

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MARCH/APRIL 2020



‘Touch Me Not’

In an Easter sermon the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr. explains what is meant when the Lord tells Mary Magdalene, mourning His death after the crucifixion, “Touch Me Not.” (Page 98)

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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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General Church Retreat Cancelled

To the Members and Friends of the General Church and the Academy of the New Church:

I write to let you know that we have made the difficult decision to cancel the General Church Retreat 2020 and the Council of the Clergy meetings which were set to follow. The reason is the uncertainty and significant disruption caused by the current COVID-19 outbreak. The Retreat and the Clergy meetings were intended to draw New Church people from around the world. We had every expectation that both would be energy-inspiring and memorable. Given the situation we are all adjusting to, we simply do not believe that is now possible.

Permit me to share a few more things related to this decision.

Are we going to reschedule the Retreat? The answer is yes, but we have not yet decided on when. We will need time to process with Bryn Athyn entities and to get counsel more broadly on the best future date. We also believe it prudent to let some time pass to see what awaits us financially and otherwise on the other side of this crisis. Please know that the goodness of the event and the value of gathering are very much on the minds of those most involved in the planning. I look favorably on rescheduling the Retreat in the not-too-distant future.

What about those who have already registered? Many of you are aware that registration has been open for the Retreat since mid-February. In less than one month more than 350 of you indicated you were planning to come. Sadly, in the space of one week, registrations almost completely stopped – again because of the travel and health uncertainty we are all dealing with. For those of you who did register, please know that your fees will be returned in full.

Well-deserved gratitude. I would like to extend warm thanks to the many people who had stepped up to make this event possible. These include: main session organizers, more than 90 workshop presenters, camp leaders for the different ages of the children's program, musicians, vendors, and a highly capable planning team. Gratitude also goes to the Bryn Athyn congregation for their willingness to host and to Bryn Athyn College and the Academy

Secondary Schools for their willingness to share their venues for this event.

In addition, I thank the General Church Board for underwriting significant parts of the cost, to the schools who were willing to sponsor their employees to attend, and to the people who donated money so that others could attend. One thing we could say about the planning to date is that it has demonstrated in great ways that we can do an event like this. The energy from many people is there, and the capability is there. That bodes well for the future when we wind up the planning once again.

The underlying reason that it matters. I would like to close with a reflection on two things that inspired me most about the Retreat. On June 19, 1770, the Lord sent out His disciples. That signaled an official beginning of the New Church faith. Our aim was to commemorate that anniversary and underscore the reason we exist. While we will need to seek other ways to honor that anniversary, it is clear to me from the planning that happened that people are inspired by the goodness of the New Church faith.

Equally inspiring to me is the possibility that we can serve as a General Church in ways that honor what the Lord set in motion back in the 1700s. The main sessions were gathered around the central reasons the church exists: opportunities to worship and connect with one another; ongoing means of learning from the Word; and consistent inspiration to put our faith into practice in authentically New Church ways. The Retreat planning has helped us focus attention on these core functions, and they will continue to drive our planning moving forward. The unpredictability of life always reminds us of our need to trust in the Lord's providence. While sad to have to make this decision to cancel the Retreat and the Clergy Meetings this June, I look forward to seeing how that energy and trust manifests for good in the future.

Best wishes,
The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.
Executive Bishop, General Church
Chancellor, Academy of the New Church

A NOTE FROM *NEW CHURCH LIFE*

Unfortunate as is this announcement of the cancellation of the General Church Retreat in June, it did come just in time to make this issue of *New Church Life*. However, it did require some changes throughout the issue which pushed back the production and mailing beyond Easter. Our apologies.

Bruce Henderson
Editor

In This Issue

Editorials (page 89) include:

- *Joy Cometh in the Morning*: Between Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter there is great drama and emotion, tears and sorrow, promise and peace. But “while weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning,” when our mourning is “turned into dancing” and we are girded “with gladness.”
- *Generations of Vipers*: Before the “Hosannas” of Palm Sunday turned to “Crucify Him” on Good Friday, the Pharisees were bent on destroying a good man who threatened their power, and there is an object lesson here for us still today.

In an Easter sermon the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr. explains why the Lord told a mourning Mary Magdalene after His crucifixion, “Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father.” Bishop Buss says: “The story of Easter is not only a record of past events. It tells of the future for all people. In the spiritual sense of the Word, each of us goes through the spiritual journey of these stories.” (Page 98)

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith offers a sermon on *Hope*. “There is always cause for hope. It does not matter how bleak things look, or how many evils and tragedies one has experienced in life. The Lord is always there, incessantly leading our thoughts and feelings – incessantly lifting our spirits and encouraging them with hope.” (Page 103)

Against the current backdrop of the coronavirus threatening the world, the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons brings perspective from the Writings on *Why Do Bad Things Happen?* “The Lord’s protection is primarily about our spiritual freedom, not our physical welfare. Yet it is also about our physical welfare insofar as this is important to our spiritual freedom. The problem is that there is a natural tension between these two things.” (Page 109)

The Rev. James P. Cooper offers his thoughts on *Appropriating Good and Evil*, noting: “If we will only remember that all life is from the Lord, and that all these things flow in from Him, then we are free to pick what will be a part of our own spiritual character.” And, “Our character becomes the sum of the

choices we make from an infinite array of ideas and feelings that flow in from the spiritual world, which we can then make our own by living according to them.” (Page 118)

This year’s Boynton Beach Retreat had no official theme but the presentations shared the vision of the Parable of the Sowers, spreading seeds for the Lord, and in that sense *We Are All Sowers*. Read summaries of presentations by Chelsea Odhner, Devin Zuber, Bruce Henderson, the Rev. Alan Cowley and Tim Bilger of the Swedenborg Foundation. (Page 123)

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth shares in From the Bishop’s Office his work on the Grand Human Project, which was also his theme in speaking at the banquet of the Boynton Beach Retreat. (Page 146)

In the annual State of Bryn Athyn College Address, President Brian Blair and Deans Wendy Closterman and Suzanne Nelson offered their perspectives on *Sharing a Common Bond*. “We all have a common bond,” President Blair said. “The joy of educating young people as they prepare for their lifelong use. This is a privilege we take seriously and with great humility. We want to do the best we can to educate and mentor our students.” (Page 148)

The Rev. Lou Synnestvedt offers reflections on *Time and Eternity*. Time is flowing like a river. We cannot stop it. We can only use it and pray: “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” (Page 151)

Church News (page 153) includes:

- An invitation to the annual meeting of the General Church Corporation
- A concluding report on the Healthy Church Match Campaign
- A report from New Church Education on the success of its YouTube channel.
- Testimonials from Bryn Athyn College on its new Master’s program
- A new and free online course from Bryn Athyn College on *Life After Death*
- What’s happening with a new athletic field for the Academy Girls School
- A report from the Rev. Todd Beiswenger on the terrible fires that ravaged Australia, with some perspective from the Writings
- Plans for this summer’s popular Jacob’s Creek Camp
- What’s being offered at this summer’s ANC camps
- The Gathering Leaves events offered for New Church women this summer in Purley Chase, Colchester, Great Britain
- An exciting update on the New Christian Bible Study website

Editorials

Bruce Henderson, Editor

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING

Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter are studded with drama and emotion, tears and sorrow, promise and peace. The backdrop of springtime in the Northern Hemisphere is a perfect metaphor: promise and denial.

We welcome the daffodils that light our landscapes and our hearts. We long for deliverance from the plagues of the world. We embrace the triumph over winter – and the rebirth of our spirit.

Easter is all about hope. In roiling debates over morality and faith – the values that lift us up or tear us down – we are challenged to elevate our minds. Easter offers perspective. It calls us to reflect on its meaning and make it relevant to our lives by applying its spiritual message to the challenges we face.

The drama begins with Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem, hailed as a king. Adoring crowds spread branches and clothing before Him as He rides into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they exclaim. “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (*Matthew 21:9*)

After all of the miracles Jesus performed in His short life, all the suffering He healed, all the wisdom He taught, and all the love He spread, the wonder is that this heady celebration would collapse within a week into betrayal, hatred and crucifixion.

The garments and branches laid down before Him symbolize spiritual truth as the foundation for the Lord being a “king” in our lives. Knowing truth is one thing; acknowledging the divinity within it is another. Having faith in that truth – and living it – is critical. This is what regeneration is all about: rejecting evil and falsity, learning truth, doing good, and living the life of heaven.

The people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as a king, but they wanted a natural king, supplanting the despised Herod and the government of Rome. They did not comprehend that He came as a spiritual king – king of heaven – not a worldly ruler.

But even before Jesus swept into Jerusalem, “as He came near and saw

the city, he wept over it.” (*Luke* 19:41) That seems contrary to what we would expect of someone being hailed as a king. But this was an act of love as well as grief. That’s because Jerusalem represents not only a city but a state of mind. The people’s hearts had been hardened so that they could no longer experience Divine love or understand Divine truth.

Jesus knew they wanted social change. What they did not understand was that it was their own hearts and minds that needed to change. Jesus wept because they were blinded by their own worldliness to His purpose in coming down among them.

That is why He said: “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from your eyes.” He showed them what He meant, casting the money changers out of the temple who had made it “a den of thieves.” Then He taught daily in the temple while “the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him, and could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.” (*Luke* 19: 41,42; 46-48)

Then came His crucifixion and the women who loved Him wept again. And He said to them: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children.” (*Ibid.* 23:28)

Still, they wept at His crucifixion and His tomb. But then their tears gave way to joy with His resurrection and its promise to all of us, for all time.

Isaiah prophesied: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . . Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. . . . and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” (*Isaiah* 65:17-19)

In *Revelation* the promise is ultimated with John’s vision of “a new heaven and a new earth . . . the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be their God.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said: Behold, I make all things new.” (*Revelation* 21:2-5)

“*All things new*” – including, and especially, we His people, if we but follow Him.

Praising the Lord for His deliverance, David says: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. . . . Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing . . . and girded me with gladness.” (*Psalms* 30:5,11)

That is the gladness of Easter.

GENERATIONS OF VIPERS

Even before the events between Palm Sunday and Easter turned the backdrop from “Hosanna!” to “Crucify Him!” pressure was mounting among the Pharisees to destroy this man who did nothing but good among them. It is an object lesson for us still today.

Jesus and His disciples were walking through a cornfield on the sabbath when the hungry disciples plucked ears of corn and ate them. The Pharisees – always looking for anything to use against Him – immediately rebuked Him for allowing what was not lawful on the sabbath. He confounded them with: “But I say unto you that in this place is one greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even on the sabbath day.” (*Matthew 12:6-8*)

Then He went into the synagogue and healed a man with a withered hand. Again He was condemned. Again He defended Himself: “What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall in the pit on the sabbath day will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore is it lawful to do well on sabbath days?” (11-12)

But even such common-sense mercy was too much for the Pharisees who “went out and held council against Him, and how they might destroy Him.”

Jesus went out and healed many more. He showed love. He acted with kindness. But they who hated Him, because He was a threat to their own power, could only think about “how they might destroy Him.”

After saying, “He that is not with Me is against Me,” Jesus struck out at this “generation of vipers” – speaking evil and who would be held for account in the day of judgment. But He knew what was coming and told them that, like Jonas, He would be three days and nights “in the heart of the earth.”

His, of course, was the ultimate victory. But as we celebrate the triumph and the promise of His resurrection, we need to be sobered as well by the way passions can swing between the highs and lows of “Hosanna” and “Crucify Him” – of following the Lord one minute, turning away from Him the next. All around us are people pursuing love, unity and what they see as good and right. But angry voices condemn them and seek to destroy. The lesson from the original Easter morning still resonates. Don’t be one with the “vipers.” Look for the good that unites. “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Letters to the Editors

Letters may be sent to the Editor of New Church Life at
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
or e-mailed to Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

A Broader View

To The Editor:

I am writing in response to the Life Lines by WEO, *Overpopulation* and *Saving the Planet*, in *New Church Life*, November/December 2019, page 565. I found both of them disturbing.

It is true that we are told that the human race is the seminary of the heavens (*Last Judgment* 10) and that the human race is the basis, container and support of the heavens. (*Doctrine of the Holy Scripture* 34) We are also told that we must trust in Divine providence but that we must also act out of rationality. Sometimes, though, I wonder if we assume that the terms “men” (homo) and “human race” only refer to this earth and that the human race on our earth will always exist regardless of what we do and whether such views distort our thinking on world population and climate change? Why else would WEO support an increasing population or ridicule Greta Thunberg?

The truth is that the Writings make it very clear that “men” and “human race” apply to all the other earths as well as our own. We also need to remember that in *Last Judgment* 10 it is stated that the human race on one earth may perish if that race separates itself entirely from the Divine but the human race would still continue on other earths.

It is worth noting that the human race on our earth would indeed have perished had not the Lord been born. (*Ibid*) Is the human race on this earth not increasingly separating itself from the Divine? Is it not greed and selfishness that cause the world to pursue growth and take no action on climate change?

Population growth, economic growth and climate change are inextricably linked and it is the former two that are causing the latter. Population growth cannot be viewed as simplistically as the article states. It suggests that to save the planet by not having population growth means extinguishing the human race.

I am unable to agree with such a statement. If we are *not* to extinguish the human race, then we *must* save the planet by adapting immediately to climate change and curtailing population growth.

The young man's answer of "overpopulation" to WEO's question of "what is the world's biggest problem" is fairly correct. Overpopulation, greed and a refusal to act on climate change are the biggest problems facing this human race. As for self-loathing leading to self-annihilation being the reason for low birth rates in some countries, this is an unproven assumption. Do those nations which have a falling birth rate loathe themselves? I think not.

The "looming crisis of underpopulation" is alarmist and is, I suspect, something that is conjured up to sell news. Besides, it is untrue. I understand that the world's population is increasing at 1.08% or 82 million a year. Some countries may not be increasing at a rate to sustain their population, workforce or social infrastructure in the long term under the current economic system based on growth. However, consider the disaster that will certainly fall on this human race and this planet if the population continues to grow.

Is WEO taking the view that because the human race is only here or only on this earth and is the only seminary of the heavens we should be increasing world population regardless of the disaster that would bring to the human race here on earth? Our human race is, of course, not the only seminary of the heavens. The Writings clearly state that myriads are going to heaven from all the earths with a human race. If we on this earth destroy ourselves as the Last Judgment states could occur, the heavens will still be filled from the human race on other earths.

The space on our earth and its resources are finite. If we keep on increasing population then it will outstrip its resources and the beautiful planet the Lord has given us will be ruined. Is that caring, spiritually and rationally, for our world? And what of the disaster that would bring to the human race?

Unfortunately, the world's current economic model has disaster written into it. The model is unsustainable. It depends on population growth, increasing development, and increasing business and production growth. It is these elements which allow some in the economy to grow ever richer. It is a model that takes no note of the earth's limited space and resources. It should also be noted that growth is measured by GDP, which does not take into account many factors – the so-called "unquantifiables." If it did, growth would be seen to have only a negative effect.

It is this growth model, driven by greed and selfishness, that has led to disastrous climate change.

The Life Line, *Saving the Planet*, also alarms me. It seems to me that it echoes the comments of a prominent USA figure who also has spoken patronizingly and with ridicule of those who have spoken out against the lack

of action on climate change, in particular against Greta Thunberg.

I find it alarming and dangerous that WEO suggests that the truth on climate change (“extreme environmentalism”) has been “distorted and turned into a heresy” despite the findings of hundreds of reputable scientists across the world and the visible evidence before our eyes.

There is nothing but ridicule of Ms. Thunberg while her “how dare you” comments are patronizingly called doomsday rhetoric suitable for politicians.

Quite rightly, the Life Line does ask what we have come to when a child feels her dreams and childhood have been taken from her? But the point is that Ms. Thunberg’s dreams and childhood – and all those of her generation – *have* been stolen from her: stolen by our generation, by our greed, selfishness and refusal to act. We do only have a few years left in which to act before the tipping point is reached.

Name removed online at author request

In Response: No Critic of Greta

To The Editor:

I plead not guilty to the charge of “ridiculing” Greta Thunberg. I said only two things about her: that she “is being hailed as a hero” for criticizing United Nations diplomats (which is simply a fact); and that her criticism was justified.

Here is what I wrote about her in its entirety.

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 is not criticizing (much less ridiculing) Greta, but the alarmist rhetoric by politicians, pundits and Hollywood celebrities who are manipulating and exploiting her as a kind of a mascot for their own political agenda.

I do not blame Greta for believing what she’s been told: namely, that “the end is near!” Nor do I blame her for being appalled by the obvious disconnect between the fulminations about global warming and the actions of those who deliver them. Remember that it was *Greta herself* who called out the UN diplomats for their hypocrisy and “empty words.” She observed that they

obviously don't feel the same panic about climate change that their words have stoked in her and countless others.

This recent news item is just one example of the kind of thing that angers Greta: "Grammy-winning singer and climate change alarmist John Legend used a private jet to take his activist wife Chrissy Teigen out for a quick Valentine's Day dinner over the weekend." They flew 500 miles in a private jet from their home in Beverly Hills to dine at a famous restaurant in Napa Valley.

The doomsday rhetoric surrounding the issue of climate change even has some groups calling for the extinction of the human race as the way to "save the planet." This was mentioned in an article featured on the cover of the February issue of *Philadelphia Magazine*: "Doesn't Anyone Want Kids Anymore?" The author, Gina Tomaine, writes that her millennial generation is "riddled with depression," and that a major hallmark of her generation "is a sense of impending doom" provoked by climate change hysteria.

She speaks of second graders having anxiety attacks about the earth melting. She says her social media feeds are flooded with apocalyptic headlines. Walking to her yoga class she passes fliers advertising an event sponsored by the Philadelphia Chapter of Extinction Rebellion, whose website claims: "A child born today will have a short, miserable existence unless we, as a people, force government and industry to change immediately." She thinks that if she has a child she'd be "adding to the problem" because "my baby would steal more resources. That's a lot of guilt to bear."

I agree with Mr. Ridgway that "greed and selfishness" contribute to man's destruction of the natural environment, but I do not believe that a wholesale change in "the world's current economic model" is the answer. Greed and selfishness are inherent in our fallen human nature, and no economic system is immune from being corrupted by them. Whatever economic theory prevails, human corruption is the enemy of human progress.

Socialism as well as capitalism can be used as a vehicle for human mischief. Those in charge of administering a state-run economy and redistributing wealth by government fiat are prone to being carried away by the love of power and dominion, which the Writings identify as the strongest of all evil passions.

I do not deny that the warming of the earth is a matter of concern, that human activity is contributing to it, or that reasonable steps should be taken to lower carbon emissions. And like everyone else I also would like to leave the earth in better shape for my children and grandchildren. I admit, however, that I am even more worried about the spiritual and cultural decline they stand to inherit.

The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein (WEO)
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Influence of the Hells

To The Editor:

I am still working through the Rev. Chris Barber's wonderful report on the history of slavery in the New Church. (*200 Years and 100 Miles: Doctrine's Failure to Settle the Slavery Debate in the New Church – New Church Life*, September/October 2019) I am grateful for his digging into all that history and the pain he must have experienced by the awful use of the Writings to justify slavery for his ancestors.

Yet I am aware of the fact that hell does its best to convince people, often using truths to justify evil, and it still visits us today. We are all one race and children of the Divine, not separate races, especially when we make others inferior. Variety is so important for the heavens. We must all be aware of the danger of allowing hell to take over our thoughts and lives!

Rev. Julie Conaron
Willow Grove
Pennsylvania

The Writings and Slavery

To The Editor:

There are two passages in the Writings forever condemning the evil of slavery! I don't know if or when these have been printed before. No one can be blamed for missing them, since they don't show up under all forms of "slave-", but under "steal-"! They come from *Exodus* 21:16: "He that steals a man, and sells him, and if he be found in his hand, dying he shall die"; and from *Deuteronomy* 24.7: "If a man be found stealing the soul of his brothers of the sons of Israel, and makes money off him, or sells him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt sweep away evil from among you."

Here are the two passages: "As all the statutes commanded the sons of Israel by the Lord were founded on the laws of order which are in heaven, that is, derived their existence and essence from the spiritual world, so for the same reason were the statutes which were enacted concerning theft; as that . . . 'He that stealeth a man . . . 'or sells him.'" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8906.3,4) Further, "All the laws in that church originated in the spiritual world, they correspond to the laws of order which are in heaven. As in *Exodus* 21:16,

Deuteronomy 24:7” (*Ibid.* 5135:12)

Even if these Old Testament laws were later “abrogated” (*Ibid.* 9349), nonetheless the laws from heaven apply on earth forever.

Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

"Touch Me Not..."

An Easter Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.

Lessons: John 20:1-4, 12-19; True Christian Religion 109; Arcana Coelestia 10023:6-8

"Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father." (John 20:17)

Mary Magdalene had more reason than almost anyone else to mourn the death of the Lord. He had cast seven devils out of her. She owed her sanity, her humanity, to Him. But she had watched Him die on the cross. He was gone, and His healing power would be known no more. All that was left for her was to mourn His past greatness. Her unspeakable joy when she became the first person in all the world to know the great message of Christianity has resonated through the ages. What must she have felt that first Easter morning when He spoke her name!

Yet into this moment the Lord injected a strange note. In her joy she must have embraced Him, for He cautioned her, saying, "Do not touch Me (cling to Me) for I am not yet ascended to My Father." It seems a strange thing to say to one whose joy was so full; yet the Lord, who is infinitely kind, spoke what was needed. She still did not know Him. She had thought He was someone who could die, but He did not know death. She had thought evil people could hurt Him, but He had transcended all evil. She had thought of Him as her Master, a great teacher and leader, but He was Her God.

"I am not yet ascended to My Father." But He was! He had glorified His Human on Good Friday, and now He was one with the Father. So why did He say that? The point is that in her mind He was not yet ascended to the Father. She thought of Him as less than God. If she was to be conjoined to Him, she had to lift up her thought about Him.

This same idea is contained in other words of the Lord: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." (*John 12:32*) We have to elevate Him in our minds above an earthly idea: we must acknowledge Him as God if we are to let Him draw us up to Himself.

What was true of Mary was true also of the Christian Church. It always

had trouble seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. Many good Christians have worshiped Him in their hearts, and learned that great truth in the world to come. But the church itself taught a divided trinity.

And now, today, the Lord has revealed in the Writings for the New Church that He is indeed God. He has ascended to the Father, even as He promised, and we can worship Him, and touch Him. For He came down to earth so that we could touch Him – that is, be conjoined with Him and feel His healing power. We might say, therefore, that today this promise has been fulfilled. "I ascend to My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." We believe that the Writings for the New Church were given so that people may see that the Lord is the one God.

But that is only part of the truth. The story of Easter is not only a record of past events. It tells of the future for all people. In the spiritual sense of the Word, each of us goes through the spiritual journey of these stories, and Mary's experience is ours as well.

Mary was a good woman. Seven devils had been cast out of her, representing the Lord's power over evil in us. She was, however, deeply despairing because of the Lord's crucifixion. It seemed that her religion was dead, because its inspired leader was dead.

Each of us will face great challenges to our faith at times. It may come in many forms, but it will seem to us that life with its problems is too much for us. And often it may seem that our particular hell is all powerful in us. It has destroyed our faith in the Lord. As on Good Friday, so long ago, the Lord Himself will seem to be gone from us.

And where is the Lord found today? Today He comes to us through the pages of His Word – through the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Writings. For it is there that we know who He is, what kind of a God He is.

In times of distress it feels that He is dead to us – crucified! His Word has proved powerless, the forces of evil have prevailed. As the passersby mocked Jesus on the cross, so it seems that harsh reality mocks our faith. Mary Magdalene was at Calgarey. She saw Him die – or so she thought.

Early in the morning she came to the sepulcher. Easter morning represents a new state, in which the Lord is about to show Himself. But she did not find Him. Why not?

The spiritual reason is that often we see the Word wrongly. Mary expected to see Him lying dead – or sealed off by a great stone. We, too, if we think

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in a limited way of the power of the Lord's Word, almost expect to see that its power is dead to us, because that is what we have experienced.

All of a sudden He was there! He stood, and asked her the same question the angels had asked, and added another: "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" What beautiful questions, at the moment when her sorrow was about to end, her search to be over! The Lord calls to us in His Word when we are in despair, when things seem hard, when we can't seem to love beautiful ideals

any longer. "Why do you weep?" "Whom do you seek?"

She thought He was the gardener. A garden signifies intelligence in the Word. Sometimes we think of the Writings as a gardener. They are wonderful books, which give us insights. As a gardener tends plants and trees, so the Writings help lovely ideals to grow and thrive in our minds. As the gardener weeds and protects the plants, so the Writings show us how to overcome evils so that we may follow our ideals.

But a gardener is a mortal human being! Mary was not seeing clearly! It was the Lord God of heaven and earth who stood before her. So she asked Him for limited help. Please take me where He is so that I may grieve over Him.

If we think of the Writings as the works of a gardener, they cannot help us through the desperate moments of our lives. Their ideas are wonderful, but when our faith dies, the best they can do is help us to grieve. This is a very real temptation in all of us – even when we feel that we believe with all our hearts that the Writings for the New Church are the Lord's Word. Part of us still thinks of them as a set of lovely ideas, and fears that maybe they are too good to be true. Such a faith may be fine when things go well, but it is not equal to the trials of life.

Then came the miracle. Jesus spoke her name. "Mary!" What a change came about in the way she thought of Him, as she looked at Him anew, and found her faith, and her Lord, alive. Yet even then she did not see. She called Him Master, and embraced Him, and He gently cautioned her.

In the dawn of a new morning, when the dark night of our struggles is ending, we find that the Writings can answer the problems of life. They don't die. They have power over all evil. This dawning faith is the joy of which the Lord spoke when He said: "You now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and

you will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." (*John 16:22*)

How eagerly we embrace that newfound faith. How gratefully we accept that the Word can solve our problems.

Yet there is one more step that we must take. "Touch Me not," the Lord said to Mary. The word He used can be translated as, "Do not cling to Me." It is the same word as was used when Jesus touched a leper and cleansed him. The woman who had an issue of blood touched (or clasped) the hem of His garment and was healed; and Jesus touched Jairus's daughter, and she rose from the dead. So also the Lord touched little children, representing His protection of interior states of innocence.

"Touch Me not." Here is the eternal reason why the Lord said these words. Mary, in her boundless joy, called Him "Rabboni." That means, "Teacher." It is not enough to see the Word as our teacher, just full of truths.

"I am not yet ascended to My Father," Jesus said. The Father means the Divine love. Mary was a good person, who had been through so many torments, and she loved the Lord. We may fight to obey Him, but He is more than our "Teacher." His Word is more than truth, it is goodness itself, that from which all love is created in us. "All things were made by the Word and without it was not anything made that was made." All things – all love.

"Touch Me not." At the moment of her wondrous joy comes a caution. Sometimes, when the hells in us are conquered, and we feel that the Lord is with us once again, alive, with all His power, we will be ready for one more step.

"But go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.'" He actually promises us that if we are following Him, we will take that step. We will see the infinite love within His truths. Then, just as Mary never again doubted, our faith will be certain. And His love will come to us. "I ascend to My Father, and your Father."

Are the Writings the work of the Divine Gardener? Do they have lovely ideas? Do they weed out our faults and allow our loves to grow and flourish? Yes, surely they do. Are they our Teacher, able to break through our unhappy

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states and give us joy, even as Mary felt such great joy on Easter morning? Surely they are. But we are invited to see them as so much more: as the manifestation of our everlasting Father, as the source of all love in our lives, as the way to heaven.

And here is the lovely promise of Easter morning. It was the Lord Himself who led Mary through those three steps. He stood before her, allowing her to think of Him as the gardener, even as He allows us to see

the Writings as the source of beautiful ideals, and little more. He then spoke and let her know who He was. So, too, He shows us the power of His Word, and through it shows us His presence. Then He leads us ever upward when He calls us to see Him as God. "I ascend to My Father, and your Father, and to My God and your God."

It will happen, if we wish Him to touch us with His healing hands. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." So, when we say the Lord's Prayer, we start, "Our Father who art in the heavens" – the Lord Jesus Christ. But early in our lives we, like Mary, have not truly believed in His ultimate power.

Much later in the Prayer, and much later in our journey to heaven, we pray, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." "Take us through the dark times," we are pleading. And only when He has done that can we say with all our hearts, "For Thine is the kingdom." "There is only one kingdom; it's Yours. Your love rules it. And You have the power to give us love. And You have all the glory."

Amen.



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Hope

A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

Lessons: Genesis 37:29-36; Exodus 6:1-8; Divine Providence 178

“For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.” (Psalm 38:15)

Vital to the human condition is hope. The desire, or expectation, that things will improve, or turn out for the best, is constantly with us. Who would tolerate the frustrations and failures that are inevitable in life were it not for the hope that there is a happier state ahead – a heaven from the human race? Without hope there is no purpose to life, no reason to do anything.

It permeates even the most mundane aspects of life. Why do most people passionately follow teams that rarely win even half of their games? There is the hope that they might improve, or at least upset a superior team in any given contest. Even if they never seem to be champions, there is always the hope that they might play well, or an individual athlete might excel. Even here hope enables us to carry on.

In a far more important area, consider those facing death in the not too distant future. When we are with them, do we speak of the failures or frustrations of life, or do we speak of the positive things, in the past, present and future? As the Writings make note in speaking to someone in this state, who does not comfort him “by the assurance that he will shortly come into the other life”? (*Arcana Coelestia* 5078:5; cf 699)

As one New Churchman said: “With what I’ve got to look forward to, what have I got to be afraid of?” The hope that death is not the end, but merely a step in the beginning of something far more wonderful than ever known on earth, is a source of hope, of strength. “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also will rest in hope.” (*Psalm* 16:9)

Hope also plays an important part in how we live day to day. Yes, there are chores and routines that need doing and can seem like drudgery, but they can be given real meaning by looking beyond them – to the use they serve for others.

The role of hope is especially important in states of temptation. When we fall into the turmoil of questioning what we believe, or are wrestling with conflicted feelings of what to do, how do we hang on and not give up? While we can't see it or feel it, we're told that the Lord is then present, touching us deep within, giving us a sense of hope.

If we can see them as expressions of love for the neighbor, the Heavenly Doctrines note, we can be “exalted by hope of becoming an angel.” (*Heaven and Hell* 571:2) Everything we do can be lifted up with this perspective. It can be embraced as a life of use that will continue forever.

Even in the hells hope is vital. The devils who have discovered that they cannot accomplish their evil ends are said to have a feeling of life from the hope they cherish. (*Spiritual Experiences* 2880, 4299) It is not a hope of becoming good, but a hope of doing evil. This hope itself, even if it is not realized, gives them some delight in their lives. In the Lord's mercy, those who choose hell may be eternally frustrated, but they are allowed some perverse happiness, for without it they would not have any life at all.

Unfortunately, we have all experienced times when we did not have hope. Whenever we sense there is

no hope, either naturally or spiritually, do we not feel a deadness? Do we not feel that there is no point in continuing? Take away our hopes and dreams and what is left is but an empty shell, a void of blackness? (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5551) And it is to this that the hellish influences in our lives would lead us. For when we are without hope we lose our strength, our will to strive and improve.

Without hope we are open to the apathy of the hells, willing to give up. Without hope of heaven, why should we try to be good? Without hope of success, why should we strive to do anything? And so the sphere of failure, of hopelessness, can pervade our minds, allowing falsities and evils to gain greater sway with our minds, and dragging us down to where we are their servants and no longer free. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6939) When we give up hope we are inclined to make bad choices, losing our ability to see what is good.

But the Lord never wants this to happen. He always leads us to have hope, for hope has power to restore, strengthen and give life. This was why He spoke to Moses as He did while the Israelites were dwelling in Egypt. They had no power; they had no hope; they were enslaved.

Moses had killed an Egyptian, and so was wanted for murder. Yet Jehovah appeared to him, assuring him that Pharaoh's objections would be overcome so that he would send the sons of Israel away from Egypt. Jehovah would bring them into the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey.

These promises must have seemed farfetched from the reality that Moses knew. But the Lord was giving encouragement, hope, so that Moses and the Sons of Israel could look forward to a better life. (*Arcana Coelestia* 7183) If they had no hope, they would not have done anything to free themselves. Jehovah had the power to release them, but they had to follow Him.

For them to make use of the Lord's power, they had to look forward to a brighter future than perpetual slavery. In this, hope is a great incentive. It can motivate a people, or an individual, to natural or spiritual achievement that is impossible without His uplifting. As the Psalmist said: "For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God." (*Psalms* 38:15)

The role of hope is especially important in states of temptation. When we fall into the turmoil of questioning what we believe, or are wrestling with conflicted feelings of what to do, how do we hang on and not give up? While we can't see it or feel it, we're told that the Lord is then present, touching us deep within, giving us a sense of hope. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6097, 6574:2, 8159:3)

That is the source of any strength we have to resist false ideas or evil urgings. We don't consciously see or feel it, but it enables us to struggle on. "It is good that one should both hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." (*Lamentations* 3:26)

When we do hope in the Lord, we can be cheered; we can eventually come to feel that there is a potential for the future, that all the dark and foreboding states that we experience will eventually pass away, much like the first dawning after a stormy night. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 8165:2) "Be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord." (*Psalms* 31:24)

However, such relief may not come very quickly. The Israelites were in the

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We need to align our hopes with what the Lord teaches in His Word if they are to give us genuine hope.

wilderness 40 years – sufficient time for virtually all of those who left Egypt as adults to have left the natural world. This indicates it takes time for states to change, and hardship along the way.

It is curious that as much as hope is a looking forward, the Lord warned against worrying about the future. We are to have no thought for the morrow, but let the morrow take care of itself.

We're also told that the angels have no memory of the past nor concern for the future, because they are so engaged in the present. And we do have to concentrate our attentions to what is happening in the here and now.

But part of the joy of hope is the anticipation of what lies ahead. Significant events in our lives are made all the more happy by looking forward to them. What would Christmas be if it suddenly occurred, without all the chaos but delight in selecting presents, setting up the tree, and decorating the house?

Even when the Lord came on earth, John the Baptist had gone before Him, preparing the way so the Lord could be received with joy and gladness. This is what is involved in hope; our minds delight in looking ahead to the good things that the Lord can make happen. (See *Divine Providence* 178) For us to anticipate with joy things in the future is to show a deep trust in the Lord and His providence, for we are believing that He knows us, cares for us, and is leading us to good.

Yet our hopes should be based in reality. If our hopes bear no relation to how the Lord operates in His infinite providence, we are likely to be disappointed. We may hope for the Lord to end all unhappiness, but if we expect Him to force people against their wills to achieve this end, we will not see it. Genuine hope, as the doctrines note, "is of the understanding by means of truth." (*Arcana Coelestia* 6578) We need to align our hopes with what the Lord teaches in His Word if they are to give us genuine hope.

This was powerfully shown in the story of Jacob and his son, Joseph. As you might recall, Joseph was the favored son, despised by his brothers because of it. They captured him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. To cover up what had happened, the brothers dipped his coat of many colors in blood, then showed it to Jacob, who assumed from it that he had been killed.

Jacob had the predictable reaction and wept bitterly. All comfort offered by his sons and daughters was rejected. In the internal sense this is significant, for Jacob's offspring represent falsities and evils. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4783) No lasting hope or comfort can be derived from these, for they do not uplift, they do not lead to what is good.

For example, what hope would there be if one thought there is no life after death? How could one then feel comfort in the death of a loved one, or one's own demise? What comfort could religion hold if it accepted the false idea of a cruel and punishing God? Falsity does not give hope for the future, but truth does, for it describes the Lord's love, His providential care for our eternal well-being. "My soul faints for Your salvation; but I hope in Your Word." (*Psalm 119:81*)

There is always cause for hope. It does not matter how bleak things look, or how many evils and tragedies one has experienced in life. The Lord is always there, incessantly leading our thoughts and feelings – incessantly lifting our spirits and encouraging them with hope. Yes, bad things can happen. We can act selfishly. Others can harm us. But that does not stop the Lord from leading us, giving us hope.

In this regard it is interesting to note that when the Lord told His disciples that He would soon be leaving them – a devastating message – He promised He would not leave them comfortless. He gave them hope that He would come again and send them the Holy Spirit. What is the Holy Spirit that the Lord promised to send, Who would be a Comforter? The Divine Truth. (*Arcana Coelestia 4673e*)

The Word by which we can see the Lord is where we should place our hope. The truths found there are meant to uplift, to direct our minds to what can be achieved in the work of regeneration. Everything we learn of good is meant to encourage us to see that it can exist within us. All the joys of heaven can be ours. Even when we are not in heavenly states, even when we are besieged with our own evils in temptations, we can derive hope from

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Inmosty, He holds us in the hope of something better. No matter how bad things look, He is always there – leading to good. If we embrace His hope for us, a heaven from the human race, He then can give us the power to realize it, even as He gave Moses the power to lead the Sons of Israel from bondage to the land of Canaan. Did He not say, “Be of good courage, I have overcome the world”?

We can have confidence, courage, when we accept His truth and let His hope for us become our own. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 365:7)

“For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.”

Amen.



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Why Do Bad Things Happen?

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

Epidemics and natural disasters have been part of the human experience for thousands of years, causing untold suffering. Our long experience with these kinds of things, however, does not make them any easier to understand or accept. People search for explanations, and the literature on the topic is extensive. New Church ministers and authors have written many articles and sermons, and also a few books, on the topic. The most recent and interesting book is Bruce Henderson's *Why Does God Let It Happen?*, published in 2010.

The age-old problem of the existence of these evils can be broken into two parts. The first is easier to answer. "*Why does the Lord let people do evil things to one another?*" The answer that many people agree with is that the possibility of acting badly is necessary if we want to say that people are free.

The second part, and the more difficult one, is: "*Why does the Lord let terrible things happen to people, like disease, natural disasters, and other bad things?*" This is a harder question because it does not seem to be about freedom, but rather about how the world was set up from the beginning. Why would God set up the world in such a way that natural disasters are so likely?

The Heavenly Doctrine provides some fascinating answers that shed light on both of these questions.

First of all, the Old and New Testaments both make it clear that preventing things that are harmful and evil is a priority. In the Lord's Prayer, He teaches us to say: "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" We may wonder why He would ever lead us into evil, but the meaning here is a plea that He prevent bad things from happening to us. It is not that He would lead us into trouble, meant by "temptation," but rather that He is always leading us and so we ask Him to lead us away from problems and suffering.

Similarly, the Lord promises us that He will keep us safe if we follow Him:

Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you. (*Psalm 91*)

How then do we understand that evil does seem to befall most people, whether they follow the Lord or not?

The Lord's protection is primarily about our spiritual freedom, not our physical welfare. Yet it is also about our physical welfare insofar as this is important to our spiritual freedom. The problem is that there is a natural tension between these two things.

New Church teachings explain that everyone is protected by the Lord, and yet He does permit evil to happen. We have the following brief explanations.

First, that everyone is protected:

Everyone is under the Lord's protection, the evil as well as the good. And to him who is under the Lord's protection no evil can happen. For it is the Lord's will that no one should perish or be punished. (*Apocalypse Explained* 643)

Secondly, that God nevertheless permits some evils to happen:

The permission of evil by the Lord is not the permission of one who wills, but of one who does not will, yet who, under the urgency of the end which is salvation, cannot bring assistance. (*Arcana Coelestia* 276)

Thirdly, that part of the reason for this is so that the Lord's leading can remain undetected:

Providence acts invisibly, in order that a person may not be compelled to believe from visible things, and thus that his free will may not be injured. For unless a person has freedom he cannot be reformed, thus he cannot be saved. (*Arcana Coelestia* 276)

Freedom is necessary for salvation because unless people freely choose what they love they cannot be said to be autonomous beings. If we are not autonomous then we are simply extensions of God's will, or robots.

One aspect of this concept of permission is that not all evil is permitted to happen. The only evils permitted are those that can result in some good, and not more than we can cope with, as explained here:

No evil is permitted by the Lord, except to the end that good may come of it, namely, that truth and good may be brought into shape and strengthened with those who are in temptation. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6574)

"Noah went into the ark" means that he was protected during temptations. The Lord protects the person by means of angels and prevents the evil spirits and genii from overstepping the mark and overwhelming him with more than he can cope with. (*Arcana Coelestia* 741)

The good that can result from terrible things is not necessarily detectable to us, nor is it clear that evils are not more than we can cope with. They often seem like more than we can cope with. The evil of life's disasters can

be overwhelming, and it can destroy everything that we love. But the meaning here is that despite this our freedom can never be completely taken away. We can't be forced to love evil.

So the Lord's protection is primarily about our spiritual freedom, not our physical welfare. Yet it is also about our physical welfare insofar as this is important to our spiritual freedom. The problem is that there is a natural tension between these two things.

One reason why bad things happen has to do with the difference between what is natural and what is spiritual. There is a teaching that natural and spiritual substances are in many ways stacked in opposition to each other, and so they react against each other. We read:

The substances of the natural world by their very nature react against the substances of the spiritual world. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 260)

The reason the natural reacts against spiritual things is that it envelops, encloses and contains them, and this cannot be the case without its reacting to them. For if it did not react, the interior or enclosed elements would break loose and thrust their way out and so drift away. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 260)

What does this mean? It means that the values and priorities of natural things are inherently in tension with spiritual values and priorities. We may wish to work all day long and reach out to help everyone we see, but our bodies tire and our resources are limited. We live our lives managing these kinds of tensions. Our natural self prioritizes things that sustain and comfort our bodies and ego. Our spiritual self does not care so much about our own welfare as it does about the welfare of others.

This tension is a good and useful thing, since without these competing forces we would work ourselves to death, divest ourselves of all of our resources, and end up helping no one. Alternatively, we would care only about ourselves and be governed by the principle of survival of the fittest. Instead, these competing forces find some kind of balance in our lives.

The table on the next page gives some examples of these contrasting values.

What does this mean?
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... These competing forces find some kind of balance in our lives.

SPIRITUAL WORLD	NATURAL WORLD
Cooperation from love	Competition of natural force
Welfare of others	Welfare of self
Reception of love from the Lord	Survival of the fittest
Spiritual power rules	Worldly power rules
Guided by spiritual laws	Guided by natural laws
Benefits to other	Benefits to self
Mercy	Uncaring forces
Desire to sacrifice for others	Desire to survive
Sharing with others	Desire to satisfy needs
Continual service to others	Need for rest
Unlimited time	Limits of time

These pairs of values may seem to be complete opposites, and yet the truth is that each needs the context of the other to be meaningful. For example, in the natural world there are scarce resources. In the spiritual world there are unlimited resources. But those spiritual resources, all of which are forms of love, can only be developed within a containing natural, where those loves are freely chosen and developed. Putting others before self is meaningless if the self had no needs to begin with.

Similarly, the concept of mercy has no meaning apart from the lack of caring that is its opposite. If nothing could ever hurt or threaten anything else what would mercy even be? If hunger and thirst were not possible what would be the point of efforts to feed people? If gravity could not pull down structures what need would there be to build carefully?

This doesn't mean that the values of the natural world are evil, only that they are natural. As long as they are taken into account and subordinated to spiritual values they are good and necessary. But evil does result when they rule.

The natural world is governed by natural laws, laws that cannot take mercy into account, but which are guided by the need to survive in an environment defined by the natural forces of physics, chemistry and biology. These natural forces are constant and stable. They do not behave differently from one time to another, they do not have mercy on the victims of their power. Gravity can help or it can hurt but it consistently follows the laws that define it.

Natural disasters and sickness happen because natural and spiritual laws "react" against each other. And it is good that they do – even though natural disasters and sickness are not good. It is good because this makes for a stable

and constant world. It is against this stable and constant background that spiritual laws and spiritual values can be freely instilled in a person, because we can choose the spiritual over the physical.

Our natural environment can produce hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and famines. But it produces these things according to unchanging natural laws that we can understand and work with. It is hard to imagine a natural environment that contained no barriers or threats to human life. A stable world, however, provides a platform within which we can live. The following teachings refer to this:

The lowest elements of nature that constitute our soils are dead. They are not varied and changeable in response to our states of feeling and thought the way they are in the spiritual world, but are unchangeable and stable. They have this stable nature because this is where creation comes to a close and remains at rest. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 160)

The reason for the creation of the dead sun is so that in final forms everything may be set and stable and lasting. This is the only way creation can have a foundation. Our globe of lands and seas, with things like this in and on and around it, is like a solid base, since it is the final work in which everything comes to a close, on which everything rests. It is a kind of matrix from which are produced the effects that are the goals of creation. (*Ibid.* 165)

The idea here is that the natural world is a solid base that provides a stable environment that can support life as long as its requirements are met. Even though everything in this world is created by God and has an origin that is essentially spiritual, its existence and function are guided by natural laws. This means that gravity is not affected by the need for mercy, that the crops of a good person and an evil person will grow regardless of each farmer's spiritual state. It means that you get sick because you were exposed to a harmful pathogen, not because you are evil. It means that bullets hit or miss depending on the aim of the shooter not the goodness of their target. The hurricane is not sent by God to punish us, it is a product of the physical laws that govern weather.

Diseases are a complicated example of the interaction of spiritual and natural forces. They are not created by God and yet they exist. How does this work? Here are a few passages describing the way that they come into being:

Natural disasters happen because natural and spiritual laws "react" against each other. And it is good that they do – even though natural disasters are not good. It is good because this makes for a stable and constant world.

These passages explain that the origin of diseases is a spiritual one and that they are therefore caused by the forces of hell. . . . (But) human evils are only the means by which a disease is brought into existence from the hells, not that a person needs to be evil to fall victim to the disease.

Spiritual sicknesses are evils destructive of the life of a will desiring what is good and falsities destructive of the life of an understanding seeing what is true, in short things destructive of spiritual life composed of faith and charity. Natural sicknesses also correspond to such things, for every sickness present among the human race has its origin in spiritual ones, because each exists as a result of sin. Each sickness furthermore corresponds to its own evil. The explanation for this is that everything composing a person's life originates in the spiritual world. If therefore his spiritual life is sick, evil spreads from it into his natural life and becomes a sickness there. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8364)

All human sicknesses have a correspondence with the spiritual world. For nothing at all comes into being in the natural creation that does not have a correspondence with the spiritual world. (*Ibid.* 5711)

But it is only permitted to evil spirits to inflow into the desires and falsities

pertaining to a person – not into a person's organs. Only when man falls into disease, then they inflow also into those [organs] in man where the disease is. For nothing ever exists with people, except from a cause from the spiritual world. Still, this does not interfere with the fact that they can be, and also ought to be, cured, or made sound, by natural means. The Lord's providence then concurs with such means. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4585)

The spirits out of such hells are not present with the sick; but there is a general sphere, and general influx, from such heats, that are at once appropriated by the disease itself. (*Ibid.* 4591)

These passages explain that the origin of diseases is a spiritual one and that they are therefore caused by the forces of hell. This makes it sound as though it is our evils that cause us to be sick. These passages point out, though, that human evils are only the means by which a disease is brought into existence from the hells, not that a person needs to be evil to fall victim to the disease. That is, the evils that people commit create the conditions that allow evil spirits to bring diseases into the physical world. But once they exist here they attack both the good and the evil.

If there was no evil there would be no sickness:

If this were so people would not know any sickness and would grow weak only as they approached extreme old age, until they became a young child again, but

now a young child with wisdom.
 And when their body was no longer
 able to serve their internal person,
 which is their spirit, they would pass,
 without knowing any sickness, from
 their earthly body into a body such
 as angels possess, and so would pass
 from the world directly into heaven.
 (*Arcana Coelestia* 5726)

In other words, if evil did not exist
 there would be no diseases. People
 would still grow old and die, but
 the process would be beautiful and
 painless.

Once a sickness or disease is
 brought into being, however, it obeys
 the laws that govern all natural
 phenomena. People do not become ill
 because they are evil but because they
 are exposed to a disease that they are
 vulnerable to, or due to some other
 physical reason. Some of these might
 have been avoided but many of them
 could not have been avoided. Our
 spiritual state may be one aspect of our
 vulnerability, but our vulnerability is a complex combination of many different
 factors. Diseases, like bullets, car crashes, and natural disasters, affect the good
 and the evil alike.

This also leaves open the possibility that improvements in humanity's
 spiritual condition could be the most important key to reducing sickness
 and disease. If people were better fewer diseases would find their way into
 the natural world from the hells. We would also be more resistant to existing
 diseases. Even in natural terms, lifestyle choices and such things as sanitation,
 hygiene, insect control and dietary factors are responsible for a huge percentage
 of human illness. Everyone knows that improvements in these areas would
 bring massive improvements in human health.

What good can come out of these kinds of hardships? Here are some
 passages that address this:

No evil is permitted by the Lord, except to the end that good may come of it,
 namely, that truth and good may be brought into shape and strengthened with
 those who are in temptation. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6574)

There is nothing
 actually good about the
 hardships and afflictions
 that cause so much hurt
 in our world. . . . But
 there is something very
 good about a world that
 is working to overcome
 its problems, about
 humanity's search for
 understanding, about
 people's day-to-day
 efforts to make their
 world a better place.

Natural temptations emulate spiritual temptations. (*Ibid.* 847)

The purpose of temptations is that the external side of a person may be subdued and so made subservient to the internal. This may become clear to anyone from the fact that as soon as a person's loves are assaulted and crushed, as they are in times of misfortune, sickness and mental illness, his evil desires start to subside. And as they subside the person begins to talk of more devout things. (*Ibid.* 857)

Life's challenges cause us to consider carefully what it is that is truly important to us. They cause us to employ effort in a way that would never happen if our lives were easy. They suppress our irresponsible thoughts and desires. When we struggle against some natural condition, such as poverty, hunger or disease, it emulates and involves a similar kind of effort as our struggles against the negative spiritual conditions that oppress our spirit – such as selfishness, laziness, envy and greed.

An important good that can come out of evil is empathy and kindness.

When a person feels or perceives within himself that he has thoughts regarding the Lord which are good, and thoughts regarding the neighbor which are good; and when he wishes to perform acts of kindness for him, but not for the sake of any gain or for the sake of his own position; and when he feels that he has pity for anyone who suffers misfortune, and more so for him who struggles with faith, he may then know that he is “dwelling in the tents of Shem” that is, that there are with him things of an internal nature by means of which the Lord is working. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1102)

It may seem inexplicable that God would create a world where suffering is both possible and common. When you consider the possibilities, though, it may not seem so strange.

Imagine a world where bullets could never find their mark, or where they could never have been invented or thought of in the first place. Imagine a world where food was abundant regardless of any human efforts, and where conflict over resources was not possible. Imagine a world where there was no alternative way of thinking, feeling or behaving than ways that were loving, thoughtful and intelligent. Imagine a world where there were no harmful animals, where our bodies could not be harmed by any existing force, where even falling from high cliffs would cause no harm, or where drowning, freezing, electrocution or poisoning simply couldn't happen.

Would that really be a better world? Yes, of course it would, we might think. But if we consider what life would actually be like under those conditions, we might change our minds. It is one thing to work to make the world safer, to try to eliminate hunger and injustice, and to make every effort to eradicate disease and war. It would be quite another thing to live in a world where negative things of any kind are not possible or even imaginable.

There is nothing actually good about the hardships and afflictions that

cause so much hurt in our world. There is nothing good about disease, poverty and war. But there is something very good about a world that is working to overcome its problems, about humanity's search for understanding, about people's day-to-day efforts to make their world a better place.

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.



Appropriating Good and Evil

The Rev. James P. Cooper

(Reprinted from *The New Church Canadian*)

It is a remarkable truth that everything of good and truth that enters our mind actually flows in from heaven, and that all falsities and evils flow in from hell. It may feel to us as if these ideas and feelings originate in our own minds, but they do not. The idea that all the activity in our minds comes from outside sources may be upsetting at first – but this concept is essential to our understanding of our own responsibility for the evils that we think about and do, and at the same time our understanding of our part in the good that we do.

If we try to step back from our own personal involvement in this issue, if we try to be objective, perhaps we can see that there really is only one life in the universe, and that is God. He created the universe and continually re-creates it by flowing into the ultimates of nature which have been created by Him to receive His life.

This view of creation is quite different from the popular scientific theories of the day where it is believed that life arose spontaneously when the proper mix of chemicals happened to occur. Today, scientists dig deeper and deeper into the molecular structure of the cell in order to discover life, but can only be frustrated in their search, for they are looking at a structure created to receive and hold life, not life itself.

This belief that life can be found within the physical structure of natural things is quite old. It leapt to dominance with the invention of the microscope in the 17th Century. Emanuel Swedenborg was one of many scientists who believed that the microscope would be the tool to help them discover the soul within the fibers of the body itself.

We know that Swedenborg spent many years studying human anatomy in order to find the soul and wrote a series of books detailing that search. The results of his search led him away from science to philosophy, and again, he wrote several important books documenting his search for the soul within the human mind. But the only thing he proved to himself is that the soul could not be found by philosophy either, and so finally from being a philosopher, he

became a theologian. His eyes were opened to see the spiritual world, and he then experienced first-hand the influx of the Lord's life through the heavens into each individual human being.

Swedenborg saw that the heavens had not been created merely as some kind of cosmic playground for favored spirits, but that it had a specific use to men on earth. Just as the earth itself has a series of atmospheres that protect those on its surface from the full effects of the power of the sun, the heavens serve as spiritual atmospheres to protect us from the full power of God's presence.

The Divine life flows into the celestial heaven where it is received by the angels, modified by them, and passed on to the spiritual heaven. There it is modified again and passed on to the natural heaven, and from there into the world of spirits. There are those who have recently died and who have not yet made the choice between heaven and hell.

The states of these spirits are most like our own, and therefore it is these spirits, both good and evil, that are most closely associated with us while we live in the world, and who serve to pass the Divine influx on to us. We sense this kind of inflowing life as the various ideas and feelings that pop into our minds during the day.

However, even though these ideas originate in the spiritual world, we still have the power to direct our mind in certain directions, to invite thoughts and the spirits associated with them. One way of understanding how this works is to think how a radio works. Our earthly atmosphere is full of electromagnetic pulses over a great range of frequencies.

Anyone who has ever played with a short-wave receiver has a feeling for how many different signals are available at any given time, and there are many other kinds of signals as well: FM, television, and microwave. But we do not hear them with our ears, because we are not "tuned in," we don't have a radio. When you turn the radio on, you can spin the tuning dial and hear all kinds of programs, and stop when you find something that appeals to you. Your mind works in a very similar way.

The spiritual world is broadcasting all kinds of thoughts all the time, both good and evil. This is why the Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount that we had to be concerned not only with actual evils, but also with the thoughts that flow in and cause them. But the choices we have made, the kind of character we have developed, make us more susceptible to certain kinds of ideas, and to be completely deaf to others.

A person who enjoys a warm, happy relationship with a spouse simply doesn't hear the lustful ideas that pass through. That person is "tuned out" because they do not make a one with the affections of the heart. On the one hand, our basic character effectively filters out a lot of the ideas, but still we

If we will only remember that all life is from the Lord, and that all these things flow in from Him, then we are free to pick what will be a part of our own spiritual character.

are free to turn our minds to any that appeal to us, we can direct our thought and concentrate in a particular direction, or on a particular subject. It's like "fine-tuning."

There is a common perception with people that evil ideas come from hell, and that good ideas come from the Lord through heaven. Who has not seen the cartoons that represent our temptations by showing a little angel and a little devil, each sitting on a shoulder and whispering in the ear?

While we instinctively understand and agree with this illustration of the good and evil influences in our lives, hardly anyone actually uses these commonly known truths in their own lives! We act as if all the evil ideas that pop into our minds are our own. And because we think they are ours, we love them and try to think up many ways to defend them. We learn to weave truths and falsities together so as to make evil seem to be good.

This is exactly what the hells want us to think. They know that if we took one second to think rationally about where these ideas come from, we would know that they come from hell, and flee from them. We could more easily fight temptation if we believed, truly believed, that our desire to do evil comes from hell, from outside of ourselves.

Think how often we can be convinced to do something if we can be tricked into thinking it was our own idea in the first place. If we think another person is forcing us to do something, we resist, even if it is something pleasant, because our freedom of choice is more precious to us than anything.

Humanists will tell us that people are inherently good and therefore do not need to be saved. The Reformed Christian Church tells us that mankind since the fall is inherently evil and can only be saved by faith. The New Christian Church says that everyone, by birth, is neither.

Everyone is nothing other than the sum total of the choices freely made during the course of adult life. Neither good nor evil are ours from birth. We have a hereditary tendency to evil, but it is only an inclination to certain evils, not the actual evils themselves.

The Lord has seen to it that our inclination to evil is exactly balanced by an equal inclination to do good through our remains of good and truth. Just as we are not compelled to act according to our hereditary tendencies to evil, neither are we compelled to act according to our hereditary goods, or remains. We are

free to choose what we do and who we shall be for ourselves.

Since our hereditary inclination to evil is from our parents, and our remains are the Lord's things with us, we actually begin life with nothing of our own and so must choose those things that will be ours to eternity, goods and truths or evils and falsities, that are in accord with our affections and delights.

If we will only remember that all life is from the Lord, and that all these things flow in from Him, then we are free to pick what will be a part of our own spiritual character. Both evil and good are outside of us, and we can choose to bring them in by our own actions, that is, appropriate them.

It is an absolute principle of the New Church that the Lord continually strives to protect and provide for everyone's spiritual freedom. We feel this freedom while we are on earth in the fact that we can think and believe anything we wish. And, to a large extent, we are free to do whatever we want, except as we are restrained by our fears of the loss of our reputation among people, our honor, and our personal gain.

We are even free to believe that we live from ourselves, although this belief is the source of most of our spiritual difficulties. We are even free to do evil from intention or by accident.

The reality is that we are only vessels created to receive life from the Lord. The living vessel is flawed and tends to evils of every kind. The Lord counteracts this by inflowing into the secret parts of our minds with affections for good and truth. Thus we live in a balance, an equilibrium between what is evil on the one hand and what is good on the other. We are even given the feeling that we live from ourselves so that we can feel the delights of life as our own.

Our character becomes the sum of the choices we make from an infinite array of ideas and feelings that flow in from the spiritual world, which we can then make our own by living according to them. We are in control of our own lives only when we believe and live according to the truth that the ideas and feelings are not ours, but inflow from the spiritual world. We must not feel guilty for evil thoughts and feelings unless we invite them, encourage them, cherish them, and through intention and act make them our own.

If we could really believe that temptations of evil are from hell, that they

Our character becomes the sum of the choices we make from an infinite array of ideas and feelings that flow in from the spiritual world, which we can then make our own by living according to them.

are hell trying to pull us down by deception, to make us do what the devils want, it would be much easier to reject those temptations. But, if we persist in our belief that we live from ourselves, then the devils of hell can easily persuade us that evil is ours as well, that it is from our own personal loves, and will therefore delight us.

We become guilty of evil only when we believe that we live from ourselves, and that all our thoughts and ideas are our own. We could just as easily choose good if we would accept the truth that life is a gift from the Lord for us to freely use.

“If a person believed, as is the truth, that all good and truth are from the Lord and all evil and falsity from hell, he would not appropriate good to himself and consider it merited, nor evil and make himself responsible for it.”
(Divine Providence 320)



The Rev. James P. Cooper is retired. He had been pastor of the Olivet Society in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He serves as Bishop's Representative to Canada and Chaplain of the Military Service Committee. He and his wife, Karen (Jorgenson), live in Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada. Contact: rev.james.cooper@gmail.com

Boynton Beach Retreat 2020

WE ARE ALL SOWERS

Bruce Henderson

Five speakers made presentations at this year's Boynton Beach Retreat on different subjects but all relating to the Parable of the Sower – looking for ways to cooperate with the Lord by sowing seeds to spread His Church.

- **Chelsea Rose Odhner** spoke at all four sessions on: *Love Unites Differences – Finding the Lord's Church Through Exploring Other Faiths*; *Confident Hope – Writing New Church Music*; and two sessions on her work with *offTheLeftEye* videos for the Swedenborg Foundation.
- **Devin Zuber** offered three presentations on his new book, *A Language of Things: Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination*.
- **Bruce Henderson** spoke at two sessions on his books: *Window to Eternity, Why Does God Let It Happen?* and *A New Key to the Bible*.
- **The Rev. Alan Cowley** also presented for two days on *The Use and Governance of Associate Spirits*.
- **Tim Bilger** gave a one-day update of highlights from the Swedenborg Foundation.
- **The Rt. Rev. David L. Lindrooth** spoke at the banquet on the Grand Man Project – building community within the Church. He enlarges on this in his report *From the Bishop's Office* on page 146.



HARMONY IN CONNECTIONS

Chelsea Odhner

Chelsea Odhner is a key member of the team that produces the highly popular *offTheLeftEye* videos, but explores other ways as well to bring people together.

Love Unites Differences: Finding the Lord's Church Through Exploring Other Faiths

Chelsea told of being in an airport in China in 2006 and seeing a family frustrated from a long journey trying unsuccessfully to access a luggage cart. She realized

there was a coin slot at the far end and quickly used a few spare coins to rent them a cart. They could not communicate in words but the gestures of gratitude and relief made a profound impression.

She reflected: “When presented with difference, do we retreat, or go near? Perhaps my own experience as ‘the stranger’ in China had prepared me to mount this opportunity to help these strangers with courage.”

It reaffirmed a teaching she had known since childhood from Swedenborg about how kindness and love render all differences benign. “Mutual love and charity bring people together into one despite the variety among them, because it draws unity out of variety.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1285:3) Experiencing the truth of this inspired her to carry it forward.

She feels the peaceful coexistence of religious diversity is a puzzle we’re still figuring out “and it is crucial to the possibility of heaven on earth.” We know from the Writings that “the distinctions among communities (in heaven) are created by differences in mutual love and faith in the Lord,” (*Secrets of Heaven* 684) yet they live together in harmony.

There is a paradox here. The highest angels feel a keen sense of their own identity while also having a heightened awareness and perception of how their life is entirely from the Lord.

What applies to our individual identities also applies to religious communities. As we come together the variety isn’t erased but can become mutually uplifting. This is what happens, she said, when we acknowledge and value differences between faiths with love while pursuing common ground.

So in any interaction we have the choice “to have the differences be paramount or to let love imbue the differences and turn the moment into one of kindness and support.”

Chelsea’s fascination with religious diversity has guided much of her life experience – including traveling to China to study traditional Chinese medicine, and the study of yoga philosophy and practice. It’s why she once catered a Passover Seder for a Jewish family. “Perhaps it was from a longing to explore how love could weave such differences together into one fabric.”

She found context in *Heaven and Hell* 328: “The Lord’s Church is spread throughout the whole world. It is universal, then, and consists of all individuals who have lived in the virtue of their thoughtfulness according to the principles of their religions.”

She is drawn to varieties in faith and religion because they are the peak of all differences – the most personal and intimate, relating to each person’s relationship with God – and ultimately our place in heaven.

She felt challenged to find her own place. “How do I make my own choice of faith without it being a value judgment on another’s?” She created a path of exploration and self-discovery for herself which she called the Common

Heart Project. Her goals for this project were to promote interreligious understanding, find evidence of the universal church, and aid her search for her own religious identity.

She began recording conversations with people about the lived experience of their faith. No matter what that faith, “we all swim in the same water of spiritual life,” with truths or ideas that impact how we think, live and love. She developed her own guidelines which each partner agrees to before conversing. This effort was supported by the Dialogue Institute at Temple University and Interfaith Philadelphia.

With most of these conversations this was their first exposure to Swedenborg “so I got lots of experience explaining how the New Church fits within the greater context of Christianity and world religions.”

She shared several of these conversations – what she learned in the process, and what they learned from her. One conversation with a 60-year-old Iranian-American Baha’i named Nahid – ended with Nahid saying, “Basically we believe the same thing.”

The whole process confirmed what she had grown up with about the universal church and that “when you’re looking for common ground in a safe setting, we are able to reveal eternal truths together and experience how our unique faiths can support and uplift one another.”

“Rather than get muddled, my sense of God got richer and deeper through this experience. It refined my sense of who God is.” And she got to experience how “when you have love as the core principle, then truth shines in its own light. The wisdom of our faiths could shine together and serve the love we shared.” (A selection of her Common Heart Conversations can be heard at www.chelrose.com/conversations.)

Confident Hope: Writing New Church Music

Chelsea’s second session focused on her passion for music, which is always evolving and reflecting our culture. She is inspired to use music to express her faith and has produced a CD, *Confident Hope*. It is not definitive of the New Church but fits with the overall vision. She feels that as the New Church grows, so will its musical expression.

She tries to convey in her music the depth of Scripture. The way that John and Lori Odhner have used words of Scripture in music has been an inspiration. There is great power in blending the words and music to move us emotionally.

Her own spiritual trials helped her with this music. She approaches the Word with a sense that she will find what she needs because her personal journey is mirrored in the stories there. The Psalms, for instance, often use

the word “wicked” referring to a part of ourselves. But overall there is always a voice of protection – to save us, not condemn us.

She likes to see the Word as an active power within us and finds a special richness in the Prophets. Swedenborg’s own copy of the Word is loaded with his personal notes there.

All of this is wonderfully accessible through music. Chelsea likes to personalize what she reads by looking for the love within. Creating her own CD is her contribution to the development of New Church music.

She shared a few of her songs, such as *Gyre of Praise*, based on the *Psalms* and *Daniel*, and a prophetic song, *Prayer of Habakkuk*. (If you would like a copy of Chelsea’s CD use the contact information at the end of this report.)

Nourishing the New Church through the *offTheLeftEye* Community

Chelsea focused her last two presentations on her work with the highly successful *offTheLeftEye* YouTube channel. YouTube was created in 2005 as a video platform that has experienced enormous growth and been bought by Google.

In 2010 Curtis and Matthew Childs began using it for *offTheLeftEye* videos. They wanted to get Swedenborg into the mix of religious discussion and began making short videos – most notably “You Are the Lungs,” portraying the Grand Human and introducing Swedenborgian thought. In 2013 the effort all became part of the Swedenborg Foundation.

The technology of YouTube changed the way they did things and encouraged longer videos. This was 2014, when Chelsea joined the team. (It includes her father, the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose, Karin Childs, mother of Curtis and Matthew, Stewart Farmer, Chara Cooper Daum, Chris Dunn and others.)

That’s when they launched their live show, “Swedenborg and Life,” and since, the *offTheLeftEye* YouTube channel has grown to having more than a million views per quarter around the world and projects to reach 100,000 subscribers this year. She has witnessed a whole new paradigm for taking the New Church into the world, including 584,000 unique viewers in just the last three months.

People are not only watching but commenting and asking questions, including 4,500 in just the past month. And everyone gets a response. It’s inspiring to feel a part of this community.

The three most popular broadcasts have been: What Happens Immediately After You Die? 5 Reunions in the Afterlife. And, How to Find True Intuition (angelic perception). Among the most popular topics are spirits, angels, mental health, living a spiritual life, and the afterlife.

“So how do we support this growing community? It’s a core part of who

we are. We respond carefully to every inquiry, to honor their experience, and to build trust through embodying our teachings.”

There’s a seven-member team of moderators. They are trained in established practices for best responses, guided by: how would an angel show up for this person? They are always friendly, grounded in love. They respect where inquirers are coming from and try to simplify the teachings for them: is this what you need to know? Part of this outreach extends to a Facebook group: Watching and Reading Swedenborg.

“What we are finding, is that there are huge numbers throughout the world who are New Church right now.” People are tuning in from 76 countries – the United States first, then India, Philippines, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, South Africa, Sweden, Ghana and Mexico. These people are adopting the teachings in their lives as a real part of the church universal.

Where will this lead us as a Church? And how are we adapting to all this?

“What we’re learning is that the New Church can be there for a great many people and it doesn’t require them leaving their faith of origin. But it requires a lot of support and patience. We are sowing the broadest concept of loving the neighbor. We don’t argue with people; we try to connect with them through love and what we have in common.”

Producing Swedenborgian Content for the World

The internet has greatly increased opportunities to share the teachings of the Church and we are developing strategies to bring them to the largest possible audience. We are committed to maintaining the integrity of the Writings.

Our digital strategy is to find out what people are searching for. There is a real science to this and we are always “upping our game” to find matches. As a result of our efforts YouTube has recommended us to viewers 31 million times.

It is good to challenge ourselves to meet people where they are. Their response to the videos helps guide our response to them.

There is a three-week rotation of three core programs: “Swedenborg and Life” videos are offered in carefully produced 30-minute segments, followed the next week by “Swedenborg & Life Live” which is broadcast live and has a biblical focus. On the third week is aired a live one-hour question-and-answer panel show, “Good Question.” Beyond these, there are two episodes of “News from Heaven,” a 20-minute show which airs on Thursdays and Saturdays. And they are working on creating short animated videos. There is an eight-person team involved in all this. The show writers refer to themselves endearingly as “Swedenborg Nerds.”

There is a lot of planning for each effort, carefully sequencing ideas to help viewers understand the message. Thought goes into how best to deliver

the message: reading, animating, diagrams, etc. “We acknowledge people’s doubts and simply offer a Swedenborgian perspective as food for thought.” Optimizing our ability to perform in the YouTube algorithm – through high quality of writing, production and digital strategy – we’ve been able to extend our reach dramatically, maximizing the opportunity for people in the world to interface with New Church teachings.

“We know we are doing good in the world. And that feels good.”

Chelsea Rose Odhner and her husband, Johan, live in Glenside, Pennsylvania, with their three children. Contact: crodhner@gmail.com



SWEDENBORG AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Devin Zuber

Devin Zuber, who grew up in Mitchellville, Maryland, with the Washington New Church, is associate professor of American Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. This includes the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, affiliated with the Convention Church, which used to be housed in the School of Religion in Boston. Devin spoke about his new book: *A Language of Things – Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination*.

Those roots in Boston run deep. This was the oldest Swedenborgian theological school in the country, dating to the end of the Civil War in 1865. It was surrounded by Harvard University and dwindling enrollment forced the sale of much of the ground to Harvard in 2001. But the Church has held on to the beautiful stone chapel – an oasis of Swedenborgian identity in the academic landscape.

The school moved to “Holy Hill” in Berkeley as part of the largest ecumenical graduate institution in the country, representing every major religion. Devin finds this a unique and satisfying theological landscape, with more than 900 students studying religion and philosophy.

His specialty is American history, including a course on William Blake and Swedenborg. Dr. James Lawrence, head of the Center, teaches theology, with some remote assistance from the Rev. George Dole. Dr. Rebecca Kline Esterson, daughter of the Rt. Rev. Tom and Nina Kline, is also on the faculty.

They don’t just train ministers there but also offer a certified program for masters and doctoral programs and plug Swedenborg into academic subjects. Devin finds it a fascinating place to be, where the Swedenborgian vision often fits into various studies.

As an example, he played a video featuring the Rev. Sage Cole, pastor of that Swedenborgian Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, about her plan to create a Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center there. Ms. Cole was in Bryn Athyn in March speaking about her plan to honor Helen Keller's Swedenborgian faith.

Devin noted that the College for the Blind is just down the street from the Chapel, and that Swedenborg became Helen Keller's spiritual guide who helped her to "see" doctrine clearly. Sage Cole's mission is to bring Swedenborg to a world that is increasingly deaf and blind to spirituality. She saw an opportunity to create a useful center to honor Helen Keller and her legacy – part of which is translating the Writings into Braille.

In writing *A Language of Things* Devin wanted to translate Swedenborg forward to the present time. Living in California is being on the front line of climate change and he is concerned about the future – particularly for his children. The book is written for a secular, academic audience, with perspective from a number of prominent thinkers, artists and writers influenced by Swedenborg.

One turning point was James Watt's steam engine, which used some of Swedenborg's thinking in its design. It opened a whole new era of carbon-based technology, with obvious advancements for society but new – and largely unseen – threats to the environment. We have become increasingly aware that the world is under constant change – and that change all originates in the spiritual world.

Devin particularly focuses on John Muir, "the father of environmentalism," and George Inness, a major American landscape painter who was profoundly influenced by Swedenborg. He also lauded the role of Johnny Appleseed, both for his environmental sustainability and his devotion to spreading the Writings.

So, how does Swedenborg influence the modern view of the natural world?

One example is Richard Powers, noted American author of 12 novels. His most recent is *The Overstory*, a paean to the wonder of trees and old-growth forests, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction last year. Powers clearly sees nature as a theater for divine influx.

The iconic Sierra Club traces its roots in the late 1800s to the painting studio of a Swedenborgian and the enlightenment of leading thinkers influenced by Swedenborg: John Muir, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and artist William Keith. They were devoted to preserving and protecting the natural world.

Emerson, who owned more than 32 books by or about Swedenborg, most notably credited him for that influence in his famous 1850 essay, *Representative Men*. His meeting with John Muir also proved transformative.

William Keith was a self-taught landscape painter out of the Hudson

River School and his first wife was Emerson's cousin. He was devastated when she died – and comforted when he was given a copy of *Heaven and Hell*. His paintings – including *The Glory of the Heavens* – took on a decided Swedenborgian influence, focusing on spiritual states and the unity of nature and the spirit.

Joseph Wooster, a Swedenborgian pastor in California, had considerable influence but humbly wished just to be useful, not focus on himself, so he burned all of his papers. But he left his mark in the unique interior design of the Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco, which includes leaving the bark on tree branches that arc over the nave, creating the feeling of entering a forest. And two “Swedenborgian” paintings by Keith take the place of windows.

Devin was delighted to find forgotten pressed wild flowers in a book Emerson had given to Muir about Yosemite. He resisted an urge and gave them back to Yosemite for its collection.

Nineteenth century writers and philosophers helped to raise environmental awareness and Devin cited chapters in his book about Inness and author Sarah Orne Jewett. One of her most celebrated books is *A White Heron* – a song of praise to the spiritual sense of nature, imbued with Swedenborg's influence. She was especially enamored with birds and was a charter member of the Audubon Society.

Jewett was influenced by Theophilus Parsons, a professor of law at Harvard who was also a prominent leader in Swedenborgian thought. There is a rich collection of letters between the two of them, giving much insight into her devotion to Swedenborg. This is reflected in her collection of stories about her Maine town, *Deephaven*, and its spiritual connections to nature.

The Audubon Society was launched in 1905 in response to a fashion craze for the feathers of herons and other exotic birds for stylish women's hats. This almost rendered the birds extinct and John James Audubon founded the society to halt the slaughter and save the birds. A bit ironically, Audubon killed many birds himself to pose them for his stunning *Birds of America* illustrations.

At the same time, Paul Kroger was leading a similar fight to save the water birds on Pelican Island, Florida, which led to President Teddy Roosevelt creating America's first national park there.

That book by Sarah Jewett, *A White Heron*, was enormously popular because it articulated the spirituality within nature – drawn from her study of Swedenborg. Indeed, her writing was in harmony with the paintings of Inness, the most significant of the 19th century Swedenborgian artists, who strove in his art to capture the essence of the spiritual world.

The Florida wetlands became the front line for protecting birds' habitat. George Inness Hartley, grandson of the painter, captured the importance of the crusade in his book, *The Importance of Bird Life*.

Inness was first introduced to Swedenborg at the Eagleswood Military Academy in New Jersey, which was strongly antislavery and training soldiers for the North during the Civil War. It was also devoted to Swedenborg's teachings about heaven and the philosophy of French scholar Charles Fourier.

Fourier developed a systematic set of economic, political and social beliefs as a form of utopian socialism. It was all based on a presumption of the existence of God and a divine social order as a driving force of human development.

The late Dr. Robert Gladish, former Dean of Bryn Athyn College, linked Fourier and Swedenborg in a book: *Swedenborg, Fourier and the America of the 1840s*.

Inness was also influenced by Henry George, whose books such as *Progress and Poverty* attracted many Swedenborgian readers. Inness particularly liked the way George depicted laborers, which is reflected in his art.

Inness's paintings are known for a special luminescence – a kind of spiritual light – especially *The New Jerusalem*, painted in 1867. It is renowned for illustrating the harmony of the natural and spiritual worlds. Unfortunately, many of his paintings were lost in a fire in Madison Square Garden in New York in 1866. But fragments of *The New Jerusalem* were recovered and restored.

All of this relates to Daniel Burnham, famous Swedenborgian architect and urban planner known for his development of Chicago and the “White City” World Exposition that gave it prominence throughout the world. Burnham was influenced by such New Church artists as George Inness, who depicted for him – and all of us – what the New Jerusalem descending might actually look like.

Devin Zuber lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife, Suzanne (Schwarz), and their two daughters. He had taught previously at the University of Osnabrueck and been affiliated with the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library in London, the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning About Religion and Theology at Wabash College in Stockholm University, and the Rachel Carson Center for the Environment in Munich, Germany. Contact: devinzuber@gmail.com

Book-Length Outreach



Bruce Henderson

Bruce has written three books over the past 30 years as gateways to key teachings of the New Church: *Window to Eternity* (life after death); *Why Does God Let it Happen?* (Divine providence); and *A New Key to the Bible* (the internal sense).

So why write books that take years to produce? He had a full-time career in journalism as an editorial page editor, plus a full life of marriage, family and volunteer service.

Well, you write a book when you can no longer not write it. The increasing popularity of near-death experiences and the ongoing need for comfort and answers encouraged him to share the revelation we have been given.

We have been given so much – about the life after death, the Lord’s providence, and the spiritual sense of the Word – and may take it for granted at times. But as we are commanded in the Great Commission, it’s a gift we are called to share with a hungry world.

Like the Parable of the Sower we are all sowing seeds to serve the Lord and never know which will fall in good ground. Many people have said about his book on the life after death: “This isn’t what my church teaches, but it’s what I’ve always believed.”

The goal is to provide readable, clear introductions to our basic doctrines and leave readers wanting more. Many church members give the books to friends in times of need, but also find them good refreshers about their own beliefs.

One of Bruce’s guides: Don’t challenge readers’ beliefs; just give them better stories. We have better stories, starting with relating faith to life: Why am I here? What is my purpose?

He told of his wife, Carol, leading a tour at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, who was asked: What does this religion mean to you? She was on the spot but gave a good answer: “Well, it gives us a confidence that we know why we’re here and where we’re going.”

A good friend – not in the Church – once was asked by an insurance salesman what was her goal in life? He wasn’t ready for her answer: to get to heaven. But that resonates. We all want to get to heaven but long to know more about what that means.

We are blessed with a lot of the answers people seek – and are charged with sharing them. These books are one way to tell that story and answer the questions everyone ponders.

Window to Eternity

This was published in 1987 – more than 30 years ago – and has been reprinted several times. It remains a best-seller for the Swedenborg Foundation, publisher of all three of Bruce’s books.

It begins with universal questions: What happens when I die? What happens to loved ones? Will I ever see them again? Is life after death real? And what does it look like?

Near-death experiences and popular books like *Life After Life* provided some answers but not enough. These people no longer fear death because they've "been there." But everyone wants more, and the Lord has given us answers.

The book emphasizes that everyone is born for heaven, and everyone can attain it. That's an appealing teaching – that no matter your circumstances you can get into heaven if that is what you truly want. That's why there are 12 gates to the Golden City – heaven – in *Revelation*.

Our life after death is determined by the choices we make on earth, and we are always free to choose. Choosing a spiritual direction in life makes us better people and a better world.

Many people fear the unknown. Hamlet ruminated about "the dread of something after death." Woody Allen quipped: "I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens."

The goal of the book is to offer comfort, strengthen faith, overcome fear, and change people's lives for the better. It all begins with our free choices determining our destiny.

One chapter is devoted to Swedenborg – telling his story and his gift as the Lord's revelator and servant. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said: "To my mind, the only light that has been cast on the other life is found in Swedenborg's philosophy. It explains much that was incomprehensible."

The book explains what happens when we die and life in heaven. It describes the gentle, loving process of awakening in the spiritual world and the three stages after death: introduction to spiritual life; separation of our internal and external character; and instruction for heaven.

It emphasizes the importance of repentance – shunning evil and becoming as innocent children, willing to follow the Lord. It describes heaven as a kingdom of kindness and usefulness where we are led by what we love.

Two of the most popular chapters in the book are on marriage and children in heaven.

Despite the traditional view of "until death do us part," many happily married people are confident they will be together to eternity.

"One of the most heart-warming visions in the Writings is of a devoted couple growing old together in this world, then growing young together in heaven, with ever-deepening love. One of the brightest promises there is that such pure and joyous love awaits everyone who truly wants it and lives for it."

Bruce quoted from a *Life Line* written for *New Church Life* in 2011:

One of the teachings we treasure from *Heaven and Hell* is that good marriages last to eternity in heaven. But many people who have never read the Writings instinctively believe this is true. They share with poet Emily Dickinson – a devoted

reader of Swedenborg – the heartfelt conviction that “I shall but love thee better after death.”

One great example of this abiding faith was one of the greatest college basketball coaches of all time, who preferred to be known just as a good man who served God and lived his faith.

John Wooden led the UCLA Bruins in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, including 10 national championships and an 88-game winning streak. Throughout it all he was a humble gentleman who never swore – and prohibited his players from swearing – read the Bible every day, and believed in building upstanding men first, then basketball players.

He was absolutely devoted to his wife, Nell. When she died in 1985, he wrote a love letter to her every month and tied the letters in a ribbon on her pillow. He wrote:

“I was never preoccupied with dying. But perhaps like most people, I feared it. Losing Nell cured me of any fear because I believe that when I am called, when the Good Lord beckons according to His plan, I will go to heaven and be with her. Knowing this gives me peace.

“Mind you, I’m in no hurry to leave, but I have no fear of leaving. When the time comes, it will be a very good day – Nell and I will be together again.”

John Wooden passed away (10 years ago), just short of his 100th birthday. His family smiled through their tears. They knew that for him it was a very good day.

The chapter about children in heaven is especially comforting for those dealing with one of life’s greatest tragedies – the loss of a child. To be able to picture that child growing in the peace and beauty of heaven – and knowing they would see him or her again – is the greatest comfort they would ask for.

The book also presents the reality of hell. A recent *New York Times* column questioned the existence of hell. Who would actually choose to go there? And why would a loving God – Savior of all – condemn anyone to hell?

But we know that hell is not some foreign, faraway place. We’ve all been there and glimpsed what it is like. No one is immune and everyone is free to choose between heaven and hell. No one is condemned to hell. Anyone there has freely chosen it and could not stand to be in heaven. Our life after death is all about coming home – home to what we love.

“Part of the problem with developing faith in life after death is that we aren’t inclined to think about death until we have to. And we usually don’t live with much of a sense that our lives on earth are shaping our lives after death.

“Swedenborg’s mission was to make heaven and hell real to us, not just as destinations after death, but as part of our daily lives. We feel the influence of each and make our choice for one or the other throughout our lives. The meaning of life is in the kind of choices we make in life.

“The questions to keep asking yourself are: On the basis of my life so far, how am I projecting eternity? Is what I see what I want? What am I becoming? Am I becoming more angelic through my life, or less so? And what can I do to change?”

A review from Amazon: “This book is a must for anyone seeking something that makes sense and is so easy to understand and accept. A must read for all of us about what heaven really is. Hey, this is about something that is certain to happen to each of us so why wouldn’t we want to know about what is inevitable? I am actually excited about the next chapter ahead.”

Bruce said several people have come into the Church from reading this book. He told of a woman – not in the Church – who’d been struggling since the death of her husband. A friend gave her *Window to Eternity* and she happily reported: “This book has changed my life!”

Why Does God Let It Happen?

This book has a blurb on the cover from Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of the 1980 best-seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*: “The best consideration of God’s role in tragedy from a traditional perspective that I have ever read.” He said the Swedenborg Foundation could use this, so they did.

Kushner and his wife had a son born with a terrible disease that took his life at age 14. Questions about God’s love and providence became intensely personal. The book was the result of his search for answers.

He sees this is a “crossroads of faith” – the only question that really matters. How do we reconcile a loving God with such tragedy for an innocent child? Kushner could not condemn God: “The God I believe in does not send us the problem; He gives us the strength to cope with the problem.”

This is the essence of Divine providence. Kushner’s final chapter – “What good, then, is religion?” – is his own attempt at reconciliation.

When the Foundation sent him the manuscript for *Why Does God Let It Happen?*, he resisted at first. He thought he had already seen all of this. But when he read it he found answers he’d been searching for.

In his book Kushner cites Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the story of a famous rope bridge in Peru in the 1500s that broke, sending five innocent victims to their death. Brother Juniper searches for a common bond that might explain the tragedy. The answers weren’t satisfying.

But 40 years later Wilder wrote another book – *The Eighth Day* – about a man whose life was ruined by bad luck. Here he used a different image – a tapestry. Viewed from the underside we see random threads and knots – the messiness of what our lives can look like. But turn it over and we see what God

sees – a beautiful harmony from all that tangle. This is an image of the Lord’s love and providence leading our lives.

The Writings give us the laws and order of Divine providence, which is never random and leads every aspect of our lives, throughout eternity. The book explains permission: why the Lord allows what He does not will for the sake of our freedom – and only what can be turned to good. “This is a book that takes the blinders off faith. It is ultimately about hope and trust.”

When Jacob fled from Esau in fear after stealing his birthright, he slept in the wilderness and dreamed of a ladder, with angels ascending and descending, and the Lord saying: “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.” This is His promise to all of us, always protecting us with His providence.

Then there is Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, who says when he is reconciled with them: “Even though you intended harm to me, God meant it for good.”

In the Sermon on Mount Jesus says: “For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous.” No one is immune. Even the man who built his house on a rock suffers the storm but survives because of that foundation of truth.

Albert Einstein, explaining why he was not an atheist, said: “God does not play dice.” He wrote: “We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they were written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn’t know what it is.” Thanks to the Lord’s revelation, we know. There is no “mystery” in these books.

Why Does God Let It Happen? answers questions about where God is in the midst of evil, suffering, diseases, disasters. Evil is permitted because we have to know it to shun it – the process that leads us to heaven. We are all touched by evil but are always free to make choices.

Most believers accept some mystery in their faith but want it to make sense. Rabbi Kushner says virtually every meaningful conversation he’s had about religion revolves around justice. And as he learned, it is love and healing that come from God, not affliction.

The Garden of Eden was heaven on earth. What defiled it was Adam and Eve’s free choice – which made them human and makes us human. The Lord never takes that away. We know that if we live good, useful lives, live the 10 Commandments, and place ourselves in the stream of providence – He leads to a good end.

The Writings say little about accidents and disasters but that there is a close relationship between the spiritual and natural worlds. Wars, for instance,

reflect combats between good and evil spirits. There are no “acts of God.” His love and healing are in what follows.

The Lord’s temptations and crucifixion are the ultimate example of permitting what is not His will. This is also the ultimate example of Divine providence – leading to good for all of us.

“In Swedenborg’s Writings, Divine Providence is a profound and complex doctrine, but simple and basic in its concepts. For centuries, theologians have been studying, pondering and debating the way God leads us. But even a child can grasp the premise that He loves each of us and has a plan for our lives. Within His teachings we find complete trust in God and the way He leads. We see Him in all His mercy, feel and understand His love, and begin to comprehend the spiritual plane, where life has its real meaning.”

From two Amazon reviews: “I have searched for spiritual truth for 40 years. This excellent book answers many of my unanswered questions. After reading this book the pieces are finally coming together in the giant jigsaw puzzle. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to better understand God and how things work in His spiritual kingdom.”

“We all have challenges in life as we grow. God does not cause the problems but allows them to help you learn and grow through difficult times. Clear and easy to understand.”

A New Key to the Bible

The year 2011 was the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. It took 47 men seven years to produce this revolutionary work. The Bible had been prohibited outside the Church. This returned it to the masses. It has been a best-seller ever since, with more than a billion copies in print.

It is still the focus of faith and wonder, doubt and mystery, a search for meaning – and controversy. The King James Version was meant to end all argument but only inflamed passions.

During the anniversary year a reporter praised it as “a mighty collection of wisdom, holiness and comfort.” This prompted a scornful letter that he was “so caught up in the language and translation that he missed all the violence: the jealous God full of wrath and vengeance; the genocide; the denigration of women; the approbation of slavery; the approval of incest and infanticide? Extremism to the max! Most of us are taught to revere the Bible, not read it. When I actually did read it I became an atheist.”

That’s an extreme response but understandable. Given only the letter of Word, many are left to wonder why it is so violent and hard to understand.

From the creation story through *Revelation* there is a lot of mystery and a hunger for answers. People wonder: How should we read the Bible? Every

word literally or figuratively? Is all that ancient context still relevant? Could there be a deeper, hidden meaning? How will we know?

Popular novelist Dan Brown took this on in his best-seller, *The Lost Symbol* – a search for the “Lost Word,” once known by ancients for the inner, spiritual meaning of the Bible.

Brown writes: “Few people in history have understood its true message. Within this ancient book are hidden powerful secrets – a vast collection of untapped wisdom waiting to be revealed.”

He says that once people began separating themselves from God and turning away from Him, “We’ve lost the Word, yet its true meaning is still within reach, right before our eyes.” Little did he know.

We know where that inner meaning is revealed – and not buried under the Washington Monument, as Brown spins his story. So, Bruce says, “This is a book I had to write.”

It begins by explaining that the spiritual meaning of the Bible is not readily visible in the literal words alone, just as the soul is invisible in the body. It had to be revealed in a new light.

“I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will lead you into all truth.” (*John 16:12-13*)

This is the revelation – the Spirit of Truth. This is the *New Key to the Bible*.

One story that illustrates the importance of the spiritual sense is God’s command to Joshua to destroy the city of Ai, where 12,000 men, women and children are annihilated and the city is left “forever a heap of ruins.” So, how could a loving God command something so contrary to His nature?

The spiritual meaning explained in the Writings is that these people represent worldly loves and where they lead us. The Lord is not ordering the slaughter of innocents but showing how to rid ourselves of selfishness. The literal sense is hard to accept, but the spiritual sense reveals the true nature of the Lord and the Word to give meaning to our lives.

The emphasis throughout is that the literal sense is holy and meaningful, but the spiritual sense enriches our understanding. The goal is to remove the mystery, reveal the inner spiritual meaning, and strengthen faith.

No matter how ancient or seemingly irrelevant, we need to read the Word with a sense that it is always speaking directly to us.

A Whole New Light on the Bible

The literal sense is essential as the foundation of the Bible but is beautifully enriched in the spiritual sense.

“Swedenborg teaches that the first 11 books of *Genesis*, which include the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, Noah, the flood, and the Tower of Babel, are

divine allegories, not meant to be taken literally. The real meaning is in the symbolism, not in the historical record. That does not diminish them though; it enriches them, with their spiritual meaning lifting them out of ancient context into compelling relevance for our lives.

“This is the way God teaches – not with straightforward lessons but through parables that we have to work at to understand completely. The Bible – from *Genesis* to *Revelation* – can be seen as one continuous parable about our own lives, with layers of meaning hidden in the text.”

A simple example is David and Goliath, a familiar story of good and evil that applies to our own lives. Goliath stands for the pride of intelligence and false ideas. David is the picture of innocence, with five smooth stones – with five signifying “just enough” truth to overcome evil.

“Everything in the Bible not only is holy and spiritually meaningful, but it also speaks to our own lives. The Lord wants us to see these stories of people and events from thousands of years ago as still intensely relevant to us today. By holding up both the literal and internal meanings of the Bible as a mirror for our experiences, Swedenborg invites us to see ourselves and our struggles within Scripture and to find there a path to peace and happiness.”

In The Beginning

The Creation story is not literally true but symbolic for our lives. A whole new meaning is revealed in the six stages (days) of our lives – our own growth and development.

The first 11 chapters of *Genesis* are divine allegory, to be understood spiritually, not literally. Eden is the story of what happens when we turn away from God. This is the fall of the first church – what happens within our own faith. Noah is all about animals and 40 days of rain – but why would God destroy all He had created? It’s really a story about temptations in our lives. The story of Babel is a judgment for turning away from God.

“Throughout all of these stories, we see how we can fall into the trap of self-delusion and egotism, working to promote ourselves at the expense of others. The consequences can be just as disastrous as they were for those in *Genesis* – but there is always hope of turning things around, if we are willing to trust in the Lord.”

Hidden Treasures: Lost and Found

Following the allegorical chapters is the beginning of actual history in the Word – real people and events – but with deeper meaning.

John Bigelow, author of *The Bible that Was Lost and is Found*, was a prominent lawyer, diplomat and editor in New York City. He was also anti-

slavery and just before the Civil War he traveled to Haiti to investigate how former slaves were governing there. He became stranded by an outbreak of yellow fever.

He was a Bible reader troubled by something that didn't make sense: Abram telling Sarai to lie to the Pharaoh and say she was his sister, not his wife. A lone companion in the hotel – whom Bigelow did not know – handed him a copy of *Arcana* with an explanation of the passage.

Bigelow was intrigued and set about devouring everything he could get his hands on by Swedenborg. He was hopeful but skeptical, certain he would find some disqualifying error. But the more he read, the more he was convinced this had to be revelation.

“John Bigelow found Swedenborg as if by chance, after years of puzzling over the Bible's mysteries. His experience was not the same as Paul's epiphany on the road to Damascus but was rather a process fueled by doubt and discovery. Once introduced to Swedenborg's teachings, though, he said he felt like a blind man who suddenly could see. His studies convinced him that the answers he sought – which have also baffled the faithful and skeptics for centuries – lay in a deeper interpretation of the literal words of the Bible.”

In *Exodus* the 40-year journey of Moses and the Children of Israel in the wilderness is really all about our own journey to the Promised Land: heaven.

The New Testament: A New Vision of God

The Old Testament is said to portray an angry, jealous God; the New Testament presents Jesus as loving and forgiving. It is the same God in both; we just see and understand Him in different ways. The Old Testament is like a geode: rough on the outside but sparkling with light inside. The New Testament is like a diamond – already beautiful but all the more dazzling when held up to the light. The Lord came on earth so we could see Him in a new, more personal way.

“Swedenborg explains that the New Testament indeed gives us a new vision of God. He is no longer the distant, sometimes angry God of the Old Testament but a visible God – one who has come down to earth so that people might know Him and see Him in a new way. He wants us to love and understand Him and to feel His presence in our lives. Building a personal relationship with Him is the continuing blessing within our spiritual journey.”

Christmas and Easter: A New Understanding

These are the best known and loved stories in the Word but enhanced and made even more meaningful through their spiritual meaning. There is abundant symbolism, from the stable and Wise Men's gifts to the trappings of

the Easter story. Christmas is all about why the Lord came on earth. Easter is about fulfilling that purpose. Both speak to our journey.

Revelation: A Bright and Morning Star

The *Book of Revelation* is the most challenging to understand without the internal sense. Swedenborg needed all of *Apocalypse Revealed* and *Apocalypse Explained* to reveal the spiritual meaning.

“Dan Brown’s *Lost Symbol* is a search for a key to unlock the inner meaning of the Bible. Swedenborg claims to have been given that key. And nowhere is the symbolism of the Bible more important, enigmatic, inscrutable, and in need of a key than it is in the book of *Revelation*.

“Many scholars consider it an unfathomable mystery, perhaps not even meant to be understood. Unlike the simple stories in the rest of the Bible, *Revelation* is more like an abstract painting, inviting interpretation but defying consensus. Amid a maze of visions and symbols, it reads like a prophecy, as though something significant is going to happen. Because so many of its images are filled with foreboding – seven-headed beasts, stars falling from heaven, a darkened sun and moon, heaven and earth passing away – end-of-the-world scenarios are inevitable.”

Revelation means to uncover. That is what the Writings do, explaining the symbols and giving meaning to all that is revealed about the Last Judgment and the New Jerusalem descending from heaven.

“The whole purpose of the ‘second coming’ in *Revelation* is to take away our blindness by shining a new light of truth so that we can see for ourselves and freely decide what kind of spiritual life we will lead. *Revelation* invites us to be made new by the light of the morning star and the water of life. Then, the Writings assure us, we may all be like ‘the people who walked in darkness [who] have seen a great light’ – ready to be transformed.”

The Word – with its internal spiritual sense – is a gift for our lives and a gift to share.

“God did not give us the Bible to chastise us or make us feel bad. He gave it to inspire and save us. Swedenborg assures us that if we read it with a humble and affirmative sense that it is God speaking to us, we may become like the disciples of Jesus: not understanding everything but still seeing clearly enough to be led by God.”

David says in *Psalms* 139:6: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Thanks to the Lord’s revelation we can attain it: *Nunc Licet*.

We won’t understand the Word completely and spiritually until we are in heaven, but we can make a good start. And we will study it to eternity – always

learning more and never exhausting its meaning.

Swedenborg was encouraged by friends to give up his spiritual writing because it was opening him to criticism and ridicule. But he said he was “compelled by conscience” to carry out his mission. What are we compelled by conscience to do with what we have been given? “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” Chosen for what?

True Christian Religion 457 states: “The Lord loves each and every human being, and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love.”

So, He needs our help and we all can contribute – in big ways, in little ways, just in how we live our lives. We have the model: The Parable of the Sower. And we’re all sowers.

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THE USE AND GOVERNANCE OF ASSOCIATE SPIRITS



The Rev. Alan M. Cowley

The teaching that two good and two evil spirits are constantly with us and influencing us – without our being aware – has always fascinated Alan and was the subject of his Theological School dissertation.

He wanted to study this because he wanted to challenge his own system of belief to make sure that **everything** systematically fit in. He came to discover that not only does the doctrine of associate spirits fit in, it is actually essential to the functioning of many other foundational teachings. (See *Heaven and Hell* 302 and *Divine Providence* 320) Central to the teaching is that we aren’t the source of everything that comes into our heads; all that is good is from the Lord and everything evil is from hell. That’s why we may have thoughts that don’t align with who we think we are. They only become our thoughts when we embrace them and make them our own.

The Lord created it to be this way for the sake of our freedom. And the whole creative force in the universe is the Lord’s love. Its essence is loving the neighbor. The Lord created the universe to make His love complete, which can only happen when it is reciprocated and true reciprocation requires freedom. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47 and *True Christian Religion* 43)

The essence of love is constant but it must be reciprocated to be real. That

requires some level of autonomy which we actually don't have. The Lord is the only source and He gives us a sense of self – “apparent autonomy.” Because we have that appearance we are able to reciprocate the Lord's love.

He does this by giving us two sources of influx – direct and indirect – which provides a perfect equilibrium between heaven and hell and preserves our essential freedom to choose.

The Lord's sphere is a combination of the affections emanating from Him – His love and wisdom. Every created thing has its sphere from Him which contributes to His overall sphere in the universe. We cannot be the source ourselves of love or truth; they proceed only from Him. But we are doing our job well if we are contributing to that sphere – such as learning to be at peace in the midst of stressful situations.

We are in freedom while receiving thoughts and affections from the spiritual world through our associate spirits – ultimately from the Lord alone as the source of all things. We cannot control the influences around us which contribute to our feelings. When we want to be led by the Lord He controls the associate spirits with us.

The two kingdoms of heaven – Spiritual and Celestial – represent that will and understanding, which are what make us human. Hell rejects all of this and evil spirits are never allowed to know the connections between us and the Lord through heaven. Our free choices of what to love do affect the associate spirits with us. Alan sees this as a critical part of our doctrines, which deserves more attention.

Associate spirits from heaven are always perfectly suited to us. We may go through a progression of them, particularly as we grow and progress. This is all part of the seven “days” of the creation story – remembering that few of us attain the seventh day on this earth.

There are cyclical progressions – ascending and descending – throughout our lives. Looking at evil as a sin against God helps to elevate us from “a heart of stone” to “a heart of flesh.” As evils are removed through regeneration this creates space for good from the Lord. And so the associate spirits with us are controlled through Divine providence.

Evil spirits are required to be useful, which can be accomplished through associating with us. We need them with us to be able to recognize evil for what it is and reject it. So evil is permitted for the sake of our salvation, as we are brought into the Lord's light so that we can recognize it and deal with it.

Love is what Divine order is and Divine providence is all about the laws of love: acting in freedom from reason; recognizing and shunning evil in ourselves; not being compelled by outside forces but compelling ourselves to shun evil; acknowledging that the Lord is leading and being willing to be led by Him.

The Lord knows what each of us needs. We should be praying that He will lead us, will lift us up and deliver us.

The Rev. Alan M. Cowley is pastor of the New Church at Boynton Beach, Florida, where he lives with his wife, Susan. Contact: pastor@newchurchboyntonbeach.org

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION



Tim Bilger

Tim has been the Director of Development for the Swedenborg Foundation for the past two years and is thoroughly enjoying his work.

He reviewed the highlights of the New Century Edition:

- Published eight deluxe volumes and 13 portable volumes, with most in e-book format
- 19 volumes still to be published but already translated and in various forms of production
- Next will be *The Shorter Works of 1763* – “The Four Doctrines”
- Lisa Hyatt Cooper finished translating the final volume of *Secrets of Heaven* and Chara Cooper Daum has completed her Latin consultation for that volume
- Two volumes of *Secrets of Heaven* have been published and work is proceeding on the other 13
- Five other volumes are yet to be published: *Marriage Love*, *Revelation Unveiled (1 and 2)*, *Survey/Soul-Body Interaction*, and *The Worship and Love of God*
- Updated volumes already in print: *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Secrets of Heaven (vol. 2)* and *True Christianity (vol. 2)*
- Sales for NCE volumes – including audiobooks, e-books and actual books – were 5,488 between October 1, 2018 and September 30, 2019
- Cumulative sales over the life of the NCE project are 65,882 in all formats
- Free downloads alone totaled 13,708 volumes in the past 12 months – an average of 38 a day!

offTheLeftEye videos remain very popular and all include a “Donate” button.

An event was held at the beautiful New York New Church in May 2019,

giving people an opportunity to tell their stories.

Another popular event was held at the Wayfarers Chapel in California in July, with 80 people attending.

Sweden Jam Live in October in Philadelphia featured musical traditions in Swedenborgianism and attracted 110 people.

Events planned for this year include Tucson, Arizona; St. Paul, Minnesota; Boston, Massachusetts; Northern California; Washington, D.C.; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas and Houston, Texas.

Contact: *tbilger@swedenborg.com*

FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

The Grand Human Project



The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

There is something special about the gates of the Heavenly City, New Jerusalem. We are taught that these gates are always open, never closed. (*Revelation 21:25*) The imagery contains a strong message for our little organization.

In the book *Apocalypse Revealed*, the gates always being open symbolizes that “they who desire are continually admitted” into the New Church that is represented by this city. (# 922) To make things clearer, we learn that “the city” is lit by the truths that come from the good of love to the Lord. So, one might infer that the people who find the New Church are led there because they are seeking this kind of truth and the life that it offers.

Teachings like this set a strong precedent for our need to be open and responsive to those who are seeking to enter into our New Church communities. If the Lord is leading them through our gates, we might take a moment to acknowledge that He has a good reason for doing so. As these people come in, their insights and spiritual perspectives can help perfect our communities, adding a beautiful variety to who we are.

Working in General Church Outreach, we have struggled with the question of how we, as a tiny church, do that! How do we truly welcome the many people who contact us from around the globe? And how do we invite people from all over the world into a New Church community that is meaningful?

While worship attendance is struggling in many congregations, we have noticed increasing numbers of people who are engaging online. More and more, people enjoy online forms of New Church content via Google, YouTube, Facebook and other forms of social media, but they live too far away from our congregations to attend church.

With that in mind, our team began creating a website that can facilitate an online interactive community with anyone who has a computer with an

internet connection no matter where they live. That website is now up and running and can be found at www.GrandHumanProject.org. We hope that if you have access to the internet, you will navigate there and sign up so that you can look around.

We call it “The Grand Human Project” because the site approximates the Grand Human described in the Heavenly Doctrines. It is set up to offer learning programs, small group interaction, and a variety of different ways to get involved. It will help a person find live-stream events such as worship services or lectures where the online audience can interact, converse and ask questions. Because it is an online interactive community, you do not have to be physically present to participate.

Soon, we will begin using the platform with several congregations in a pilot project that helps online users connect with specific churches in a way that is defined by the cultures of specific areas and groups. This will broaden a congregation’s reach even when distance prevents many participants from attending physically.

We hope to use the Grand Human Project, for example, to enable anyone living in the state of Florida to participate with the Boynton Beach Church and its congregation. While we continue to emphasize the value of face-to-face contact, we see this as an important new tool that will help people enjoy New Church community in ways never before imagined.

Contact: David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org

Celebrating a Common Bond

State of Bryn Athyn College Address 2020

On January 13, Bryn Athyn College offered its yearly “State of the College” address. Speakers included President Brian Blair and the two Deans, Dr. Wendy Closterman, and Dr. Suzanne Nelson.

President Blair opened with a reminder that “We all have a common bond: the joy of educating young people as they prepare for their lifelong use. This is a privilege we take seriously and with great humility. We want to do the best we can to educate and mentor our students.”

The evening’s presentations covered some of the initiatives and projects underway at Bryn Athyn College, as well as ways that the faculty, staff and administration carry out the mission to benefit the students.

Dr. Wendy Closterman, Dean of Academics, began by acknowledging the College’s distinct role in the world as “an intellectual center for all who desire to engage in higher education enriched, guided and structured by the study of the Old Testament, New Testament, and theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.”

Dr. Closterman spoke on a variety of ways the College carries out this mission. For example, since New Church doctrines support the growth of one’s spiritual, moral and civil life, College students take courses specifically designed to foster personal ethics and encourage responsibility, as well as courses that examine a New Church outlook on current events in local, national and international contexts. Students also take religion classes every year, attend weekly chapel, and have access to many other ways to worship, reflect and express their spirituality.

Dr. Closterman also explained how various faculty bring the New Church teachings into their classrooms, not only in religion classes, but in art, philosophy, math, English and more. For example, in a metals course assignment, Dr. Jonathan Kline “encourages students to identify a text of personal significance and produce a piece of art that reminds them of that passage.” In a math course, Professor Caira Bongers integrates the concept of Divine Providence in class discussions around determinism vs. probability.

Dr. Closterman pointed out that while the students generally rank all their

classes highly (around 80% reporting “very satisfied”) the highest rankings go to the New Church Religion 101 courses, where, for the past three years, nearly 90% of students say they agree or strongly agree that they were “very satisfied” with the courses.

She also reported that over the past decade, most of the students (60-80%) say that the College has made a “great” or “very great” contribution to their spiritual growth, with four-year grads reporting the highest rates of satisfaction. While these numbers are encouraging, the College strives to continually grow in its ability to nurture the students’ spiritual lives.

In addition to the core requirements, one new initiative supports students in finding their personal calling, using a professional development grant of \$9,600 from the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE). One use of this grant brought to campus an international author and speaker, Dr. Tim Clydesdale, who spoke about his research around the importance of spirituality and purpose in the lives of young adults.

Another initiative, the Institute for Swedenborg Studies, has gained traction under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn. Through the Institute’s partnership with *offTheLeftEye*, the College will provide programming at the OTLE conference in June. In addition, thanks to donors, the Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn and the Rev. Grant Schnarr launched a pilot online course in March on the topic of life after death. A future seminar on Swedenborg and Spirituality, involving a variety of institutions, is in early development.

Dr. Suzanne Nelson, Dean of Students, presented on behalf of the Student Life team, explaining their goal of helping “sow the seeds for life-long spiritual growth and development” by “providing opportunities for students outside of the classroom to enhance their physical and psychological well-being, develop leadership skills, and participate in charitable, community-based experiences.”

On the mental wellness front, Dr. Nelson reported that the College has seen a 60% increase in the use of counseling services, with students saying they would “highly recommend the services to their peers,” and ranking the support received as 4.7 out of 5. This program has been so effective that the program director, Scott Jones, was invited to speak about the College’s model at the American College Health Association’s National Conference in June.

Some of the program’s characteristics include the College’s state-of-the-art Health and Wellness Center, where students can make individual appointments and join small group meetings that focus on wellness, spirituality and meditation. Additionally, they can partake in educational initiatives that offer support on anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Counseling services are offered 20 hours/week, with same-day service, and an additional after-hours call service.

Another flourishing avenue for student life occurs under the direction of

Jon Carr, who helped coordinate more than 38 sponsored events, including charity events and community bonding activities. President Blair described a conversation with one student who said how profoundly he had been impacted by a College trip to feed the hungry. This trip, coordinated with NewChurch LIVE at St. Francis Inn, showed the student how each person can have an impact on those in need.

Even sports teams carry a sense of spiritual purpose. At the beginning of each season, student athletes partake in a “commissioning service” at the Cathedral. During this ceremony, students receive a blessing and commission to “compete passionately and act with respect, integrity and perseverance.” Each team also has a volunteer “spiritual mentor” from the faculty, clergy or wider community.

In terms of housing, Dr. Nelson reported that first-year residence halls have grown by 15% since the fall of 2017, with Goodenough and Cooper Halls holding 80% occupancy for the first time since opening, and Childs Hall re-opened. Students rated their overall satisfaction in the residence halls a 4 out of 5, while scoring their Resident Assistants a 4.3 average for their “efforts to get to know me.”

President Blair explained that two years ago the College struggled with recruiting, but last year the numbers “bounced back.” The College now has its highest retention score of 84 percent with first-year students. Although it’s too early to make predictions, President Blair confirms that the pipeline for incoming students is now strong, thanks in large part to a financial gift to help with recruiting.

The President reported that with this gift, Bill Larousse has been hired and has been helping reshape and energize the admissions department. The College has also retained a top-class marketing agency who is helping with the College’s brand, celebrating its unique qualities as a strongly committed faith-based institution.

Brian Blair finished the presentation by comparing spiritual life to the “glue that keeps everything together,” with gratitude to faculty and staff who “really care about the students we educate.”

Time and Eternity

The Rev. Louis Synnestvedt

(Reprinted from the February 2020 Newsletter of the General Church in Great Britain)

Time and eternity. What are these to us?

Time. Have you paid any attention to it today? Have you looked at a clock? Were you thinking at all about your day today and where this very moment sits in the course of your awareness?

Each of us alive is experiencing some form of “now.”

Pause a few seconds and that “now” has been replaced with another “now.”

What we call “now” is so fleeting, so momentary, it could almost be said to hardly exist at all.

Time is a flowing, like a river. It carries us along from one experience to the next; even from one place to another place.

We cannot stop time. We can barely pause it. It marches on with a sort of inevitability that is so strong that there is nothing to be done that will prevent its advance.

Time: we can talk about it. We use language to describe it. But do we know what it is? Is it something to touch? Do we see it?

If nothing else, we know it’s possible to run out of it.

Try to go back to your yesterday. Where were you . . . and what did you do? What picture comes to mind? What feelings? Was it a good day?

Can you go back *before* yesterday, when yesterday was then present to you as a tomorrow? Try playing around with your sense of time. Are you ready for what tomorrow will bring? But remember, before you know it, your tomorrows will turn into your yesterdays.

Perhaps this conversation strains your patience. But, like all things, it soon will pass. So, no worries, we will be done in short order.

Let’s put time in its proper, Biblical, context with this passage from the *Psalms*:

For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past. (*Psalms* 90: 4)

Consider something rather unique about Divine Revelation. Here we have

a written Word that informs our understanding of the past, provides a hope for the future, and offers up a context for the present we find ourselves in.

The Word of God is a mirror in which we can see reflected any time and all time. As it says in the Epistles:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (*Hebrews 13: 8*)

Our topic is time. But time is so “this world.” On a deeper level is the experience of eternity.

We read in the Writings:

THE DIVINE IS IN ALL TIME, APART FROM TIME: Angels do not know what time is, and when it [time] is mentioned [in the Word] they perceive in place of it state. . . . Joyfulness of state makes time seem short, and joylessness of state makes time seem long. (*Divine Love and Wisdom 73*)

Is it possible for us as earthly beings to experience our world like the angels? Angels are into what is timeless, namely, states of wisdom and love. We can be, too.

To have wisdom is to see the higher truths of life, to organize our habits and routines on God-given values which ultimately stem from the Ten Commandments teaching us how to live. Wisdom guides us. Love is the moving forward according to that guidance.

We say:

My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! (*Psalms 31: 15*)

Today is today. How are we living it? By understanding our yesterdays, and looking forward to our tomorrows, we can make the most out of each moment through which we speed.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. (*Psalms 90: 12*)



The Rev. Louis Synnestvedt serves as interim pastor for the Colchester New Church in Colchester, Essex, England. His permanent home, with his wife, Aileen (King), is in Kempton, Pennsylvania, USA. Contact: lou.syn@gmail.com

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

The annual meeting of the General Church Corporation, which had been scheduled for June 17, to coincide with the since-cancelled General Church Retreat in Bryn Athyn, has been rescheduled for June 27 at 3 p.m. in the Pendleton Hall Auditorium of Bryn Athyn College.

If it becomes necessary to postpone this meeting date also because of coronavirus limitations it will be rescheduled for September 26, 2020 – same time and place. Members of the Corporation will be advised by mail and/or email.

General Church Corporation members are invited to hear about the state of the worldwide New Church, participate in election of Board directors, and vote on proposed bylaw amendments. Members will receive detailed information in a separate mailing.

If you are not a General Church Corporation member but have been a General Church member at least three years, you are invited to complete a Corporation enrollment form. To vote in this meeting, Corporation enrollment should be completed by May 17.

If you are unsure of your status as a General Church or Corporation member, or to enroll, please contact Anita Halterman – anita.halterman@newchurch.org or Kelly Treacy – kelly.treacy@newchurch.org.

A HEALTHY MATCH

The Healthy Church Match Campaign, which kicked off 10 years ago, has been successfully concluded.

The campaign provided dollar-for-dollar matches to assist General Church congregations with fund-raising initiatives. Twelve congregations requested a total of \$12,883,000 and 10 years later, with the help of more than 700 donors, more than \$10 million was raised and was matched by the General Church. Five congregations were able to eliminate their operating grants from the General Church.

Participating congregations included: Asakraka, Ghana; Concord, Massachusetts; Glenview, Illinois; Kempton, Pennsylvania; South Korea; Oak Arbor, Michigan; Phoenix, Arizona; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; San Diego, California; Tema, Ghana; Washington, D.C.; and Westville, South Africa.

All of these initiatives strongly aligned with the mission of the General Church: *Helping people live a heavenly life through the teachings of the Lord God Jesus Christ in His Second Coming.*

GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION

Sarah Bruell Odhner

Have you visited General Church Education's (GCED's) YouTube channel? Our channel, <https://www.youtube.com/ncsundayschools>, recently topped two million views. More than 2,500 have signed up as subscribers, returning viewers who value our content. We currently offer 100 videos, which are available not only on YouTube, but through our resource website, www.newchurchvineyard.org as well.

Occasionally viewers express appreciation for videos they have enjoyed or found useful. We love comments and feedback. Most viewers are not subscribers. Many live outside the United States. The five countries at the top of our viewing list include the United States (25%), India (9%), Vietnam (8%), the United Kingdom (6%), and the Philippines (5%). While many viewers still use computers to access videos, most viewers now use mobile devices, such as tablets and phones.

Most videos go with a program produced by GCED. Our three-video series on the life of Emanuel Swedenborg complements Sunday school lessons from our teen *FaithBuilder* series. These informative videos, online at bit.ly/EmanuelSwedenborg, bring to life Swedenborg's childhood, his career as a scientist, and his work for the Lord as a revelator. Teachers at elementary, high school and college levels have found them a valuable tool for teaching about Swedenborg's remarkable life. Three companion lessons, available at bit.ly/ESLessons, provide background for teachers and discussion questions and ideas for engaging students.

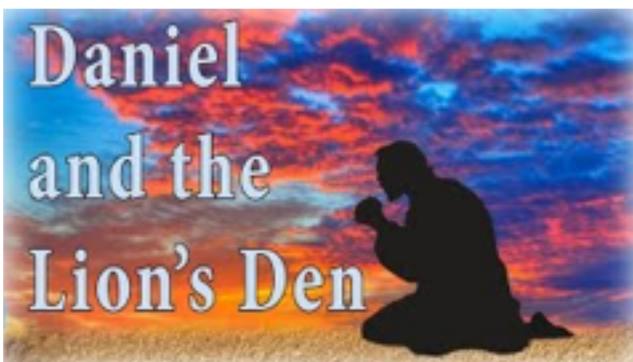
Our *HeartFelt* festival videos consist of illustrated readings from the Word for Christmas, Easter and New Church Day. Volunteer artist, Gretchen Glover, poses her stunning felt figures to lovingly convey stories from the Word. These videos make wonderful add-ons to our *Festival Family Gift Mailings* for children and are included as part of the *Jacob's Ladder Lessons*.

Some smaller congregations have used these videos during festival services in lieu of tableaux. A variety of *HeartFelt* videos have been translated into languages other than English to serve non-English speaking New Church

members or for use by foreign language teachers. Look for videos in French, Portuguese and Spanish.

Our object lesson videos feature hands-on demonstrations that bring spiritual ideas to life. Our popular *Forgiveness Experiment*, online at bitly.com/ForgivenessExperiment, illustrates how forgiveness works, and outlines how the Lord wants us to act when we do something wrong. It was created as part of a Sunday school *Youth Journey Program* on the life of Joseph.

Songs are a wonderful way to stir affections and teach stories from the Word. GCED offers a variety of videos with songs for listening and sing-alongs by a variety of New Church composers. For example, *Daniel and the Lion's Den* and *Jairus' Daughter*, are by singer-songwriters John and Lori Odhner, while *Angels Around Us* was written by Christine Taylor. We received a touching video from a Sunday school in Asia showing children singing and acting out the song *Samuel, Samuel!* by Lori Odhner. We invite you to stop by to see the treasure trove of resources we offer families and classrooms at youtube.com/ncsundayschools, or www.newchurchvineyard.org.



FIRES DOWN UNDER*The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger*

I think most Australians knew that we were going to experience severe bush fires this year. It had hardly rained at all since March, so that wasn't good. But what most non-Australians don't realize is just how flammable our forests are here. The Eucalyptus tree produces a blue-ish colored oil, and this oil is highly flammable. So our trees are more flammable than a dried-up three-month-old Christmas tree. As a result, forest fires here are just part of life. Lightning strikes, the oily trees catch fire, and the fire brigade goes to work. But this year we had a drought too, which makes the flammable super-flammable.

As you have probably heard, the fires covered a lot of ground. Thankfully they never got particularly close to our church in southern Sydney. About an hour drive is as close as they came. The other New Churches throughout Australia similarly were unaffected. But, while the properties were unaffected, the people were not.

Major roads had to be closed at times, and due to terrible air quality many flights and outdoor events were cancelled. If you had asthma, or any sort of breathing difficulty, you didn't want to be here. When we drove from Sydney to Adelaide there was about a six-hour stretch where it was just like driving through fog.

Since the fires lasted for so long, it did allow for some reflection on what the Writings have to say about fire, and the teaching that everything in the Word has a meaning and its opposite. Fire corresponds to love, and when you think about it, fire, like love, is very useful. Think of all the things we use fire for. Cooking and home heating come quickly to mind, but there are countless other ways in which it is utilized and through which we can love other people.

As for the opposite side of fire we similarly don't have to think too hard. For centuries fire has been used to destructive ends in battle, and I would imagine that throwing flaming objects at an enemy is probably one of the earliest weapons humanity created. It isn't hard to see that fire has some very useful attributes, but can also be very destructive. It really isn't hard to see why fire corresponds to love, and also unrestrained lust and desire that is so destructive in our lives.

Now let's finish this focusing on the positive. The Lord has taught us about cycles of life: the Most Ancient Church rose, fell, and another church rose to take its place. We go through cycles as well, where something dies in us, and something new rises up that furthers us along our path. These cycles are natural, and necessary in order for growth.

Likewise, for all the havoc and destruction caused by these fires, the Australian eco-system depends on fires to thrive. Some Australian plants,

such as the Eucalyptus and Banksia have serotinous cones or fruits that are completely sealed with resin. These cones/fruits can only open to release their seeds after the heat of a fire has physically melted the resin. Without the fires, the seeds never sprout, and the forest/bush eventually dies off.

We do need the fires, even if we do hope that we never see them this big again.

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE MASTER'S PROGRAM

Bryn Athyn College is offering a Master of Science in Special Education (MSSpEd). It has a literacy concentration that prepares candidates to support students experiencing a range of learning differences, with an emphasis on addressing the needs of struggling readers. Throughout their course of study, graduate students engage with a New Church philosophy of education, which enriches the critical skills, knowledge, research opportunities and practica in the program curriculum. The program is comprised of 11 courses and may be completed in as little as 14 months.

Dr. Kelly Ballard, head of the Master of Science in Special Education program at the College, states: "I am excited to offer teachers the critical knowledge and experiences required to meet the needs of struggling readers and students with learning differences, while fostering skills to nurture the innocence of youth within the demanding academic environments of today's classrooms."

The program follows a cohort model design that offers collaborative relationships and incorporates an optional participation in the Bryn Athyn College Teacher Residency Program. This unique, nine-month placement opportunity offers in-depth, hands-on experiences for graduate students seeking a level of expertise and practice in specialized school settings designed to meet the needs of students with language-based learning differences. Students who complete the program may also be eligible for the Pennsylvania Special Education Certification.

Here are testimonials from some of the participants:

As a Grade 1 and 2 teacher in an inclusive, multi-grade General Church Education classroom, I am dedicated to using best practices to remove learning barriers for all my students. (This program) provides the ability to access professional development remotely. The course work supports a philosophy of teaching the whole child; spiritually, academically, physically, socially and emotionally. Of special importance is the freedom to reflect and speak concerning a child's spiritual development. As a General Church Education teacher, professional development with a spiritual component can be challenging to find. This program fills the void by providing remote learning capability, spiritual respect, and flexible scheduling. Thank You!

Laura H., Canadian General Church Education Teacher

Each day I am faced with situations in which I have to quickly accommodate work for my high school students. Each day I must create lesson plans that use a tight budget to fit the needs of my social studies classroom. This program has equipped me with so many resources, that even though I am in a new school this year with a new curriculum I am able to confidently and easily do this.

*Katie S., H.S. Social Studies Teacher
Private High School, Delaware*

The graduate level Special Education program at Bryn Athyn delivers in a collaborative and thoughtful spirit. I'm pleased to continually be able to transfer what I've learned in the program directly to my teaching practice. I value the program, not only for the effect it is having in the classroom, but for the growth that it supports professionally.

*Jara Z., 5th Grade Teacher
Delaware County, PA Public School*

(This program) has transformed my teaching practice! The assignments and projects are meaningful and often directly tailored to my teaching situation. (It) has challenged and stretched me in ways that are not always comfortable and has given me a real sense of empathy for my students and the struggles they face. I know that my students are benefiting from what I am learning.

*Jessica B., Student Support Teacher
Bryn Athyn Church School*

So often graduate programs can be theoretical. When you offer a program that provides opportunities that put those theories to practice, it is keyed into what teachers and their students really need.

*Kira S., Principal
ANC Secondary Schools*

(This) offers a unique, collaborative learning environment where educators can come together and share experiences, ideas, and the latest findings from cutting-edge research. The professors bring a depth of knowledge and personal experience to our graduate courses; inspiring meaningful assignments and dedication to the betterment of our classrooms.

*Brenna S.,
1st-4th grade Remediation & Enrichment Specialist
Washington New Church School*

As a working mom of two, this unique program has allowed me to collaborate, research and learn with other educators from all over the country. This incredible opportunity has given me the chance to share my experiences and ideas while gaining a wealth of knowledge from the professors and colleagues in the program. The option to be virtual has allowed me to attend classes and participate within my busy home and work schedule.

*Kelly S., Kindergarten Teacher
Delaware County, PA Public School*

To learn more about the MSSPED program at Bryn Athyn College, contact Kelly Ballard, Head of MSSPED program: Kelly.Ballard@brynathyn.edu or 267-502-2416.

FREE ONLINE COURSE ON THE AFTERLIFE

The Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn

The Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College is excited to announce the launch of a new, free online course. *The Afterlife* provides a detailed exploration of the vision of the afterlife presented by Emanuel Swedenborg, examined in tandem with the phenomenon of near-death experiences. The course is divided into eight sessions which you can take at your own pace, while also interacting with others enrolled in the course if you so choose.

The course opens on Monday, April 13. You can reserve a place by registering at www.brynathyn.edu/afterlife.

GIRLS ATHLETIC FIELD



Groundbreaking: Left to right, Brian Llewellyn, Whin Sylla, Jackie Pennink, Kira Schadegg, Jim Adams, Eileen Glenn

On January 9 the Academy of the New Church broke ground for the **Terry and Eileen Glenn Field**. This new turf field, generously donated by **Eileen Glenn** and her family, will be home to the Girls School field hockey and lacrosse teams.

The field will be ready for play this spring. It will be lined for field hockey, lacrosse and soccer and will be available for rentals on weekends and during the summer months.

ANC Secondary Schools Managing Director **Jim Adams** said: “This is an extremely generous donation to our girls’ athletic program. It will provide our current and future students with a quality turf field that will be usable in most

weather conditions. In addition, it will provide annual maintenance savings and rental income opportunities for our school. We are so appreciative of this donation to further our girls' athletic program."

Girls School Athletic Director **Jackie Pennink** stated: "We deeply appreciate Eileen's investment in the future of girls athletics at ANC. We cannot wait for construction to be complete and are looking forward to the first game on the new field!"

Head field hockey and lacrosse coach **Whin Sylla** expressed: "We are extremely grateful to Eileen Glenn for her generous gift to the girls field hockey and lacrosse programs. Having a turf field will allow us to better prepare and compete against opponents who have been playing on turf for many years."

During construction, the parking lot next to the athletic field is closed and used as a staging area for construction equipment and materials.

ANC SUMMER CAMPS

All Academy summer camps have been canceled.

Performing Arts

The ANC Performing Arts Camp – June 22 to July 2 – offers an exciting theatrical experience for current sixth, seventh and eighth graders, culminating in a performance of Seussical JR.

Directors will lead campers through the process of blocking, vocal production, choreography and character development. The aim of the camp is to foster imagination, creativity and practical performance skills.

For more information and to register please see the ANC Performing Arts Camp (www.ancss.org/fs/pages/542)

Summer Camp

The ANC Summer Camp – July 12 to 18 – is a residential event for current eighth and ninth graders, with students from across the United States and Canada joining in a weeklong adventure to experience what ANC is all about. Campers will work with teachers and coaches, explore the campus and community, and participate in a lot of fun events.

For more information and to register see ANC Summer Camp (www.ancss.org/about/summer-programs/anc-summer-camp)

Tools 4 Life

Tools 4 Life is an opportunity for sophomores and juniors to begin preparing for life after high school. Campers will be given many opportunities to explore a range of options, meet with professionals, and connect with the greater world

through service, college visits and career day.

The camp runs June 21 – 27 – just after the General Church Retreat. For information contact Director **Ali Durand** at 267-615-1528.

Glencairn Museum

Glencairn Museum's 2020 Medieval Summer Camp will offer a choice of two sessions – June 15 to 19 and June 22 to 26, 8:30 to 12:30 each day – for 9- and 10-year-olds, who are invited to learn about life in the Middle Ages. Contact: **Amy Glenn** 267-502-2962 or amy.glenn@glencairnmuseum.org

GENERAL CHURCH SUMMER CAMPS

(Subject to cancellations due to coronavirus precautions. Check with contacts for more information)

Jacob's Creek

This year's Jacob's Creek Family Retreat will run from July 19 – 22 at the Laurelville Mennonite Church in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania. This year's theme is The Ten Blessings.

The **Rev. Matthew Genzlinger** again will be the retreat pastor, assisted by the **Rev. Mac Frazier** (Washington New Church), and the **Rev. Brett Buick** (Kempton New Church).

Camps Directors again are **Blake and Paul Messman, Jamie and Julie Uber**.

For registration forms: www.jacobscreekfamilyretreat.org

FriendthecamponFacebook: www.facebook.com/JacobsCreekFamilyRetreat/

Contact: Julie Uber at 412-782-2710 or email jacobscreekfamilyretreat@gmail.com to receive forms by mail.

Maple Leaf Academy

This year's Maple Leaf Academy – a New Church camp for teenagers – will be held June 25 – July 1 at the Ecology Retreat Centre near Mono, Ontario, Canada. The theme is Light; "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.'" For information contact **Steph Kuhl** at 519-895-1891 or stephkuhl@live.ca or check facebook.com/mapleleafacademy

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY

Steve David, director of the New Christian Bible Study Project gave an upbeat update at the Boynton Beach Retreat. He said the big idea behind the website – www.newchristianbiblestudy.org – is that millions of people throughout the

world are reading the Word online, looking for truth, meaning and help. The New Church has the unique knowledge of the internal sense. “We can and should make the world’s most truthful, helpful Bible Study site.”

People from all over the world are coming to the site and need five key things in their own languages:

- The Old and New Testaments (84 translations in 42 languages)
- The Writings (more than 350 translations in 20 languages)
- Explanations (9,500 explanations of words, stories and concepts)
- A User interface (13 languages so far)
- Interaction, with groups, discussions and mentoring

Among the languages used: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Dutch, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Malayalam and Zulu.

“In each language,” Steve says, “we’re driving to provide the Five Key Pieces so that clergy and congregations are well-equipped. (The website) can provide traffic, the Word, the Writings and a User Interface, plus translator tools and co-branded sites. The churches can help write concise chapter explanations and help lead discussion groups.”

Leverage, including small groups and big messages, includes:

- Links to 650 *offTheLeftEye* videos, with Bible and Writings references
- Links to 280 of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose’s *Spirit and Life Bible Studies*
- Working with the Academy of the New Church, all of our churches, publishers, photographers, translators and librarians
- Links to 457 New Church groups in 49 countries on our live map

Check it out: www.newchristianbiblestudy.org

GATHERING LEAVES 2020

(Subject to cancellations due to coronavirus precautions. Check with contact for more information)

Gathering Leaves, the international retreat for Swedenborgian/New Church women, will take place August 28-31, at the Purley Chase Centre, in Warwickshire, England. The theme for the event is "Fruits of the Spirit."

There will be a variety of activities, and time for connecting. Room and board fees for the retreat for everyone are being covered by generous donations, at the Early Bird rate. Details about the event, and about booking in, are on the Purley Chase Centre website www.purleychasecentre.org.uk.



The cast



Luke David and Baird Kistner



Brandy Rose



Richard Glenn and Luke David



Richard Glenn, Luke David, Phoenix Fritch



Brandy Rose



Luke David



Bradley Robinson and Brittany Gunther

ANC SECONDARY SCHOOLS WINTER PERFORMING ARTS CONCERT

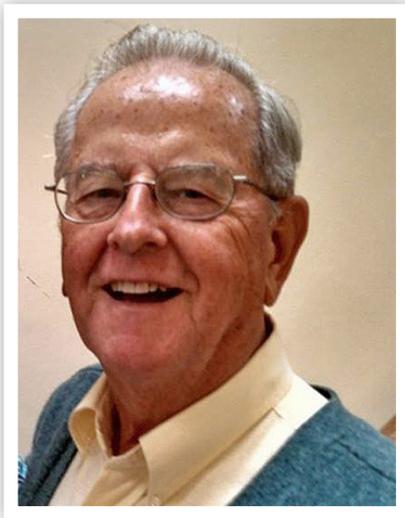
(Photos by Bruce Cronlund)



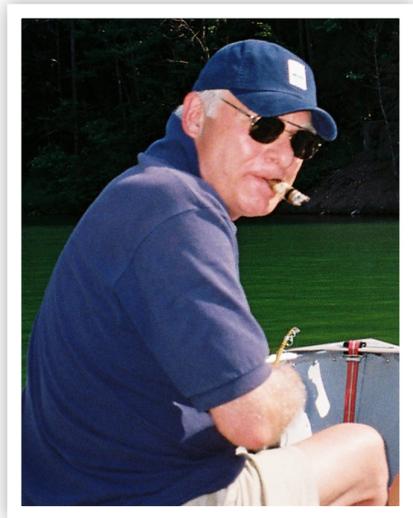
Life Lines

Bruce Henderson

A FEW GOOD MEN



John Wyncoll



Bill Buick

The backbone of the Church are dedicated men and women quietly giving of themselves to boards and committees and other uses – attracting no attention, just serving the Lord and the Church with solid ability and selfless humility. We've lost two of the best recently – John Wyncoll and Bill Buick.

John passed on to the spiritual world in late January, having just turned 83. He grew up in England but spent his adult life – with his wife, Nancy (Gladish) – in Toronto, where a successful career was balanced with outstanding service to the Olivet Church, the Academy and General Church Boards and many committees.

Bill Buick left us at age 79 in Bryn Athyn in February but began his life in Detroit, Michigan. After he married Barbara Childs there he not only became a

member of the General Church but devoted his life to serving it, the Academy and New Church education and his community. Once retired from his career he served as Director of Development and Treasurer of the General Church.

John and Bill were the epitome of “faithful servants.” They were quiet, diligent workers behind the scenes, always acting from principle and looking to what was right and good for the institutions they loved.

They would have been uncomfortable at their memorial services to hear the many heartfelt words praising them. The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs quoted *Conjugal Love* 164 in Bill’s service – and the words apply every bit to John as well – describing what it means to be a real man in light of the Heavenly Doctrine: “Virtues which have to do with men’s moral wisdom, called temperance, sobriety, integrity, kindness, friendliness, modesty, honesty, helpfulness, courteousness, diligence, industriousness, skillfulness, alacrity, generosity, magnanimity, energy, courage, prudence.”

And this: “Spiritual virtues in men are love of religion, charity, truthfulness, faith, conscience, innocence. These virtues, both moral and spiritual, can be attributed in general to a man’s love and zeal for religion, for the public good, for his country, for his fellow citizens, for his parents, for his wife, and for his children.”

John and Bill would have squirmed at all this and shrunk from the adoration of family and friends paying tribute to these true gentlemen – and gentle men. But they need to be remembered, respected and honored as model “servant leaders.”

In his memorial service for John the Rev. Michael Cowley said: “John loved the doctrines of the Church, and among his favorite subjects were the Lord’s Divine providence and human freedom.”

And in his memorial address for Bill, Bishop Heinrichs said: “As we look back on his wonderful life, we will not just remember the length of his days but how he applied his heart unto wisdom. Life is more than a chronological series of events; it is about the spiritual and moral character that a person develops as he looks to the Lord and strives to serve his neighbor.”

It is no coincidence that John and Bill each were chosen to speak at Academy graduations – then including the College and Secondary Schools – to pass on the wisdom that guided their lives. It is also no coincidence that they spoke from the heart about what really matters.

In 1983, John said to the graduates: “Self-discipline from within needs to be nurtured and grown slowly so that order may flow in. We are told that where true order is, the Lord is present. What an incentive to order our minds and attitudes so that Providence has a chance to work with our conscience. This will take time, demand patience and trust in our long-term plan of commitment to do the Lord’s will.”

Ten years later Bill challenged graduates to bring to the world what it so sorely needs – New Church leadership. “Change cannot occur without leadership. Leadership involves a set of common principles and practices. You are so fortunate that the principles and practices learned at the New Church School of Leadership have qualified you to become the leaders of the future. Go for it!”

Michael Cowley welcomed the congregation to John’s memorial service with the words:

“This afternoon we celebrate the life of a Good Man. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in His way.”

John Wyncoll and Bill Buick – these were two of the good guys. May we forever smile at their memory and be guided by their example.

TOWARD A NEW CHURCH UNIVERSITY

Bryn Athyn College is on a long and challenging path to becoming a New Church university. It has come a long way from the second floor of Benade Hall in my first two college years to the impressive campus across Tomlinson Road that was once a farm pasture. It is still somewhere between dream and destiny.

A popular model of a college that has attained what Bryn Athyn College aspires to be – a renowned university forever guided by its New Church mission – is Hillsdale College in Michigan.

Bryn Athyn College has its roots in the Academy Charter of 1877, rising from the first 100 or so years of existence as primarily a two-year college for almost exclusively New Church students, with enrollment never much more than 100. Now it is a four-year college with more than 300 diverse students on a separate, distinguished campus.

That’s all encouraging. But Hillsdale recently celebrated 175 years of thriving existence with an enrollment of 15,000 and a waiting list of 7,500 – largely because it has never deviated from its Christian roots and spiritual mission.

The founders were classically educated New England preachers who “thought liberal education was the road to good living, good citizenship and good statesmanship.” They believed – and still do – that “college is about thinking, and the refinement and informing of the intellect is its first purpose. This requires the education of the whole human being.”

Above all, this education required thinking about God. The four pillars of the founders of Hillsdale College were learning, character, faith and freedom.

President Larry Arnn says: “Higher learning is not learning about means but ends. Ends are higher than means, and the highest ends are the best and

most beautiful to know.”

Because of its values and commitment, Hillsdale has a huge following. Almost 50 years ago it began distributing its signature publication, *Imprimis*, to 1,000 people each month. Now it goes to almost five million. Hillsdale also has more than two million online students. Now that’s extending your reach. And what an inspiration for Bryn Athyn College.

Arnn attributes Hillsdale’s success to finding “the lamp by which to seek wisdom and the reason to strive for courage and all the moral virtues. Not comprehension of the divine, but a way to think about God and understand Him better.”

Yes, Hillsdale is an inspiration but not the perfect model for Bryn Athyn College. That model is the Nunc Licet temple described in a memorable relation in *True Christian Religion* 508: “Now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith.” Here there is full comprehension of the Divine. Here students come to know and understand the Lord and be led by Him.

This is the dream. This is the destiny.

THE LORD GOD MADE THEM ALL

Bill Bryson is a fascinating, eclectic writer. He charms and instructs in books about exploring – *A Walk in the Woods* (Appalachian Trail) and *In a Sunburned Country* (Australia); history – *One Summer* (1927); language – *The Mother Tongue*; and such cheerful travelogs as *The Road to Little Dribbling: Adventures of an American in Britain*. His two most memorable books for me are *A Short History of Nearly Everything* and his latest, *The Body*.

They are both grand attempts to probe the mysteries and marvels of creation – from the enormity of the universe to the infinitesimal atom that is the building block of everything from ancient rocks to ourselves. Under all of this – which Bryson does not acknowledge but which any thinking person cannot help but see – are the love, wisdom and order of the Lord’s creation.

In both books Bryson explores the breadth of science in a readable, informative, entertaining style, such as: how we know how old the earth is and what it weighs; how many factors combine in our enormous universe to make life on earth possible; and the incredible combination of trillions of particles that make us who we are.

As fascinating as his books are, it’s disappointing that Bryson is purely the scientist, explaining only what we see with our natural eyes. We can fill in for ourselves that God is the source and sustainer of every aspect of creation: “The universe is like a stage on which are continually being exhibited evidences that there is a God.” (*True Christianity* 12)

Within all the fascinating discoveries of science – and we still have much

to learn – what we really are seeing is the breathtaking intricacy, efficiency and order of God’s creation.

Start with the almost unfathomable extent of the universe – at least the little we know of it – and the equally unfathomable protons, the building blocks of everything in the universe. (Just for perspective, 500 billion protons could fit into the period at the end of this sentence.)

What Bryson calls “the visible universe” is a million-million-million-million miles across. The number of light years to the edge of the larger unseen universe is written not with tens of zeroes but millions. The average distance between the stars we see is 20 million-million miles. Nobody knows how many stars are in just our Milky Way – somewhere between 100- and 400 billion. The Milky Way is just one of some 140 billion other galaxies. And all of this is part of God’s natural kingdom, created by His love and ruled by His providence.

Now shift the perspective from the telescope to the microscope: “It all starts with a single cell. The first cell splits to become two and the two become four and so on. After just 47 doublings, you have 10 thousand trillion cells in your body and are ready to spring forth as a human being.”

When you look in the mirror you see trillions of cells, all arranged into unique you. Each has a specific job to do, each carrying your complete genetic code, each constantly being used up and replaced. “Every cell in nature is a thing of wonder. Even the simplest are beyond the limits of human ingenuity.”

In *The Body*, Bryson writes: “In the second or so since you started this sentence, your body has made a million red blood cells. They are already speeding around you, coursing through your veins, keeping you alive. . . . Altogether it takes 7 billion-billion-billion atoms to make you. No one can say why they have such an urgent desire to be you. They are mindless particles, after all, without a single thought or notion between them. Yet somehow for the length of your existence, they will build and maintain all the countless systems and structures necessary to keep you humming, to make you you, to give you form and shape and let you enjoy the rare and supremely agreeable condition known as life.”

All mind-boggling stuff. But it is all so much more than science. The more we learn and understand about the symbiotic order of creation, the harder it is for scientific purists to deny God and ascribe all this wonder to random serendipity.

The real wonder of it all is that everything in nature – everything – no matter how impossibly large or unbelievably small, was created by God for use. “The Lord arranges and keeps in order all things down to the least detail.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2267) And: “What is marvelous is that every individual thing, even the most minute, is adapted for use.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1191:2) And the more we learn from the Lord about creation, the more we

comprehend that it is an ongoing process. As the familiar hymn reminds us: “Amid all change one changing not, yet making all things new.”

And that, Bill Bryson, is “The Short History of Nearly Everything.”

‘THE MOON AND STARS WHICH THOU HAST ORDAINED’

Until U.S. astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first men to land on the Moon in July 1969, the Moon was just out there – as it has been for 4.5 billion years. We thrill to the first sliver of a new Moon and delight in the romance of a glowing harvest Moon. But we’ve little appreciated just how important the Moon is to our very existence.

In that *Short History of Nearly Everything* Bill Bryson notes: “Without the Moon’s steady influence, the Earth would wobble like a dying top, with goodness knows what consequences for climate and weather. The Moon’s steady gravitational influence keeps the Earth spinning at the right speed and angle to provide the sort of stability necessary for the long and successful development of life.

“This won’t go on forever. The Moon is slipping from our grasp at a rate of about 1.5 inches a year. In another two billion years it will have receded so far that it won’t keep us steady and we will have to come up with some other solution, but in the meantime you should think of it as much more than just a pleasant feature in the night sky.”

Traveling to the Moon definitely has changed our perspective – not only seeing it up close, including the previously unknown dark side of the Moon, but also looking back and seeing the whole of the Earth suspended in space.

In a wonderful book, *Rocket Men*, Robert Kurson tells of the three courageous astronauts rushed into space over Christmas 1968 for the first orbit of the Moon. This was critically important – and enormously risky. It compressed much of NASA’s meticulous training in a desperate effort to beat the Soviets to the moon – a crucial win in the Cold War – and to deliver on President Kennedy’s promise to land a man on the Moon before the end of the decade.

The risks were almost overwhelming. So much had to go right – down to split-second accuracy thousands of miles away in space for what had never been done before: orbiting the Moon, coming out in just the exact trajectory to return to Earth, then penetrating the Earth’s atmosphere at just the right angle without burning up. One of the astronaut’s wives was convinced she would never see her husband again and wrote his eulogy while he was hurtling through space at thousands of miles per hour. The backdrop of Christmas was all the more ominous as the people in Mission Control barely dared to breathe.

The mission, of course, was successful, and paved the way for that

triumphant Moon landing just seven months later. But we gained a lot more than just science and technology.

From the dark loneliness of space, astronaut William Anders snapped an indelible photo forever known as Earthrise. Kurson describes:

“To Anders, Earth appeared as a Christmas tree ornament, hung radiant blue and swirling white in an endless black night. From here, it was no longer possible to pick out countries or even continents; all a person could see was Earth, and it occurred to Anders, in this last week of 1968, this terrible year for America and the world – [the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, the Tet offensive in Vietnam, riots in America’s cities] – that once you couldn’t see the boundaries, you started to see something different. You saw how small the planet is, how close all of us are to one another, how the only thing any of us really has, in an otherwise empty universe, is each other.

“As Apollo 8 came around the limb of the Moon and readied to reconnect with home, it seemed to Anders so strange – the astronauts had come all this way to discover the Moon, and yet here they had discovered the Earth.”

What they “discovered,” of course, is what the Lord sees – our planet Earth, a lonely blue and white ball suspended in the vast enormity of space, so apparently vulnerable but forever protected by its Creator.

And that gives us all hope.

IN THE BEGINNING

As those astronauts circled the Moon on Christmas night 1968 they were scheduled to speak to the world. Everyone wondered what their message would be. Would they just describe what they were seeing? Would they have messages for their families – maybe a “Merry Christmas” for the world? After all, these were by-the-book astronauts, not poets. Again, Kurson describes:

“Inside Mission Control, every square foot was packed with NASA personnel. At their homes in Houston, the astronauts’ wives gathered around television sets with children, friends and family, gifts for their husbands wrapped and placed under twinkling Christmas trees, awaiting their return. In 64 countries, a billion people – more than one-quarter of the world’s population – joined them, pushing close to their own televisions and radios, waiting to hear what the first men at the Moon would say on Christmas Eve.”

Anders began: “We are now approaching lunar sunrise and for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you.”

Then they stunned us all with what has become an indelible memory for anyone who experienced it. They simply took turns reading:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good,
And God divided the light from the darkness . . .

It was perfect. "Inside Mission Control, no one moved. Then, one after the other, these scientists and engineers in Houston began to cry. The agency had allowed (Frank) Borman to choose what to say to the world on Christmas Eve – no oversight, no committees, not even a quick glance on the day before the flight departed. It had come as a complete surprise to them."

It was a welcome surprise to everyone who heard it. Veteran commentator Walter Kronkite wept on TV. There were tears all over the face of the earth.

And it was good.

IF I MAKE MY BED IN HELL

There's a trend among "enlightened" Christians to deny the existence of hell, or at least see it as something of a purgatory cleanse on the way to heaven. Surely a loving God would not condemn anyone to an eternity of fire-and-brimstone suffering, they say. Wouldn't He want everyone He has created and loved to be with Him in heaven?

One of the champions of this philosophy, David Bentley Hart, wrote a long column recently in *The New York Times*: *Why Do People Believe in Hell?*

Hart is a prolific philosopher, theologian and author whose latest book – *That All Shall Be Saved* – lays out his premise that if God is the Creator of all, He is the Savior of all – no exceptions. "If He is not the Savior of all," he argues, "the Kingdom is only a dream. There is no such thing as eternal damnation – all will be saved."

That's an appealing notion for those trying to reconcile God's abiding love for everyone with the image of sinners cast into fiery pits for eternal suffering and torment. But many a traditional Christian revels in the "justice" of Adolf Hitler or Osama bin Laden "getting what they deserve" and "rotting in hell." One television commentator said: "If Hitler's in heaven, I'm not going!"

C. S. Lewis progressed from cynical atheism to one of the noblest champions of Christianity in the mid-1900s because of the God he came to know and love in the Bible. Charles Darwin went the other way.

Hart writes: "Once the faith of his youth had faded into the serene agnosticism of his mature years, Darwin found himself amazed that anyone could even wish Christianity to be true. Not, that is, the kindlier bits – 'Love thy neighbor' and whatnot – but rather the notion that unbelievers (including

relatives and friends) might be tormented in hell forever.”

He cites the anti-Christian tenet in some churches that even innocent babies are consigned to eternal “punishment” in hell for the “sin” of being unbaptized. How could a loving God permit that? Indeed.

Hart has trouble – as many others do – reconciling a God who promises salvation for all with the belief that He could allow some to suffer the torment of hell – forever. He does not grasp the Lord’s love for the freedom that defines us – the ultimate freedom to choose between following the Lord or turning against Him, of choosing heaven or hell for ourselves.

Hart justifies his vision with what Jesus promised in His Sermon on the Mount: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Exactly. And if your “treasure” – what you love most – is from hell, “there will your heart be also.”

We are blessed to know from the Lord’s revelation that people are not cast into hell against their will but choose to go there because that is where their love is. Hell is not really a fiery furnace but a normal enough world to its inhabitants where they are completely at home. If they think they deserve to be in heaven they may be allowed to experience its sphere – but quickly flee back to the delight of their own hell because that is where they have “made their bed.” It grieves their loving God, but that is what they have freely chosen as the eternal home for their spirit.

They have made their bed in hell because that is the only place they want to be, and that is where they are as happy as they ever can be.

CHOOSING LOVE

The opposite of choosing hell, of course, is choosing love – choosing heaven. Scarlett Lewis, who lost her 6-year-old son Jesse in the horrible shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012, has turned her life into a mission: Choose Love.

She has spoken twice at NewChurch LIVE in Bryn Athyn and travels the nation to encourage love in place of hatred and violence. She is a living testament to the power of Divine providence in our lives – finding a way to turn trauma and tragedy toward good.

She says our brains “have a negative bias that is woven into our DNA. We unconsciously focus on the negative every day: in our thoughts, decision-making, relationships, and especially after traumatic loss. This ancient predisposition is there to keep us safe but it can lead us to concentrating on what’s wrong, rather than moving toward acceptance and even gratitude. We can grow in life through roadblocks, mistakes and discomfort.”

Scarlett founded the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement within months

of his death and has been impacting millions of children and adults ever since with the “essential life skills lessons” of choosing love over fear, anger, rage. This, she says, “would have saved my son’s life, as well as the life of the perpetrator, and can reduce and prevent so much suffering that leads to the violence and dysfunction we are experiencing in schools that translates into our society.”

She says it is her faith “and knowing that I will be reunited with Jesse one day” that gave her the foundation for her resolve.

“We learn so much through loss. We realize our beloved are gifts that can be taken from us. It teaches us the importance of being present while we have them. It teaches us to prioritize micro-moments of joy that occur multiple times a day, even in our darkest times. We experience the power of compassion as others rise to the occasion to support us. Through acceptance we come to be grateful for the memories, which leads us to grace. Through loss we gain a heightened awareness of the all-encompassing power of love.”

Echoing Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl whose classic book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, says the last freedom we cling to is our ability to choose our response to whatever life throws at us, she says: “We can’t always choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how we respond. When we find the courage to respond thoughtfully with love, such as kindness, caring and compassion, to any situation, circumstance or interaction, we empower ourselves and make the world a better place.”

THOSE ‘DEAD CHURCHES’

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* had a provocative headline: *Thank God, American Churches Are Dying*. It quoted Ed Stetzer of Wheaton College: “Sometimes churches die and sometimes they should. A whole new church, not a reboot of the old, should be started in its place.”

Many people “are looking for ways to live faithfully but in a less-structured way.” That means the mainline Christian churches are in decline – no surprise – and non-denominational evangelical churches are on the rise. The author feels that fear of the secularization of America is overwrought and that a religious renewal could be on the horizon.

In the New Church we view all of this through the lens of the Last Judgment on the Christian Church and the general teaching that these have become “dead churches,” along with the promise of the New Church descending out of heaven to become “the crown of all churches that have ever existed on the earth.”

The concept of “dead churches” is uncomfortable because all of us know good people very much involved in them and living good lives from their faith.

We know these churches still have a vital role in maintaining their essential link with the Lord and heaven. And we are encouraged that even though the General Church is not growing, the New Church “universal” certainly seems to be. Witness the worldwide appeal of the *offTheLeftEye* videos of the Swedenborg Foundation.

But how do we handle the teaching about those “dead churches”? In 1964 my father, the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, wrote a timeless series of editorials in *New Church Life* on “Hard Sayings.” The first was on “Dead Churches,” beginning with the teaching “that the Christian churches are dead, and that they have suffered the death from which there is no resurrection.”

The editorial goes on:

“For many new readers of the Writings this is a hard saying indeed, and it long remains such even for some who have become loyal members of the church. It seems to be harsh, unrealistic, and not in accord with the observed facts. It appears to be a judgment on the former lives of those who have come out of the Christian churches; and, more important, it sounds like a total condemnation of those still in those churches to whom they are bound by ties of deep affection and long friendship. Yet that is only the appearance; the reality is quite otherwise.

“What the Writings really mean when they say that the Christian Church is dead can be understood only when it is known that all life, spiritually, is in use, from use, and according to use. The church is established by the Lord to perform certain uses: to provide for the presence of the Divine among the people and to teach them the way to heaven and lead them in it; to keep open a communication between heaven and earth, and thus serve as a means for that transmission and reception of the Holy Spirit by which men are taught and enlightened, reformed and regenerated.

“When the doctrine of a church, and the life to which that doctrine leads, become such that it can no longer perform these uses, that church is spiritually dead, no matter how vigorous it may seem in other fields and no matter what other functions it may be performing. Furthermore, the use cannot be restored to it through any reformation; it is entrusted to a new church raised up for that purpose.

“When the Writings say that the Christian Church is dead, therefore, they mean that its doctrine and life are no longer the means through which men can be regenerated while they live on the earth. No one can deny that it is performing social, moral, ethical and even certain religious uses; but it does not perform the uses in which the spiritual life of a church consists, and for that reason it is dead.

“In this, however, is no blanket condemnation of individuals. What the Writings condemn is not men and women, but evils of life and falsities of

doctrine therefrom. In the Christian Church, as in the New, those only are condemned who confirm themselves in evil; in the former, those who from an evil love confirm false doctrine; in the latter, those who from evil reject truth.

“There are in the Christian churches untold men and women, known only to the Lord, who belong to the church universal. In so far as simple gospel is preached to them, the Lord can bring them into a state in which the spiritual mind, neither opened nor closed here, will be opened after death.

“In so far as the old, dead dogmas are still being preached – in orthodox or in modified but even more dangerous form – He can and does withhold them from interior confirmation of them. These men and women will be saved; but the Lord’s saving operation through, though not by means of, an imperfect medium, or despite a useless one, cannot be credited to the medium itself.

“Once these distinctions are clearly seen we can come into a new freedom. We can accept what the Writings say about the Christian Church without fear that in doing so we are condemning millions of our fellows. This is vital, for upon that acceptance depends the establishment of a distinct and distinctive New Church.

“The faith of the New Church and of the Christian Church are so utterly opposed that they cannot be together in one mind; and no one can truly come into the New Church without the intellectual honesty to admit that the faith of his previous church is false. Yet in so doing he can take his stand with the Writings in repudiating, not men and women, but false doctrines.”

Announcements

ORDINATION, Second Degree

The law of the truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and turned away many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should see the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. (Malachi 2:6-7)

Assiobo, Yaovi Kouglo (Leopold) – At Vogan, Togo, January 26, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

BAPTISMS

Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord. (Psalm 127:3)

Adjei, Rita Adjeley – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Adjei, Ruth Adjeley – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Amarh, Janet Amerley – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Bostock, Gabriel David – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 19, 2020 (born September 14, 2013), son of Peter and Katja Bostock, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Childs, Deegan Ethan – At Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, November 17, 2019 (born January 23, 2019), son of Derek and Brittany Childs, Rev. Calvin A. Odhner officiating.

Childs, Lochlan – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, December 22, 2019 (born August 5, 2018), son of Luke and Meray Childs, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Clemmer, Noah Colton – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 12, 2020 (born October 23, 2018), son of Jeremy Clemmer and Amber Jewell, Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh officiating.

Dakouri, Corneille Manasse Opah – At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, February 26, 2020 (born February 25, 2020), son of Evariste Dakouri and Esther Gogoua, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating.

Davis, Jordan Glendon – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 16, 2020, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Davis, Kailyn June – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 16, 2020 (born September 14, 2009), daughter of Joel Davis, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Davis, Tyler Evan – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 16, 2020 (born April 30, 2007), daughter of Joel Davis, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Franzen, Madeline Grace – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 2, 2020 (born October 28, 2019), daughter of Zachary and Annalisa Franzen, Rev. Grant H. Odhner officiating.

Gladish, Alexander McLean – At Tucson, Arizona, December 21, 2019 (born May 24, 2018), son of David and Leyla Gladish, Rev. Frank S. Rose officiating.

Hoekstra, Merlèn Baltazar-Rogers – At San Diego, California, December 15, 2019, Rev. C. Mark Perry officiating.

Homick, Myles Giovanni – At Brookhaven, Georgia, November 30, 2019 (born June 8, 2019), son of Gerald and Geneva Homick, Rev. J. Clark Echols officiating.

Jean, Melody Pearl – At Bensalem, Pennsylvania, January 20, 2020 (born September 26, 2019), daughter of Reynald and Dieubenithe Jean, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

King, Emma – At Kempton, Pennsylvania, December 28, 2018 (born February 22, 2018), daughter of Adam and Aven King, Rev. Derrick A.M. Lumsden officiating. Delayed report.

Kwon, So-Hee – At Gwangju, South Korea, December 15, 2019 (born November 6, 2018), daughter of Jai Hyun Kwon and Na Hee Choi, Rev. Jong Ui Lee officiating.

Nmashie, Amos Adjei Adjetey – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019 (born February 9, 2015), son of Justice Nmashie and Janet Amarh, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Nmashie, Maria Astwei Adjetey – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019 (born August 13, 2006), daughter of Justice Nmashie and Janet Amarh, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Nmashie, Roselyn Ajorkor – At Pankrono, Kumasi, Ghana, December 22, 2019 (born April 21, 2007), daughter of Justice Nmashie and Janet Amarh, Rev. Kwadwo Adu Amoako officiating.

Parry, Natalie Awefa – At Abelemkpe, Accra, Ghana, January 12, 2020, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Parry, Nhyira Acheampomah – At Abelemkpe, Accra, Ghana, January 12, 2020 (born July 31, 2012), daughter of Kojo and Natalie Parry, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Parry, Kobina Bentum – At Abelemkpe, Accra, Ghana, January 12, 2020 (born July 1, 2006), son of Kojo and Natalie Parry, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Parry, Kojo Baah – At Abelemkpe, Accra, Ghana, January 12, 2020, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Parry, Kweku Agyare – At Abelemkpe, Accra, Ghana, January 12, 2020 (born April 14, 2004), son of Kojo and Natalie Parry, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Rogers, Isolde Quinn – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, December 29, 2019 (born April 2, 2019), daughter of Kingsley and Elizabeth Rogers, Rev. Prescott A. Rogers officiating.

Swiski, Mark – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 5, 2020, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Synnestvedt, Aurella Grace – At Kempton, Pennsylvania, December 22, 2019 (born December 2, 2019), daughter of Judah and Lydia Synnestvedt, Rev. Lawson M. Smith officiating.

Weaver, Stella Kathleen – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 12, 2020 (born August 11, 2019), daughter of Noah and Suzanne Weaver, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

West, Archibald James – At Charlotte, North Carolina, December 30, 2019 (born October 21, 2019), son of Erick and Rachel West, Rev. Kenneth J. Alden officiating.

BETROTHAL

By betrothal the mind of one is conjoined to the mind of another, so that a marriage of the spirit takes place before a marriage of the body. (Conjugal Love 303)

Lundsgaard-Hoekstra, Ole Lundsgaard and Merlèn Baltazar-Rogers Hoekstra

– At San Diego, California, December 15, 2019, Rev. C. Mark Perry officiating.

MARRIAGES

Truly conjugal love is not possible except between two; neither is it possible between two except from the Lord alone. Engraved on this love is heaven with all its blessings. (Conjugal Love 332)

Closterman-Clark, James Albert

Closterman and Maria Angela Clark – At Southampton, Pennsylvania, December 28, 2019, Rev. Elmo K. Acton officiating.

Lermitte-Naslund, Lowen Daryl Lermitte

and Danielle Lee Naslund – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, December 29, 2019, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Smith-Ropars, Owen Brent Smith and

Emily Anne Ropars – At Naperville, Illinois, January 18, 2020, Rev. Mark D. Pendleton officiating.

White-Bedford, Timothy Patrick White

and Michelle Star Bedford – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 18, 2020, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

DEATHS

In order that a person may live to eternity, it is necessary that what is mortal, or the material body, should be taken away from him by death. When this is done, that which is immortal is uncovered and the person becomes a spirit still in the human form. (Divine Providence 324)

Barber, Donald George – January 30, 2020, of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 89.

Buick, William Wolcott – February 21, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 79.

Childs, Helga Synnestvedt – February 24, 2020, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 90.

Davies, Ruth Margaret Waters – December 30, 2019, of Colchester, Essex, United Kingdom. 86.

Hendricks, Dr. Frederick Edwin – May 26th, 2019 of Penticton, British Columbia, Canada. 92.

Kuhl, Roger Brian – December 1, 2019, of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. 89.

Morley, Rachel Marion Howard – February 7, 2020, of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 95.

Parker, Richard Motum – February 4, 2020, of Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada. 81.

Riedemann, Walter Ernest – January 3, 2020, of Addison, Illinois. 87.

Rose, John Wells – January 18, 2020, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 95.

Streicher, Jane Elizabeth Scalbom – January 14, 2020, of Madison, Wisconsin. 88.

Umbach, Sandra Dee – December 29, 2019, of Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada. 57.

Wyncoll, John Harold – January 18, 2020, of Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada. 82.

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