. He had a very clear vision of the big picture in life, but he found small points that colored the ideas he was presenting. He could take a simple teaching that we hadn’t noticed and show how it was key to the big picture.”

That was always Alfred’s strength. His “library” was more than a collection of books on shelves. He studied and mastered all that is in those books, then made it accessible and relevant to our own questions about the challenges ever before us. That was his gift. And that library never closes.

(BMH)

WHAT LIVES ON

In the days and years ahead, friends and family of Alfred Acton will have flashbacks – warm memories evoked by a photograph, a recording, a shared experience. And Alfred will fill their lives again in that moment – and they’ll smile.

That is the beauty of life after death – that life not only continues in the spiritual world but never really ends on this earth, as long as there are people to remember.

In a wonderful new read – *Books for Living* – Will Schwalbe relates his own passion for books to issues we all deal with in our lives. In one chapter he relates the challenge of “Finding Friends” to the charming classic, *The Little Prince*. In that enduring tale author and narrator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry says he tries to describe the little prince “so I won’t forget him. It’s sad to forget a friend.”

In something more than coincidence, Schwalbe picks up this book he hadn’t particularly liked as a teenager and begins reading it again years later in a coffee shop as he waits for a rainstorm to pass. He begins thinking about a classmate who had died of cancer in their boarding school many years before – a girl who was not a close friend, but a friend, and at age 14, the first friend he had lost. But he hadn’t thought about her in years.

He remembered that their class had dedicated their yearbook to her and went back to read the tribute:

Love lives on.

The best of what we mortals are, and what we create, lives on.

In a spiritual sense. And in other ways, too.

Think how much poorer the world would be if, for instance, the words of Shakespeare or the music of Beethoven were silenced with their composer's passing. How fortunate we are that it doesn't happen that way.

Every time a school boy reads Hamlet's soliloquy . . . every time a young girl sits at the piano and begins to play the graceful notes of the Moonlight Sonata . . . a brilliant idea of a strong emotional feeling bursts to life once again.

Ideas live on. Gifts and talents live on. Acts of caring live on.

Love lives on.

We are all defined by what we love. What we love determines our place in heaven. What we love forever radiates from the sphere we carry with us – in this life and the next. And all that Alfred Acton loved – in those teachings that helped him show boundless ways to help us in our lives – is what lives on.

(BMH)

BEING AN EXAMPLE

It's been many weeks now since the pomp and pageantry honoring U.S. President George H. W. Bush in early December, but it's worth remembering just what was celebrated about his life – and how it applies to ours.

President Bush was a man of uncommon accomplishment but his life was honored less for what he did than for who he was. His son Neil said just after he passed that what mattered most to him was that "he was just the best man I ever knew."

Put the politics aside in his long lifetime of service and just look at the qualities he was remembered for and that defined him: Consummate gentleman. Genuine. Integrity. Faith. Decency. Humility. Modesty. Gracious. Kind. Always looking for the good in people. Civility. Commitment to serving others. Of all the titles he held in his life he said the three that mattered most were husband, father, grandfather. A beautiful backdrop to all the services and ceremony was the confident faith – within the family and throughout the land – that George was together again with his beloved Barbara, who died earlier in the year, and their daughter, Robin, who had died in infancy.

Bush was born into a life of privilege but turned it into a life of service to others, which became his family's legacy. We cannot all know wealth and privilege. We cannot all aspire to the highest callings of service. But George H. W. Bush is best remembered for his enduring example and we can all emulate the qualities and character for which he was praised and celebrated. We can all set examples that help to make this a better world.

How we live should always matter more than what we achieve. Let us just live with the opportunities we are blessed with, to be remembered, finally, as a good man, a good woman – “just the best man I ever knew.”

(BMH)

‘WHY WAS I SPARED?’

George H. W. Bush was a senior in prep school in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed and he put off a safe deferment at Yale University to enlist in the U. S. Navy. He became the youngest fighter pilot in World War II. But that almost came to an untimely end, as it did for so many young men.

His plane was shot down during a bombing run off the coast of Japan. Two fellow crew members died but Bush was able to eject at the last minute. He was momentarily safe, bobbing in the Pacific Ocean, but the closest land was an infamous prisoner-of-war camp in Japan where he probably would not have survived.

While he was paddling furiously away a U.S. submarine suddenly surfaced and rescued him. And he was left to ponder for the rest of his life the question that has haunted many a survivor: “Why was I spared?”

We know Divine Providence is “in every smallest moment of a person’s life, entail(ing) a chain of consequences into eternity.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3854)

The Fifth Law of Divine Providence is that its operation should never be evident to us but we should always know that it is working in our lives. (“We are allowed to see Divine Providence from behind but not face to face, and when we are in a celestial state, not a materialistic state.” *Divine Providence* 175)

And so we can see – or sense – providence in retrospect, as with President Bush, but even then not with absolute clarity. With all that he was able to accomplish in his life in service to his country and the neighbor – throughout the world – and for the active, service-minded family that would not be here without him, we can see the hand of providence in that rescue submarine showing up “out of nowhere.”

So why was he spared? Well, we can speculate in such cases, and feel fairly confident that there was a reason and it wasn’t just luck. “Everything that happens which is called accidental and is ascribed to chance or fortune, is of providence. But the Divine Providence operates invisibly and incomprehensibly, in order that people may be in freedom to ascribe an event either to providence or to chance.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5508:2)

We cannot know all the workings of providence. We can just be grateful to the Lord.

(BMH)

THE MYSTERY OF SWEDENBORG

In so far as we view natural things in a spiritual light, we will understand them more truly, because the natural comes from and represents the spiritual. But in so far as we try to understand spiritual things in natural light, they will remain incomprehensible to us. The human mind, for example. Or marriage. Or life after death.

The Lord Himself was an enigma to those who saw Him only as "the carpenter's son" – as He still is to Bible scholars who seek (and concoct) "the historical Jesus" instead of concentrating on the Jesus revealed in the Bible, who is the only Jesus about whom we have any actual record at all.

We do have considerable historical knowledge of Swedenborg, but it can't explain the nature of his theological Writings – despite the absurd pretense of some writers that it does.

Truth speaks for itself. The truth of the Lord's Word in His first advent speaks for itself in the Gospels, and the truth of it in His second advent speaks for itself in the revelation received and published by Swedenborg.

The essential questions anyone should ask who is trying to decide what to make of Swedenborg are not about the man, but about the theological works he published. Are they revelation or not? Do they make sense? Do they clear up questions that have perplexed people for ages (such as, is God One or three Persons)? Are these teachings helpful in my striving to be a better person (honest, kind, useful, hopeful)? Do they lead to God and the good of life? In a word: are they TRUE?

After his name on *True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg identified himself simply as, "Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ." So . . . do the Writings serve the Lord in His mission to save us? Are they of service to us in our quest to grow closer to the Lord? If so, then they are of supreme importance; a revelation. If not – if we do not find the Lord in them – then for us at least Swedenborg is just an interesting and puzzling historical figure.

If we perceive that the Writings truly are Divinely inspired, that does add to the interest the man has for us, but at the same time the miracle of the new revelation so far eclipses Swedenborg the man that he fades into relative insignificance in our mind.

On the title page of each volume of the *Arcana Coelestia*: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (*Matthew* 6:33) For the reader whose main goal is to find God and who does indeed find Him in those pages, then the mystery of Swedenborg will be only one of many great mysteries that will be solved.

(WEO)

LOVE AND HATE

Strong passions are ever with us. But fueled by “hot” social media, intense 24-hour news cycles and a growing, pervasive hostility, our cultural and political climate seems more harsh and unforgiving than ever. We are beset with hate crimes, hate speech, divisiveness. Some manifestations of hate are real and atrocious. But differing opinions may be judged and dismissed as hateful. Intolerance is often justified because it opposes what is “hateful.”

There is an encouraging counterpoint as well – a longing for more love in our interactions with each other. But voices of condemnation are always louder and more insistent than soft appeals for love.

We all need to step back from judging the opinions and behavior of others and look at ourselves and our attitudes. There are many cautionary tales and teachings in the Word and the Writings to calm our perspective.

In the story of God’s covenant with Abram in *Genesis* 15:17, it is said: “And it came to pass that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between these pieces.”

Secrets of Heaven 1858 teaches that the setting sun symbolizes the last days, when the end is near, and darkness symbolizes hatred displacing charity. What passed between the smoking furnace (clouds of falsity) and the lamp (a burning craving) is a fever “that separates people in the church from the Lord.”

We cannot help but sense that the strident hatred stalking our world is not good. One of George H. W. Bush’s old Senate friends credited their mothers for teaching them both not to hate because “hate erodes the container it is carried in.” There’s also the saying that hate is like swallowing poison and hoping the other person dies.

Secrets of Heaven 1860 goes on to warn: “When hatred displaces charity, the darkness is so deep that we lose any awareness at all of the presence of evil. Still less do we see that the evil is bad enough to send us to hell in the next life. When people hate, they sense a certain pleasure and a certain energy in their hatred, and the pleasure and energy themselves make it nearly impossible for those people to see hatred as anything but good. Whatever caters to their sensual desire or craving seems good to them, because it caters to what they love.”

Whenever we are tempted to judge, to scorn, to look down on, to hate, we need to remind ourselves to look to the Lord. He is the source of all love. He loves all of us and wants to raise us up. His love and His intention never waver. And we have the guiding promise: “The Lord is present with you the moment that you start to love the neighbor.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 904:3)

(BMH)

UNITED BY RITUAL

Ritual is an important element of human life. We especially associate it with religion, of course, but there are all kinds of rituals. Lowering the ball in Times Square on New Year's Eve is a ritual. Candlelight vigils are rituals. Twenty-one-gun salutes are rituals.

I think the word "ritual" is related to "rio" for river, which reminds me of the words of our anthem: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together! It is like the oil on Aaron's head that ran down to the hem of his garments; like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion . . ." Ritual is a formal expression on the natural plane of life which is intended to bring something of spiritual life down into the natural, as from a river from on high, so that we may connect with and participate in that higher dimension.

And, as the anthem suggests, engaging in rituals together is a strong **unifying force** for a community. The religious beliefs we share bind us together, and the outward rituals of our religion strengthen that bond.

But the water that flows from Mount Hermon runs all the way down to the Dead Sea. This reminds us that rituals can become lifeless if they become ends in themselves, or if those who engage in them do not know their origin and the meaning of them. It is important, therefore, for the Church to provide instruction about our rituals and how they evolved, especially for the young people of each new generation.

Some evolution in our rituals is natural, but too many changes would be counter-productive. Part of the power of rituals is that they are familiar and can be carried out without having to focus on the form of the ritual itself. We might compare ritual to a dance; you can't dance well if you have to think about each step.

And dance steps are accommodated to the music. This illustrates the principle that rituals should be formed according to the Word. Rituals that embody teachings from the Word won't be empty but will have life and real meaning in them.

The rituals we have today are the result of much thought over many years by careful scholars of the Heavenly Doctrine. They are inspired by the Word and are beautifully simple and appropriate. They aren't the *only* rituals that could be inspired by the very extensive teachings of our Church, but any new ones should be crafted with the same careful attention to the doctrines that went into our present rituals.

(WEO)

CLOSING THE WORD

One very meaningful, reverent and beautiful ritual which, as far as I know, is unique to the New Church, is the opening of a copy of the Word on the altar at the beginning of each worship service and closing it at the end.

This ritual is loved in the Church, but from time to time some have questioned the closing part. Opening the Word is clearly symbolic of the opening of its internal sense by the Heavenly Doctrine, but why close it at the end of the service?

A number of interesting thoughts about this appeared in a recent online discussion by ministers. A couple of points especially that struck me:

When we go into church to worship, we are also entering into the house of the Lord in our minds. We come into a new spiritual state, in which the things that occupy our minds during our worldly activities are set aside as we pray and focus on the Lord and His Word and spiritual life. Opening the Word at the beginning of the service represents the opening up of the higher region of the mind to the presence of the Lord.

And then, as we prepare to leave the sanctuary, and go back out into the world, in which our minds will be occupied by more external things, it is appropriate to close the Word. Closing the book does not cut us off from the Lord or the truths of the Word, of course; it is just a sign that the state of special concentration on them has come to a close.

Another point that one man made in the discussion is something I hadn't thought of before. He simply noted what the Lord did in the Gospel story after He finished reading from the Word in the synagogue. "Then He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down." (*Luke 4:20*)

(WEO)

OPEN THE GATES

Ross Douthat, one of few journalists these days openly supportive of religion, had a recent column in *The New York Times*, "The Return of Paganism." He laments that Christianity has been declining since the 1960s as our culture becomes more and more secularized. But he is heartened that many of the people abandoning organized religion increasingly identify as "spiritual but not religious."

They may be dissatisfied with their churches – for many reasons – but still sense a spirituality in life and creation, and they hunger for answers.

Douthat sees in back-to-nature movements and the rise of self-help gurus a retreat to paganism. Paganism is a generally pejorative term – dating back to the fourth century – for those who believe in false gods, a self-indulgent

lifestyle, hedonism, materialism, and no life after death. He fears that traditional religious leaders “have ceded their pulpits to Joel Osteen and Oprah Winfrey.”

Well, we see plenty of false gods all around us these days – sometimes even in the mirror. We are guilty of creating false gods whenever we elevate something above God as central in our lives. But just as growing numbers of people are dissatisfied with traditional Christianity, often because its interpretations of doctrine are largely man-made and fallible, the “new pagans” are just substituting their own man-made tenets. They are like the children of Israel wearying of Moses’ leadership and begging Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship.

We know that the Last Judgment upon the Christian Church occurred in 1757 it is still going on all around us, with no clear end in sight – when the New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven emerges as “the crown of all churches that have ever existed in the world.”

So where Ross Douthat has a dystopian view of religion reverting to paganism we have an optimistic vision of the true church taking hold in the world. It may be frustrating that the process seems so long in our eyes, but in the Lord’s providence it proceeds free of time and space in an orderly progression. The best we can do is always to be looking for opportunities to cooperate with the Lord in spreading His truth.

One of the teachings many newcomers find appealing about the New Church is that we believe everyone is created for heaven and can get there by loving the Lord and living a good life of loving the neighbor. These people like the image from *Revelation* of 12 gates into the kingdom of heaven – that there is more than one way to get in.

We offer a lot of gateways. Consider:

- The General Church website (www.newchurch.org) had 300,000 visitors last year – mostly newcomers whose questions are answered.
- The weekly OffTheLeftEye programs of the Swedenborg Foundation have 70,000 subscribers on Youtube – from all over the world.
- The New Christian Bible Study website, which offers direct links to the spiritual sense of biblical passages, had 2.2 million visits last year.
- All sorts of other gateways – books, journey groups, social media, church and historic building tours – are introducing people to the Church and leaving favorable impressions, hopefully with a desire to learn more.

The opportunities are endless. “The church of the Lord is not here or there, but everywhere. It is within those places where the church is, as well as places outside of the church, wherever people’s lives are formed according to the principles of charity. So it is that the church of the Lord is spread through

the whole earth and yet that it is one; for when life constitutes the church, and not doctrine separate from life, then the church is one. The church of the Lord is everywhere in the world, although it is specifically where the Lord is acknowledged, and where the Word is." (*Arcana Coelestia* 8152)

We have much more to look forward to than a "return to paganism."

(BMH)

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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

USE

Because of its importance in our vocabulary it is desirable that we free this term from a certain confusion that sometimes surrounds it. We commonly speak of occupations, actions and services as "uses," and indeed use the term as the New Church synonym for a job.

While there is value in this as a recognition that there is more to a job than the work and its rewards, it should be understood that these things are the external means by which uses are ultimated; and that although uses are performed through these ultimates, they are in themselves interior and distinct. Use is the unique personality, the individuality of thought and will built up by reception of love from the Lord which a man puts into his work and other activities and transfers to others by means of them.

It is, therefore, the influence toward good which he exerts through his work, business or profession; which is not personal, but a transfer through him of what is from the Lord. Use is, then, the spiritual effect of the way we do our work. (See *Divine Wisdom* xi; *Conjugal Love* 183)

Announcements

ORDINATION, Second degree

The priesthood, in the highest sense, is every function which the Lord performs as Savior, and whatever He performs as Savior is from His Divine love. Because of this, the priesthood was representative of the Lord as to all the work of salvation from Divine love. Therefore, all worship was of the office of the priest. (Arcana Coelestia 9809:2)

Acton, Elmo Kenneth – At Oak Arbor, Detroit, Michigan, December 2, 2018, Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith officiating.

BAPTISMS

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

Childs, Adessa Mae – At Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, September 30, 2017 (born August 26, 2017), daughter of Derek and Brittany Childs, Rev. Calvin A. Odhner officiating. Delayed report.

Equipado, Nathaniel Baltazar – At San Diego, California, November 10, 2018 (born November 2, 2017), son of Krisando Equipado and Irish Baltazar, Rev. C. Mark Perry officiating.

Fennell, Maxwell Alexander – At Sarver, Pennsylvania, November 11, 2018 (born November 18, 2017), son of Dusty and Emily Fennell, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Glenn, Daniel Keld Haven – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 27, 2018 (born September 3, 2018), son of Thane and Joralyn Glenn, Rev. J. Clark Echols Jr. officiating.

Hyatt, Lila Bea – At Mitchellville, Maryland, December 9, 2018 (born June 27, 2018), daughter of Derek and Hanna Hyatt, Rev. Michael D. Gladish officiating.

Lopes De Oliveira, Yuri Paulo – At Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 21, 2018, Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith officiating.

Micklewood, Michael John – At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, December 1, 2018 (born May 4, 2018), son of Christopher and Chelsea Micklewood, Rev. Malcolm G. Smith officiating.

Pierce, Kaitlyn Nicole – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 28, 2018, Rev. Barry C. Halterman officiating.

BETROTHAL

Thus says the Lord: "I will remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase. (Jeremiah 2:2,3)

Levy-Kerr, Michael Travis Levy and Skye Kerr – At Boulder, Colorado, June 10, 2018, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

MARRIAGES

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

Avellano-Aquino, Jonathan Vary Avellano and Joanna Kris Avellano – At Rochester, Michigan, October 20, 2018, Rev. Elmo K. Acton officiating.

Clauser-Pitcairn, Jack Clauser and Emma Brett Pitcairn – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 27, 2018, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Edmonds-Kleparsky, Travis William Posey Edmonds and Sheri Lynn Kleparsky – At Glenview, Illinois, October 27, 2018, Rev. Mark D. Pendleton officiating.

Hartman-Moser, Robert Austin Hartman and Irene Marie Moser – At Lenhartsville, Pennsylvania, October 13, 2018, Rev. Lawson M. Smith officiating.

Heinrichs-Jungé, Calvin Bradley Heinrichs and Liza Renee Jungé – At Kempton, Pennsylvania, November 17, 2018, Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Horan-Gardner, Alec Robert Horan and Stephanie Jean Gardner – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 18, 2018, Rev. Scott I. Frazier officiating.

Hyatt-Borzillo, Travis Daniel Hyatt and Catherine Lindsey Borzillo – At Collegeville, Pennsylvania, November 16, 2018, Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith officiating.

Konkin-Sych, Yuriy Konkin and Svetlana L. Sych – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 17, 2018, Rev. Jeremy F. Simons officiating.

Levy-Kerr, Michael Travis Levy and Skye Kerr – At Boulder, Colorado, July 8, 2018, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

McGuckin-Cronlund, Patrick Joseph McGuckin Jr. and Elise Jeanette Cronlund – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, October 26, 2018, Rev. Christopher A. Barber officiating.

Mero-Kovaleski, Kenneth James Mero and Nicole Michele Kovaleski – At Oak Arbor, Michigan, December 8, 2018, Rev. Elmo K. Acton officiating.

DEATHS

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

Cochrane, Donald J. – November 25, 2018 of Rochester, Michigan. 84.

Cowley, Margot Linnea – June 23, 2018 of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 11 weeks.

Day, Dwight Goodwin – April 21, 2018 of Buffalo Grove, Illinois. 76.

Elphick, Una Joan Paul – October 16, 2018 of Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 97.

Emery, Theodora Coffin – July 2, 2018 of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. 87.

Hill, Richard Edward – July 5, 2018 of Fort Collins, Colorado. 68.

Pafford, James Theodore Gese – December 11, 2018 of Rochester, Michigan. 57.

Smith, Catharine Cornelia Arrington – December 12, 2018 of Mitchellville, Maryland. 87.



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



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