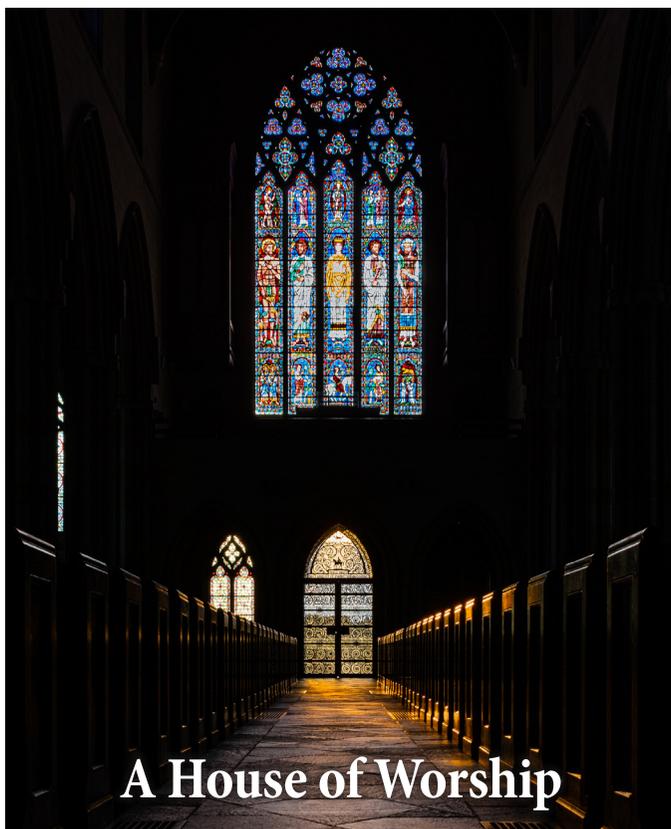


NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019



A House of Worship

October 5 marked the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, which was celebrated as part of this year's Charter Day observance. Read the sermon delivered by the Rev. Eric Carswell, *A House of Worship* (page 496), see photos from the original dedication (page 537), and a report on the anniversary activities (page 535). (Photo by Stephen Conroy)

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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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New Church Life is online at www.newchurchlife.org, with issues archived back to 2006. All issues of New Church Life can be searched back to 1881 at www.heavenlydoctrines.org.



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In This Issue

Editorials (page 492) include:

- *"And the Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us"*: "The great gift of the New Church – or rather the Lord to the New Church – is that its teachings make God visible – visible to the eye of the mind, our understanding."
- *The Gates of Heaven*: The ultimate Christmas gift is the Lord coming on earth to subjugate the hells and restore our freedom to choose heaven. And the gates are all around us, inviting us in.

At the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, celebrated over the Charter Day weekend, the Rev. Eric Carswell preached a sermon, *A House of Worship* – on all that has made this cathedral a living house of worship, and all that we do in our own lives and traditions to bring the glory of the Lord into its walls and its work. (Page 496)

The Rev. Mark Pendleton spoke directly to the students of the Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College attending the Charter Day Cathedral service with a message, *Go to Galilee*. It is in Galilee, he said, "that any one of us will come to know, and understand, and form bonds of closeness, togetherness, and relationship with the Lord of the universe that can last a lifetime and beyond." (Page 501)

We are happy to reprint a talk Donnette Alfelt gave to the Academy Secondary Schools Honor Society in 1990: *The University of the Natural World*. We are all students – all our lives in "the real world." We're all learning, we all fail, and we all goof off sometimes. But the lessons are really simple and fundamental. (Page 509)

Christmas is a time of angels – with the shepherds and with all of us. We may not actually see them as the shepherds did, says the Rev. John Odhner, but we can feel their presence when we act like angels ourselves. (Page 513)

The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers offers a Christmas sermon, *O Lord, Our Lord*, about the God made known to us by coming on earth and the God we worship – His pure love manifested in wisdom. This is all part of the Christmas miracle: "Who could have predicted that the ministry of this itinerant preacher, which lasted only a short three years in a tiny country, would have had such an impact

on civilization?” (Page 515)

In another Christmas sermon, *Refrain Your Voice from Weeping*, Rachel, the Rev. Jeremy Simons says Rachel is the one who loved most what Herod wanted to destroy. He talks about the threats within “the culture of the fallen church” but notes: “The Lord is our shepherd on this route. Just as He guided Mary and Joseph away from danger, He protects the precious truth of the church every step of the way, as He brings us all together. He will not let Herod extinguish them.” (Page 520)

The Rev. William Ankra-Badu was a much-loved leader of the growth of the New Church in West Africa. The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. preached a sermon – *A Place Provided* – at his memorial service in Ghana in October. Speaking to his own teaching as the Church grew in West Africa, Bishop Buss said: “It is into this land that the Rev. William Ankra-Badu is even now being led. It is into this place that all of us are called by the Lord, to our specific home there prepared especially for us. He can receive it – we can receive it – to the extent that we allow ourselves to be prepared by the Lord right now.” (Page 526)

Church News (page 533) includes:

- Notes and tributes from the memorial service for the Rev. William Ankra-Badu
- The Bryn Athyn Cathedral Centennial, celebrating 100 years since its dedication, with a flavor of that special day in our church’s history
- The Charter Day celebration, including the dedication of the new College Center, a memorable banquet and Theta Alpha luncheon, and a distinguished group of Distinguished Alumni and Outstanding Volunteer
- A wonderful gift for New Church families is a beautiful new book from General Church Education: *The Word of the Lord – The Old Testament for Young Children*
- Reports from the General Church Board of Directors, the Academy Board of Trustees and the Academy Corporation
- The dedication of an addition to the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church School
- A report on the Jacob’s Creek Family Retreat
- A last update on the Boynton Beach Retreat
- An exciting update on the New Christian Bible Study Project
- A milestone with the completion of translating *Secrets of Heaven* by the Swedenborg Foundation

This issue also includes the Annual Report of the General Church Secretary (page 569), the Directory of the General Church Clergy (page 573), and the Index for the 2019 issues of *New Church Life* (page 593).

Apology: The September/October issue of *New Church Life* arrived in your mailbox much later than was planned. Once it was ready to go in the mail a glitch was discovered in the printing – something that inadvertently occurred while fixing one problem that created another. The printer immediately recalled the entire batch and reprinted the whole run – which caused a delay but assured you an intact issue. We apologize for the lateness but thank the printer and his staff for their professionalism and graciousness.

Editorials

“AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US”

The fact that the Lord's birth was a miracle does not mean it was contrary to the order of creation, or that believing in it is contrary to reason. In fact, if we consider it in the context of the whole scheme of creation, it makes perfect sense.

This is the context in which the *Gospel of John* explains the incarnation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (*John* 1:1,3,4)

Note how that Gospel account echoes the first words of the creation story in *Genesis*: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. . . . And God said, Let there be light, and there was light."

The Word that was "in the beginning" – the Word that was "with God and was God" – is the *Logos*, the Divine Wisdom behind the wonderful order of the cosmos and all the "laws of nature." That wisdom is inherent in the Divine Love out of which God created the heavens and the earth – namely, for the sake of a heaven from the human race. And that same creative wisdom was conveyed by the written Word as the means for preparing and leading people to the Lord and heaven. The Word that created the world serves in our spiritual re-creation, or regeneration.

This is the secret of the universe. It was created for the sake of the human race that would inhabit it, and by their lives in it be prepared for eternal life in heaven. It was created because God is Love, and it is the essence of love to love others outside itself, to make them happy, to be loved by them in return, and thus to be conjoined with them. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47)

We can see, then, that God the Creator is and always has been *Human*, because He is Love itself and Wisdom itself, and these are the defining attributes of humanity. We are human because we have been endowed with the faculties of liberty and rationality and are thus able to receive love and wisdom from God in ourselves. This is what it means to be "made in the image and likeness of God."

But to love God and be conjoined with God, and so attain our full human potential, it is necessary to *see* God – not as an abstraction, or a philosophical

necessity, but as a Man. This is why "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," so that we might know and love and be conjoined with the Lord, and thus enter into the life of heaven; for it is the presence of the Lord in heaven that gives it the peace and happiness that make life there heavenly.

Everyone has the potential to see that God is Human, for "to see God as a Man is implanted in the human spirit." (*Apocalypse Explained* 955, sections 4 and 5) This truth can only be seen in the light of heaven, however, and as people turned more and more away from God and sank into evil and falsity, the dimmer that light grew in their minds. Until at last, "the light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." (*John* 1:5)

At the time of the Lord's first advent the human race was in a downward spiral. The faculties of free will and rationality that make us human were being misused to practice evil and justify it with false reasoning. The prophets were stoned, the Word profaned. The Old Testament Scriptures, although accommodated to people in a very natural, very dense spiritual condition, were no longer sufficient to maintain even a representative presence of the Divine on earth.

Finally, the very survival of the human race was threatened because people had closed their minds to the influence of heaven, and heaven was the conduit of the qualities that make us human – namely, love and wisdom from the Lord. To be cut off from heaven, therefore, was to be cut off from the wellspring of humanity itself. And so, the Lord "bowed the heavens and came down." (*Psalms* 18:9)

Before the Lord assumed the Human in the world and glorified it by uniting it with the Divine Soul within Him by which it was begotten, life from the Divine flowed into the natural degree of creation mediately through the angelic heaven. That intermediate presence made it possible for people to conceive of God as Human, but only representatively. But now, after the Lord's glorification of the Human in Himself, the Divine is present with us immediately from Him. The Divine is now present in the natural degree more directly and powerfully than before His advent. (see *Divine Love and Wisdom* 233)

The distant, mysterious God of Moses, who spoke from a cloud atop Mt. Sinai, is now more deeply and truly revealed to be the wise and loving teacher and healer that we see in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep. Our Savior, who forgives our sins and gives us everlasting life. "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has brought Him forth to view." (*John* 1:18)

Unfortunately, though, theologians, in their doctrine of the Trinity, put asunder what the Lord had joined together – the Divine and the Human – and

revealed to people in His first advent. The doctrine of the Trinity separated God into three Divine Persons, and so once again obscured the simple truth that God is a Man.

The great gift of the New Church – or rather of the Lord to the New Church – is that its teachings make God *visible*. That is, visible to the eye of the mind, our understanding. These truths affirm and fully explain what the Lord said when He was on earth: "I and My Father are one." "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (*John* 10:30; 14:9)

The Divine in itself is beyond our finite comprehension, but by being born on earth and glorifying the Human in Himself, and then explaining fully what that means in the Writings of the New Church, the Lord has revealed Himself as a Human God whom we can know and love—thus fulfilling the purpose for which the world was created "in the beginning."

(WEO)

THE GATES OF HEAVEN

The ultimate Christmas gift was – and still is – the Lord coming on earth to subjugate the hells and restore our freedom to choose heaven. It is the gift that endures – forever.

Because of the corruption of the human race 2,000 years ago, the hells had become so dominant that it upset the essential balance between heaven and hell and took away human spiritual freedom. By coming on earth to take on the hells and subdue them, the Lord reopened our pathway to salvation and heaven.

People had forgotten the Lord because they could not see Him and did not know Him. By dwelling among us on earth He came to be seen and understood, so that everyone could know Him and freely follow Him. And He leads us to the gates.

In the book of *Revelation* we have John's inspiring vision of "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." (21:10) The city had 12 gates of pearl, each with 12 angels – facing east, north, south and west. This is a comforting teaching because the 12 gates illustrate to everyone that there is not just one way to enter heaven. There are countless ways to know and live the truth so that everyone who loves the Lord, keeps His commandments, loves the neighbor and lives a good life can come into heaven.

And the gates are all around us. Remember the story of Jacob, traveling to Padam-aram to take a wife of Laban's daughters, who paused to sleep in the wilderness with stones for a pillow. He dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending and the Lord standing above. He promised Jacob that he and his family would prosper and that He would

always be with him.

Jacob awoke, frightened by this dream, and said: “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.” Then he proclaimed: “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (*Genesis 28:17*)

The gates of heaven are all around us – even in the wilderness, even when we are not looking for them. And this is our gift: heaven is always there for us. And thanks to this eternal Christmas gift, we are always free to choose to enter into its blessings.

(BMH)

A House of Worship

A Sermon by the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

For the 100th anniversary of the dedication
of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, October 6, 2019

Lessons: *Exodus* 40:1-9,34,35; *I Kings* 8:1-11; *True Christian Religion* 187.3,

“. . . the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.” (*I Kings* 8:11)

What makes a church a dwelling place for the Lord? While the beauty and uplifting nature of its architecture and windows can help draw a person’s mind to higher contemplation and worship, these things by themselves are insufficient.

We can know this if we’ve paid attention to homes in this world. There can be a clean, neat, wonderfully decorated home and the life that goes on inside may either be warm and loving or thoroughly unpleasant, cold or angry. Similarly, you can have a home not so spic-and-span, with simple, worn furniture and it likewise can be either warm and loving or unpleasant, cold or angry. It is not so much the externals of the home; it is what goes on inside. What is the life of the household? What are the relationships like within it?

For both the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, once they were assembled and dedicated the glory of the Lord filled them. This was because both served a special role in the church at that time. For the people of the Israelitish Church there was a connection between heaven and the church on earth, not by the interior qualities of the people in the church but through the proper order of the externals of their worship.

Consequently, when the tabernacle and temple existed with the ark in the holy of holies, there was huge power with the lampstands, basins, altar of sacrifice and all the other elements of their worship. When the tabernacle was set up and all its parts were anointed with holy oil, the glory of the Lord filled it. When the temple was set up and countless sheep and oxen were sacrificed, the glory of the Lord also filled it.

We cannot depend on external things alone. We need to change our lives.

This concept is clearly presented in this teaching for the New Church:

All of us have to do our part and move closer to God. The closer we come to God, the more God enters us, which is His part. It is similar with a house of worship: first it has to be built by human hands; then it has to be dedicated; and finally prayers are said for God to be present and unite Himself to the church that gathers there. (*True Christian Religion/True Christianity* 126)

There are things we need to do for the glory of the Lord to be with us. Reading again from the teachings for the New Church:

The meaning of the glory of the Lord can be seen from this, that the light of heaven, from which is all wisdom, beauty and magnificence in the heavens, proceeds from the Lord as

a sun, and it is the Lord's Divine love that appears to the angels as a sun. From this it is clear that the light of heaven, which in its essence is Divine truth and Divine wisdom, is the Divine love proceeding; and as love desires nothing else than to give that which is its own to another, thus to fill others with blessedness, what will not the Divine love do?

Nevertheless, the Lord cannot give His glory to us and fill us with wisdom and blessedness unless we acknowledge and worship the Lord, for it is by this that we conjoin ourselves to the Lord by love and faith; for in order that acknowledgment and worship may be acknowledged and worshipped, it must be from love and faith; and without conjunction by means of these no good can flow in from the Lord, because it is not received. All this makes clear that "to give glory to the God of heaven" means to acknowledge and worship the Lord. (*Apocalypse Explained* 678:3)

When the tabernacle had been built, Moses anointed all parts of it with a special oil that represented all the good things that come from love. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10010) When our lives come to a state in which a wise kindness reigns in each part of our lives, the glory of the Lord is revealed within us. When Solomon was dedicating his temple, he sacrificed countless sheep and oxen. These also represent good affections and good things done by a person from love. When our lives are filled with countless good motivations and good words and deeds the glory of the Lord is revealed within us.

What would bring the glory of the Lord to the Cathedral? Picture an

When the tabernacle had been built, Moses anointed all parts of it with a special oil that represented all the good things that come from love. When our lives come to a state in which a wise kindness reigns in each part of our lives, the glory of the Lord is revealed within us.

This is our opportunity as well. Each of us by our lives can bring the glory of the Lord to this Cathedral.

infant girl who was baptized in this building. Her parents inspired her with habits of regular Sunday worship. They encouraged her to think about what she was learning and to see how it could change some of her habits and reactions. As she grew up, she continued to grow spiritually. Her heart was touched over and over again with the music at services.

When she started into a serious relationship with a young man, they made attending Cathedral services an important part of their growing love and life together. They chose to have their wedding in this building and make their commitment to their marriage before the Lord. When children came, they, too, were brought to Sunday worship services. They strived to have their home be a place where the Lord was present. Through good times and bad she remembered to turn to the Lord for guidance, comfort and hope.

In her friendships and the life of this community this woman was treasured for her willingness to help out, whether it was listening to personal challenges or providing a meal or helping look after someone's children after a tragedy. As her children grew up and became adults, they could count on wise counsel from her for their life-choices.

Eventually she became a grandmother with grandchildren who looked forward to any visit with her. She treasured the opportunities to accompany them to Christmas Tableaux services and see the wonder on their faces as they heard the Shepherds Choir and got to go forward to see a tiny infant in the manger. As she grew even older her failing health limited some of her activities but still she found that Sunday just didn't feel like Sunday if she couldn't be here to worship, praise and learn from the Lord.

Finally, the time would come when her natural body could no longer support her spirit and she passed from this world to the next. A memorial service would be held in this building and so many of those who attended could be filled with gratitude for what her life had meant to so many. It is lives like hers that bring the glory of the Lord to this house of worship.

Or picture a man who learned about the New Church as an adult coming to this Cathedral, first out of interest in the building and grounds. A Cathedral guide piqued his curiosity with what she said. He had long felt disappointed in what he learned from the church of his youth and even some of the behavior seemed lacking in common Christian kindness.

Coming here for Sunday services was challenging as he tried to shift his

perspective on the Lord, the Word, the life of religion, and the nature of life after death. He found that the Family Service seemed to serve his growing spiritual life the best.

Over time he recognized how much his life was changing for the better. He could face stressful situations with a greater focus on what was most important and an inner trust that all the Lord expected of him was to do what he could reasonably accomplish. Each Sunday he looked forward to the benefits of attending the Family Service and checking in with the friendships he had formed there.

Through his changed relationship with the Lord, improved usefulness in his many roles and responsibilities, this man would bring the glory of the Lord to this house of worship.

And this is our opportunity as well. Each of us through our lives can bring the glory of the Lord to this Cathedral.

One of the times the Lord was seen in His glory was the transfiguration when He shone like the sun before three of His disciples. We read:

Peter, James, and John . . . represented faith, charity and good flowing from charity. Their presence alone on that occasion meant that no others are able to see the glory of the Lord which is present in His Word than those with whom faith, its partner charity, and good flowing from charity are present. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2135)

Certainly, many of us have times when we don't feel so spiritually alive. The idea of the glory of the Lord filling our lives can seem like a remote possibility. The Lord knows we go through such times. It is His greatest desire to lead us out of these states.

The final lesson today from *True Christian Religion* describes a miraculous transformation leading to a sight of the Lord in His glory. Prior to the portion read today is a description of a falling-apart building with a profane image within it. The floor was a swamp under which was a copy of the Word hidden under a large hewn stone. These images represented an empty faith with no presence of the Lord.

Then the wind blew away the building and image, dried the swamp and revealed a stone covering the Word. A tabernacle was then seen, then a temple

Certainly, many of us have times that we don't feel so spiritually alive. The idea of the glory of the Lord filling our lives can seem like a remote possibility. The Lord knows we go through these times. It is His greatest desire to lead us out of these states.

This Cathedral and the services we have been holding here for 100 years exist to help the Lord bring about a transformation of our lives from times of spiritual darkness to ones that behold the glory of the Lord.

and finally the Lord Himself. The Lord can bring about this transformation in each of our lives if we are willing. This Cathedral and the services we have been holding here for 100 years exist to help the Lord bring about a transformation of our lives from times of spiritual darkness to ones that behold the glory of the Lord.

May we be grateful for the generations that have gone before us who helped bring this Cathedral into existence and provided worship services with inspiring music, heartfelt prayers and ideas that the Lord has revealed to us. May we do what we can to invite the glory of the Lord into our lives and so into this house of worship.

Amen.



The Rev. Eric H. Carswell is pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church. He has previously been pastor of the Glenview, Illinois, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, societies and heads of their schools; Dean of the Bryn Athyn College Theological School; regional pastor for the Northeastern United States; Vice Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church; and Bishop's Representative for Education for the Academy and General Church schools. He and his wife, Donna (Zeitz), live in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: Eric.Carswell@brynathynchurch.org

Go to Galilee

Charter Day Address
Academy of the New Church
Bryn Athyn Cathedral, October 4, 2019

The Rev. Mark D. Pendleton¹

Readings: *Matthew* 28:1-0; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 117;
Secrets of Heaven 5432.1,5; *Doctrine of Faith* 1-4

Student body, good morning. I'm Mark Pendleton. I'm 59 years old and a Licensed Physical Therapist turned New Church minister 28 years ago. I'm the senior pastor of the Glenview New Church in Glenview, Illinois. I live with my beautiful wife, Ellen, and together we love her two adult children, the work that each of us gets to do, the people we serve, and the dear friends we have nearby and around the world. We also love long walks on Long Beach Island, New Jersey. If given the chance on a Saturday morning, I'd drive a big John Deere bulldozer with a six-way blade for self-amusement.

When Bishop Keith contacted me last March and asked if I'd like to speak to you today, my answer was an enthusiastic "Yes!" I thought I had something to say, mainly in terms of my experience at the Academy schools, what I feel I was given by them, and the positive impact this all has had on the entire trajectory of my life.

But then something happened. I reached out to a number of my minister colleagues who teach religion in the high school and college. I wanted to find out from them who my audience would be, what you're all like, and what the attitudes and climate are toward learning – especially spiritual learning – in the Academy schools today.

I spent time on the phone with the Reverends Chris Barber, Barry Halterman, Ray Silverman, Grant Schnarr, Scott Frazier and Coleman Glenn. By the time I was finished, I realized there was a real difference between where

¹ With a thoughtful, sensitive, and helpful critique by Jill Brickman of Glenview during the creative phase. Thank you, Jill.

I was personally when I went through these schools, and where many of you are, or may be, today. And I thought to myself, “Maybe I don’t have something to say after all.”

So here’s what I’d like to do: I **would** like to tell you a bit about myself and my experiences at the Academy schools. Also, some of what I’ve learned about you, and, at the risk of being patronizing, a few things that I see and appreciate from what I’ve learned.

First let’s set a context. Here I am, standing in a pulpit, a number of feet above all of you, in a white robe and blue stole. But feel free to think of me differently. Imagine me standing on the ground level with all of you, in whatever different attire, separated from you by nothing more than 35 or 45 years of experience:

I was the freshman in high school who was one of the youngest and smallest kids in his class, the leader in class hours of detention for the stunts I pulled, who once sat in the back corner of the classroom writing an angry comment about the school on the wall when the teacher wasn’t looking.

I was the sophomore who struggled with algebra and relationship interests and was in tears of frustration trying to make sense of long, Latinized sentences from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg that were part of my religion homework.

I was the junior who broke into varsity athletics, enjoyed them to the hilt, and sat in this Cathedral on Charter Day, wishing the speaker would stop talking so we could get on with the homecoming football game that used to happen on Friday afternoon.

I was the senior who just missed being class president following two tie votes, but who co-captained the football and baseball teams with the guy who did become president, and who became a lifelong friend.

But while I was busy being a jock on back campus, I was also the one who missed out on some of the finer things in the high school that many of you enjoy today – drama, and art, theater and dance, debate, and so on. Some of these things weren’t even offered when I was in school.

I was the college student who was amazed to see his mind grow and expand at an incredible rate, and to realize for the first time in my life that what I know is nothing compared to what I don’t know.

And through much of that time, I was the student who, of his own choosing, sat regularly in the spot in front of that pillar – fourth from the front – in a building which this year celebrates 100 years since its dedication, to take in services of worship and Sunday messages that have helped and inspired thousands of people over that century of time.

But here’s the thing: Unlike any number of you, I was born and raised in the New Church – right here in Bryn Athyn. And what I learned in school,

particularly with regard to the theology of the New Church, I simply took in and accepted.

What I was taught back then made sense to me. I liked it. I had no reason – in my own life, or in my own thinking, or from the cultural or world influences that impacted me at that time – to question or doubt much of what I was given. Because of this, beginning in junior year of high school, I started to fall in love with my faith. It took hold of my mind and my interest. I wanted to grow in it, and I wanted it to impact my life for good.

Fast forward a few years, and I was 19 years old. One week before my 20th birthday I was on a walk around this Cathedral. As I passed under the arch of the Ezekiel Tower, a thought came to mind: “I think I’m going to read the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.”

The next day I began reading all of his books on theological subjects – those that were published by him, and those published after his death, beginning with *Secrets of Heaven*. I read chronologically, 10 pages a day, from start to finish. As I recall, and interestingly, that project took five years to the very day.

This happened before and during my physical therapy studies, and years before my return to Theological School. I was just an average student like you at the time, making his way on a journey of life, with nothing more than 35 or 40 *fewer* years of learning and experience than I can boast now. I guess I was just someone who wanted to see for himself what it was all about.

And what I experienced during those five years was something so valuable for my spiritual life and relationships that it soon cemented itself at the heart and soul of all that I am and all that I ever hope to be.

To my experience, were Swedenborg’s Writings perfect and fully accurate throughout? No, they weren’t – especially in his knowledge of science and use of scientific examples, which were, of course, limited by the time in history when he wrote. But in my simple, perhaps naïve world, I simply looked past those limited views of science to underlying principles that seemed to be conveyed. In point of fact, I didn’t care if the science of his day was accurate or not, as it was simply being used to elucidate and confirm spiritual principles that might be patently true *without* these things.

And was everything Swedenborg said politically correct by today’s standards? Nope, it wasn’t that either – especially in some of the negative

Beginning in junior year of high school, I started to fall in love with my faith. It took hold of my mind and my interest.

I wanted to grow in it, and I wanted it to impact my life for good.

I suspect this concept applies to our church as well. The New Church is a church that stresses individual freedom and inquiry into all facets of faith. This free investigation can lead to divergent ideas and conflicting opinions about how the church should be progressing with its efforts.

generalizations and characterizations I saw him making about different religious groups of his time.

But again, in my perhaps unenlightened world, I simply looked past the political incorrectness of his day and saw him making statements about human nature in general that applied to me just as well as anyone else. What Swedenborg said about different religious groups challenged me to look inside of myself and see if any of the things he was talking about existed in me, as things I could usefully work on and address as part of my own spiritual development.

And so it was with other points of doubt or disagreement that I may have experienced in my reading of Swedenborg. Right or wrong, innocent or naïve, it's just the way my mind worked.

But based on my conversations with some of your religion professors, that's not the way things are anymore. It sounds like starting in freshman year of high school, and continuing all the way through, there's a fair amount of healthy back-and-forth dialogue, debate, wrestling and grappling that you students do with ideas and concepts in ways that I and others my age never did. It sounds like gone are the days when students read what is written, hear what is taught, and simply take it in and accept it at face value.

And I like that. It reminds me of when I was in Theological School and teaching one term of religion to 20 or so junior boys in high school. Those guys were the start of the culture and climate that now exist in the Academy schools. I can remember coming back to my office after one of the classes was over and thinking, "Wow this is awesome! I get to be on a spiritual wrestling mat with 20 of these students all at once! I love it!"

Maybe I was mistaken, or simply unenlightened, in my approach to my own religious and spiritual education. I'm not sure how much of genuine faith is about simply hearing and accepting what is read and taught, especially (or maybe I would say specifically) if it doesn't make sense to a person or isn't fully understood. Maybe a part of real, emerging faith is about **not** accepting something as true and good until you **do** understand and **can** make sense of it.

Well, if we look back over the history of our world, on the very first Easter morning Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared first to Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary.” When He did, He said to them: “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee. There they will see Me.”

Why Galilee? Maybe it’s because that’s where most of them hailed from. In a manner of speaking, maybe Jesus was telling them to get back to home base – the starting point of all the good work that He and they had ever done or would ever accomplish. Maybe it’s because Jesus feared further persecution at the hands of the leading faith of that time and in that culture, and Galilee – full of Gentile people – was where the least of this was likely to happen.

But whatever the historical reason for Jesus telling His brethren to go to Galilee, Emanuel Swedenborg adds a spiritual reason as well. He suggests that on a symbolic level, Galilee represents certain states of mind that many people experience – states of openness to considering what they hear or read, and then putting what they believe to be true and good to work in their lives.

As said, based on my conversations with some of your religion professors, this is what I hear goes on today in the Academy schools. As just one testimony to this, I understand that each year Chris Barber surveys his students in freshman through senior years of high school. He invites feedback on his courses and welcomes any advice the students might like to offer to future students. In his surveys of the last few years, the students have offered 228 pieces of advice and 116 of them (51%) say things like:

- Keep an open mind
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Open yourself up to new ideas
- Be ready to learn
- A great time to expand your thoughts
- Great for spiritual thinkers
- Most of what we learn is either important or interesting
- Don’t turn it away
- Participate
- Contribute
- Engage
- Speak your mind
- State your opinion
- Don’t hold back
- Argue what you believe
- Ask questions

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 – that I believe any
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 and form bonds of
 closeness, togetherness,
 and relationship
 with the Lord of the
 universe that can last a
 lifetime and beyond.

- Consider all perspectives

Three pieces of advice I especially liked were these:

1. If you listen, you'll learn stuff that is helpful in your life and relationships.
2. Find out how [it] can be relevant to your life.
And my favorite of all:
3. Be good.

All of these responses sound similar (spiritually speaking) to what Jesus said to the two women on that first Easter morning: "Do not be afraid. Tell My brethren to go to Galilee. There they will see Me."

And I believe it's true: If there is a God in heaven above, and if that God is also the Lord of heaven and earth, then I believe it's *there* that people will see Him – in states of mind called "Galilee," states of openness to what may be true, and a determination to put it to work in life. It's there – in Galilee – that I believe any one of us will come to know, and understand, and form bonds of closeness, togetherness, and relationship with the Lord of the universe that can last a lifetime and beyond.

All good wishes to you in that.

But that's not all there is. Because I know that there are some of you here today who are like I was back then. For you, it may not be a challenge, or a struggle, or a wrestling match to read, and hear, and take in, and embrace, and love. I imagine there are some of you here today who are already falling in love with your emerging faith the way I did back then.

I think that's a good thing too. And I imagine that you are, in one sense, just like the rest of the people in this 100-year-old building. Because it's in your desire for truth and goodness in life, in your openness to learning and considering, and your determination to put things you learn and love into practice, that I believe you will see Him, too.

All good wishes to you in that. I have loved every minute of it in my own life, and I hope you will as well.

But that's still not all there is. Before I get down off this platform and let the athletic events continue, I want to say something about your teachers – the women and men who make up the faculty of the Academy schools, many of whom I've known over the years, and who may hope to have a positive

impact on your education and even your personal development.

I trust that I can speak for all of them – even the ones I don't yet know – when I say that they care about you. They really do. I believe that these women and men want nothing but the best for each one of you – now, in your future, and for the entire trajectory of your life. In their minds, and in this particular approach to education, they have a hold of something that they have to give – something they believe is so true and so good, so valuable and worthwhile, that they don't need you to like it or accept it in order to make their day or fulfill their purpose. All they want to do is give it away to all of you – offer it up with no strings attached – in the hope that it will bless and benefit your life as it has theirs and the lives of many others.

Are your teachers and professors perfect educators? I doubt it. Are they such good human beings that they can readily admit when they've been wrong? Not likely. Are they so spiritually advanced that they're spotless in their attitude toward you, and never need to do a course correction themselves? I'm sure they wrestle with these things, too. Don't you?

But underneath it all – underneath all their personal strengths and weaknesses, and the learning and development curve that each one of them is on – I believe they love you. If they don't, they're working on it. They think about you. At times they lie awake at night worrying about you. And years down the road, long after you've graduated and gone from these hallowed halls, they will still think about you, and remember you, and talk of you with their friends, and wonder how you're doing. And they will love it when they see you again – whether it be three years down the road or three million.

Early last spring I was at the Bryn Athyn College giving a Saturday seminar and workshop. While I was here, I met and interacted with a number of students. On her way out of the seminar, one of those students paused to thank me for the day. Then she turned to one of her religion professors who was standing next to me and exchanged words with him as well.

The difference between the way that young woman looked at and interacted with me, and the way she looked at and interacted with her professor, was remarkable. Everything about her displayed a level of trust, comfort, rapport

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and relationship with that professor that eclipsed any of the same things she may have developed for me through the event that day. She seemed to feel relaxed, safe and fully comfortable with him. It was heartening to watch, and I thought to myself, “That’s as it should be. And **that** is this institution.”

Do not be afraid. Go and tell the Lord’s “brethren” within you – the very best parts of who you are – to go to Galilee. **There** you will see Him.

For myself, and on behalf of your teachers and professors, all good wishes to you in this.



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The University of the Natural World

Donnette R. Alfelt

Note: Following is a talk given by Donnette Alfelt to the Academy Secondary Schools Honor Society in 1990. She was prompted to offer it again by the article, *Cramming for Our Finals*, (July/August *New Church Life*) written by her Academy classmate, the Rev. Robert S. Jungé. Donnette and Bob share another bond: her husband, Lennart, has been in the spiritual world for 38 years, and Bob's wife, Vera, for 39.

All of us attend the same school. Living in the natural world is nothing but a prep university for eternity. All human beings are accepted at the University of the Natural World (UNW) regardless of SAT scores or financial ability. The All-Wise Administrator recognizes the potential of each of us and continually provides us with opportunities to develop to the fullest.

All of us in this room are students at UNW though none of us enjoys all the courses or takes full advantage of all the opportunities available to us. We are all guilty of not always paying attention or doing our homework and of sometimes goofing off. Our cries and complaints are similar.

I hear ANC students saying such things as: "It's not fair we have homework over the weekend." Or, "This is much too hard. I can't possibly be expected to do it." Or, "This isn't the course I wanted to take." Or, "School has nothing to do with real life."

You might find yourself saying similar things after you leave this school – as I did. Such as: "It's not fair the kids got sick when we wanted to go away for the weekend." Or, "Life is much too hard. I can't possibly get through this crisis." Or during difficult times: "This is not the course I wanted to take." And if you think school has nothing to do with real life, think again.

What is this elusive "real life" that some of you think you'll find when you leave high school, and that college students think they'll find when they leave college, and that young singles think they'll find when they get married, and the young marrieds think when they have more money, or when the baby starts sleeping through the night or gets over chicken pox or into school or

What is this “real life” that’s always going on at someone else’s house in someone else’s perfect life? It sure isn’t here and now! Or is it?

out of school or out of the house or married or after retirement, and so on and so on?

What is this “real life” that’s always going on at someone else’s house in someone else’s perfect life? It sure isn’t here and now! Or is it?

Of course, in the highest sense real life is our life in the next world, but the Lord did put us here first for very good reasons. Our entire earthly life consists of a series of choices that will finally

determine where we will live, with whom, what our homes will look like, what we will look like, and what we will be doing in the next world.

In high school you may not always pay attention in class or may let your homework go with the idea that you can make it up on the final exam. Young and old alike tend to think that we will show our love and trust in God when we face some future challenge. We all tend to feel that daily living is filled with insignificant irritants that don’t count that much – but of course they do count.

The Lord asks us to love our neighbor as our self: to love one another as He has loved us. He explains to us in so many ways that this is the key. Looking to Him and the good in others. He asks us to practice this in everyday encounters, as the child practices the times tables and the high school student practices French vocabulary. Our daily choices are the pop quizzes at UNW.

Can we disagree with someone and still look to the good in them? Can we be kind to someone who has hurt us? Can we maintain a spirit of charity in the midst of frustration?

School is a series of problems to solve and so is life. When we have school problems, money problems, strained relationships or disappointments – all these things provide us with opportunities to practice making unselfish choices. As someone else put it: we are continually faced with great opportunities brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems.

Every generation that goes through the school system learns some of the same things their grandparents did. When your grandmother was in school 8 times 8 was 64 and it still is. It would be possible for the class of ’97 to pass down answers to the class of ’98 which would be correct. It’s different at UNW because the answers have to do with intent and application and the answers differ for each student.

Of course, the source for finding the answers is the same. To follow God’s teachings is always correct. But how we raise our families, cope with illness, do our jobs, will never be the same for someone else. There will forever be

new books written on how to be happy, get rich, raise children, run a school or run a country. But there will never be a final answer to any of these questions.

This will never happen because human beings are changing and complex, and though we may need the same things, we will give and receive them in different ways and only we can know our motives.

What makes heaven heavenly is that it is filled with individuals who act from love and truth. At UNW we are to practice doing this and it may take many forms. Even Republicans and Democrats can be acting from the same concern and motives.

One of the most wonderful parts of the system at UNW is that we are continually changing roles so that we can practice charity from different points of view and vantage points. We are the student and then we are the teacher. We are the child and then we are the parent. We are the healthy and then we are the sick. We are the secure and then we are the frightened. We are the caretakers and we are the lost. We are your teachers and you may become ours.

How do we handle these many roles and tests? We flunk some and do well in some. We learn from every encounter, disappointment and triumph. This is all part of the curriculum and we excel some days and fail others. But pass or fail, we always can learn things to help us through the next challenge.

Someday you may look back at high school with regrets. At UNW students have regrets – things they wish they had or had not done. But of course guilt is not what God wants us to feel as we look back. If we are looking back with regret it means we are looking back with new understanding – from another place, in another course. We were different people then. We were different people yesterday. If we had it to do over again, perhaps we would do it differently because we have had more experience or courses in living. So we build on what we've done and look to the future with new skills, insight and resolve.

If we believe shunning evils is important and is the road to the real happiness that God wills for us, we'll try to do it even when it interferes with our plans – or seems to. The hells would have us believe we are justified in behaving selfishly if other people do – that dishonesty is okay or even necessary in a dishonest world. But the hells lie and we add to the problem when we

School is a series of problems to solve and so is life. When we have school problems, money problems, strained relationships or disappointments – all these things provide us with opportunities to practice making unselfish choices.

The only way we're going to pass the exams and find ourselves in the right place when we leave UNW is when we finally get it. That all we have to do is shun evils as sins against God so that we can do good from Him and His angels. A lifetime job, but that's it – that's all.

listen to them.

Do you remember a time when you didn't do your homework? Do you remember what it felt like when you found a friend who hadn't done theirs either? The feeling of elation and diminished guilt. That the more widespread a disorder the less it becomes a disorder is made to sound reasonable by the spirits who love disorder.

If we believe marriage is sacred but allow ourselves to be influenced by those who mock or compromise it, it means we are willing to settle for less than an A, less than the perfect love God wants for us in exchange for a temporary or counterfeit feeling.

The only way we're going to pass the exams and find ourselves in the right place when we leave UNW is

when we finally get it. That all we have to do is shun evils as sins against God so that we can do good from Him and His angels. A lifetime job, but that's it – that's all.

Our job is to work on our homework every day. Cramming for the final on our death bed isn't going to work. Remember the motto at UNW: "*Hodie Non Cras*" – "Today not Tomorrow."



Donnette Rose Alfelt was a beloved teacher in the Academy Girls School for many years, remembered especially for her distinctive course, *Formative Years*, which helped students prepare for the life issues and choices of adulthood. She is the wife of the late Lennart Alfelt and has been a widow since 1981. She has led groups for widows and widowers and has written several booklets including: *Comfort and Hope for Widows and Widowers*; *When a Spouse Dies*; *From the Top of the Yardstick*; and *Nobody Dies*. Donnette lives in Bryn Athyn and looks

forward to being reunited with her husband, Lennart, and her son, Sten, in the spiritual world. Contact: dalfelt@aol.com

Christmas Angels

The Rev. John L. Odhner

(Reprinted from the Pastor's Box, *Bryn Athyn Post*, December 18, 2018)

The Lord's birth was a time when angels drew near the earth with messages of hope, joy and peace.

- "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid." (*Matthew* 1:20)
- "Arise, take the young Child and His mother . . ." (*Ibid.* 2:13,20)
- "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard. . . . And you will have joy and gladness." (*Luke* 1:13-14)
- "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (*Ibid.* 1:30)
- "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." (*Ibid.* 2:10)
- "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (*Ibid.* 2:14)

"Behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them. . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host." The angels appeared to the shepherds suddenly. There is no description of them here flying or walking from a distance. This is because the angels were already with the shepherds before they appeared.

What actually happened was that the shepherds' spiritual eyes were opened so that they could see first one angel and then a whole multitude. Afterwards it says that the angels "went away into heaven." It may have appeared to the shepherds that they flew up into the sky, or perhaps they simply disappeared as suddenly as they appeared when the shepherds' eyes were closed.

The reality, though, is that the angels did not go away from the shepherds. Angels are always close to us. "Unless spirits and angels are present with us . . . we cannot have life for even a single moment." (*Secrets of Heaven* 10219.2) Angels from the Lord lead and protect us every instant and fraction of an instant. (*Ibid.* 5992) If we lead a good life, angels are close to us, and the instant we begin to have bad thoughts, they raise us up to a higher level. (*Ibid.* 6315)

The influence of angels is especially upon our conscience. (*Ibid.* 6207) Evil spirits make accusations and torment our conscience, but angels still protect

us; that is, the Lord does so through the angels, preserving in us a sense of hope and trust. (*Ibid.* 6097)

Angels are present with us in our ends or goals. When our goal is to love the Lord and our neighbor the way angels do, then angels are delighted with us and join themselves to us “like a brother or sister.” (*Ibid.* 3796)

It is unlikely that we will see angels this Christmas the way the shepherds did, but there is no doubt, if we are paying attention, that we will hear angels speaking in the voice of our conscience, feel their presence in acts of compassion, and share their joy when we feel the joy of another as if it were our own.



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O Lord, Our Lord

A Christmas Sermon by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers

Lessons: *Psalm 8; John 1:1-4,14; True Christian Religion 623*, selections

"O LORD, Our Lord." So begins the 8th *Psalm*, and by LORD there the Psalmist – David – meant Yahweh, or, as later vocalized, Jehovah. This was ancient Israel's God, the creator of the universe, whose power extended supreme over that of all other gods. Today we recognize it as a reference to the Divine itself, to the one and only God, who is at once transcendent and imminent, infinitely beyond finite nature and yet at the same time omnipresent within it.

In essence this God is love, which manifests itself in His wisdom, two qualities which, though divisible in the recipients of His creation, are forever united in Him.

This is the God we worship. And yet it is a God whose nature and essence surpass all understanding, (cf. *Philippians 4:7*) being beyond our comprehension, finite creatures that we are. It is vain to speak of a love of God, therefore. No one can love what he or she does not know. If we try to love this transcendent God, either we fail in the attempt or we remake God into whatever image of Him we choose to invent.

Inevitably, then, God has found ways to make Himself known. Known in finite form, or rather, reflected in finite form. This He has done through Sacred Scripture, first in the Ancient Word, later in the Old Testament, and then by taking on human form as recorded in the New Testament, on which the Christian Church is founded.

As described in the preface to the *Gospel of John*:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. This was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and nothing that was created was created apart from it. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as though of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (*John 1:1-3,14*)

This incarnation refers, of course, to the birth of Jesus in the small town of

Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. It was a miraculous birth, accomplished without the participation of a human father. We can imagine the consternation and perhaps terror experienced by the mother, Mary, a virgin, at the cessation of her menses. What was wrong with her? Perhaps a fatal disorder.

And so the angel Gabriel was sent to her to allay her fear. “Do not be afraid, Mary,” said the angel. “You will bear a son, conceived in you by the spirit of God.” (*Luke* 1:26-35)

Now Mary was betrothed to be married to Joseph, a carpenter, and when he found that Mary was with child he was minded to put her away privately. He was minded to put her away privately because in Israel and Judea the essential marriage compact was the betrothal. A betrothed woman found to be with child not the child of her intended would have been termed an adulteress, and the penalty for adultery was death by stoning. (*Leviticus* 20:10; *Deuteronomy* 22:22)

But Joseph was unwilling to charge her with adultery. He determined instead simply to terminate the betrothal. To prevent this unhappy result, an angel appeared to him in a dream, who explained that the child had been conceived by the spirit of God. Furthermore, the child’s name should be Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins.” (*Matthew* 1:18-21) “Jesus” is a Hellenization of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “Yahweh saves.”

From His birth, then, Jesus was to be a savior. And this was affirmed by angels appearing to shepherds out in the fields (*Luke* 2:8-14), by a man named Simeon when Jesus was presented at the Temple (*Ibid.* 2:25-32); at the same time by Anna, a prophetess, there (*Ibid.* 2:36-38); and so, too, shortly afterward by wise men from the east. (*Matthew* 2:1-12)

Of Jesus’ outward life during His childhood in this world we know almost nothing. We know that Mary and Joseph married, that Jesus was accounted the son of the carpenter, and that He was raised in Nazareth (*Luke* 2:39,40) with several brothers. (*Matthew* 12:46,47, 13:55; *Mark* 3:31,32; *Luke* 8:19,20; *John* 2:12, 7:3)

The one account we have took place when He was 12 years old, when He was taken to Jerusalem by Mary and Joseph to take part in His first celebration of Passover. (*Luke* 2:41) They would not have traveled alone. Highwaymen made traveling alone too dangerous. Rather they would have traveled in a caravan of their fellow citizens. We infer this from the fact that at the end of a day’s journey on the way back home, Mary and Joseph found Him missing. How could they have not found Him missing earlier? Because they assumed Him to be with His friends or relatives elsewhere in the caravan. (*Ibid.* 2:44)

So they traveled a day's journey back to Jerusalem, despite the danger, to find their son, and they found Him in the Temple precincts, conversing with the rabbis there, experts in the Jewish law and religion. We sometimes suppose that it was just Jesus asking them questions; but in fact the rabbis were also asking Him questions, and all present were astonished at His answers and understanding. (*Ibid.* 2:46,47)

This tells us two things about Jesus' young life. First, it shows that He had received enough education to impress the rabbis. Indeed, we also know that at some time during His life He had learned to read. (See *Luke* 4:17) He also later quoted Old Testament scripture. And secondly, this incident shows that He matured more quickly than is the case with others. (*True Christian Religion* 89)

After that the record is again silent. It was not until Jesus turned 30 years of age that He began His work of salvation. It may be supposed in accord with the Heavenly Doctrines that the preceding years were ones of internal preparation. But at the end of that time He presented Himself at the Jordan river in the southern Palestinian province of Judea to be baptized by His distant cousin John. John's mission was to call the Jews to repentance in preparation for the coming of the promised Messiah or Christ. And it was John who identified Jesus as being that Messiah or Christ.

"Behold!" he said. "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" (*John* 1:29,30)

So began Jesus' journeys through the provinces of Palestine and the territories just to the north and east. He led the life of an itinerant preacher and miracle-worker. What He preached is exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount found in *Matthew* 5-7 and in the Sermon on the Plain found in *Luke* 6:17-49. In these sermons He taught the virtues of humility, mercy, peace-making, chastity, forgiveness, sincerity, generosity, piety, love of the neighbor, love even of enemies, trust in Providence, and more. The Golden Rule is made a Christian commandment. (*Matthew* 7:12; *Luke* 6:31) When Peter once asked Him how often he should forgive his neighbor, Jesus told him to forgive "up to seventy times seven." (*Matthew* 18:22) That is 490 times, which is forgiveness practically without end.

In Jesus' teaching, the central precept is love for the neighbor. He named it one of the two great commandments on which, He said, "hang all the Law and the Prophets." (*Matthew* 22:37-40) And to His disciples He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." (*John* 13:34)

As for His miracles, most of them involved the healing of illnesses and

the curing of diseases. But He also turned water into wine. (*Ibid.* 2:1-11, 4:46) He walked on water. (*Matthew* 14:22-27; *Mark* 6:48) He put an end to a storm at sea, so that His disciples exclaimed, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Perhaps His greatest miracle, however, was the resurrection of Lazarus after Lazarus died and had been entombed four days. (*John* 11:1-44) No such miracle had been seen in Israel since the days of Elijah and Elisha. And even greater than this was His own resurrection of Himself, after His crucifixion and death, when He rose from the tomb and was seen alive by a number of His followers. (*Matthew* 28; *Mark* 16; *Luke* 24; *John* 20,21)

Did Jesus ever claim to be God incarnate? The answer is yes. When His disciple Philip once said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father," Jesus said to him, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (*John* 14:8,9) And when some Jews challenged His authority, saying, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" Jesus replied, "Before Abraham was, I am." (*Ibid.* 8:53-58) "I am" echoes the answer Moses received at the burning bush, when he asked who he should say had sent him, and God replied, "I am I who am. . . . Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I am' has sent me to you." (*Exodus* 3:13,14) The identification was clear to all who heard it.

Some boys in the spiritual world were once advised by their teacher to think of God in terms of His essence and from this of His person. (*True Christian Religion* 623:5) The Heavenly Doctrines teach us His essence. The Gospels present the person, namely Jesus, who embodies that essence and whom we acknowledge as Lord. Jesus also once said to His disciples, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am." (*John* 13:13)

So began the Christian Church, a church that eventually spread throughout Europe, Greece and Russia, and was finally carried to the Americas and Australia, to India and Africa, to the point that there is scarcely a country today where the name Jesus Christ is not known. Christianity is now the dominant religion in the world, and even among Islamic nations Jesus Christ is viewed as a great prophet.

The long history and spread of Christianity are itself testimony to the hand of Providence. Indeed, one might deem it a miracle, indeed a very great miracle, as unlikely as it might otherwise have been. For who could have predicted that the ministry of this itinerant preacher, which lasted only a short three years in a tiny country, would have had such an impact on civilization? Indeed, western civilization is a Christian civilization. Atheists and agnostics, wittingly or not, espouse Christian virtues and values. Jews and Muslims espouse Christian virtues and values. Who does not know the Golden Rule? Who does not acknowledge the goodness of love for the

neighbor? Humility, mercy, honesty, generosity and other Christian virtues akin to these are commonly esteemed, even if not practiced, even without people's realizing their Christian foundation.

"O LORD, Our Lord. How excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" (*Psalm 8:1,8*)



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

Refrain Your Voice from Weeping, Rachel

A Christmas Sermon by the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

Lessons: *Jeremiah* 31:15-17; *Luke* 2:13-23; *Apocalypse Explained* 695.15

Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears;
for they shall come back from the land of the enemy. (*Jeremiah* 31.16)

You may wonder, when you hear the account of the boys who were put to death by Herod, why it is said to fulfil the prophecy of Rachel weeping for her children and heard in Ramah. Rachel was not the ancestor of these children in Bethlehem, but Leah. Ramah is a town 20 miles north of Bethlehem, with no obvious connection to this story.

The passage in Jeremiah in the literal sense actually refers to the Jews being taken captive to Babylon. They were gathered first at Ramah (see *Jeremiah* 40.1) and taken from there into exile. Rachel is the one who mourns because, as the beloved wife of Jacob, she is the idealized mother of all Israel.

In Jeremiah's prophecy she is comforted and told that her children will return from the land of the enemy. In the Matthew account, however, the comfort is not mentioned, only inconsolable weeping. The only comfort is that, unknown to the mothers of Bethlehem, the target of Herod's wrath has escaped to safety.

According to the New Testament apocryphal work, *The Martyrdom of Matthew*, Herod killed 3,000 children in this event. The Byzantine liturgy places the number at 14,000 and the Syrian tradition says 64,000 innocent children were killed. More recent scholarship, however, asserts that the population of Bethlehem at that time would have been about 300, and the number of male children, two years old or younger, would have actually been about six or seven. (*The slaughter of the innocents – Historical fact or legendary fiction?* By Gordon Franz, 2009) This would also explain why it would have been easy for the shepherds to locate the infant Lord on the night of His birth.

The real scale of the tragedy, however, was not in the number of victims, as terrible as that was, but in what it represented.

There was no spiritual truth remaining.

The true reason why Rachel is mentioned is that in the internal sense she is the one who loved most what Herod wished to destroy. Rachel stands for the interior love of the truth, a love truly from the heart. Both Ramah and Bethlehem represent spiritual truth. The Lord came into the world, born in Bethlehem, to bring the light of spiritual truth, which had almost been obliterated by the hells, and which those represented by Herod would have loved to snuff out at its birth.

When Herod put to death the infant boys of Bethlehem, it represented the seemingly final extinction of truth in the church – a cause for such great sorrow that we are told that heaven itself was threatened. (*True Christianity* 3, *Apocalypse Explained* 695.15)

But the Word of God born into the world was kept safe, spirited away in the night to Egypt. So Rachel's bitter weeping would be comforted, for the truth can never actually be extinguished or lost.

Our topic is this miraculous preservation of the truth that Rachel loves, and how the Lord leads each person, and the human race as a whole, so that her tears are dried and her children return to be united with her. This is what this account of the little boys of Bethlehem, and the Lord's escape, is about.

A church's teachings are like its sons.

The birth of children, and the preciousness of those children, is a frequent theme in the Word. Few things can cause greater heartbreak for parents than the lack of a child or the loss of a child. In the New Testament, the joy at the Lord's birth, and the fear when He is threatened, reiterate that theme.

In the internal sense sons depict the doctrine of the church, or the church's body of teaching. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2584, *Faith* 59) It is like a child because it is fragile and needs caring for, and because if it is lost or damaged the church cannot live and has no future. You would think that the future church itself

You would think that the future church itself would be the offspring of the present church, just as actual children are. But a church's teachings really are its future, for the spiritual church is always shaped and formed according to its faith.

In this case the truth is not just scarce in Israel, its very existence is threatened. It stands for a time in the life of the church when the Word is misunderstood and falsified, when evil practices are condoned, and when the truth is marginalized and persecuted.

would be the offspring of the present church, just as actual children are. But a church's teachings really are its future, for the spiritual church is always shaped and formed according to its faith. We read:

As everyone knows, the church depends on its body of teaching and its body of teaching is based on the Word. Nevertheless, it is not the body of teaching itself but its integrity and purity, and therefore an understanding of the Word, that forms the church. The church in miniature that is in us as individuals is also formed and established not by a body of teaching but by our faith and by our living our faith. (*True Christianity* 245)

It is really the life according to faith that makes the church, but this is not possible without doctrine. The relationship between a parent and a child has a poignancy and fierce love

that may be hard to see in the relationship between a church and its doctrine. But the analogy should help to illustrate the urgency of the relationship. Just as Rachel is inconsolable at the loss of her sons, so the church would be truly bereft without its beliefs. The number of its followers may shrink or grow, but without the integrity and purity of its body of teaching, and the life according to it, the church has no real existence.

The flight to Egypt

In our story the Lord escapes to Egypt, a frequent safe haven in the Word. In several stories people look to Egypt for safety in hardship, and then return to Canaan, often enriched by their time there. The story describes the flight to Egypt, followed by an attempt to return to Bethlehem when Herod dies, and ending with the Lord in Nazareth, where He is to grow to maturity. What do these things mean?

In the Word people typically go to Egypt during famines, because famines stand for the lack of truth, and Egypt represents instruction. In this case the truth is not just scarce in Israel, its very existence is threatened. It stands for a time in the life of the church when the Word is misunderstood and falsified, when evil practices are condoned, and when the truth is marginalized and

persecuted.

Rachel's lamentation and bitter weeping for her sons represents sorrow because of this state of the world. Specifically, it represents sorrow that there is no spiritual truth in the church. For Rachel represents the internal affection for truth, truth loved deeply and in life, truth which is not so much truth as good, a love of the neighbor having its origin in the solid truths of the Word. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3906) This is not so much the knowing of an answer as a love of an answer, or really a loving of a way of life. Her weeping in Ramah underlines this, because Ramah particularly means the truth from love. (*Ibid.* 4592.10)

In the culture of the fallen church we do not hold the Word and the things of religion in high esteem. We often subject them to doubt and criticism. The promise of the New Church is that in the long run they will nevertheless be the source of our peace.

Egypt is the first stop in the journey.

When Moses was a young man in Egypt, had killed an Egyptian and was found out, he escaped to Midian. (*Exodus* 2.15) We are told that this represents the person of the church, when faced with hard dilemmas, escaping to the basic truths of the Word, and finding refuge there in the things which they know to be true. (*Ibid.* 6773)

Escaping to Egypt is different than escaping to Midian. Egypt is not basic truths, but rather the knowledge of all the goods and truths of the Church; not an interior affection of them, as with Rachel, but simply the memory knowledge of them. The knowledges of the Church, of the truths and goods of the Word, are tremendously enriching. They are both a shelter from harm and want, and a way of gaining the means to return to the struggle and fight successfully. (*Ibid.* 1463, 3368)

This means that the beginning of our own rescue from the threat that Herod represents is to be found in instruction and scholarship. We need to know what the Word teaches and what it doesn't teach. We need to be clear about what we stand for. We need to be educated in the truth.

The true answers to Rachel's sorrow, however, are not to be found in Egypt. Egypt merely lays the groundwork for the path to salvation. We need to do more than learn.

This is why the characters in the Word never stay in Egypt but leave there

to go to the Promised Land. So the angel of the Lord appears again to Joseph in a dream, saying:

Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead.

They are headed, presumably, to Bethlehem. But when they learn that the son of Herod rules in Jerusalem they are afraid to go near.

And he came and dwelt in a city of Galilee named Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. (*Matthew 2.22,23*)

Why do they go to Nazareth?

There is no prophecy that says anything like this about being a *Nazarene*. One possibility is that *Nazarites* in the Old Testament prefigured the Lord. Scholars, however, point out that although the words *Nazarite* and *Nazarene* sound similar to our English ears, they are not so persuasively close in Hebrew or Greek.

There are a number of other possible explanations for this statement, but one that may be relevant to the theme of Herod's persecution is that the Lord's growth to maturity in Nazareth, which is in Galilee, is related to the prophecy: "*In Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*" (*Isaiah 9*)

A key to understanding this is the idea that the word *Nazarene* is not a compliment but an epithet. In *John 1* Nathanael said, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" The name may actually be a fulfillment of the prophecy that He would be "*despised and rejected.*" (*Isaiah 53*)

The Lord being a Nazarene may mean that the true answers to life's issues come from a place in our life that we do not hold in high esteem. The Word may not seem to hold the answers. Yet there is actually no other source.

In the culture of the fallen church we do not hold the Word and the things of religion in high esteem. We often subject them to doubt and criticism. The promise of the New Church is that in the long run they will nevertheless be the source of our peace.

The route of the escape and nurturing of the Divine Truth among us is a circuitous one. When the Lord's presence is threatened by Herod and all that he represents, we go first to Egypt, where we learn. The expected result of this learning is to return us to the innocent state where we began, the deep love of what is good and true that is Bethlehem. But it isn't so simple, because the threats to our spiritual life don't just go away. So this life grows to maturity in a new place within us, far off Galilee. There its true value is hidden from us until

the time is right.

Your children will come back.

When the time is right, however, we recognize more and more clearly the value of why the Lord was born on earth to deliver us. These are the truths that lead us out of Galilee on the road to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place that the captives always longed for, and Jerusalem is the goal for every person because it stands for heaven's peace, the ultimate comfort to Rachel's tears.

The Lord is our shepherd on this route. Just as He guided Mary and Joseph away from danger, He protects the precious truths of the church every step of the way, as He brings us all together. He will not let Herod extinguish them. As Jeremiah says:

He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore, they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord . . .and they shall sorrow no more at all. (*Jeremiah 31:10-13*)

Amen.



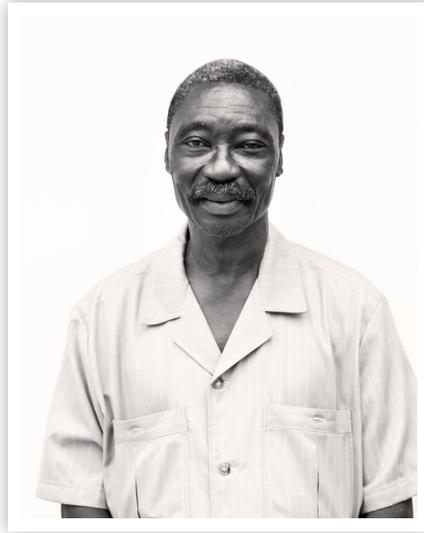
The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons is semi-retired and serves as Chaplain of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Most recently he served as pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, and has also served in Glenview, Illinois, and Kempton, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Allyn (Edmonds), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: Jeremy.Simons@brynathynchurch.org

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A Place Provided

*A Memorial Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.
In honor of the Rev. William Ankra-Badu*

Accra, Ghana – October 19, 2019



Readings: *Psalm 84:1-4; John 14:1-3; Psalm 27:4; Deuteronomy 6:10-13; Psalm 23:1-6; Divine Providence 203; Arcana Coelestia 6054; Heaven and Hell 519*

(**Note:** See a tribute to the Rev. Ankra-Badu from the General Church, plus other information about this service, in Church News, page 533.)

An eternal home. When someone known to us dies, we often find ourselves saying, “He has gone to his eternal home.” For many of us who call ourselves Christians that means to heaven – and it is to heaven that we convey in our thoughts the man whom we honor today, willing that the Lord bring him there, and that He provide him every happiness we associate with that eternal home.

But what does it really mean to go to one's eternal home? Today we have the opportunity to consider answers to this question that come to us from the Word of the Lord. *The Psalms*, for example, contain beautiful statements about the longings of our souls for such a home:

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.” (*Psalms* 27:4) Similarly, “Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.” (*Psalms* 84:3) And most famously: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” (*Psalms* 23:6)

But it is to three specific places that we focus on today, to discover more of what it means to actually follow our God to our eternal home – to receive a place provided for us by our Creator and Savior.

Homes “that you did not build.” The first comes to us in *Deuteronomy*, where Moses is encouraging the ancient Israelites, as he often did, to commit to their part of the covenant:

So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant – when you have eaten and are full – then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him. (*Deuteronomy* 6:10-13)

The promise of a home for the ancient Israelites who had no home – who were in bondage in Egypt – is a metaphor for the Lord's promise to us of a home in heaven. His eternal kingdom is our “promised land,” and we can receive our inheritance in it to the extent that we do our part of the covenant.

As with the ancient Israelites, that starts with honoring the Lord our God – loving Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength (*Deuteronomy* 6:5), as Moses had just reminded them before speaking these words. It means having no other gods before His face, not taking His name in vain, honoring the Sabbath by worshiping Him, and turning to Him as our Heavenly Father – as the Ten Commandments require us to do. (See *Exodus* 20:3-12)

The covenant also means obeying the rest of the commandments of the Law: we are not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet what belongs to our neighbors. (*Exodus* 20:13-17)

Taken as a whole we know this means that we refrain from hurting those around us, withholding ourselves from inflicting pain on them, or taking away their dignity, their possessions or their good name. To the extent that we push

How many times did the Rev. William Ankra-Badu preach about these things during his lifetime and ministry?

Many of you could testify to messages where he expanded on the covenant, on what it means for people like you and me to truly obey the Ten Commandments. That was his function as a priest. And it was his calling as a human being.

away those destructive ways of treating others, the Lord can plant heavenly qualities of love and commitment and safety and kindness in their place. It's as if the land of Canaan is rid of the enemies within, together with their profane worship practices, and the worship of the Lord is established in its place. This is the way we receive our inheritance in the Lord's kingdom – by keeping His covenant, thereby allowing Him to plant the kingdom of heaven within us.

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“A place prepared.” A second place to which we can turn in the Word focuses on the concept of “home” in an even

more personal way. We hear Jesus saying to His disciples:

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know. (*John 14:2-4*)

Most people hear the same covenant, the same eternal home, the same promised land as we encountered with the ancient Israelites. Only now it is clearly not a place in this world. That's because Jesus came to introduce us more directly to the world of the spirit – the place named heaven to which He brings those who follow Him. It's a personal promise, a specific place suited just to us.

It is useful here to focus on the word “mansions.” Mansion means, in one sense, a large house – almost a palace – calling to mind a vision of luxury and opulence for the blessed in heaven. But in truth the more accurate way to think of this word is in terms of spacious rooms: “In My Father's house are many rooms.”

Today I invite you to think of these many rooms as the teachings of the New Church describe them. They lead us to consider our minds as having many “rooms.” The picture this presents is of the multi-faceted people we are. It provides us with an elaborate description of our minds, as if they are like the many rooms of a large mansion.

There are “rooms” which contain our memories – memories of past events, memories of things learned. There are other rooms which contain our habits or characteristic ways of responding to the people and events around us: some rooms contain generosity, others compassion, still others, defensiveness or anger.

There are rooms filled with our various loves – a desire to be useful, the energy to make a difference in this world, a love for marriage, the deep affection we have for certain people. There are rooms – secret rooms – that we don’t show to anyone else, containing our known evils, or the parts of us we’re embarrassed about, rooms we sometimes enter when we know no one is watching.

Still other rooms are filled with information from the Lord’s Word, or our own understanding of what it means to be a good person. There are rooms filled with what the teachings of the New Church call “remnant states” – memories of when heaven touched our lives in some deep way that the Lord gathers up in our minds as a force for good in our spiritual development. And so the list goes on.

Truly this is a fascinating way to describe a human being. But how does it relate to heaven and the Lord preparing a home for us there? Amazingly it has everything to do with this preparation and leading. It calls us to consider that our job in this world – the bulk of our spiritual responsibility – is to clean up that house.

We are asked to cooperate with the Lord as He orders the various rooms of our mind and perfects them over our lifetime. The picture I get is of a person opening various doors and dealing with what is behind them. Many of us are aware that the Lord calls us to examine ourselves, see something that needs changing, and set ourselves to work on that area of our lives with the Lord’s help.

So, we open that door which contains our habit of twisting the truth to suit our purposes and commit ourselves to tidy it up. Over time, with the Lord’s strength and help, that room no longer contains lies, but now is a room where honesty lives.

In another part of our lives, we choose to enter the room of forgiveness more often and intentionally – to make it one of our central living spaces, instead of a neglected corner of our “house” that we rarely visit. In the same way we may choose to focus on being more compassionate, more willing to

take the opportunities to be of service that the Lord shows us – making these “rooms” that we visit and stay in more often. We may set up a worship area in our “home” – a part of our lives devoted more fully to going to church, reading from the Lord’s Word and praying for the Lord’s presence and guidance.

I invite you to think of the particular qualities of the Rev. William Ankra-Badu that we have heard about today – his unique mind with its qualities and habitual ways of interacting. We can think of the way that the Lord has opened the doors of his mind over his lifetime, helping him to deal with the rooms that contain negative inherited qualities, and giving him the strength year in and year out to develop his version of service – his way of helping those around him and serving His God. Then we can think of the Lord saying to him specifically, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” (*John* 14:2-4)

Heaven opened. All of this symbolic imagery, given to us in the Word of God as we know it – the Bible – is expanded in wonderful and vivid ways in the teachings of the New Church. I invite you to consider an image presented to us in the book of *Revelation*: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True.” (*Revelation* 19:11)

That image, according to New Church teaching, is a symbol for a revelation from the Lord which He predicted during His lifetime, when He would, as He said, “guide [us] into all truth.” (*John* 16:13)

It is a tenet of the New Church, the faith to which William Ankra-Badu subscribed, that the fulfillment of this prophecy has taken place. A new and fuller understanding of the Word of God is now available to us, forming much of what I have been sharing with you today – a symbolic way of viewing the Scriptures and demonstrating their meaning for our lives today.

In addition, there is information shared with us that is new – heaven opened in a way through books like *Heaven and Hell* penned by Emanuel Swedenborg. This work shows the reality of that world and takes away so much of the mystery of what lies ahead for those who die.

In these teachings, we hear about communities in heaven populated by people who have, in this lifetime, kept the Lord’s covenant. They have been prepared by means of their consistent efforts to obey the Ten Commandments and other teachings of the Lord. They have heard the Lord’s call to follow His example of service and love – to use our gifts and time and energy to be a blessing to those around us, to find our unique way of being a useful and contributing member to society.

People like that, who care as much or more for the welfare of others, love to live with others like themselves. Together they form communities where the

needs of all are fulfilled, by caring and loving people around them. They love to learn more about the Lord God and to worship Him. They love to live as husband and wife in a marriage of deep love and commitment – a relationship that grows in depth and meaning to eternity. Nothing gives them more joy than to render service to others – even to have the opportunity to do so.

Underlying this vivid picture of heaven are some basic realities. There are homes there, with beautiful furnishings inside and splendid gardens outside. Everything there is designed to reflect perfectly the inner nature of the inhabitants, as happens in the best of cases in this world when people are surrounded by their most treasured possessions, filled with memories and meanings of precious times in their lives.

The teachings of the New Church further describe the bodies given to each of the people who live there, as healthy and capable vehicles for the vibrant spirit within. Gone are the vestiges of old age and the frailty it often brings. The inner spirit, with all its vigor and strength, is once again housed in a human form that corresponds and responds to the spirit within. Men are still men; women are still women. The beautiful array of skin colors and facial features we see in this world are there too, with the only things missing being disease, pain, deformity of any kind, fatigue and suffering.

Rounding out the picture of heaven are paradisaical scenes – of mountains, streams, valleys, fields of crops and vines, gentle animals and birds and fishes, and trees and the like. It is a Garden of Eden of sorts – a “land flowing with milk and honey” – the only difference being that it is all a reflection of the beauty within the people who dwell there.

It is into this land that the Rev. William Ankra-Badu is even now being led. It is into this place that all of us are called by the Lord, to our specific home there prepared especially for us. He can receive it – we can receive it – to the extent that we allow ourselves to be prepared by the Lord right now.

May we take the opportunity that is before us of a life well-lived, and of a parting from this life to the next of someone known to us, to reflect on the

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(The Lord) can prepare us – the rooms of our minds, the land within – to be the kind of people who want nothing more than to dwell with Him and others in heaven. Our part is to willingly follow and obey.

concept of an eternal home. When someone dies, we say that he has entered his eternal home. Again, for those of us who call ourselves Christian, that means heaven.

Today we've had the opportunity to expand on that concept, and to think of it in terms of a place prepared specifically for us, for the best of what we can become with the Lord's help. That is the home to which the Lord wants to lead us. He can prepare us – the rooms of our minds, the land within – to be the kind of people who want nothing more than to dwell with

Him and others in heaven. Our part is to willingly follow and obey.

- “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” (*Psalms* 27:4)
- “Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young – even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.” (*Psalms* 84:3)
- “The human race throughout the whole world is under the guidance of the Lord, and everyone from infancy even to the end of his life is led by Him in the most individual things and his place foreseen and also provided.” (*Divine Providence* 203)
- “In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And the place you know. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” (*John* 14:2-4)
- “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (*Psalms* 23:6)

Amen.

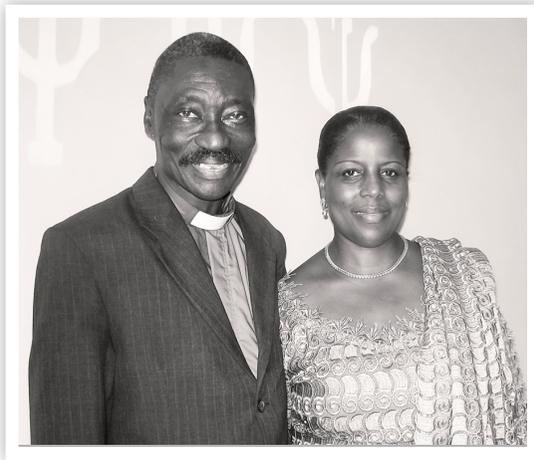


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Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

THE REV. WILLIAM OFEI ANKRA-BADU



Rev. Ankra-Badu and his wife, Vivian

The Rev. William Ankra-Badu, the first Ghanaian to be ordained by the General Church in Ghana and much beloved as a leader in the growth of the Church there, passed into the spiritual world on August 30. (See the sermon from his memorial service on October 19 by the **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.**, *A Place Provided*, page 526.)

The observance included a beautiful 36-page booklet with information about the three services (pre-burial, burial and at the graveside, with hymns, prayers, tributes and the Celestial Essence Choir); a biography; tributes from his wife, **Vivian**, family members and others; and many colorful photos from his life and career.

In addition to Bishop Buss, officiating ministers included the **Rev. Martin Kofi Gyamfi**, Bishop's Representative for West Africa, and 14 ministers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo.

Excerpts from a Tribute by the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons:

I first went to Ghana in 1976 and spent a good deal of time there while living in neighboring Togo as a Peace Corps volunteer. There was no New Church organization there then but books of the Writings could be found everywhere, thanks to the Swedenborg Foundation.

After returning from Africa in 1978 I visited Ghana again during the summers of 1979 and 1980, with the specific aim of finding suitable students to bring to Bryn Athyn to attend College and Theological School.

Ankra-Badu was introduced to me in 1980 in Tema, and **Pastor (Benjamin) Garna** recommended that he should be the first one to come to Bryn Athyn.

His story is really almost too good to be true: successfully completing Theological School, returning to Ghana as a minister, establishing both a congregation and a theological school, and then shepherding the growing movement over a period of maybe 25 years.

He had a great ability to get along with people and seemed to adapt easily to his situation. He was not only an excellent student with a sincere love of the New Church, he also had a large network of friends both in this country and Ghana. He always stayed at my house when he came to Bryn Athyn and there was inevitably a continual stream of visitors coming to see him.

The growth of the New Church in West Africa over the past 30 years is a bright spot in New Church history. Ankra-Badu's steadiness and loyalty, his intelligence and adaptability, provided key leadership while the Church has been in its infancy in Ghana. I am grateful for everything that he did and for his friendship over the years. I expect that he is continuing his work in the spiritual world.

Excerpts from a Tribute by the General Church, West Africa

The Rev. William Ofei Ankra-Badu (affectionately called Kwadwo) was the first Ghanaian to be ordained for the General Church, Ghana. He had embraced the General Church faith through the book *Conjugal Love*, leading him to Pastor Benjamin Garna, a lay pastor who recommended him for theological training in the U.S. from 1982 to 1986.

Right after his arrival in Ghana in July of 1986, Kwadwo saw the enormity of the challenge before him . . . to grow a formal General Church organization that would genuinely impact lives positively and enhance the salvation of souls.

By 1987 he had a handful of followers. He conscientiously nurtured this group, teaching them in his living room, and got them baptized to form a formidable nucleus for the Church. The stage was set for expansion.

The General Church International, especially General Church West

Africa, celebrates your life, a legacy to do what is right, transparent, honest and truth. We will recall your sweet sense of humor, your strength, your style of doing things to perfect.

A Tribute from the General Church, presented by Bishop Buss:

The Rev. William Ankra-Badu was a pioneer for the General Church in West Africa. I stand today to honor his contribution and his legacy on behalf of the General Church of the New Jerusalem.

He came into contact with the teachings of the New Church in the early 1980s and had the opportunity to travel to Bryn Athyn, the center of the General Church, for formal theological training in the New Church faith. He started his work as a General Church pastor in 1986 in Accra, Ghana.

Over the years that followed he mentored and trained many other priests, several of whom are here today. As a testimony to his impact, from one pastor – himself – back in 1986, we now have 35 General Church priests in six West African countries: Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Benin, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Today I bring greetings from many other colleagues: the **Revs. Jeremy Simons, Robert Jungé, Willard Heinrichs, Dan Goodenough, David Lindrooth**, and his classmates. Together with our wives and the whole clergy family, we offer our thanks for his service and praise the Lord for the spread of the New Church faith in West Africa. May it continue in the Lord's good providence.

CATHEDRAL CENTENNIAL

The 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral – October 5, 1919 – was celebrated during Charter Day weekend (October 3-7) in Bryn Athyn.

Events included fascinating artisan tours on Saturday morning, including woodworking, metal working and stained glass, led by experts in those fields, and a special worship service on Sunday morning, led by **Pastor Eric H. Carswell**. (See his sermon – *A House of Worship* – on page 496.) During the service **Meg Rohtla**, Director of the Cathedral, presented Eric with the symbolic key designed for the original dedication. The service also included **David Alden**, Class of 1969 – attending his 50th class reunion – as vocalist, plus the Bryn Athyn Cathedral Choir, directed by **Dr. Graham Bier**. (See photos from this service on page 550.)

The dedication key, designed by Parke E. Edwards from Monel metal, includes the dates of the cornerstone laying (June 19, 1914) and of the dedication (October 5, 1919) on one side. On the other is the familiar Latin phrase from *True Christian Religion*, “*Nunc licet intellectualiter intrare in*

Arcana fidei.”

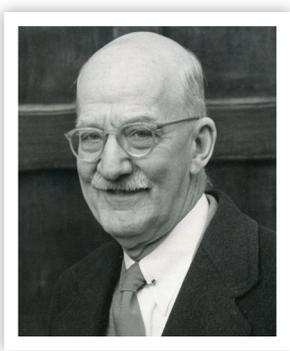
Photographs and articles from the dedication can be found in the New Church Digital Collections at www.swedenborglibrary.org/digital. Select Archives > Bryn Athyn > Historic District > Cathedral > Dedication. For more information contact Marvin Clymer, Digital Collections Supervisor at the Library: Marvin.Clymer@brynathyn.edu.

More than 1,000 people from all over the world attended the 1919 Assembly and the dedication, which included three services – a morning dedication attended by 900, an afternoon Holy Supper service and an evening “service of praise.”

Dr. William Whitehead, professor of history at the Academy, wrote in his “Impressions of the Dedication Service” for *New Church Life*:

Perhaps the deepest impression made upon us by this Service of Dedication was through the perception that the long years of spiritual depression and anxiety – states induced both by the greatest war in history (World War I) and by the pangs of transition from one generation to another . . . had failed to destroy our faith. . . . A sense of happiness and satisfaction flowed into all our minds, as it seemed from heaven.

At the morning service, 25 ministers marched along the south side of the Cathedral and the choir along the north side. They met at the west door and walked up the nave to the chancel. During the service, **Raymond Pitcairn**, who had overseen construction, presented the dedication key to **Bishop N. D. Pendleton** at the west door, saying: “We who have wrought upon this building know full well that all that which is good comes from the Lord alone. We have been happy and had honor in His service and see therein His doing and fulfillment of His will.”



Dr. Whitehead’s heartfelt impressions included:

“On June 19th, five years ago – just before the world broke into a Saturnalia of death and flame – a procession of worshippers slowly climbed to a place in the fields overlooking Bryn Athyn village for the purpose of taking part in the founding of a new church building.

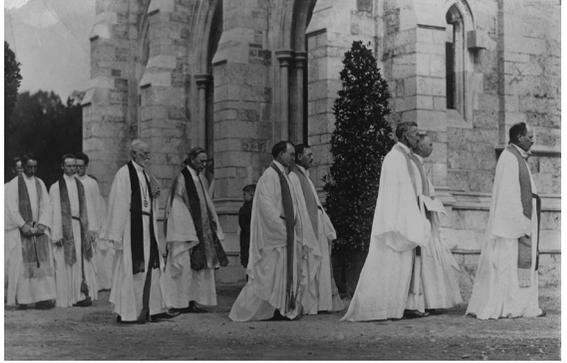
“In a deep and reverential hush – broken only by the twittering notes of birds and the undertones of the woods nearby – the Bishop of the Church uttered the solemn ritual words by which the cornerstone of the new sanctuary was laid. As he spoke these words, the sun – which all day had remained behind a black and threatening sky – suddenly came forth and flooded the hill and the valley with a golden tide of light. Then all the

BRYN ATHYN CATHEDRAL DEDICATION – OCTOBER 5, 1919

*(Photos from the Academy of the New Church Archives and the Swedenborg Library
New Church Digital Collection. Marvin B. Clymer, Digital Collections Supervisor)*



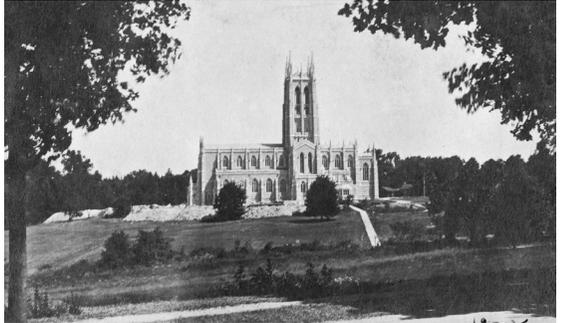
Bishops W. F. Pendleton and N. D. Pendleton



The clergy procession for the dedication: right to left, the Revs. Homer Synnestvedt, William Caldwell, Charles Doering, Fred Waelchli, Eldred Iungerich, Bishop Nathaniel D. Pendleton, Bishop William F. Pendleton, Theodore Pitcairn, George de Charms, Reginald Brown



Cathedral interior (1919)



The Cathedral from the South (1922)



Congregation outside the West door

worshippers with one voice broke into the song, *Jerusalem the Golden!*

“Until that day, few things had stirred us so profoundly.

“The upturned faces of old people and little children, the ritual that breathed a simple faith and an undying hope, the atmosphere as of a temple that already seemed to envelope the rough stones at our feet, all blended into a perfect marriage of sunlight and praise.

“But when, five years later – just as our men had returned from the war – the same phenomenon was repeated at the dedication of the completed temple, when we witnessed the same breaking forth of the sun as the essential words were spoken, and listened to the same exultant song of praise to the glorious city of our God – then indeed the cup of memory was filled with a deep and rich remembrance. Nothing, perhaps, in the history of worship and ritual in the New Church can compare with this second event.”

You can read the full text of Dr. Whitehead’s “Impressions” from this dedication service in the digital collection cited above. It ends with these words:

“The message from the congregation at Bryn Athyn (was) a note of supreme joy that the Church had passed safely through its tribulations and had in some manner been made strong for a new era of uses in the cause of the Lord’s Heavenly Kingdom. May that note ring around the world and find a ready reception in the hearts of all who gather in the Lord’s name, so that the strength of internal peace may be with us all.”

CHARTER DAY 2019

This year’s Charter Day celebration in Bryn Athyn – in addition to all of the class reunions, social and sporting events – included two milestones:

- The 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. (See above.)
- The dedication of the new Bryn Athyn College Center.

The College dedication on Friday afternoon, October 4, included a welcome by **President Brian Blair**; worship and remarks by **Chancellor Peter M. Buss Jr.**; musical selections by the College Choral Group, led by **Dr. Graham Bier**; an overview of the project and acknowledgements by President Blair; a message from **Brent McCurdy**, Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees; a description of the uses of the building by **Dr. Suzanne Nelson**, Dean of Students; a student perspective from **Alerica Tait**, a student at the College; and closing remarks from President Blair, followed by tours of the stunning building. (See photos on page 550.)

President Blair and Vice-Chair McCurdy thanked anonymous donors for the gift of this building. Mr. McCurdy encouraged the students to think of

the donors who could do whatever they wanted with their money but “loved you enough” to make sure they could take advantage of all the benefits of this building as part of their educational experience at the College.

Among other highlights of the weekend:

Cathedral Service

The Friday morning Cathedral service was presented by the **Rev. Mark D. Pendleton**, pastor of the Glenview (Illinois) New Church: *Go to Galilee*. (See page 501) This was followed by the traditional spirited singing of Academy songs on the north lawn, led by Secondary Schools music director **Chris Waelchli**.

Charter Day Banquet

Presiding over the banquet – with good humor and graciousness – was the **Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn** of Bryn Athyn College. The program featured talks by three College seniors: **Francines Gomez Almonte**, **Rob Breitner** and **Hannah Dewees** (also a 2016 graduate of the Academy Girls School). They spoke to the theme of “What Connects Us,” including the College, community and images of heaven.

Reunion classes were joyfully acknowledged – from 10th through 70th. Most of their gifts to the Academy supported the scholarship fund. A unique gift, presented by **Gwen M. Asplundh** for the Class of 1949, is a memorial wall to be displayed in Benade Hall honoring all alumni who have served in the U.S. military.

Distinguished Alumni and Outstanding Volunteer

Each year the College and Secondary Schools honor Distinguished Alumni whose education has impacted their lives and careers.

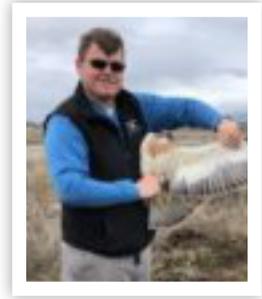
This year’s Distinguished Alumni for Bryn Athyn College are:

- **Dr. Charlotte Gyllenhaal**, a long-time member of the Glenview (Illinois) Society, who graduated from the Academy Girls School in 1967 and received an AA degree from Bryn Athyn College in 1969, before graduating from Ohio State University and receiving a PhD in Biology from the University of Alabama. She spent nearly 30 years on the faculty of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Chicago, and



is retired but still teaches. She is now research manager at the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment in Skokie, Illinois. She is also a member of the General Church Board of Directors and the Pastor's Council in Glenview. She and her husband, **Dr. Michael Huft**, live in northwest Indiana.

- **Bracken Brown**, a 2011 graduate of the College, grew up in Kempton, Pennsylvania, where an early love of birds guided his education and career. At age 6 he volunteered at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and has worked for a number of state agencies, non-profits and consultants in bird migration, toxicology and ecology. After four years of teaching science at the Kempton New Church School he accepted a job as Biologist-Naturalist at the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.



The Outstanding Volunteer for the College is **Sonia S. Doering**, who graduated from the Academy Girls School in 1952 and attended the College. Her love of sewing led her to the Ray-Vogue School of Design in Chicago. After she married **Dale Doering**, they moved to Bryn Athyn. She worked for an apparel company in Philadelphia, then accepted a job teaching sewing at the Academy for 25 years. She has spent many years making robes for ministers and costumes for

Academy and community productions and has been a beloved volunteer at the Swedenborg Library since 2005, logging more than 1,400 hours. She is grateful that Bryn Athyn College continues to foster the ideals that were so important to her.

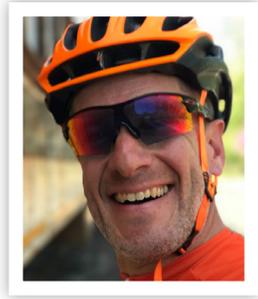
This year's Distinguished Alumni for the Academy Girls School and Boys School are:

- **Glenn Bostock**, a 1979 graduate of the Boys School, studied woodworking at Bucks County Community College and started his own custom cabinetry business. He is the founder and CEO of SnapCab, which has grown from a one-man operation to more than 100 employees and last year had \$23 million in revenue. It went international



in 2011 with the opening of a factory in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He wants SnapCab to become a model for other companies to achieve success. He and his wife, **Cheryl**, live in Southampton, Pennsylvania.

- **Sean Connelly** graduated from the Boys School in 1989 and Bryn Athyn College in 1994 with a BA in Economics and Science. In 1994, with nine friends and while still in college, he co-founded Refinery, an interactive agency, serving on the board and management teams in the United States and abroad. He is the founder of Noroc, a global location platform that helps save lives on the road. He has long been involved in endurance cycling, including setting records and placing second in the 400-mile Crush the Commonwealth in 2018. He serves on the Academy Board Finance Committee and the Cairnwood Estate Board of Governors and is passionate about the value of New Church education. He and his wife, **Holly (Goerwitz)**, who teaches in the Girls School, live in Huntingdon Valley. They have two daughters – one in Bryn Athyn College and one in the Girls School.



- **Nina Cooper Dewees** graduated from the Academy Girls School in 1979 and received an AA from Bryn Athyn College in 1981. She has taught, coached and administered in athletics, student life and academic life at the Academy and College for more than 20 years. In 2001 she began working part time for Bryn Athyn Church as volunteer coordinator, community connector and spearheading caring/support programs such as Stephen Ministry and Pay-It-Forward Crew. She and her husband, **Niles**, live in Huntingdon Valley. Three of their four children will graduate from three different church schools next June.



- **Kate Kronen** graduated from the Girls School in 1989 and spent one year in Bryn Athyn College. She graduated from Penn State in 1994 with a degree in Agricultural Education. She grew up in Freeport in Western Pennsylvania and has been teaching agriculture and horticulture in that area for 15 years. She is the mother of four children,



is active in her community and church and enjoys riding horses, flower gardens and reading.

(For more information of the Distinguished Alumni and Outstanding Volunteer see the websites: www.ancss.org and www.brynthyn.edu)

Theta Alpha Luncheon

The popular Theta Alpha luncheon following the Cathedral service on Friday featured a moving presentation, “Stories of Adoption,” plus a brief performance by the Secondary Schools dancers. Watch for more on adoption in the new issue of the *Theta Alpha Journal*.

Reunion Artists

An impressive display of artwork from this year’s reunion classes was hung in the Fine Arts Building on the Secondary Schools campus, which continued through November 1. This year’s reunion artists are:

- **Kimberly Poole Adams** (1979)
- **Tania Buss Alden** (2009)
- **Joy Asplundh Feerrar** (1979)
- **Kat Gatti** (2009)
- **Jacque McFall** (1979)
- **Kerstin Sandstrom Okubo** (1989)
- **Carey Smith** (1959 – posthumously)
- **Soni Soneson Werner** (1969)

Student Scholarship Golf Outing

This year’s tournament took on sudden drama a few weeks before the event when problems at Philmont Country Club – the host for all but one year of the tournament – made the course unplayable. Some quick scrambling by **Jim Adams**, Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools and key organizer of the tournament, plus the intrepid Charter Day team, got everything switched to Huntingdon Valley Country Club – site of the first tournament in 1994 – where everything went very smoothly.

Thanks to the 140 golfers participating, proceeds for scholarships over the 25 years of the tournament exceed \$575,000.

The Team

The Charter Day weekend is filled with events, each of which has its own needs,

and everything works to perfection. That is thanks to Jim Adams, who oversees the Charter Day activities, with the dedicated team of **Kaylene Heldon Glenn**, Charter Day Events Manager, supported by **Nicole Kahle Bau-Madsen** and **Jahna Boutin Henderson**. They make it all look easy and everyone who enjoyed the weekend is indebted to them.

A GIFT FOR NEW CHURCH FAMILIES

General Church Education has produced a colorful new book: *The Word of the Lord – The Old Testament for Young Children*. (See photos on page 552.) The book, with a letter from the **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.**, has been sent to 573 New Church families with children up to age 10 in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe. Books have also been sent to General Church Sunday Schools. Ministers will take copies to English-speaking societies in their travels. The books are available from the Bryn Athyn Cathedral Bookstore, www.newchurchbooks.com.

Bishop Buss says in his letter: “It is with real pleasure that we send your family a collection of stories from the Old Testament designed to introduce children to the wonder and power of the Word. The text is guided by careful study of the Heavenly Doctrines, and there are notes for parents about the meaning of the stories at the back of the book.

“Having a New Church children’s Word has been a long-time dream for many people. We are very grateful to **Carol Buss** for envisioning and coordinating the project, and to **Dianna Synnestvedt** for her beautiful artwork. General Church Education staff thoroughly enjoyed partnering with these and many dedicated volunteers in making this dream become reality.”

(Editor Carol Buss has long been involved with New Church education for children in South Africa, Bryn Athyn and at General Church Education. Illustrator Dianna Synnestvedt is a long-time art teacher in the Bryn Athyn Church School.)

Bishop Buss also thanked “several generous donors” who made it possible to publish and distribute the book.

Carol says: “My dream was to write a New Church children’s Bible that was unique and different from any other children’s Bible on the market.” With that in mind she had three criteria:

1. I wanted it to be the Lord’s words, simplified for young children, with no additions or embellishments. I wanted the text, even though it was for young children, to reflect the beauty and cadence that is present in the Word itself.
2. Also important was the length of each story. I wanted the story to be one page in length, so that tired children and their parents would not

feel overwhelmed at the end of the day but would feel they could read a short story.

3. And finally, and most importantly, I wanted the focus in every story to be on the Lord. Even though it is the history of the children of Israel, I wanted the children to see what the Lord was doing in every story, to see how He led, guided and saved His people, just as He does with us today. So, every story begins with the title, "The Lord . . . 'In this way I hope that young children will feel His power and His presence in their lives.'"

Dianna says she had several principles in mind in doing the illustrations. "One is that young children see things first as wholes and then as parts. So, I wanted the pictures to be made of simple shapes and rather smooth textures. To keep the pictures simple, I did not add cast shadows to the objects. To keep the texture smooth I used colored pencils blended with mineral spirits. Children have the sense that objects are alive, so I avoided outlines (which are not found in living things). I added details like plants and little animals to keep the attention of the littlest ones."

Included with the letter was this quote from *Arcana Coelestia* 1776:

Angels have a better and fuller understanding of the internal sense of the Word when very young boys and girls are reading it than when adults do so with whom there is no faith grounded in charity. . . . The angels said that the Word of the Lord is a dead letter, but that in everyone, when they are reading it, it is given life by the Lord, each according to their capacity to receive it, and that it is made alive according to the life in their charity and according to their state of innocence. This happens in countless and varied ways.

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highlights from the meetings of September 20-21 in Bryn Athyn:

President's Report:

Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. is working with many teams to set the administrative agenda for the General Church and the Academy. He led a management team retreat, including the two new assistant bishops, focusing on priorities, defining roles and strengthening working relationships. He also established a Strategic Planning Steering Committee with 10 members.

The General Church Retreat 2020 (formerly known as a General Assembly) will be held in June 2020 in Bryn Athyn with the theme, "Behold I make all things new." Applications for session presentations are open into November. More information and updates can be found at www.gcretreat2020.org.

Bishop Buss's role as Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church includes: maintaining the bridge between the General Church and the

Academy; keeping the focus on mission; an involved presence through Board engagement and partnering with leadership; and working to enhance priestly leadership within the Academy.

OUTREACH – GRAND HUMAN PROJECT

Bishop David H. Lindrooth led a full-day planning retreat the day before the Board meetings with **Bergen Jungé** and the **Rev. Pearse Frazier**, continuing a holistic approach to the project and focusing on next strategic steps. They selected a platform to deliver content and build spiritual community. Content development is overseen by Pearse, using marketing themes based in the Word, including scattering seeds and taking in the harvest.

ROLE OF THE BOARD

Bishop Buss carried forward the review process launched in May at meetings of the Board and General Church Corporation, including a review of Board roles as defined in *The Nonprofit Answer Book*.

The Board agreed to:

- Ensuring resources are used appropriate to the mission
- Providing proper financial oversight
- Ensuring legal and ethical integrity and accountability
- Ensuring effective planning and implementation
- Supporting the chief executive and administration

Bishop Buss discussed the church's organizational structure – especially what it means to be priest-led. The Board agreed and affirmed the priesthood's priority role in ecclesiastical matters. He is exploring how the Board appropriately enhances the organization's public standing and determines, monitors and strengthens the organization's programs and services. The goal is to bring counsel without collective or individual advocacy that could be seen as political.

Bishop Buss will draft a letter with input from the Board before sending it to the Corporation.

ADVANCEMENT

Amy Buick and Mark Wyncoll

Early in the new fiscal year we are ahead of last year. Contributions are up 49% (\$32,000); number of gifts received is up 6% to 284, and number of donors is up 4% to 199. There is continued focus on communicating with constituents.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

David Frazier and Bishop David Lindrooth

A project manager has been hired for pilot projects in the Ivory Coast and Togo. Training is underway, including in English and French.

There was further discussion by the Board of what it means to be a global church, and is the General Church Board optimally positioned to serve globally?

GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION

Bishop Bradley Heinrichs, new Director of General Church Education, Scott Daum and Rachel Glenn

The department was preparing to send to New Church parents the new illustrated book: *The Word of the Lord – The Old Testament for Young Children*. (See above.) A Sunday School series has been prepared on Gideon's trust in the Lord. There was Board discussion of how to do a better job of marketing the extensive and invaluable resources of General Church Education.

A two-day science workshop was held for 25 teachers, focusing on best practices in teaching science and Next Generation Science Standards. An update was presented on the New Church Teacher Competencies Program, with positive feedback and encouragement from the Board. Leadership training for school administrators was conducted on "Crucial Conversations."

Other Business:

David Frazier reported an operating surplus of \$1.9 million for fiscal year 2019 due to several major planned gifts received.

The Board is considering a request for certain communications to be sent in appropriate foreign languages.

ACADEMY BOARD AND CORPORATION

Highlights from October 5 Board of Trustees meeting and the October 4 Corporation meeting:

Chancellor: The Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.

Former Board member **Philip Zuber** was elected as Secretary of the Corporation. **Jamie Uber**, who had resigned to make way for Mr. Zuber, will continue as a Board guest and liaison between the Academy and General Church Boards.



The Girls School and Boys School banners



Bryn Athyn College students gather at the Brickman Center for the procession



The Secondary Schools procession advances to the Cathedral



Reunion artists display their work in the Fine Arts Building



The 2019 reunion class banners



Banners at rest at the Cathedral



Gathering for traditional songs on the Cathedral North lawn



Charter Day Events Manager Kaylene Glenn with sons Callum, left, and Jacob



Chris Waelchli conducts spirited singing of Academy songs on Cathedral lawn



Bryn Athyn College students with flags of France and Germany



Girls School Senior servers at the banquet



Three students in their Girls School uniform



Happy times at the Mix & Mingle



Kite Day



The field hockey team beat Plumstead Christian 2-0 under the lights



Here we come!



Taking the field for a 48-7 win over Lower Moreland



Soccer team takes the field for a 6-0 win over the Phelps School



Spirited action in the rain

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE CENTER DEDICATION

(Photos by Serena Sutton)



Sunny skies smiled on the dedication



President Brian Blair cuts the ribbon
officially opening the College Center



Chancellor Peter M. Buss Jr. leads worship at the dedication



Vice Chair Brent McCurdy with a
message from the Board of Trustees

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CATHEDRAL DEDICATION

(Photos by Graham Bier)



Cathedral Director Meg Rohla and
Bryn Athyn Pastor Eric Carswell



Kenneth Leap talks about stained glass as part
of artisan tours in the Cathedral

DEDICATION OF A NEW ADDITION TO THE KEMPTON SCHOOL



The growing complex of the Kempton New Church School



Volunteers working on the roof



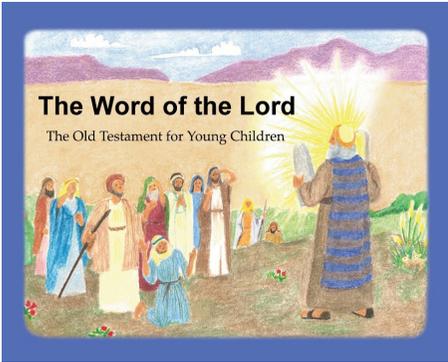
Volunteers seeding the grounds



A glowing sunset blesses a hard day's work



The entrance to the new addition



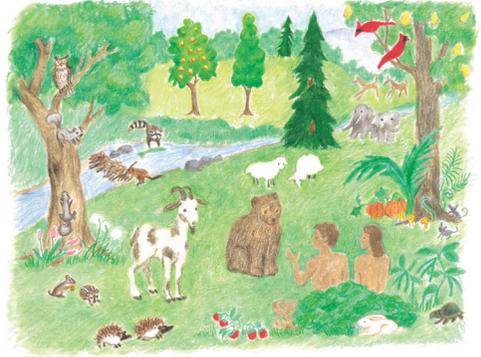
The cover of the new book



Noah's Ark



Baby Moses



The Garden of Eden



Crossing the Red Sea



Jacob's Dream

The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs and the **Rev. Dr. Andy Dibb** were affirmed as non-voting priest-advisors to the Board.

Chancellor Buss is in the process of convening a Chancellor's Council of Academy priests, aimed at strengthening priestly leadership within the Academy and serving as a potential resource for administrators.

Vice Chair: Brent McCurdy

A Board member was asked to serve on a Bryn Athyn College Ad Hoc Mission Review Committee as part of the Middle States accreditation process. **Shaun Buss** volunteered.

Review of a recent Bryn Athyn College faculty survey indicated less-than-optimal communications between the faculty and Board. Chancellor Buss and Mr. McCurdy have been invited to a faculty meeting to consider ways to enhance teamwork. **Kyle Genzlinger** and **Susan de Maine** volunteered for an effort to revitalize the Education Committee as a way to bring Board members in closer contact with the College and Secondary Schools.

Bryn Athyn College: Brian Blair, President

This year's enrollment includes 314 students and an 87% retention rate. Greater offerings in on-campus housing are having a positive effect, as is the new College Center. An enhanced admission team is being formed with a consultant, thanks to a private contribution, including a significant marketing effort.

Academy Secondary Schools: Jim Adams, Managing Director

Enrollment is at the budgeted level 9 (85 girls and 131 boys). Glenn Hall and Girl School enrollments were discussed, as well as outreach to potential New Church students. The Schools are narrowing down the selection of an admissions consultant to supercharge outreach efforts.

Finance Committee: Chuck Lindsay

Three motions were approved:

- A FY20 operating budget with a \$2.25 million deficit. It was approved, given extensive effort to get to this point and the adoption of these additional motions.
- Formation of an ad hoc subcommittee to develop an operating budget for FY21 and a multi-year plan that promotes the College's long-term financial sustainability and mission. The proposed budget is expected to

reduce the operating deficit by \$450,000 per year through a combination of cuts, giving and enrollment.

- That a strategic plan be adopted by the Board to guide deliberations of the ad hoc subcommittee and the Finance Committee. The College administration committee to present an updated strategic plan by November 15.

Treasurer: Duane Hyatt

Noted with gratitude were \$37.1 million in gifts to the Academy in FY19. Assets exceed liabilities by \$350 million, with endowment at the same level as five years ago.

The Secondary Schools achieved a balanced budget in FY19 for the first time in many years, thanks to significant planned gifts. All Academy entities except the College are in a surplus position – a substantial shift from eight years ago.

Corporation Elections:

Incumbents re-elected to six-year terms on the Academy Corporation were: **Scott Brickman, Michael Buss, Bradley Cranch, Andrew Davis, Neil Genzlinger, Lee Horigan, Suzanne Smith Laidlaw, Nick Rose and Phil Parker.**

Newly elected to six-year terms on the Corporation were: **Joel Allen, Edmond de Chazal, Jack Elder, Phil Feerrar, Megan Carswell Fraser, Reagan Smith Mergen, Hosanna Odhner and Ken Schauder.**

KEMPTON DEDICATION

The Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church School dedicated a new addition on September 24 which is mainly for the new high school but also includes shared space, such as a new science lab. Presiding over the dedication was the **Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs.**

During the dedication a new copy of the Word was placed in the addition dedicated as the center and foundation for the uses of New Church education there. The Word is inscribed: “Nothing therefore is of more importance to a man than to know what is true.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 794)

See photos on page 551.

JACOB’S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT

Jamie Uber

Jacobs Creek Family Retreat in the mountains of western Pennsylvania is a

religious retreat for all ages. It combines a family vacation with the wonderful doctrines of the New Church. It offers the best of both worlds: plenty of companionship and a time for quiet contemplation; a feeling of true connection with New Church ideas; and a chance to step out of your everyday life.

The theme for our 2019 (July 21-24) retreat was Sacraments and Rites. We learned about the two sacraments in the New Church (Baptism and Holy Supper) as well as the difference between a sacrament and a rite, such as confirmation, ordination, betrothal, marriage, memorial service and dedication.

Jacobs Creek Family Retreat has been around for 25 years (since 1993) and this was our largest attendance ever with 211 people. We had 104 adults (18 and over), 107 children under age 18, including five babies under two and more than 40 high school age kids.

Our program this year included an adult lecture each morning by the **Revs. Matthew Genzlinger** (on Baptism), **Brad Heinrichs** (on the Holy Supper), and **Scott Frazier** (on Rites). There was also a fully planned children's program. Youth are grouped by age and their program runs at the same time as the adult lecture. Sessions include projects and discussions centered around stories from the Word and other activities. There was also a pre-school and a nursery.

We begin after breakfast and end after dinner each day with family worship as a congregation. There is ample unscheduled time in the afternoons for family activities such as swimming (in a new pool), sports, games and electives for adults. Evening programs include a worship service on a sunset hill, a campfire with songs, field day with relay races, and a talent show. "This retreat is a little slice of heaven!" said a 2015 attendee.

People of all ages love Jacobs Creek Family Retreat because of all the very comfortable accommodations (private air-conditioned rooms), interesting lectures and activities, and time for family. The Retreat has been building a reputation for being a great place to come as a New Church family.

One family said: "The countdown for next year has started for us! Our family loves this retreat because it brings us closer to the Lord, we catch up with old friends and make new ones, and it is super relaxing. There is no cooking or parents running from point A to point B. If this is your idea of a good vacation, please join us!"

The theme for our July 19-22, 2020 retreat is the Ten Blessings from the Sermon on the Mount. We will be exploring the Beatitudes, the 10 qualities we must embody to experience the eternal blessings of heaven. Some things on this list may seem obvious. Others may cause us to rethink our approach to life and the question, "Where does lasting happiness really come from?"

Bishop David Lindrooth will join and offer an afternoon elective.

Registration information will be available in January. Please consider joining us in 2020. Matthew Genzlinger is the pastor for Jacob's Creek and the lay leaders are **Jamie and Julie Uber** and **Blake and Paul Messman**.

BOYNTON BEACH RETREAT

The Boynton Beach Retreat, January 26-30, 2020, at the Duncan Center in Boynton Beach, Florida, will feature presentations by:

- **The Rev. Alan Cowley**, pastor of the Boynton Beach New Church
- **Bruce Henderson**, author of three New Church books and editor of *New Church Life*
- **Chelsea Odhner**, Director of Productions for *offTheLeftEye*
- **Dr. Devin Zuber**, professor at the Graduate Theological School in Berkeley, California

There will also be afternoon presentations by **Steve David** for the New Christian Bible Study Project and joint presentation from the Swedenborg Foundation in the United States and the Swedenborg House in London, England.

Watch for a report on the Retreat in the March/April 2020 issue of *New Church Life*.

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY PROJECT

Steve David, who will make a bonus presentation at the Boynton Beach Retreat for the New Christian Bible Study Project, reports:

“We have just made a breakthrough in highlighting words (with defined significations) in the Bible text across many languages. We’ve been hammering away at the problem for a while – it’s a tricky thing – for all sorts of reasons. (We just) ran our latest code and now we’ve got a big batch of words highlighting in more than 35 languages.

“This is really important. We get millions of visitors, reading the Bible in many languages. When we highlight some of the words that have an inner meaning they can see that there is an inner meaning and get an idea of how it works.

“So, for the first time ever for some languages people reading the Word can see what the New Christian ideas are about the deeper truths in the stories they are reading.” Check it out at: www.newchristianbiblestudy.org

TRANSLATION MILESTONE

The Swedenborg Foundation is celebrating the completion of translating *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Coelestia)* by **Lisa Hyatt Cooper**. This means that all the translation work is finished for Phase 1 of the New Century Edition. Its goal

has been translating all the books of the Writings published by Swedenborg himself.

Thirteen of these books have been published and are available. Seventeen are in the process of editing, annotation and writing introductions. The first two volumes of *Secrets of Heaven* are in print; the remaining volumes are in some stage of the publication process.

THETA ALPHA SCHOLARSHIPS

Theta Alpha International, the Women's Alumnae Association of the Academy of the New Church, is awarding financial aid scholarships for 2020-2021 to support girls attending the Academy of the New Church and women attending Bryn Athyn College of the New Church.

Bryn Athyn College Awards Five Scholarships

Scholarships will be awarded to two women attending the College who declare an Education major or minor and plan to become New Church teachers. Each award is for \$2,100 – with \$700 paid directly to the College at the beginning of each trimester. One award is for an incoming freshman, the other for a current Education student. The money may be used toward tuition, fees and/or books.

Three scholarships are also available to women in the College who have a 3.0 GPA and are studying Religion (major, minor, ID), who are in the MARS program, or who are international students. Two \$2,000 and one \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded to eligible recipients who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. These merit-based scholarships can be used for tuition, college fees, books or supplies. Applications are due February 1, 2020. Email ancdaughters@gmail.com, or phone Sarah Wong at Bryn Athyn College, 267-502-6085, or use the website, www.brynathyn.edu.

NEW Academy Girls School Scholarships

Two scholarships of \$2,500 each are offered for the 2020-2021 school year for up to two young women in the Academy Girls School who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. The money may be used toward tuition, books or fees. These are annual merit-based and need-based scholarships and may be applied for yearly. Applications are due April 15, 2020. Email ancdaughters@gmail.com.

Life Lines

SEEDTIME AND HARVEST

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. (Psalm 103:1,2)

Thanksgiving dates to biblical times and throughout history people have thanked God for the bounty bestowed on them. The formal Thanksgiving traditions in Canada and the United States crown the harvest. Much of the focus may be given over to turkey and football these days. Hopefully gratitude is not forgotten – for freedom, for opportunity, for plenty. But what we really need to be thankful for are our spiritual blessings.

The Rev. Thomas Rose recently noted that the “seedtime and harvest” mentioned in *Genesis* really refer to “the person who is to be regenerated, and consequently the Church. The individual compares to a field and so to seedtime and the Lord’s Word to seed, and what it accomplishes to produce or harvest.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 932) And what does the Lord’s Word accomplish?

Without this implanting of seed from the Lord nobody can do the least good thing. Every good that stems from charity is seed obtained from the Lord. In particular, the subject here is the person who is to be regenerated. . . . Seedtime and harvest, which are the Church, will always be emergent somewhere on earth. (*Ibid.*)

All the bounty of the earth is not the true gift from the Lord. We live in an age of wonder and excess, with more blessings than anyone in history. But we are no happier, kinder, caring, or free from fear.

Why? Listen to how President Abraham Lincoln’s first Thanksgiving Proclamation in 1863 – in the heat of the Civil War – still resonates today:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God.

We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us.

What we should “solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledge” – Lincoln’s words – are the spiritual blessings from the Lord that give peace, hope and purpose to our lives. We are not truly content with our “blessed” lives if we do not first remember and praise the Lord. We do that by going to His Word, by loving, following and obeying Him, by using His blessings in serving our neighbor.

As the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson framed it in a 1955 *New Church Life* editorial, *The Increase of the Earth*: “Deep in the thought of Thanksgiving are two ideas. The first is that all the Lord’s gifts, like His productions in nature, are proffered in such form that men must work as if of themselves to enjoy their fruits; the second is that true gratitude goes far beyond formal expressions of thanks, showing itself in support of the use for the sake of which the gift was bestowed.

“We have much for which to give thanks to the Lord; and from the Writings, as from no other source, we can learn to work as of ourselves to enter into the real benefits of all the Lord’s gifts, and how to promote the uses for the sake of which they were given. As we strive to do these things we will truly praise the Lord. The earth will yield its true increase, and God, our own God, will bless us.”

(BMH)

THE PHILOSOPHER’S STONE

The alchemists of the Middle Ages sought a mysterious substance known as the Philosopher’s Stone that supposedly could transform base metals into gold or silver, as well as cure illnesses, prolong life and revitalize the spirit. It wasn’t necessarily a stone; it might have been a powder, but it was called a “stone” because it endured and wasn’t affected by fire.

The quest for the Philosopher’s Stone wasn’t entirely unproductive because in the course of their experiments the alchemists “acquired a body of knowledge that ultimately led to the sciences of chemistry, metallurgy and pharmacology.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

When we consider the legend of the Philosopher’s Stone from the standpoint of the New Church doctrine of representatives, we can see it as a symbol of spiritual wisdom; and indeed, the real interest, at least for the more enlightened alchemists, was not in turning lead into gold, but in changing the quality of the human mind and spirit.

This reminds us of the medieval knights search for the Holy Grail. It was said to be the cup that the Lord drank from at the Last Supper, and was also reputed to have miraculous powers. But like the Philosopher’s Stone, it really signifies a spiritual treasure of immeasurable value. It is no more a material

object than the "pearl of great price" that the Lord spoke of in His parable.

Our Philosopher's Stone is the "Rock of Israel," the Lord. It is the Rock upon which He builds His Church – namely, the truth that He is the One God of heaven and earth. There is no magic object that can save us or make us better people; only the Lord, operating through His Word, can transmute the base metal of our natural character into the gold of heavenly love and the silver of spiritual wisdom.

(WEO)

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

One of my favorite parts of the Academy's annual Charter Day celebration is something few people get to witness – and it should always be that way. It's the Distinguished Alumni presentations to the senior boys and girls of the Secondary Schools.

I got involved when I came into the Development Office of the Academy almost 20 years ago and am privileged to be invited back by the Boys School. Each year the faculties of the schools vote to honor two alumni each – often chosen from that year's reunion classes.

The women speak to the senior girls (so I don't hear them), and the men to the senior boys. They are asked to talk "about how their life journeys and the lessons learned at ANC intersect in meaningful and valuable ways." Boys School Principal Jeremy Irwin challenges the seniors to picture themselves at a reunion many years down the road and asked to speak about how their Academy experience prepared them for the choices they have made and the lives they have led.

The talks are always personal, unique, inspiring. The experiences and lessons are varied but the constants are the values instilled at the Academy which became the foundation of their careers, their marriages, their lives – sometimes without them even realizing it until years later.

This year's honorees for the Boys School were Glenn Bostock and Sean Connelly – both of whom have become very successful but started with no real vision of where they are now. But the Academy is very much a part of who they are and how they got there – finding their use through what they love. (My wife, a former faculty member, attended the Girls School presentation – honoring Kate Kronen and Nina Cooper Dewees – which she also found to be "fabulous" and inspiring.)

These seniors get a gift every Charter Day which is just for them – and hopefully will stay with them and guide them through their lives.

Jeremy also charges the senior boys with respecting the tradition of Charter Day and embracing the opportunity to be ambassadors for the Academy. It's

all about being part of the Academy Family, with its lifelong bonds – as seniors and “distinguished alumni.”

(BMH)

WHAT A DIFFERENCE CHILDREN MAKE

I saw two interviews with movie stars (one in the newspaper, the other on a TV talk show) in which each man said the same thing: that they are much more discriminating in the choice of roles they will accept since becoming fathers. They regret some of their earlier roles and are not looking forward to explaining to their children, who will one day surely see them, why they accepted those roles.

Take the enhanced sense of moral sensitivity and responsibility that was inspired in those two men by the presence of children in their lives and you get an idea of the positive spiritual influence of children on a society as a whole, and the negative effect of their absence.

(WEO)

THE PRESSURE WOMEN ARE UNDER TODAY

A young woman who chooses to get married, have children and care for her family may be made to feel that this use is less important than a career outside the home – but that is very far from the truth.

There is tremendous pressure, including economic, for women to try to “have it all” – to have a career and at the same time be a homemaker. But there is growing recognition of how very difficult, if not impossible, this is. Advancing in a career requires a full commitment at exactly the same stage in life (young, fertile, energetic) when it is natural for a woman to have children, whose care demands her full attention.

The economic realities of contemporary life, as well as the relentlessly trumpeted opinion that a career outside the home is the only way for a woman to be “empowered,” make the choice not to seek a career in business difficult. I am not suggesting a one-size-fits-all approach, but at the very least women should know that being a homemaker is an incredibly valuable and important use. It is a challenging and satisfying career choice, and society should affirm that truth and support those who make it.

The Church and its schools should lead the way by teaching how vitally important and rewarding marriage and motherhood can be. It is vital to the survival of the Church organization, and to the well-being of society as a whole, which needs a continual influx of new members who were well cared for during the formative first years of their life.

(WEO)

THE GREAT DIVORCE

As an introduction to a five-week small-group series on angels sponsored by the Bryn Athyn Church, community members were treated in late September to a one-man performance of the C. S. Lewis classic, *The Great Divorce*.

This little book was Lewis's response to William Blake's epic poem, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Blake clearly was influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's Writings in his poetry and art, and many a reader of Lewis is convinced that *The Great Divorce* "is right out of *Heaven and Hell*." (More on Lewis and Swedenborg in the following Life Line.)

Lewis had transformed himself from dour atheist to one of the noblest champions of Christianity in the mid-20th century, acclaimed for such insightful books as *A Grief Observed*, *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*, as well as such moralistic children's classics as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. *The Great Divorce* is seen by some as an allegory of his own spiritual liberation.

The stage presentation was by Anthony Lawton, longtime playwright and actor in Philadelphia, who adapted the book himself and plays multiple parts in a fanciful bus ride between heaven and hell. He is committed to "spiritual theater for a secular audience" and strives for an ongoing dialogue and exploration of faith with his audience. It's a spell-binding performance. (He does a similar show with *The Screwtape Letters*.)

The title of the book and the play is a bit misleading until you quickly realize this is not about divorce in marriage but spiritual separation – heaven from hell, and our own regeneration from selfishness and love of the world. In Lewis's spiritual awakening, his title seems to echo the teaching in *Luke 16* about the beggar Lazarus in heaven and the rich man who winds up in hell – and the "great gulf fixed" between them. Ultimately – like echoes of Scrooge and *The Christmas Carol* – it is all about choices and consequences.

The narrator of *The Great Divorce* finds himself in a grim and joyless "grey town" where it never stops raining. He escapes on a bus ride to heaven with a cast of malcontents – and Lawton masterfully switches between them. They are met by shining figures (angels) who urge them to repent and come into heaven, but they are full of excuses to stay on the bus.

This is the heart of *The Great Divorce* – a deeply spiritual investigation of human behavior and moral responsibility. Like all good theater and literature it holds up a mirror where we see ourselves – and the choices that shape our destiny.

The message is clear: the time to choose and change is in this life, not after we die – which is why the passengers choose to stay in hell, despite their

tempting glimpse of heaven.

Indeed, Lewis says in his book that everyone is free to get on the bus. “Never fear. There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”

Doesn't that sound like he'd been reading Swedenborg?

(BMH)

C.S. LEWIS, SWEDENBORG AND THE NEW CHURCH

So, did C. S. Lewis read Swedenborg and was he influenced by the Writings? There has been some debate in the Church, but no consensus.

In December 1990 the Rev. Donald Rose wrote an editorial in *New Church Life* about Lewis, Swedenborg and “the MacDonald Connection.” This referred to late 19th century British author George MacDonald, whom Lewis openly called his “master.”

The editorial notes: “Way back in 1883 a writer in this magazine was talking of special books. He spoke of certain novels which give evidence that the author, though not a member of the New Church, has read the Writings. The most powerful writer of this class is George MacDonald, who is considered by many as ‘almost a New Church man.’”

The following year a report in *New Church Life* referred to a lecture in London, *The Writings of George MacDonald and Their Relation to the New Church*. “The lecturer considered MacDonald to be virtually a New Church man, but he was by no means certain that MacDonald had read anything of the Writings.”

It is no small coincidence that the narrator in *The Great Divorce* is Clive, which was C. S. Lewis's first name, and that one of the first people he meets on his tour of heaven and hell is George MacDonald. Clive says: “I tried, trembling, to tell this man all that his writing had done for me.” MacDonald then explains to him many of the “difficult truths” about heaven and hell.

The Rev. James F. Lawrence, now Dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley, California, wrote a letter to the *Life* in March 1991 on “The C. S. Lewis Connection.”

“There was a time,” he wrote. “when I thought the two most interesting exponents of Christianity were C. S. Lewis and Emanuel Swedenborg. The comparison was striking because both possessed such fascinating intellectual profiles. Lewis was at once an Oxford don and the General Editor of the *Oxford History of English Literature* (which he affectionately referred to as ‘O, Hell.’) a

writer of the delightful children's Narnia series, a lasting science fiction genius, and the leading Christian apologist of the 20th century, among a few of his literary mantles!"

Lawrence says that as he read *The Great Divorce*, "I kept saying to myself, 'This guy had to have read Swedenborg; this is straight out of *Heaven and Hell*.'"

Well, he says, "Of course Lewis was aware of Swedenborg! He was an expert on Blake and Yeats, as well as a very literate man in a region with a strong Swedenborgian presence. Though a lover of keen imagination, Lewis was skeptical of experiences as thorough as Swedenborg's. And in the matter of doctrine, Lewis was far from Swedenborgian. He argued strenuously for the vicarious atonement, for tripersonalism, and for faith separate from understanding. . . . Despite some wonderful 'common-sense' approaches to modern Christianity that may sound to Swedenborgians as New Church, Lewis was nonetheless a staunch defender of orthodox Anglican doctrine and in no way can be construed as a closet Swedenborgian."

Richard Gladish, a favorite English teacher of mine in the Academy Boys School and College, wrote several lengthy letters to Lewis in the 1940s trying to convince him to read Swedenborg. Lewis was polite but resistant. Mr. Gladish persisted and at one point wrote: "In my humble opinion, you have a wonderful philosophy and viewpoint on which to build, and it would be a shame not to build upon it without more delay."

Mr. Rose noted that, "In 1963 Lewis departed this life, and we may like to think of his continuing to build in philosophical understanding." It's also interesting to picture all three of them – Lewis, Rose and Gladish – having wonderful discussions in the spiritual world about what they are learning.

Meanwhile, we may conjecture about who might be influenced by the Writings, and who may be part of the "church universal" without even being aware of the revelation.

Indeed, Anthony Lawton, who has devoted his professional life to presenting Lewis's work, may seem "ripe" for the Writings himself. He calls himself a lapsed Catholic and once wrote a play, *Heresy*, about his own struggles with the church and Christianity.

Although he is compelled to preserve and promote the vision of C. S. Lewis, he says: "I don't have a literal belief in the Jesus story anymore, I'm sad to say, but have a strong belief in the figurative meaning of the Christian myth and the content of Jesus' teaching. I think our just and charitable actions are the most real incarnation of God that we can attain."

He offers a "New Church view" that faith is not what you believe but what you do to put your faith into action, loving God and the neighbor – the "all" in religion.

So maybe that's why his life is so absorbed with Lewis and *The Great Divorce*: He's like so many of the passengers on that bus, searching for answers but realizing that the choices he's making right now are the ones that will count.
(BMH)

"OVERPOPULATION"

Does "saving the planet" require that the human race extinguish itself? If so, what are we saving it *for*?

I asked a young man what he thought the world's biggest problem is. "Overpopulation," he said. As it happened, there had been a long article in the newspaper that very morning about the looming crisis of *underpopulation*. And there have been many similar articles in the last year or so.

For some reason – and it's worth speculating on the spiritual and psychological causes that inspire such self-loathing – a program of self-annihilation has taken hold in parts of the world; especially, it seems, in societies considered to be the most advanced and "developed."

The birth rate in America, Europe and Japan is alarmingly low – below replacement level – and the resulting social and economic consequences are sobering. In addition to their other contributions to mankind (political, economic and scientific, for instance) these countries which are failing to procreate are the very places on the globe where conservation and policies to protect the natural environment are most developed.

And yet we have a very prominent and influential political figure in the United States asking: "Is it OK to still have children?" Well, if not, then nothing else much matters, at least for those societies that fall for this line. As someone said: The future belongs to those who show up for it.

(WEO)

"SAVING THE PLANET"

First of all, working to reduce pollution and to preserve and improve the natural environment is a good thing. The world was created for us by God, and we do have a responsibility to take care of it. We find the first indication of this in the creation story in *Genesis*: "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed . . . to tend and keep it." (*Genesis* 2:8,15)

But every truth can be distorted and turned into a heresy by over-emphasizing it at the expense of other, qualifying truths. It is human nature to do this, and *extreme* environmentalism is an example.

People used to worry about the salvation of their own souls, and they had a Savior to turn to for help and comfort. Now they worry about "saving the

planet," and see themselves as its collective savior.

Has any generation of schoolchildren ever been saddled with such a daunting task as "saving the planet?" A 16-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, is being hailed as a hero for her "scathing speech" to the United Nations, accusing it of failing to carry out its responsibility to save the planet from climate change.

"How dare you!" she proclaimed. "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words." She was right to call out diplomats who burn tons of jet fuel flying around the world to talk about "climate change" – but what have we come to when a child feels *her dreams and her childhood* have been stolen by adults' failure to change the earth's climate?

This doomsday rhetoric, convenient for politicians, is taking a toll on the children who take it seriously. How must they feel when they hear adults on television proclaiming that we only have 10 or 12 years left before the earth is irretrievably doomed?

(WEO)

DESOLATION AND DELIVERANCE

We build memorials for the victims of horror and tragedy: among them, the haunting Holocaust Museum and Vietnam Memorial in Washington, the Ground Zero Museum in New York. It is a way to honor those who lost their lives and to promise we will not forget. And there is within these stark tableaux a spark of hope – that no matter the sorrow we will also see the promise of the Lord's providence, leading to good.

On the way home from a recent visit to Western Pennsylvania, my wife and I visited the Flight 93 Memorial just east of Pittsburgh. Flight 93 was one of the four hijacked planes on 9/11 destined for Washington, DC, likely targeting the Capitol or the White House. The 40 passengers heard of the attack on the Twin Trade Towers in New York and knew their fate.

They courageously voted to storm the cabin and try to take over the plane – or at least make sure it did not reach Washington. They even waited until they were over a rural area before Todd Beamer famously said, "Let's roll." And they did what will be forever honored and never forgotten.

The plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, its anonymity forever elevated to sanctity. The scarring crater of that day is filled in as a bucolic grave for these brave souls. The memorial grounds, buildings and displays are tasteful, respectful, powerful. Visitors are hushed to whispers and tears. What died there lives forever.

When one of the park rangers sharing information was thanked, he said simply: "Don't thank me. It's an honor to be here."

With these memorials we confront evil and tragedy, honor the victims, and praise the Lord for turning us always toward good.

A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is a garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. (Joel 2:3)

(BMH)

MEMORIAL GIFT

We are all encouraged to attend to end-of-life issues so that our families are not burdened with critical decisions, often with little time to prepare or act – and possibly without agreement among family members. This is a kindness we all can do for those we love.

One senior citizen in the Church is taking it a step further – and it makes sense.

In consultation with her family, she has chosen the minister she would like to do her memorial service and is planning it with him. As she says, people in her situation “are frequently urged to help our families by making a living will, choosing a power of attorney, making it easy to find legal papers, etc.” She has made these additional provisions for three reasons.

- My kids will have plenty to do when I leave this world, so I thought I could spare them having to debate this.
- I feel for the ministers who have only a couple of days to come up with an address that pleases, informs and comforts everyone.
- I like that this minister will also be there for me and my family if things get complicated or difficult as I transition.

Now that’s the ultimate in end-of-life planning – a gift for families and a model we all could adopt.

(BMH)

2020 PRESCRIPTION: SEEK YE FIRST . . .

20/20 is considered perfect vision. With the year 2020 looming, what do we see – or hope to see? Much of our vision is clouded with doubt, fear, anxiety.

In an age where so many people have lost connection with the Lord, who lose themselves in technology but cannot find purpose in their lives, it is no wonder so many are worried and self-absorbed. For all the progress of our society, we are surrounded by confusion, insecurity and a breakdown of moral and spiritual values.

People look to best-selling gurus for the latest guide to happiness, when it all is there in the ageless Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life. . . . Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? . . . For our heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (*Matthew 5: 25,27,33*)

It's easy to say: trust in the Lord's providence and don't worry. Throughout our culture and the world we are besieged with challenges and threats. But anxiety is a product of self-absorption and is self-defeating. Worry never solves anything. Neither does looking to ourselves to "fix" what ails us. The only antidote to anxiety is trusting in the Lord and His providence – and doing our best to cooperate with Him.

That does not guarantee we will be spared suffering and misfortune. When the Lord asked His disciples for their trust, He both warned and promised them: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (*John 16:33*)

There are no guarantees – going into 2020 or any year – that we will not have tribulation. We know that all of the tragedies we will witness – whether they affect us personally or not – are not the Lord's will but are permitted only that good may come of them. That is His providence. That is His promise. That is the attitude to take into the new year.

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads toward an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace, since he then fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him. (*Arcana Coelestia 8455*)

(BMH)

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