

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MAY/JUNE 2020



Seven Golden Lampstands

The seven golden lampstands surrounding the Word on the altar of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral – and used symbolically throughout the Church – are not merely for decoration but with the Word form a powerful tableau of everything the Lord stands for in our lives. They are a message of hope from the Lord to us. (Page 195) *(This photo is from the May 10 memorial service for The Rev. Kurt Ho. Asplundh. Courtesy of Stewart Chapin.)*

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A Tribute to The Reverend Kurt Horigan Asplundh

The Rev. Walter E. Orthwein



Editor's note: The Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh passed into the spiritual world on May 2, 2020, at the age of 86. He was ordained into the General Church ministry on the 19th of June, 1960. Throughout his long and dedicated career he was Pastor of the New Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Principal of the Bryn Athyn Church School; Dean and then Pastor of the Bryn Athyn Society; and editor of *New Church Life*. He lived with his wife, Martha (Lindsay), in Bryn Athyn. The Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh presided at the live-streamed resurrection service on May 10. We will publish that Memorial Address in the July/August issue. The tribute below was written by Kurt's good friend, the Rev. Walter Orthwein, just days after his passing.

In the three days since the Reverend Kurt Asplundh passed into the spiritual world, there has been an outpouring of love, respect and gratitude for his character, his leadership and many contributions to the life of the Church. A common theme emerges as people recount their experiences with Kurt: "big-hearted," "caring," "kind," "gentle," "wise," "strong leader."

Kathy and I came to know Kurt and Martha very well, and their friendship has been one of the great blessings of our life. They are New Church through and through, an inspiring example of the ideals we aspire to. What a pair they made, and will forever make, in the Lord's New Church: Kurt, reserved, dignified, strong and steadfast in his principles; Martha, ebullient, emphatic, outspoken, always cheerful and enthusiastic. Even in this life it was easy to see them as one angel, deeply united in their faith and by the mission they devoted their life to, the establishment of the New Church on earth.

Kurt was a quiet man, soft-spoken, but the depth of his love for his wife and family and his Church was touchingly obvious. I think he exemplified the saying, "still waters run deep."

He was respected and trusted for his doctrinal knowledge and clear sight of truth, his wisdom, sound judgment, and the long record of his accomplishments. And also for good will and charitableness that guided his actions. In the Council of the Clergy he spoke in a thoughtful, measured way, and his words carried a lot of weight.

Kurt loved words and read widely. He also had a keen sense of humor. That and his skill as a writer are evident in the wonderful poems he wrote for so many occasions over the years. As a young man, Kurt planned to go into journalism, and did write for a newspaper for a time. But he was driven by a strong desire to be of use, and after careful consideration he decided that the highest use he could serve would be in the priesthood of the New Church. And how well providence smiled upon that choice!

In addition to their interest in and caring for individuals, Kurt and Martha have provided support, quietly, for virtually every endeavor of the General Church, the Academy, and the Bryn Athyn community. They didn't have to be asked; they were always on the lookout for needs that they could help with. They generously opened their gracious home to entertain the whole Council of the Clergy and other large groups, as well as for individual visitors to Bryn Athyn, on numerous occasions.

Kurt's devotion and lifetime of work as a pastor and preacher, school principal and teacher, writer and an always-present supporter of Church events, bore much fruit. He would not want a list of his accomplishments — and none is necessary. All who knew him know how greatly the Church has benefited from his lifetime of service to it.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

Godspeed, Kurt!

In This Issue

The much-loved Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh passed into the spiritual world on May 2, 2020. His good friend the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein offers a touching tribute. (Page 181)

Editorials (page189), include:

- *All Things New*: This was to be the theme of the General Church Retreat, but its cancellation due to the coronavirus pandemic does not stop the process or the promise of the Lord forever making all things new – for the world, for the Church, and for each one of us.
- *The Promise and the Hope*: So how, exactly, does the Lord “make all things new” in our lives? Only He has the power to do so but we also have a role in the process.

What is “The most remarkable event in the history of the human race”? The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs has the answer for New Church Day and why it is so important not only to the Church but for each one of us. (Page 186)

The seven golden lampstands around the Word – as shown on the cover – are a familiar image in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. It’s also an image reflected throughout the Church, with special meaning on the 19th of June. In a sermon, the Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb says the seven golden lampstands represent us, drawn to the Word – “the people from whom the Lord will form and create a new church and a new heaven.” The lampstands are an enduring message of hope. (Page 195)

In another New Church Day sermon, *Walls of Crystal*, the Rev. Nathan Cole says: “The internal meaning of the Holy City is not just a description of what we need to do to be worthy of heaven, but also a picture of the blessings for those people who do belong.” (Page 201)

In a message *From the Bishop’s Office*, the Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs reflects on two lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic: that all evils are contagious and that the Lord is in charge and always provides for what is good. Hopefully we have all been learning our own lessons and drawing closer to the Lord. (Page 206)

At the height of the coronavirus pandemic that had people all over the world confined to their homes and filled with concern, the Rev. Eric Carswell preached a sermon live-streamed from the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, *Strengthening Ourselves in the Lord*. This is what David did when his city of Ziklag was sacked and burned, and is a reminder for how best to cope with the tragedies and challenges that befall us – beginning with understanding the Lord’s Providence and trusting in Him. (Page 209)

With a very timely study the Rev. Michael D. Gladish offers *Doctrinal Reflections on the Novel Coronavirus*. There is much to learn spiritually from this pandemic – not only medically but for our own spirituality. He writes: “We know that we can learn many things from the contrasts between light and dark, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, but even more than this the exposure to corrupting influences can motivate us to look for better ways to live.” (Page 215)

We’ve always used 20/20 as a sign of perfect vision, so in this year of 2020 the Rev. Jeremy Simons offers some guidance in our search for truth. “If we are searching for the truth,” he says, “we need to avoid being misled by easy and obvious arguments based on appearances, and instead think from the Word.” (Page 223)

May is the month of Mother’s Day and the Rev. John Odhner traces its history, beginning with Julia Ward Howe – best remembered for writing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* – but also a devoted reader of Swedenborg. “Howe loved the teachings in the Writings about marriage,” he says, “and her appeal for women to bring peace to the world follows the nature of heaven.” (Page 229)

The Rev. Alan Cowley also loves the teachings on marriage and feels that “one of the most wonderful teachings of the New Church is that marriage is eternal.” And in this age where marriage is “often taken lightly,” it is important for all of us who believe in the promise to set an example through our own marriages. (Page 231)

The Rev. Andy Heilman offers an overview of the Theistic Science Symposium held at Bryn Athyn College last October, with summaries from each of the presenters. While “Theistic Science” may sound lofty and daunting for the layman and woman, it is really a fascinating study, through natural science, of the influx of the spiritual into the natural, which is happening all around us, all the time. (Page 234)

Church News (page 243) includes:

- A report on the March meeting of the General Church Board of Directors, including an update on strategic planning
- Rescheduling of the General Church Corporation meeting

IN THIS ISSUE

- A survey of pastors throughout the Church on encouraging experiences with online services, especially during the coronavirus shutdown
- How the Pittsburgh New Church School is providing online learning – even for students with dyslexia
- Another successful service trip by Bryn Athyn College students to the New Church at Boynton Beach, Florida – with photos
- The popular Jacob's Creek Family Retreat joins the many cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic
- Revised plans for the Bryn Athyn College commencement and other graduations

The Most Remarkable Event in the History of the Human Race!

The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

There might be a variety of answers people would give as to what they believe is the most remarkable event in the history of the human race. It could be the invention of the wheel, the discovery of the atom, or the end of World War II. Religiously, some might consider it to be the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, or His resurrection from the tomb.

I believe the most remarkable event in the history of the human race happened the day after Swedenborg had completed the work *True Christian Religion*. We're told that then "*the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and . . . sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that THE LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages . . . This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770.*" (*True Christian Religion* 791)

Some of you might still be wondering why I am picking this as the most remarkable event, and maybe even thinking that this is a ridiculously bold claim. However, I will present a line of thinking as to why I think this is reasonable. The first thought has to do with the context of history and the fact that according to the Heavenly Doctrine we are living in the time of the last of the great churches upon earth, and that "*this New Church is the crown of all the churches that have hitherto existed on the earth, because it is to worship one visible God.*" (*Ibid.* 787)

History provides an opportunity to observe how the Lord has guided the human race throughout the course of time. On June 19, 2020, we will be celebrating the 250th birthday of the New Church, and as churches go we are still a very young church, so it is exciting to consider what role we can play in helping the Lord to establish it upon the earth. I believe the importance of our role is magnified when we consider what the Lord tells us about the history of the churches upon this earth.

We are taught that "*there have been in general four churches on this earth*

since its creation, one after the other.” (Ibid. 760) The Most Ancient Church came first, followed by the Ancient Church, the Jewish or Israelitish Church, and finally at the time of the Lord coming to earth He established the Christian Church. In the course of time each church came to an end, and we’re told that “after one church is finished, then a new church comes into existence. This cyclical pattern has continued up to the present time.” (Ibid. 753)

While the Lord was on Earth He foresaw that the Christian Church would fall and promised that He would come again as the Spirit of Truth because He had many things left to say that could not yet be understood. Then in the book of *Revelation* He revealed through the apostle John that He would establish a New Church on Earth symbolized by the Holy City New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. The General Church strives to be an embodiment of that New Church and believes that the Heavenly Doctrine is the Spirit of Truth the Lord promised to send and that those books constitute the Second Coming of the Lord.

The following teaching inspires me with awe in reflecting on what role I might play. All these churches in history were *“divided into grand ages and individual movements over time.... The overall history was shaped by these ecclesiastical epochs; and the epochs were shaped by the general and the individual movements within them.” (Ibid. 775:2)*

The gist of this number is that the history of the churches played a major role in the history of the entire human race, and that the individual movements within each of those churches helped to shape that history. You are a part of one of those individual movements within the New Church!

Now think about your own personal history as to how you came upon the teachings of the New Church and became interested in it. Chances are that looking back at the Lord’s Divine Providence you can see many unique and fascinating turns in the road that led you to where you are now. What an incredible era we are living in, so a great question to ask yourself is: “Why did the Lord have me born during this time period and what would He be wanting me to do for His New Church?”

I know two areas that I hope to contribute to are making sure that the teachings of the New Church are available around the world in many languages and that we remain a Church that cares about the soundness and purity of doctrine they reveal. Why? Because, *“It is known that the church is in accordance with its doctrine, and that doctrine is from the Word; nevertheless it is not doctrine but soundness and purity of doctrine, consequently the understanding of the Word, that establishes the church. Neither is it doctrine, but a faith and life in accordance with doctrine, that establishes and constitutes the special church in the individual person.” (Ibid. 245)*

The other area I would love to play a part in is helping restore the vision

of conjugal love once again upon this earth. There is so much pain and confusion in the world about marriage that could be healed by the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine. The eternity of marriage in heaven could give so many people hope! I find this simple, beautiful teaching from the Lord strengthens me daily: *“The conjugal union of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of the Christian religion.”* (Conjugal Love 457)

Hopefully, some of these thoughts might encourage you to really reflect on the vital importance of the New Church becoming established on this earth, and might inspire you to really make this 250th celebration of the birthday of the New Church a meaningful one. You might even consider whether or not the Lord sending out the twelve disciples on June 19, 1770, and declaring the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns is actually the most remarkable event in human history! More importantly, may you think seriously about what role the Lord has for you in establishing His New Church as the crown of all the churches that have hitherto existed on the earth.

Happy New Church Day to you all!

Editorials

Bruce Henderson, Editor

ALL THINGS NEW

“Behold, I make all things new.” This was to be the theme of the General Church Retreat June 18 – 21 in Bryn Athyn – another victim of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. But it will not stop the process or the promise of the Lord making all things new – for the world, for the Church, for each one of us.

“Behold, I make all things new.” This is the crowning promise in the Word. It is preceded with this memorable verse: “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.” (*Revelation 21:4*)

Then follows: “He that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”

In the context of the *Book of Revelation* and its internal, spiritual sense this heralds the Last Judgment, then the creation of a new heaven, a new earth and a new church.

The wonder of this promise is that it is on-going. The Lord did not just make everything new in one moment. He *makes* all things new – continuously and forever. And this is another beautiful reminder that while the Word may speak of a distant past, it always speaks directly to us about our own lives – right now. It is also an assurance that the Lord is always with us as we regenerate and strive to make our lives better – and make the world a better place.

In his sermon on the *Seven Golden Lampstands* (page 195), the Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb says: “In the *Gospel of John* we read how the Word came down and dwelt among us, and in the words of John, the Word is a light shining in darkness. It shines into the darkness of our minds and turns the darkness into light. And when this happens, the Lord has made all things new.

“Our light is His light and the descent of truth from the Lord down through the heavens and through the Word to us now finds a fitting receptacle,

a person who receives and reflects His love and wisdom. They are now the church, and in time, they will be the angels of heaven.”

So, we – each one of us – has a central and continuing role in the whole process of the new heaven – the New Church – descending and being established on Earth.

The General Church Retreat – which will be rescheduled – was promoted with the thought: “The New Church, on a grand scale, is about a new era of Christianity; a new faith that at once inspires and makes sense. On a personal level it is about newness of life for each of us; a bright future for ourselves and those we love” – how we connect with the Lord by serving Him and our neighbors. This is what makes “all things new” for us.

Heaven and earth are “made new” for us as we see them in the new light of the Divine. Indeed, all of the beauty and order of nature – especially in the splendor of spring – reflects its spiritual origin and the glory of heaven. We also are more attuned to the goodness in people helping and serving their neighbor, especially in the challenging environment of the coronavirus.

The invitation to the Retreat offered this hope for all of us: “The New Church, on a grand scale, is about a new era of Christianity; a new faith that at once inspires and makes sense. On a personal level it is about newness of life for each of us; a bright future for ourselves and those we love.”

This was not meant to be a passive experience but participatory, with mind and spirit eagerly engaged. That kind of preparation – which was not cancelled – begins with reading, contemplating, and committing to opportunities to be ever kinder and more useful.

Reading through the *Book of Revelation* – which culminates with the new heaven, the new church and “all things new” – we need to reflect on where we are in the midst of this great drama: maybe feeling overwhelmed by the dragon; perhaps enticed by the siren song of Babylon, with no love or understanding of the Lord; or fighting with Michael and his angels to drive out the dragon so that we can be with the Lord and follow Him.

Revelation, we know, is not just a fanciful account of what John witnessed on the Isle of Patmos a long, long time ago. It is a prophecy for our own lives – for the life of the Church within us. It is the realization that the Lord is forever and always ready to “make all things new” – in heaven, in the Church, in our own lives,

As was said in the invitation to the Retreat, which still applies: “You are invited to consider your part; your way of connecting anew with your Lord, and of experiencing His call, by means of His Church, to serve.”

That is the way we are involved in “making all things new.”

THE PROMISE OF THE HOPE

So how, exactly, does the Lord make “all things new” in our lives? With our help. Indeed, only He has that power. But we have a role in the process – if we choose to let Him lead us and make us new.

We recall the story in *John 5* about the man with an infirmity for 38 years, waiting by the pool in Bethesda for the angel to stir the waters so he could be cured. But someone among the “multitudes of impotent folk” always got there before him.

When Jesus saw him there he asked him a strange question: “Do you want to be made well?” This man had been waiting for 38 years! Of course, we say, he wanted to be cured. But this is an important lesson for all of us. We not only have to want to be made well – to be made new – but need to realize as well how powerless we are to cure ourselves and that all such power belongs only to the Lord.

When Jesus then said to him, “Take up your bed and walk,” he was made whole. And so the Lord can make “all things new” for us – if we really want to be made well.

There is also the parable in *Matthew 13* about the enemy who sowed tares in a farmer’s field of wheat. When the servants asked if they should separate out the tares the master said no, lest the wheat also be rooted out with them. He told them to “let both grow together until the harvest,” when he would tell the reaper to gather the tares and burn them, then “gather the wheat into my barn.”

This is a parable about our essential freedom: suspended between heaven and hell, between good and evil, in this life so that we are free to make our own choices. We can all be harmed and threatened by evil without choosing it – witness the coronavirus – but we have to know exactly what evil is to be able to freely reject it or embrace it. Only by shunning it throughout our lives can we really do what is good from the Lord. Only by shunning evil as part of our regeneration do we actively choose to trust in the Lord and follow Him. And only then can He “make all things new” in us.

That is why we need both tares and wheat in our lives so that we can make our own free choices. It is like weeding our own garden.

Once we submit to the Lord’s power to make us new we are like “the people who walked in darkness (who) have seen a great light.” (*Isaiah 9:2*) The Lord takes away our blindness by shining a new light of truth so that we can see for ourselves and freely choose what kind of spiritual life we will lead – to eternity.

So, making “all things new” in us is a continuing process throughout our regeneration. It is the work and triumph of a lifetime. It is why the promise of being made new is the ultimate message of hope.

Letter to the Editor

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

Water Into Spiritual Wine

To The Editor:

Regarding the administration of the Holy Supper, it seems to me that the Rev. Mark Allais has hit the nail on the head with his message in the December 19 *Chronicle* (of the Carmel New Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada).

He points out that the Lord gives us all the freedom to choose, to weigh up all we have learned from Him and to pick the path we will follow to Him. And in recognizing the tension that can arise from differences in the understanding held by different ministers, he rightly calls for us all to be tolerant of our neighbors, to allow them to walk in their path to the Lord entirely as they find it.

There has been controversy concerning the correspondence of the elements to be offered: wine, grape juice, or water, each having different significances. And then, there is the command of the Lord Himself: “*This* do in remembrance of me.” (*Luke 22:18*, emphasis added) That seems pretty explicit, doesn’t it?

The correspondences of unleavened bread, wine, eating and drinking do not appear to be controversial. The controversy seems to arise only when good people, for reasons of physical health, have been medically advised to stop consuming one of the elements offered. So the question becomes: “Should a minister, because of his personal convictions in doctrine, refuse to adapt his presentation of the holy supper sacrament to accommodate such handicapped persons?”

A pretty important question!

Rev. Allais appears to be reminding us that truth is only half of the equation. He has presented an important quotation from New Church doctrine that shows the instruction that truth must be tempered by charity:

If charity occupied the first place and faith the second the whole appearance of the Church would be different. . . . They would not on the basis of particular ideas about the truths of faith distinguish between and make many churches out of different groups. Instead they would speak of one Church that included all leading a good life, and not only those within that part of the world where the Church exists but also those outside. – (*Arcana Coelestia* 6269[2])

He asks us: “What do we choose to focus on?” According to this number maybe the answer should be: “Charity!”

To obey a clear commandment of the Lord God would seem to be essential to our salvation, wouldn't it? “*This* do in remembrance of me.”

But wait. Swedenborg reveals:

With the laws of the Israelite people . . . it can be seen that they came to an end along with the sacrifices and every other ritual observance when the Lord came into the world and disclosed the more internal things within acts of worship. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9211)

So, it looks like the Lord wants us to apply His love in our lives and His truths in our actions, which I think is the *spiritual* core of the Holy Supper. And, if that is our true desire and intention, is it really *essential* for us to adhere to external correspondences as we acknowledge our commitment?

In the *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 97, Swedenborg testifies:

The literal sense of the Word is a guard to the genuine truths concealed within it; and the guard consists in this, that this sense may be turned in different directions and explained according to the apprehension, and yet the internal not be hurt and violated by it.

If we prudently follow medical advice and use an imprecisely correspondential substitute, will He love us less? Will the church suffer because of the improper representation that was used? Can it be said that we have really taken the supper if we have knowingly used a substitute? Well, that is the whole question, isn't it?

Here are a few additional thoughts:

- Isn't the Lord's *love* the essential of His wisdom?
- Doesn't Swedenborg reveal that truth without goodness (love) is actually evil?
- The Lord, we are told, protects our freedom of choice as the apple of His eye.
- And, “but without a parable spoke He not to them.” (*Mark* 4:34)

The Lord said to the Samaritan woman at the well: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (*John* 4:14) Earlier, the Lord actually turned water into wine. (*John* 2:1-11) Since He said and did these things, what might He do for someone who deservedly

comes before Him at the Holy Supper?

Even today, correspondences are doubtless important. I've been taught that the clergy is inspired through a special internal influx from the Lord. But could not one conclude that by strictly adhering to the *literal* statement of a Gospel *parable* a minister might be frustrating another human being's approach to an essential heavenly gate and might be . . . what, overkilling the truth?

However, the nagging thought remains: "If I don't practice the correspondences exactly, can it be said that I have *really* partaken of the Holy Supper?" I guess the Lord has to answer that one with Love.

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, Florida

Seven Golden Lampstands: A Message of Hope from the Lord

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

Lessons: John 1:1-14; Revelation 1:9-20; Apocalypse Revealed 43, 66

*" And I turned to see the voice that was speaking,
And I saw seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:10)*

We begin this morning by looking around this cathedral. It is a work of art designed not only to represent the Lord in His creation, but also to lead us to Him. It is obvious that the focal point is the Word, resting on a golden altar in the inmost part of the chancel. Every detail of the cathedral draws our eyes to the Word: the nave stretches toward it.

Something we can't see unless we are looking for it is that the floor of the nave rises a whole foot from the West door to the steps of the chancel so that one rises to approach the Word. Now look at the chancel itself: the outer chancel is narrower than the nave, as if focusing inward toward the Word. The middle chancel is narrower still, and finally the inmost chancel forms a square, visually set apart from the rest of the chancel. This is where the Word stands in its glory. Everything is designed to draw the eyes inward to focus on the Word.

The Word, of course, is the Lord with us. As we read in the first lesson, the *Gospel of John* starts: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and He came down and dwelt among us."

As we look at that book on the altar, what we see is the last level of divine truth. It is the final descent of the Word which begins in the Lord Himself and passes down through the heavens until it takes its final rest in the stories and teachings of the Old and New Testaments. In a purely natural sense, we are looking at a book, but in reality we are looking at the support, basis and

containant of all the good and truth the Lord presents to us. This explains why the Word is the focus: it is the Lord speaking and this is why the Word is placed in a special, inmost part of the chancel, and why all eyes are drawn to it.

As we contemplate the Word, however, we might find ourselves overlooking the other articles in that holy place: the seven golden lampstands arranged in a circle around the Word. I want to focus our attention on those golden lampstands, for they are not merely decoration, but together with the Word they form a powerful tableau of everything the Lord stands for. It is a message of hope from the Lord to us.

In the opening chapter of the *Book of Revelation*, John is drawn into the spirit and tells a story of hope and promise for each of us. He describes how he heard a voice as loud as thunder behind him. As he turned to see the voice that spoke to him, he saw seven golden lampstands. These are the first things he mentions, and after them he saw in the midst of them one like the Son of Man who is, of course, the Lord as the Word, and the rest of John's description describes Him in detail.

But those seven golden lampstands are the first things John sees in the vision. The reason it is so important to stress this is because of what we are told about first-mentioned things in the teachings for the New Church. In the *Arcana Coelestia*, or *Secrets of Heaven*, we are told that “*what is stated first must be held in mind and must be seen to reside universally in everything that follows.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8864) In other words, the correspondence of those lampstands infuses and leads the entire *Book of Revelation*. Another way to put it is that this whole book is about those lampstands. This makes them extremely important and if we understand them, that understanding should fill us with hope.

When John turned to see the voice that spoke to him, he may have been expecting to see an angel, but what he saw were the seven golden lampstands. He did not see an angel. He saw an image of us, for the seven golden lampstands represent us, the people from whom the Lord will form and create a new church and a new heaven.

John then goes on to describe in detail the One like the Son of Man in the midst of the seven lampstands. Every aspect of His appearance relates to the truth making a picture, or an image of the Word as it comes from the Lord. In focusing on the Lord, we might, at this point, think the lampstands are forgotten, but that is not the case because the Lord from the midst of the lampstands draws attention back to them, saying: “The seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” and this is explained in the Heavenly Doctrine: “The seven churches mean all people in the Christian world who turn to the church – and this in every case according to each one's state of reception.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 43) These are the seven churches of Asia, and the Lord has a message for each of them: they will be the New Church and in

the next world, the New Heaven.

As we look at the Word on the chancel, the lampstands surround it, as if containing and holding it in a matrix. It looks as if the lampstands are there for the Word, but it is really the other way around: the lampstands are there because the Word is there. The purpose of a lampstand is to hold a lamp, and the purpose of a lamp is to shine with light. That light comes from one source, the Word.

The Word flows directly from the Lord into the Book and it flows from the Book to the people of this world. As we receive the truths of the Word, the Word shines through us, and darkness is dispelled. The Word connects to each lampstand and holds it in its place, representing the billions of people in this world, who each shine with the light received from the Word.

The Word is the Lord's Divine love and wisdom flowing down from Him like the heat and light of the sun, passing through the different levels of heaven and adapting to the state of the angels there until it enters into the lowest point, which is the book we see on the altar. But the stream of truth does not stop at the book; instead it enters and opens the minds of people, individuals, you and me, so that we can see Him, respond to Him and become connected with Him. We can shine with the light He gives to us. The lampstands represent everyone who receives that truth. These are the people who will make the church on earth, and afterwards heaven itself.

John's description of the lampstands is given in a very specific order: there are seven of them, they are gold and they are lampstands. Each of these details is important.

First there are seven lampstands. Seven is a very common number used in the Word because it signifies all or completeness. Bearing in mind that these lampstands represent the people who will make up the Church and heaven, the fact that there were seven of them contains the promise that the Lord gives His truth for all people. There are no exceptions. Every single one of us is included in this number. This becomes clearer when we think of each lampstand being one of the Seven Churches of Asia.

The second and third chapters of *Revelation* describe each of these churches, which are different types of people who respond to the Lord. Some

As we receive the truths of the Word, the Word shines through us, and darkness is dispelled. The Word connects to each lampstand and holds it in its place, representing the billions of people in this world, who each shine with the light received from the Word.

The message of hope given by these lampstands is that even though we fall short of the mark, the Lord, by means of the Word, continues to lead us. . . . The promise for each church is that if we turn from our sins and build on the goodness the Lord implants in us, then first the church and afterwards heaven, develop within us.

people in this world, represented by the Church of Philadelphia, receive the Lord and respond to Him fully. We could say these people are already regenerate. The other six churches represent people with a mix of good qualities and spiritual failures – times when we turn toward the Lord, and times when we turn away.

The message of hope given by these lampstands is that even though we fall short of the mark, the Lord, by means of the Word, continues to lead us. He could concentrate on our weaknesses, berate us and turn away from us. But that is not what He does. With each of the churches of Asia He patiently confirms the good that is in them and then identifies their issues and shows them how to rectify them. The promise for each church is that if we turn from our sins and build on the goodness the Lord implants in us, then first the church and afterwards heaven, develop within us.

The second detail about the lampstands is that they were gold. Gold in the Word corresponds to goodness, and because these seven lampstands were made of gold it means that every person in this world has good in him or herself at some level. From the moment we are born right through to the end of our lives, the Lord implants states of goodness and truth in each of us. He gives us the capacity to respond to Him. This is the raw material we are made from, for just as the lampstands were made of gold, so the church in us is based on love to the Lord and to each other.

In the messages to the seven churches of Asia we see the different states of people who are called to be part of the New Church and the New Heaven. While each person has their own particular form of good, they also have spiritual failings, which are inclinations toward evil and the actual sins we commit when we give in to those inclinations.

Most people are aware of these failings in themselves. With a bit of self-examination, we can see times when we have been self-absorbed or when we have been critical of others. There are times when our priorities are out of order. The list of our shortcomings can go on and on, and at times we think of these

and feel hope drain away.

The message to the seven churches of Asia, and the message of the seven lampstands surrounding the Word, is that there is always hope. The Lord gave each of the seven churches specific instructions on how to rectify their sins, and if they did, they would receive the blessings He wants to give them. He held out the message to them that there is hope that the church and heaven can be established in them if they let go of their evils and sins. And He is willing to help every step of the way. His final words to the last of the Seven Churches, are a promise to all of us:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sit with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
(*Revelation 3:19-22*)

When we hear what the Spirit says to the Churches, we are not only lampstands, but lamps. Lampstands serve one purpose: to hold up lamps and shed light into darkness. Lamps represent the common purpose the Lord has for each of us, to reflect His love and wisdom. The object of the Word is not simply to tell us truth. Truth is a means to an end, and that end is goodness. The Lord tells us the truth so that by understanding Him we can remodel our lives according to what He teaches us, to become the gold the lampstand was fashioned from and a lamp shining in the darkness.

As we overcome the evils and sins of our lives, gradually we become a part of the Church of Philadelphia where good and truth are evenly matched. Then we don't need instruction to remove evil, for the evil has been removed. Now we need instruction of how to do good and build those heavenly states that will make us a part of the New Heaven.

When the Lord showed John the seven golden lampstands as the first image in the *Book of Revelation*, He was essentially saying: I am going to create a New Heaven and a New Earth, and I will populate them with people of all types who have overcome sin. The seven golden lampstands are a promise that each of us can reach this state. Truth can lead us through life, away from evil and into real goodness, and that goodness is the gold the lampstands are made from, and it is the oil within the lamp on the top of the lampstand. Just as the oil fuels the lamp so that it burns brightly, so love from the Lord burns with a bright in a new understanding of the meaning of the Word.

In the *Gospel of John*, we read how the Word came down and dwelt among us, and in the words of John, the Word is a light shining in the darkness. It shines into the darkness of our minds and turns our darkness into light. And when this happens, the Lord has made all things new. Our light is His light,

Each time we sit in this cathedral and look at that representation of the Word surrounded by the seven golden lampstands we are being given a message: a message of hope from the Lord, that out of the many mixed states of our lives He will build a new heaven and a new earth.

and the descent of truth from the Lord down through the heavens and through the Word to us now finds a fitting receptacle, a person who receives and reflects His love and wisdom. They are now the Church, and in time, they will be the angels of heaven.

As we allow our eyes to be drawn through this cathedral to the tableau in the inner chancel and see the Word, we can think of the descent of the Lord's Word, down to the heavens and into a book. As we contemplate those seven golden lampstands, we can think of how the Lord achieves His purpose of a New Church and a New Heaven, not abstractly, but in each of us. Each of us is in and part of one of those lampstands. We may be at different points of journey, we have different journeys to travel, but the Lord has provided for that by giving not one but seven lampstands.

Each time we sit in this cathedral and look at that representation of the Word surrounded by the seven golden lampstands we are being given a message: a message of hope from the Lord, that out of the many mixed states of our lives He will build a new heaven and a new earth.

And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

To him who thirsts I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."



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Walls of Crystal

The Rev. Nathan F. Cole

And he carried me away in the spirit on a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; and her light was like a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, shining like crystal.
(Revelation 21:10-11)

The vision of the Holy City is a wonderful picture of heaven. In the New Church we love to study the *Book of Revelation*, because it is a prophecy not only about heaven, but also the New Jerusalem (or the New Church) descending to earth.

We are careful about looking at these prophecies in too literal a way, as many of them cannot happen literally, although they contain spiritual truths that are important to understand. In this case, the Holy City is both a symbolic picture of the New Church and actually a real place in heaven. Heaven is truly a wonderful place. There are paradise-like gardens of indescribable beauty. And we can look forward to amazing homes perfectly prepared for us. Of course, if we do become angels, it is not the outward beauty that will delight us as much as the spiritual realities creating them.

In heaven there are paradisaical gardens and also cities, with magnificent palaces, contiguous to one another, resplendent in their coloring, beyond all the art of the architect. Nor is this to be wondered at; cities of similar appearance were seen also by the prophets, when their interior sight was opened, and this so clearly that nothing in the world could be more distinct. Thus was the New Jerusalem seen by John. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1626)

I have seen the palaces of heaven which were so magnificent that they cannot be described. Above, they glittered as if made of pure gold, and below, as if made of precious stones. Some were more splendid than others. It was the same within. Neither words nor knowledge are adequate to describe the decorations that adorned the rooms. On the side looking to the south there were parks where, too, everything shone, in some places the leaves glistening as if made of silver, and the fruit as if made of gold, while the flowers in their beds formed as it were rainbows with their colours. . . . The angels said that such things and innumerable others still more

perfect are set forth before their eyes by the Lord. Yet they said that these things are more pleasing to their minds than to their eyes, because in every one of them they see correspondences, and through the correspondences, things Divine. (*Heaven and Hell* 185)

How do we get to live in such an amazing place as the Holy City? It might seem like anyone could enter the New Jerusalem since the gates are always open. It is not so simple because as real as the Holy City is in heaven, it operates by spiritual laws.

Each part of the description of the Holy City tells us something about the qualities we need to have to belong there. The gates are always open because everyone is free to enter, but if someone tries to enter whose life does not correspond to that of the city, then they will not be able to enter, as nothing can enter the city that defiles or does abominations or lies. "Abomination and lies" are general spiritual terms for evils and falsities.

The gates that are always open are made of a pearl. A pearl symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ. To truly enter the city you need to know and follow the Lord. The Lord is also the Temple and the light of the New Jerusalem. Religion can only get someone to heaven when it is truly living. Worship by itself without the living presence of the Lord is not a true religion.

We read in *Matthew*: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (*Matthew* 7:21) And in *Luke*: "Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?"

To put it another way, the people who live in heaven with Jesus are those who act as if He was a real person. It is unfortunately a Christian tradition to think that just being a Christian in name is enough; or only following easy or superficial commands, instead of what is actually important to the Lord.

We can see that a person who only talks about the Lord, or only does the commandments that are easy or convenient, is not acting like Jesus was a real person, let alone the One God of heaven and earth. The problem with fair-weather Christians, or being Christian in name only, is more obvious when we think about that kind of behavior in relationship with a real person.

How would we feel if a spouse, parent, child or friend repeatedly hurt or attacked things that were important to us? Would it matter if they claimed to love us, or occasionally did some nice things when it was easy for them? We know that no real person would want to be treated that way. So do we treat the Lord like a real person?

What is important to the Lord? The Lord cares about us: obeying the commandments, loving Him and loving our neighbors. Due to our fallen human nature these commands take work. If we only do what is easy, we are not doing what the Lord cares about. From birth we have selfish tendencies,

so we need to resist and repent of evils that go against those commandments.

So repentance for the sake of heaven is a major theme of the New Testament and is essential to being a true Christian. There are people who call themselves Christians who do not live a Christian life, and there are non-Christians who have the Lord's life inside them, because they obey His commandments. Acting in the ways that respect the things that are important to the Lord, because we love Him, is entering through gates of pearl.

To be at home in the Holy City is to be at home with the Lord. The Lord is also called the Lamb because we need to follow Him with innocent willingness. The streets of the city are gold because gold symbolizes love, and the path people walk in that city is the doctrine of life of the Lord's truth from love. The gates are never shut, but only people who have the heavenly qualities inside them will be able to enter in and walk that street.

If tomorrow we were suddenly brought to a palace of gold and jewels and told it was our new home, we might feel overwhelmed, as if we didn't belong or deserve it. The internal meaning of the Holy City is not just a description of what we need to do to be worthy of heaven, but also a picture of the blessings for those people who do belong. We don't have to create it; the Lord is the one who makes it; we just have to be willing to come in.

One of the more amazing parts of this vision are the walls of the city. They are made of clear crystal and the foundations are adorned with 12 precious stones. Stones represent the truth and precious stones represent the precious spiritual truths shining from heaven, to be visible on earth through the Word. Precious stones can have beautiful colors, but what makes them especially beautiful and valuable is their quality of letting light through, or translucence and transparency.

The Word in the literal sense alone can be valuable, but the real value is how it brings spiritual light and life to earth. The 12 precious stones of the Holy City's foundation represent all the beautiful truths of the New Church. We don't need to know them all ahead of time because there will always be continuously more and deeper truths we can learn.

Heaven is not the end of the journey, it is an ongoing journey. The walls themselves are clear crystal, because the Heavenly Doctrine of the angels is

The internal meaning of the Holy City is not just a description of what we need to do to be worthy of heaven, but also a picture of the blessings for those people who do belong.

How can we find our home in this city? By making sure we don't hold onto anything that would keep us outside.

now clearly revealed to earth in the books we call the Heavenly Doctrines or the Writings.

This doesn't mean we can just pick up a book and know everything at first, anymore than having a library card lets you know automatically what is inside every book. What we do have is a new clarity in the doctrine of the New Church, unlike any previous church.

With a little study we can see in the Word the spiritual sense and the heavenly message there.

The more we want to enter in, the wiser we can become. Many people, even religious people, feel blind in spiritual things, and if they do not feel ignorant they may be actually more confused. But how do we reconcile the fact that we now have access to the same doctrines as the angels in heaven, and that many people even in the church seem confused or debate about the truth? The Lord's Holy City has open gates but nobody is forced to enter or be brought in before being ready.

A frequent way this is stated in the doctrine is that now it is possible for people to understand and comprehend spiritual truths, but that is not a guarantee that they will. People have to be willing not just to learn the truth but also live it. The beautiful Holy City is there, in plain sight. You can't just walk through the clear walls, but it is like we are invited to see everything about it, including the way to get in. The gates are already open, and we don't need to know everything, just be trying to live our lives according to the truths we see inside.

How can we find our home in this city? By making sure we don't hold onto anything that would keep us outside. We need to seek to walk the path to heaven, even if imperfectly at first, just being willing to start living the heavenly life, even while here on earth. The biggest challenge is not in understanding the truths, but in first being willing to obey the truths and then we will understand them more and more.

We need to remember that this prophecy is not just about heaven. The Holy City is descending. That doesn't mean a physical place on earth to match the one in heaven, but the internal qualities and life can descend to earth and prepare people to spiritually enter the city.

Imagine if our church building looked like the Holy City. Don't you think people would flock to see it? Do you think people might be curious about what they could do to become a part of this church?

The reality is that there is a new church descending that is spiritually as

beautiful as this image from the *Book of Revelation*. We need to make sure that we are being a part of making that church come to earth. And if we are not doing that, we are not ready to be part of the Holy City in heaven either. We need to help people see the beauty of this church with their spiritual eyes. We can demonstrate the Love of the New Church, the Truth of the New Church, and the Life of the New Church.

We don't need to imagine that our church is special and valuable. It already is. We just need to take responsibility for being part of it. Now, even if we are doing the best job we can, that doesn't mean everybody will see us and be converted.

The Holy City in heaven is a real place, and there are people who choose not to go in, and even try to attack it. There are also many people who are drawn to it and do enter in. We have the potential to make that Holy City a reality here on earth. Not in a physical sense, but in having the Lord's Love shine in us as bright as gold, and His truth seven times as bright as the sun shining out through crystal walls:

And the nations of those who were saved shall walk in her light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into her. And her gates shall not be shut by day; for there shall be no night there. (*Revelation 21:24-25*)

We need to remember that this prophecy is not just about heaven. The Holy City is descending. That doesn't mean a physical place on earth to match the one in heaven, but the internal qualities and life can descend to earth and prepare people to spiritually enter the city.



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Two Lessons from the Pandemic



The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

When bad things happen or there are things I don't fully understand, I usually find myself asking the simple question: what lesson can I learn from this? The pandemic we have all been enduring certainly has had me asking this question a lot, and I'd like to share two lessons I have learned, with the hope they might be useful to you.

1. ALL EVILS ARE CONTAGIOUS

As I have read countless articles about the coronavirus, one thing seems certain: this virus spreads like wildfire and is easily transferred to others. We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that diseases in this world correspond to spiritual diseases which are "*evils destroying the life of the will of good, and falsities destroying the life of the understanding of truth;*" and that every natural "disease in the human race is from this source." (*Arcana Coelestia* 8364:3) Notice that the source of natural diseases from which the human race suffers comes from evils and falsities that seek to destroy our willing of good and understanding of truth.

Now I won't get into speculation of which evils and falsities the coronavirus may correspond to, but one thing we know is that it is extremely contagious. In fact, we know that all evils are contagious, some more so than others, but they all spread, for "*diseases are in themselves unclean, because as before said they spring from unclean things.*" (*Ibid.* 5712) So, what are the consistent recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control on how to deal with the spread of the virus? Wash your hands frequently. Keep an appropriate social distance. Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth. Routinely disinfect your environment.

This sounds like great advice spiritually as well. Wash yourselves and

make yourselves clean by ceasing to do evil. Keep your distance from those who may be spreading evil and falsity by their words and deeds. Cover your nose from those things that produce hellish stenches, and don't inhale. Clean out the things in your house that invite infectious influences from hell into your home!

One of the most poignant admonitions about the nature of the contagion from evil and falsity is from a passage which speaks about the necessity of the Lord's redemption. It warns that associating with people in evil can have deadly effect, for *"whoever associates with robbers or pirates at length becomes like them; and whoever lives with adulterers and harlots comes to make light of adultery; and whoever makes common cause with outlaws, does not scruple at length to do violence to anyone. For all evils are contagious, and they may be compared to the plague, which is communicated merely by the breath . . . from the infected. They may also be compared to cancer or gangrene, which spreads slowly, infecting first the nearer and then remoter parts, till at last the whole body is destroyed."* (*True Christian Religion* 120:2)

So, the first lesson I have learned from this pandemic is to take a serious look at my life and the evil influences that I have allowed myself to be around. The contagious effects of the virus can serve as a spiritual wake-up call for all of us to pay closer attention to the evil persuasions and false ideas around us that may have been slowly infecting us and destroying our will to do what is good and our ability to see what the Lord says to be true.

2. THE LORD IS IN CHARGE AND ALWAYS PROVIDES FOR WHAT IS GOOD

As the spread of the coronavirus continues to dominate headlines and wreak havoc, often it seems as though evil may actually be winning. We may even find that we are having difficulty maintaining our confidence that the Lord is really in charge, has a plan, and that everything will turn out well in the end. In these times of doubt, it is so useful to return to this teaching of the Lord that is a favorite of many New Church people around the world:

Be it known that the Divine Providence is universal, that is, in things the most minute; and that they who are in the stream of Providence are all the time carried along toward everything that is happy, whatever may be the appearance of the means; and that those are in the stream of Providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8478:4)

Notice the phrase "whatever the appearance of the means." This pandemic is most likely not the will of God, but rather a permission of evil that at first glance appears to bring only misery, not happiness. However, if we look closely enough, probably most of us have already seen good come out of this bad situation. People around the world are taking time to reflect on what is

important in life, and are taking note of their inherent selfishness, shallowness and materialistic natures.

In many cases this has resulted in people turning back to the Lord for hope and comfort. I know some people who are watching three worship services on a Sunday, and attending virtual chapels during the week. Others have started reading the Word again on a daily basis. People are volunteering in a multitude of areas, from making masks to delivering food to calling the elderly on the phone just to check in. Many families are worshipping together more. Children are at home and getting to spend more time with their parents, often playing games outside or going for walks together. At General Church Education we have seen downloads of our religious materials from www.newchurchvineyard.org and www.newchristianresources.org increase dramatically!

So, the second lesson I have drawn from this tragic pandemic is that the Lord really is in charge and can bring good out of any situation. How the Divine Providence of the Lord works to improve us even in the worst circumstances is truly miraculous. *“At every moment of its operation, or at every step of its progress, when it sees a person stray from the goal, it guides, bends and directs the person in accordance with its laws, withdrawing him from evil, leading him to good. This cannot be done without the permitting of evil.”* (Divine Providence 234)

I hope these lessons I have learned might resonate with you and I pray that the Lord has taught you some lessons as well during these extraordinary times. I encourage you to take this unique opportunity to reconnect with the Lord in a deeper way through His Word, and set up a daily routine of reading it, meditating on it, and praying to the Lord to grant you trust in His Divine providence. In this way the Lord will be able to grant you the inner peace He spoke about in the gospel of *John* when He said: ***“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*** (*John* 16:33)

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Strengthening Ourselves in the Lord

A Sermon by the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

(Note: This sermon was live-streamed from the Bryn Athyn Cathedral on March 29, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic that affected people all over the globe.)

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. (I Samuel 30:6)

You probably have heard many quotations that remind us to depend on the Lord. One from *Psalms* is: “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.” (*Psalms* 121:1-2) One from the gospel of *John* is: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (*John* 15:5)

But when life moves along in familiar patterns we can sometimes feel quite self-sufficient. Our health is reasonably good, we have a roof over our heads, food on the table, and the bills we have to pay seem under control. And then something can come along that reminds us that things can go very wrong.

A few months ago, more than 30,000 people in this world might have had a sense that they were reasonably self-sufficient, and now a virus has ended their natural lives. For many others, the jobs and income they relied on have suddenly ceased to exist with uncertainty clouding when they might be able to return to work again.

The story I read of David’s band of men returning to a sacked and burned Ziklag is an ancient example of a massive tragedy. For David and his men, their wives, children, homes and possessions had all been lost during their absence. Their reactions included overwhelming grief.

As *I Samuel* states: “Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.” (*I Samuel* 30:6) But there was also tremendous anger. David’s men in their loss and desire for someone to blame talked of stoning him – making him responsible for their loss. This would not have brought back their wives or children. It would not have erased the sadness.

When we don't sense God's help, we can think that He has chosen the consequence we are facing. We are told very clearly in the teachings for the New Church that not all things that happen are what the Lord desires.

In this apparently hopeless situation we read that "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." (*Ibid.*) And from this strength David sought the Lord's guidance in what they should do next. For them the story had a happy ending. They were able to rescue their wives and children. They were able to regain their possessions and more.

Consider what Jesus was facing as He prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane. While sometimes Jesus felt He was one with the infinite God, other times he felt like a frail and fallible human being. This prayer is one of those later times. Jesus knew that He was facing arrest, being beaten

and whipped and then crucified; but much, much more challenging, He knew that He was going to face His deepest and most draining spiritual battle. It was not something He welcomed. He prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." The upcoming temptation was going to strain Jesus to the utmost.

Over and over again we will face the results of tragedies, disorders and outright evil in this world. We will be saddened by these results and we will also be tempted to have a number of reactions that are dangerous to our own spiritual welfare and to the welfare of those around us. There are evil spirits who seek to poison our minds with hatred, bog us down with hopelessness, or cripple us by fear and mistrust. We can feel abandoned by God. When we don't sense God's help, we can think that He has chosen the consequence we are facing. We are told very clearly in the teachings for the New Church that not all things that happen are what the Lord desires:

When we say, therefore, that God allows something to happen, we do not mean that He wills it, but that for the sake of the goal, which is salvation, He cannot prevent it. Whatever happens for the sake of salvation as the goal, happens in accordance with the laws of Divine providence. . . . Consequently at every moment of its operation, or at every step of its progress, when it sees that we are straying from the goal, it guides, bends, and directs us in accordance with its laws, withdrawing us from evil, leading us to good. This cannot be done without the permitting of evil. (*Divine Providence* 234)

We are called to see the Lord as a God of infinite love, wisdom and power.

We are told that the Lord is caring for each of us every least fraction of a moment. And yet this is not always the way it appears. God can seem distant in sad situations, such as when a baby is born with severe birth defects, or the tragic death of a child or a young person just entering the prime of life, or a parent leaving behind a spouse and children. The Lord can seem distant when elderly people feel lonely and useless and when their natural body has gotten so old that it hinders them every moment. That person can feel burdened and like a problem for others. How are we to make sense of events that seem far more destructive than constructive? How are we expected to feel?

We know that when a person dies, the only thing that is really dead is something purely natural – the physical body. However, that physical body had been extremely important. By means of it a person's spirit has been able to exist, to learn, to make choices, and through these choices can serve others in this world. Though something merely natural, that physical body is very important.

Similarly, when a tragedy strikes in this world, harming some other natural thing that has been of use, we can appropriately feel sadness at that loss. When people lose their jobs and the income it provided, their ability to support their life is threatened. The sense of loss need not be from a materialistic love. Certainly the Lord encourages us not to set our heart on natural things, but when we have valued the use a natural thing has served, we are not so much valuing the natural thing itself as the use.

Why do bad things happen? A wise answer is not saying, "It's the Lord's plan." If we assume that everything is determined to happen the way it happens we can become apathetic. For example, a person can say: "I don't need to wear a seat belt. When my time is up, I'll die and that is that." This perspective taken to an extreme would say we really don't need to worry about any decisions because the Lord is controlling all things.

The truth is that things happen that the Lord doesn't want to have happen. There are things that happen that are extremely destructive of the goals He seeks to accomplish with His infinite love and wisdom.

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Why doesn't the Lord intervene to stop such bad things? The reason is that He cannot without causing far greater harm than benefit.

Some people have tried to understand bad things by thinking that God only has a part of the power that governs the universe. Some have seemed to personify an evil force existing entirely separate from the Lord, vying with Him for control, and sometimes the Lord wins and sometimes the prince of darkness wins. But when we say the Lord's Prayer we end with the words: "For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever." We don't say "part

of the power."

In a very real sense, nothing happens apart from the Lord's government. Nothing is completely out of control. But this does not mean that bad things are what the Lord wants to have happen. Instead, we are told that some things happen directly according to His will, some things happen only partially according to what the Lord would wish and some things happen contrary to what He would want. Such things are said to be "permitted" by the Lord.

Why are they permitted? Why doesn't the Lord intervene to stop such bad things? The reason is that He cannot without causing far greater harm than benefit. The key reason for why He cannot intervene is that it is absolutely essential for our happiness that genuine spiritual freedom exist. Without freedom to choose between good and evil, true ideas and false ones, we cease to be human and it is only to the degree that we receive love and wisdom from the Lord that we can feel happiness.

But it is also important for us to recognize that bad things that happen are not always a consequence of our own choices or of some lesson that we need to learn. While it is true that the Lord works to bring some good out all things that happen, even those which are terribly destructive, it is not necessarily the way the Lord would most want us to gain that benefit and doesn't necessarily reflect a problem that we needed to face.

When a person faces a series of challenges in his life, sometimes the way he looks at it is reflected in the words: "I guess the Lord is trying to teach me something." If this implies that the Lord chose these events with a lesson in mind, I think it does not reflect the way the Lord really operates. He never wishes that bad things happen even for the sake of teaching us some lesson. When destructive things happen it is always something that the Lord has allowed to happen even though He would wish it were different.

The Lord is constantly working to accomplish His goals in our lives. But

there are two other influences that He permits that can interfere with what He wants. Firstly, our individual freedom can have us make choices that hurt us and others. We know that people can make profoundly bad decisions that have terrible consequences. But there is also a second force, one that exists because hell exists.

Accidents, sickness and other tragedies can occur whose consequences that far exceed the significance of an individual person's choice. A moment's inattention while driving can result in a terrible car accident. Is the driver responsible for this consequence? I don't think we should think so. A person can slip, fall and hurt himself, perhaps even lose his life. Is he responsible for his death because of where he placed his foot or for being in a situation in which he could slip? I think not.

Some bad things happen because the Lord permits even the evil spirits of hell some freedom. They, using their life which they have received from the Lord and perverted, can produce tragedies in this world. These tragedies do not reflect a proper consequence of choices by people in this world. The influence of the hells can produce sickness and natural disasters. They can produce tragedies that seem so random and without clear explanation that they sometimes get called "acts of God." But in reality it would probably be wiser if we called them acts of hell.

We are called to trust that even in these terribly destructive events we have not been abandoned by the Lord. Consider the following words:

From this it may be seen how far someone errs who believes that the Lord has not foreseen and does not see the smallest individual thing with a person, or that within the smallest individual thing He does not foresee and lead, when in fact the Lord's foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with him, and in details so tiny that it is impossible to comprehend in any manner of thought one in many millions of them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3854:3)

We are called to trust in the Lord's loving care. This trust will not be an

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easy matter when loved ones and our financial security are at risk. At times, many of us will inevitably go through feelings of sadness and even anger. But the Lord would lead us to a peacefulness that can follow our initial reactions.

May our trust in the Lord grow stronger each day. This trust will come as we face the ups and downs of life and seek to acknowledge that even through things that are not the Lord's will, He can still work to accomplish some good. We can ask for an underlying peace even as we deal with problems and sadness. When facing hard times we, too, can strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

Amen.



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Doctrinal Reflections on the Novel Coronavirus

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish¹

In the Writings for the New Church we are taught that “all things in the Universe, both in general and in particular, represent the Lord’s kingdom; insomuch that the universe with all its constellations, atmospheres and three kingdoms is nothing else than a kind of theater representative of the Lord’s glory which is in the heavens. In the animal kingdom not only man, but also each particular animal, even the least and lowest, is representative.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3000)

Further, we read: “In all and each of the things in nature and her three kingdoms there is an inward active force from the spiritual world; and unless this were so, nothing whatever in the natural world could act as cause and effect, and consequently nothing could be produced. That which is within natural things from the spiritual world is called a force implanted from the first creation; whereas it is an endeavor, on the cessation of which, action or motion ceases. Hence it is that the universal visible world is a theater representative of the spiritual world.” (*Ibid.* 5173:2)

Unfortunately, this also applies to evils and falsities inspired by the hells (*viz. ibid.* 7384), these being the real causes of everything harmful and negative in the natural world. There’s even a section in *Divine Love and Wisdom* that addresses the subject this way:

All good things which exist in act are called uses, and all evil things which exist in act are also called uses, but the latter are evil uses while the former are good uses. Now since all good things are from the Lord and all evil things from hell, it follows that none but good uses were created by the Lord and that evil uses arose out of hell. By the uses especially treated of in this section are understood all those which are to be seen on the earth, such as animals and plants of every kind. The animals and plants which perform uses to man are from the Lord, and those which do injury to man are from hell. By uses from the Lord are likewise understood all things which perfect the rational of man, so that he may receive the spiritual from the Lord.

1 Inspired by a brief communication from the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth by email on March 2nd.

And by evil uses are understood all things which destroy the rational, making man unable to become spiritual. These things which do injury to man are called uses because they are of use to the evil in doing evil, and are also conducive to absorbing malignities, and thus to curing them. (#336)

Thus, “By evil uses on earth are meant all noxious things in both the animal and vegetable kingdom, also in the mineral kingdom.” (*Ibid.* 338) “For man, as regards his affections and lusts and consequent thoughts, and as regards his actions springing from them which are good or evil uses, is in the midst either of angels of heaven or of spirits of hell; and as such things as are on the earth are also in the heavens and the hells, it follows that ***influx therefrom directly produces such things when the temperature is favorable.*** For all things that appear in the spiritual world whether in heaven or in hell are correspondences of affections or lusts, for they have existence there in accordance with these. Consequently ***when affections or lusts which in themselves are spiritual meet with homogeneous or corresponding things on earth, there is present both the spiritual which provides a soul and the material which provides a body.*** Also within everything spiritual there is a conatus to clothe itself with a body. The hells are around man and hence contiguous to the earth, because the spiritual world is not in space, but is where there is corresponding affection.” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 343, emphasis added)

The one positive thing about these “evil uses” is noted at the end of #336 above, where it says they “are conducive to absorbing malignities and thus to curing them.” We’ll come back to that shortly.

Meanwhile, what is it about this coronavirus that is so insidious, and what can possibly be its spiritual cause?

First of all, since it is pervasive around the world, not recognizing any social, spiritual or political boundaries, it would seem to have a very general significance related to fundamental human evils and/or falsities. According to physicians at Johns Hopkins University² in Baltimore, Maryland, “the virus is not a living organism, but a protein molecule (DNA) covered by a protective layer of lipid (fat), which, when absorbed by the cells of the ocular, nasal or buccal mucosa, changes their genetic code (mutation) and converts them into aggressor and multiplier cells.”

Since fat corresponds to innocence (*Arcana Coelestia* 3994:3) or the good of love (*Apocalypse Explained* 167:6, etc.), this protective layer would seem to suggest a covering of good or apparent good that serves to prevent the virus from being rejected by the host, a pretty clear indication either of some sort of hypocrisy or naivety that makes a person susceptible to a very bad idea.

2 Source: Irene Ken, physician, whose daughter is an Assistant Professor in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins

As for the molecule itself, the word, *insinuation* comes to mind as the Writings describe how falsities “insinuate themselves” into our thinking, penetrating to the heart of our spiritual lives, described by some as a spear point penetrating a sphere, in this case the sphere of our understanding.

In this connection we have the statements in *Spiritual Diary* 715 about “the evil spirits who strive by artifice and deceit to insinuate themselves into heaven.” There is also a teaching (*Ibid.* 2963) about “sirens,” who are particularly insidious spirits. Swedenborg writes:

I have spoken with spirits about what sirens are, and I was informed through angels that *sirens are those who steal into the passions, pleasures, and feelings of another in such a way that those in the process of slipping in do not know that evil or deceit underlies it.* Thus they are caught up in enjoyment together with the others with whom they are in company, and yet, although they do not think on this at the time, still when the chance arises, some evil intent shows itself, either of getting hold of their possessions, or of cheating, or of killing them, and the like.

Still, as a non-living molecule, the virus would seem to correspond to a falsity, rather than an evil love, but this falsity obviously is pretty pervasive in our human nature. What could it be?

- The idea that we have life in or of ourselves?
- The idea that we can know, of ourselves, what is right and wrong (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil)?
- The idea that just believing something without living according to it can provide for our spiritual lives?
- What do you think?

Further from Johns Hopkins: “Since the virus is not a living organism but a protein molecule, it is not killed, but decays on its own. The disintegration time depends on the temperature, humidity and type of material where it lies.”

This is important because we know that falsity in and of itself has NO POWER:

All power in the spiritual world belongs to truth from good, and falsity from evil has no power whatever. All power belongs to truth from good because the Divine Itself in heaven is Divine Good and Divine Truth, and all power belongs to the Divine. (*Heaven and Hell* 539)

To the extent falsity *seems* to have power it is because it masquerades as

Does it matter who we “hang out with” or with what ideas and attitudes we surround ourselves? Yes. Yes, it does. It matters a lot.

truth, or is in fact truth perverted and falsified. Think about it: if you really knew something to be false it would have no power over you, but if you *think* it's true you can be badly hurt.

The “temperature, humidity and type of material” mentioned above obviously relates to the whole spiritual atmosphere surrounding a person. Is it conducive to this falsity or is it opposed to it? Does it matter who we “hang out with” or with what ideas and attitudes we surround ourselves? Yes. Yes, it does. It matters a lot.

In this connection the *asymptomatic* aspects of the disease caused by the virus are also very interesting. In short, we can go quite a while without even realizing we have it. And isn't that the way with just about any falsity? It's why reading the Word, and in fact all the four ways of being impacted by it (*Divine Providence* 154) are so important. Left to our own thoughts and prejudices we are bound to become infected *and not even know it*. Then we can become unwitting carriers, infecting others, a process which is also very interesting and correspondential. For example, in this almost eerily prophetic comment on our present situation we read:

Association with the evil [in hell] produces this result, as may appear from these considerations: that whoever associates with robbers or pirates at length becomes like them; and whoever lives with adulterers and harlots comes to make light of adultery; and whoever makes common cause with outlaws, does not scruple at length to do violence to anyone. For all evils are contagious, and they may be compared to the plague, which is communicated merely by the breath of emanation from the infected. (*True Christian Religion* 120)

But again, science tells us: “The virus is very fragile; the only thing that protects it is a thin outer layer of fat. That is why any soap or detergent is the best remedy, because the foam CUTS the FAT (that is why you have to rub so much – for 20 seconds or more – to make a lot of foam). By dissolving the fat layer, the protein molecule disperses and breaks down on its own.”

Here again we see symbolically how fragile falsity is, and how it is protected by some good, or something that seems to be good. But when that good breaks down and the falsity is exposed it is rendered harmless and “disperses on its own.”

So what is the correspondence of soap? The Writings barely mention this but as a cleansing agent it is clear that it means something good – or true. One passage (*Apocalypse Explained* 475:11) says it is the good by which a person is purified. It would certainly seem that the careful application of *genuine good* from the Word will have the effect of breaking down the apparent good and so exposing the falsity to its own self-destruction.

In this connection the process of fermentation comes to mind, where yeast corresponds to falsity corrupting the truth and causing temptation, but

a good outcome of temptation is that the spirit is purified, represented by the fact that the alcohol that is produced in the fermentation process ends up killing the yeast.

And, according to the physician at Johns Hopkins: “Alcohol or any mixture with alcohol over 65% dissolves any fat, especially the external lipid layer of the virus.” Now again we’re talking about the effect on good, or pseudo-good, not on falsity directly, but isn’t it interesting that the alcohol, which represents a distilled, purified understanding of the truth, has the power to expose falsity by breaking down the protective layer of, shall we say, merely natural good? Of course, ordinary fermentation will not yield 65% alcohol, but the principle is clear and seems instructive. And distillation simply concentrates the alcoholic content.

Now let’s consider what happens when the virus is unchecked. As we know, the principal effect is that it attacks the lungs, causing an inability to breathe. And how plainly symbolic is that?! The heart corresponds to the will, the lungs to the understanding. And if the understanding is not able to function, that is, to process the truths we take in, we are going to die.

In the meantime, the disease will be spread by the vapors emanating from the lungs and the mouth (vapors of which we are barely aware), infecting others, and these tiny droplets of moisture clearly represent the falsities that expose other people to that corrupted thinking. Isn’t it ironic, then, that the prevention of this spread involves “social distancing” or even social isolation, the exact opposite of the spirit of community that is the foundation of heavenly life? (See *Heaven and Hell* 268 and 399)

Even the mandate that people should wear face masks to prevent the spread of infection seems to reflect a spiritual principle of isolation, and a testament to how far we have drifted from heavenly life, for we know that angels, particularly, communicate by means of their facial expressions.

It is tempting to elaborate on the social, civil and political climate in which we find ourselves today, a climate in which it is increasing difficult to discern “real news” from “fake news,” and where everyone, it seems, has his or her own conspiracy theories to explain the way the world works. Likewise, it is tempting to contrast a spirit of selfish nationalism with one of global co-operation. But we dare not go there in this article, which is mainly written

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just to stimulate thought and reflection from the doctrines. No doubt the deeper one goes into the science of infectious diseases the more one can learn about the spiritual realities that cause them.

To conclude, however, let's return to the question of what USE this virus may serve.

Of course, the conditions imposed upon us to prevent the spread of this thing immediately serve to remind us of the tremendous benefits of social interaction – not just for our mental health but for our economy and productivity and every other aspect of life in the world. We know that we can learn many things from the contrasts between light and dark, good and evil, beauty and ugliness (see *Divine Providence* 64, *True Christian Religion* 61 and 763), but even more than this the exposure of corrupting influences can motivate us to look for better ways to live. The following passage is

instructive:

When societies in the spiritual world are purified, which takes place whenever those who are evil, especially hypocrites, have insinuated themselves into them, and mingled themselves with the good there (the signs of whose presence are an obscuration of the understanding, a loss of the perception of good, a dullness of the affection of truth, and the like), then influx is let in from hell, at which the evil rejoice, but the good are disturbed in mind, and turn themselves away; thus there is a separation, and those who become afraid and turn themselves away are preserved, while the rest are cast out. (*Apocalypse Explained* 677:3)

The well-known teaching about evils being “permitted for the sake of the end, which is salvation” (*Divine Providence* 275) also comes to mind. But note, as this is explained we are shown that evils do not have to appear physically in the world for us to see and avoid them, but they must be seen clearly in the *understanding*, where we can reflect on them and on their consequences. This is why we have all the horrible stories in the Word! So we read:

Evils cannot be removed unless they appear. This does not mean that a person

should do evils in order that they may appear, but that he is to examine himself, not his actions only, but also his thoughts, and what he would do if he were not afraid of the laws and disgrace; especially what evils he holds in his spirit to be allowable and does not regard as sins; for these he still commits. In order that a person may examine himself an understanding has been given him, and this separate from the will, that he may know, understand and acknowledge what is good and what is evil; and also that he may see the quality of his will, or what it is he loves and desires.

In order that he may see this his understanding has been furnished with higher and lower thought, or interior and exterior thought, to enable him to see from higher or interior thought what his will is doing in the lower or exterior thought. This he sees as a person sees his face in a mirror; and when he sees it and knows what sin is, he is able, if he implores the help of the Lord, not to will it, but to shun it and afterwards to act against it; if not wholeheartedly, still he can exercise constraint upon it by combat, and at length turn away from it and hate it. (*Divine Providence* 278)

Despite the emphasis here on an internal understanding – or perhaps even because of it – this message is clearly made even more obvious and compelling (especially to the natural man) in the experience of a natural pandemic.

- What will we do about this?
- How will we respond going forward?
- What does it really mean in terms of how we apply the lessons of spiritual causes and natural effects?
- And what role does the New Church as an organization have in this?

Ultimately, it's a spiritual battle, isn't it? The enemy in this case appears to be making effective use of what we might call guerilla tactics. And we know that in such battles brute force almost never overcomes – not in the long run, anyway. Rather people's hearts and minds must be won in a sphere of freedom and rationality. But this is exactly what the New Church represents. This is what we have to offer one another, and through our consolidated efforts, it is what we have to offer the whole world.

We will not, however, make any real progress until we start with ourselves,

We know that we can learn many things from the contrasts between light and dark, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, but even more than this the exposure of corrupting influences can motivate us to look for better ways to live.

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doing what we know from the Word, from the doctrine and from conscience what is right in our own lives and truly good in the sphere of the heavens. And that, in turn, begins with serious reflection on the life-saving revelation that has been entrusted to us, and a proactive response to the evils and falsities we find within ourselves. THEN we can share – and perhaps we will have the courage and the enlightenment to share – what we learn with the general public.

Yes, the virus can be traced to explicit factors or agencies in the natural world, but the REAL cause, the ultimate cause, is much deeper and more profound. Let us dedicate ourselves to addressing that cause, even as the dedicated professionals of this world work on the physical, social and psychological conditions that serve to provide the right conditions for a better influx to be received.



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20/20 Vision: Our Search for the Truth

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

Two stories in the Word may provide us with some key ideas about the process of discovering the truth and resolving the controversial issues that so often trouble this church, as they do so many others.

One is the story of Balaam and Balak in the *Book of Numbers*. Balak was the king of ancient Moab. When he understood that the Israelites had come across the wilderness and were threatening his land, he called Balaam the prophet from Syria to come and curse them. Balaam was more than happy to do this, but the Lord made it clear to him that he could only speak the words that God put in his mouth. He attempted to curse Israel anyway, but ended up blessing them. This enraged Balak but Balaam explained:

Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. (*Numbers 22:18*)

In the New Church the *Heavenly Doctrine* provides an unparalleled opportunity in our search for truth. If we believe in what they say, and trust them as an accurate source of information directly from the Lord, we have access to a perspective on every controversy that we face. We have access to 20/20 vision.

Yet controversies persist. The reason may be partly due to what is described in the story of Balaam and Balak. Balak seems to represent the way that our natural and worldly interests cause us to be easily led astray even when our intentions are not evil. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3242) In the story Balak's desires are clear, and they conflict with the Lord's desires for Israel. Balaam understands the conflict but is on Balak's side and hopes to satisfy both. In us a combination of bias, ignorance and self-interest misleads us into thinking that our conclusions are consistent with the truth, even when they are not.

The lesson for us is to avoid Balak's influence and say what Balaam said to Balak:

Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak. (*Numbers 22:38*)

The real issue may be even better illustrated by the story in Revelation about a little book that an angel gave to John to eat.

The angel said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about peoples, nations, tongues, and many kings.' (*Revelation* 10:9-11)

The Writings explain that the book in this story is the doctrine about the Lord:

This symbolically means that accepting the doctrine from an acknowledgment that the Lord is the Savior and Redeemer is pleasing and agreeable, but acknowledging that He alone is God of heaven and earth, and that His humanity is Divine, is displeasing and vexatious. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 481)

Another way to put this may be to say that it is pleasing to have a rational doctrine that answers our questions, but it can be bitter to acknowledge their authority when they conflict with what we want them to say. We want the Lord to save us, but we don't necessarily want to acknowledge that He alone is God and that we need to obey Him.

These two stories speak to the challenges that stand in the way of resolving religious issues.

The General Church position on doctrine

This church is founded on a single position, which is that the theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg are the truth, the Word of God. As is stated in the *Statement of Order and Organization of the General Church of the New Jerusalem: The Old Testament, the New Testament and the Writings together are the supreme authority in matters of faith.*

This position has been the rock that this organization has been built on, seen from the beginning as the way to promote love to the Lord and love to the neighbor in the community and toward all others.

At the same time this position is also sometimes seen as providing stones to throw at those who disagree. Any claim to certainty about religious questions has this potential. Religious people may be prone to seeing themselves as Balaam, speaking only the word that God has put into their mouths, and may see others who think differently as Balak, misled by bias, ignorance and self-interest.

The truth is that many controversial issues are controversial because they involve questions that are difficult to answer. So it is only natural that people will come to different conclusions. For the most part people are fine with that and respect other people's right to their own views. But of course, this is not

always the way that it works.

In any case, this is the Information Age and people have an expectation that information will have a major role in solving issues of every kind. I think most of us are also aware, though, that controversies are often most acute among the so-called experts in various fields, people who have the most knowledge about them. So who do we trust?

Despite this, or maybe because of it, there is a widespread interest in discovering accurate information, and in finding ways to ensure that it is accurate. This in turn has generated an understanding among all of us that we should not believe something just because we have read it, or heard it, or because some expert has pronounced it. Instead we learn to rely on evidence and learn the rules for how evidence demonstrates the truth.

We come to understand the common tools of scholarship that help to establish the accuracy of the information that we encounter. We learn to look for evidence, to ask about the science behind it, if it is a scientific question, to wonder whether the source is reliable, and whether the context of statements we hear is consistent with what is quoted.

This approach is completely consistent with what the Writings teach, and the Writings themselves include many similar rules and guidelines that help us take a scholarly approach to religious belief.

These guidelines are genuinely helpful tools for discovering and clarifying the truth. Learning how to use them could be an important key to getting past some of the controversies that lead to doubts and anxious feelings in our religious lives.

Guidelines from the Writings for discovering the truth

If you accept the General Church view that the Writings “*are the supreme authority in matters of faith*” you might think that it would be a simple matter to tell right from wrong. But hard questions are hard questions. Here are some ways that the Writings help us to discover the truth.

When it comes to religious questions, divine revelation is the only authoritative source of information. That is, not our own reasoning, not our own feeling that the Lord has enlightened us, not our study of psychology, or the lessons of science or history.

1. The Word is the only source.

The first example is the understanding that, when it comes to religious questions, divine revelation is the only authoritative source of information. That is, not our own reasoning, not our own feeling that the Lord has enlightened us, not our study of psychology, or the lessons of science or history.

The Word is the only source of divine truth for Christians. (*True Christianity* 777)

The Word is the one and only teacher of how a person should live in the world in order to be happy for evermore. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8939)

2. The Word is about spiritual things.

A second example is the understanding that the Word is about spiritual questions, not natural, scientific or historical ones. Arguing about the accuracy of scientific examples or historic events misses the point of divine revelation.

The Word of the Lord does not deal with worldly things but embodies Divine matters. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1151)

3. The Rule of Two Witnesses

A third example is the importance of bringing together multiple teachings when trying to demonstrate an idea.

For one truth unconnected to others does not confirm it, only a number together, because from one truth it is possible to see another. One by itself does not give any form to good, and so does not manifest any essential quality possessed by good; but many in a connected series do so. For just as one musical note by itself does not constitute the melody, still less the full harmony, neither does one truth achieve anything. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4197)

4. Understanding opposites

A fourth example is what is taught about how important it is to be able to understand opposing points of view.

It should be recognized that it is in accordance with the laws of order that no one should become convinced of the truth instantaneously. . . . This goes to explain why in the next life as soon as some truth is presented through plain experience to good spirits, some opposing idea giving rise to doubt is presented. In this way they are led to think and ponder over whether it is indeed a truth. . . . This enables their spiritual vision in respect of that truth to be broadened, seeing even into the ideas that are opposed to it . . . for truths take varying forms as dictated by circumstances. (*Arcana Coelestia* 7298)

The point here is that unless we are able to understand and empathize with opposing points of view, we don't really understand the truth.

5. Falsity is more easily demonstrated than the truth.

There is nothing that cannot be defended, and falsity more easily than truth. (*Divine Providence* 318)

Being able to provide arguments to support whatever you want is not intelligence; intelligence is being able to see that what is true is true and what is false is false and to provide arguments to support that. (*True Christianity* 334)

The reason that false ideas are often more easily defended than true ones is that they are often in line with the way that things appear to be and not the way that they really are. There is no way to prove that there is an afterlife, or that God exists. It is challenging to prove that sexual immorality is harmful. If we are searching for the truth we need to avoid being misled by easy and obvious arguments based on appearances, and instead think from the Word.

There is no way to prove that there is an afterlife, or that God exists. If we are searching for the truth we need to avoid being misled by easy and obvious arguments based on appearances, and instead think from the Word.

6. All genuine truth is about love.

A final example of ways that the Writings help us to resolve issues and discover the truth is the understanding that in the end the purpose is not so much about coming to the correct conclusion but about seeing the love that is in the truth. We read:

Rational good never fights, no matter how much it is assailed, because it is gentle and mild, long-suffering and yielding, for its nature is that of love and mercy. But although it does not fight, it nevertheless conquers all. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1950)

Rational good, or love based on the truth, is said here to “conquer all” because there is no real resolution of issues without love and kindness and a sight of how the path taken leads to them.

There are many similar teachings in the Writings that can guide us in our efforts to resolve whatever challenging issues and questions we may encounter. The main thing, though, is to know that the answers exist, that they can be found, and that the rules of scholarship play a role as we approach the Lord in His Word and pray for enlightenment.

The point here is that many of our controversies could be resolved by closer attention to the rules of scholarship that are given in the Writings.

More important is the fact that the life of religion is not about answering hard questions, but about living a life of love and charity. The truth is that this kind of life is the only way to get past the seemingly endless controversies that surround us.

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The bitterness of the little book that John was commanded to eat is something that all of us experience in life.

But the prophecy that Balaam was sent to give – against his own will – gives us hope. He said:

I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel. (*Numbers*)

24:17)

The Light will shine in the darkness, it will not be snuffed out, and it will prevail in the end.

The star coming out of Jacob is a prophecy of the Lord's coming as Divine Truth to bring order to a disordered world, and to bring love and peace to a world in conflict. This was Balaam's true mission, although he never knew it.

If we can believe in this Divine Truth, study it, and live by it, it will help us to see clearly in this year whose name is all about clarity of vision. That is 20/20 vision.



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

Mother's Day

The Rev. John L. Odhner

(Reprinted from the Pastor's Message in the *Bryn Athyn Post*, May 7, 2019)

Perhaps the first effort to establish a day for mothers was by Julia Ward Howe, a reader of the Writings, who crusaded to end slavery, oppression of women, and war. Her *Battle Hymn of the Republic* was indeed a battle hymn, inspiring hundreds of thousands to join the fight against slavery. (Another popular war song was *Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom* by George Frederick Root, the New Church composer of two songs in our Liturgy.)

I believe both of these people from their New Church background saw freedom as something worth fighting for, and saw the Civil War as linked to the Last Judgment and the Second Coming, since “wars at the present day . . . correspond to spiritual things . . . that have relation to the church.” (*Divine Providence* 251)

Yet Howe grew sick of the bloodshed and longed not only for freedom but for peace. (Another promise of the Second Coming: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” *Isaiah* 2:4; *Micah* 4:3)

After the war, in 1870, she appealed to mothers to work together to bring peace into the world, with what we now call her *Mother's Day Proclamation*. She asked women “to take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, man as the brother of man, each bearing after his own kind the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.” She established Mother's Day festivities on June 2, which continued for a number of years.

Howe loved the teaching in the Writings about marriage, and her appeal for women to bring peace to the world follows the nature of women: “The intelligence of women is by nature modest, gracious, pacific, compliant, soft and gentle, while the intelligence of men is by nature critical, rough, resistant, argumentative and given to intemperance,” (*Married Love* 218) “Pacific” literally means “making peace.” If women have more facility for making peace

than men, what is their role in bringing world peace?

Our modern celebration of Mother's Day began with Anna Jarvis in 1907 in remembrance of her mother. Her campaigning for a day to remember and honor mothers on the second Sunday in May led to national and international recognition of the day in 1914. Jarvis would rather we offer handwritten notes of thanks than commercially printed cards, flowers or candy. Yet I hope we don't forget Howe's suggestion that the best gift for mothers, and from mothers, is to "live in peace, man as the brother of man."

"Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." (*Isaiah 66:12-13*)



The Rev. John L. Odhner is assistant to the pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, teaches in the Bryn Athyn Church School, works on the Office of Outreach Internet Project, and is one of the directors of the Stephen Ministry program. He lives in Bryn Athyn with his wife, Lori (Soneson), and their family. Contact: John.Odhner@newchurch.org

Setting An Example

The Rev. Alan M. Cowley

(Reprinted from the newsletter for The New Church at Boynton Beach)

There is a true marriage love, which today is so rare that people do not know what it is like, and scarcely that it exists. (*Marriage Love* 58)

One of the most wonderful teachings of the New Church is that marriage is eternal. In our wedding services, we do not even use the common phrase “til death do us part” because we hope and believe that a couple can grow together and forge the type of love that actually makes them “*no longer two, but one flesh*.” (Matthew 19:6) Also, this concept that marriage continues after death is so important that I think the Lord implants the belief in the very hearts of committed married couples. This is why, despite the doctrines of many religions which teach “til death do us part,” a widow or a widower often talks about being reunited with their partner in heaven.

Yet we also have teachings like the one above saying that true marriage love “is so rare [today] that people don’t know what it is like, and scarcely that it exists.” This statement paints a really sad picture if we realize how fundamental marriage love is to the happiness of human beings.

We are told that marriage love is “*the fundamental love of all loves*,” (*Married Love* 65) and consequently it is the source of all celestial, spiritual and natural loves. (*Ibid*) “*Moreover, into this love have been gathered all joys and all delights, from the first to the last of them*.” (*Ibid*. 68)

So if both of these things are true – that all loves and delights stem from this fundamental love that we call “true marriage love,” and that it is so rare today that people don’t know what it is like or even that it exists – we have a dilemma and a challenge. It is a dilemma because the lack of understanding about marriage love must prevent a lot of “joy and delight.” And it is a challenge in that the Lord intends to restore true marriage love in the New Church era. One of the most important uses to which Lord has challenged the New Church is to make marriage central again, and to aspire to be good examples of marriage to society.

One of the most important uses to which the Lord has challenged the New Church is to make marriage central again, and to aspire to be good examples of marriage to society.

Sadly, as we all know too well, marriage in our society today is often taken very lightly. This is not to say there are not some, or even many, who stay committed despite the difficulties and hardships, and work through cold states, but there are so many who just give up. After just a year they will say it was a mistake. After a few years when the honeymoon phase wears off they think they have fallen out of love. Or even after a decade or so a couple might choose to throw in the towel, sometimes saying “he/she just isn’t the person I married.” It is a very sad

reality.

I as a New Churchman lament the current state of marriage in our society, and I would think many of our readers do as well. But we can do something about it! And I’m not talking about legislative moves; I’m talking about setting an example. Because even though I was brought up learning about the centrality and sanctity of marriage in the Lord’s Word and the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, and had heard from my ministers growing up about how important marriage is, the most important influence on my understanding of marriage are the examples of those closest to me.

I am lucky! Just a couple months ago my grandfather, John Alden, at the age of 94 joined his wife Joan in the spiritual world. They were married for 71 years before she passed two years ago. Now I know that they had their issues over those 71 years, but especially in the few decades that I have been alive to see them, they have always shown me that their love grew and blossomed over time. The joy and delight which have their origin in marriage love was palpable between them. There was a beautiful sweetness, goofiness, gentle care, and yes still even some bickering.

Another example that may be important to mention is my grandparents from my father’s side. Now I never knew my grandfather, Loyal Cowley, who passed away many years before I was born. My grandmother Ingrid (Micky) passed away when I was just five. However, they served as an example to me of not giving up, and of the proper use of separation in marriage.

Mind you, there was a lot of disfunction in their relationship, and a lot of difficulties for the children through it all, but when grandpa finally chose to stop drinking, he remained in New York where he was working at the time. The seven children at that time lived in a couple of different locations while

the parents figured out how to get past the disease of alcoholism. Eventually grandma went to New York to visit and grandpa invited her to go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Their eighth child was named Anthony Alan, “A.A.” And also my namesake.

I am also lucky to see the example of my parents who have now been married for 46 years. I have been able to see their perseverance through my own father’s struggles with addiction; through the loss of their son, my brother; through poverty – you name it! They have stuck with it, and to each other, and I am very thankful that they have shown to me that we don’t just throw in the towel when things get hard.

When we commit and consent to marry someone, it is not “‘til death do us part”, or “‘til things get hard.” Marriage is an eternal commitment, and one we should not take lightly. And I know from personal experience that having good examples of marriage is the primary way we can promote the institution. This doesn’t mean picture-perfect marriages, it means sticking it out through the rough times. It means perseverance in our love even when resentment is trying to seep in. It means falling back on the friendship bonds within the relationship when the love is not so warm.

So far Susan and I have been married for 10 years. A drop in the bucket compared to eternity. But one of my goals for our marriage is not to just do it for ourselves, but also to set an example for my friends, for my church, and for generations coming after us – that the cause of marriage is worth fighting for because it truly is the source of all celestial, spiritual and natural loves; and because it is also the one source, from the Lord, of all joy and delight.

The cause of marriage is worth fighting for because it truly is the source of all celestial, spiritual and natural loves – and the one source, from the Lord, of all joy and delight.



The Rev. Alan M. Cowley is pastor of the New Church at Boynton Beach, Florida, and visiting pastor in Bonita Springs, Florida. He served previously in the Michael Church, London, England. He and his wife, Susan, live in Hypoluxo, Florida. Contact: amcowley@gmail.com

Theistic Science Symposium

Hosted by the Swedenborg
Scientific Association

Bryn Athyn College, October 12, 2019

The Rev. Andrew J. Heilman

This symposium was the culmination of about a year-and-a-half of Monday morning Skype meetings about New Church science – what it was and what it could be. We all agreed that the Heavenly Doctrine gives us a new perspective and new insights into the amazing workings of the natural world. During these Monday meetings we have been exploring what these are.

Several ideas and points of focus developed as we discussed what we called Theistic Science, science in which the Lord as God is ever present and always creating. One of the areas of focus was what part the highest of the three natural atmospheres plays in the physical world. The other area which caught our interest was how is it possible for the protein to fold into its useful form in less than a second?

For this article each of us wrote a brief summary of our presentations, highlighting the essential points of what we hoped to communicate to those who attended this symposium, and to those who read this article. We had two morning sessions and two afternoon sessions, followed by a panel discussion led by Dr. Dan Synnestvedt, a professor of philosophy at Bryn Athyn College.

After Dr. Reuben Bell, as president of the Swedenborg Scientific Association, welcomed those attending, Ron Horvath, co-founder of the Theistic Science Group, opened the session explaining what the Theistic Science Group is. Following is his summary:

Introduction to Theistic Science Group

The Theistic Science Group was formed by Forrest Dristy and me more than two years ago, and began to grow with the addition of Reuben Bell after his

thesis on *Intelligent Default*, and theoretical physicist Ian Thompson of the Lawrence Livermore Labs, author of the book *Starting Science from God*. Those unable to attend Skyped in to the sessions. The Theistic Science Group has concerned itself with how influx into the natural world shows itself and can be observed in physics. We propose that it does, and we will be doing so, not in the language of *Genesis* but in the language of the physicists themselves, with possible solutions to natural world physics. In doing so we consider:

1. If natural things and processes are derived from spiritual causes, how can these be described in scientific terms?
2. Using the doctrines from Swedenborg's theological works, how does spirit descend into nature, creating it as it comes without becoming it?
3. Questions regarding the origin of matter, Divine order in nature, and the emergence of organic forms.
4. Can Causal Closure of the universe explain all the natural world behavior?
5. What minimum changes in physics are required to allow for Divine Influx to operate.

In these sessions we will show the correspondence of spiritual degrees with their physical counterparts. We will focus on organic forms, and more specifically the formation and folding of protein molecules, to demonstrate a scientific foundation for Divine Influx.

While we are not offering a proof for the existence of God, we are moving profoundly in that direction scientifically. We do so by studying and explaining a scientific phenomenon that leaves little or no room for natural causes and explanations, thus challenging the boundaries of a causal closure universe – one in which all causes are initiated from within that universe.

The Writings say the New Church will not be established by miracles but enlightenment, but we don't always need to prove things absolutely. Sometimes

In these sessions we will show the correspondence of spiritual degrees with their physical counterparts. We will focus on organic forms, and more specifically the formation and folding of protein molecules, to demonstrate a scientific foundation for Divine Influx.

Swedenborg came of age with the rise of modern science and the waning of religious orthodoxy. As a theistic scientist he was at odds with the naturalism of his colleagues, and as a mystical theologian he was equally at odds with orthodox Christianity.

it is enough to put forth a proposition that is so scientifically robust and rationally competitive that the result is the opening of minds to new ideas – a Theistic Science paradigm.

After Ron's introduction, Dr. Reuben Bell discussed his new book, Intelligent Default, which arrived from the printer's just in time for the Symposium. Following is a summary of his presentation in his own words:

Where Do We Go From Here? Theistic Science Done Right

Emanuel Swedenborg's theistic model of nature is a powerful tool for predicting and explaining the things we observe in the world. This is

what science does, and this was precisely his intention – to explain natural phenomena according to objective scientific rules and laws, but to explain how these phenomena reflect the operation of an internal, spiritual cause. This axiom – that natural things have spiritual causes – lies at the base of theistic science.

Swedenborg believed that if his scientific principles were clear and powerful enough, and if they behaved according to Enlightenment rules for doing science, and if their underlying spiritual principles showed the same consistency of logic and reason, then he could present an intellectually defensible science for his time and for the future.

Swedenborg came of age with the rise of modern science and the waning of religious orthodoxy. As a theistic scientist he was at odds with the naturalism of his colleagues, and as a mystical theologian he was equally at odds with orthodox Christianity.

Yet his accomplishments in science and spirituality did much to improve the lot of both: his scientific discoveries are capable of informing 21st century physics and biology, and the spiritual principles he discovered are sufficiently comprehensive to support a model inclusive of both. His method is as useful today as it was in his time.

To support this claim we apply Swedenborg's science, spirituality and method to a present-day problem in the natural sciences: the evolution of organic forms. Using Swedenborg's doctrines of Influx, Degrees, Forms, Correspondence and others, which combine to produce a comprehensive

model of spiritual causation, new light is shed on this perennial problem: natural forms are not “designed,” nor do they appear by accident.

Every organic form is a “default setting,” as it were, established according to parameters inherent in matter, in response to environmental conditions, but dependent on reciprocal, functional interaction with a spiritual cause as well.

These parameters are analogically reflective of the Divine Human form, manifesting itself in continual creation. A comprehensive treatment of Swedenborg’s doctrines of forms and correspondence reveals these principles to be complementary structural and functional mechanisms of spiritual-natural influx, respectively. Change of form is by discrete degrees of order, and spiritual-natural interaction is by corresponding function. What results is matter, receptive of and responsive to Divine influx, participating in the human form, to the limits of its organizational parameters.

These parameters, seen from our natural perspective as the physical constraints of natural laws, are this Divine Human form accommodated to and at work in the natural world, apart from, and yet interactive with it. Evolution of new forms and adaptation of existing forms to changing conditions, occur in the crucible of the “randomness” of nature, into which, at its inmost level, flows the template of the human form from the Divine.

After a short break the Rev. Andrew Heilman and Dr. Ian Thompson shared a session focusing on the discrete degrees in the physical world, how these degrees correspond to the three spiritual degrees in heaven, and how through this idea of degrees we can see the influx of the spiritual world into the natural world as end, cause and effect. As with the others, I will give a quick summary of my presentation, highlighting the central points:

Seeing the Spiritual in the Natural

In 1987 Bishop George de Charms was in the hospital in his late 90’s, and my wife encouraged me to visit him, as it might be the last opportunity. What he said to me then had a profound effect on my thinking about what New Church science is all about. But only recently did I come to realize just how profound this was. He referred me to the conversation in the spiritual world between Hans Sloane and Martin Folkes, as recorded in *Divine Love and Wisdom* 344, which reads:

To settle the disagreement between them Hans Sloane was given a spiritual bird to examine and he saw that to the least detail it was exactly like the bird in the natural world, and he concluded that if the spiritual bird in his hand were to be infilled, in its minutest parts, with corresponding matters from the earth, and thus fixed, it would be a lasting bird, like the birds on the earth.

What this means is that a bird in the physical world is really a spiritual bird with some chemicals added to give it fixity in the natural world. All of

To understand how the spiritual can be the cause of the creation of the natural, we need to understand discrete degrees.

the biological functions in the body of this bird, together with its habits, sought out habitat, its classification and physical appearance come not from nature and the properties of the chemicals of which it is composed, but from the spiritual bird within by influx and correspondence. No wonder one of the last articles Bishop de Charms wrote for *New Church Life* was on the importance of this teaching about Hans Sloane's bird. (See *New Church*

Life, October 1982, page 468: *Sir Hans Sloane's Bird*)

To understand how the spiritual can be the cause of the creation of the natural, we need to understand discrete degrees. We see the rudimentary beginning of this idea in Swedenborg's scientific works, especially in the first volume of the *Principia*, but here he is thinking from geometry and the physical world. It is not until his introduction into the spiritual world that he really understood how influx and discrete degrees worked, and how the creation of the natural world and everything in it is a continuous creation from the spiritual world.

What is worth noting is that Swedenborg in his *Principia* began with five elements or degrees within degrees, the solar vortex or gravity, magnetism, ether (or light and electricity), air and then water. In the early *Spiritual Diary* this becomes four natural atmospheres: the universal force (or gravity), magnetism, ether (or light), and air. (*Spiritual Diary* 222) But from the correspondence to the three spiritual atmospheres, this becomes universal gravitation, magnetism (ether, and light), and air. (*Last Judgment Posthumous* 320) Thus from correspondence the Heavenly Doctrine is the first place we find light and magnetism brought together, 100 years before the scientific world discovered this.

But the next teaching in this work shows just how the spiritual is in the natural, and is the cause of everything in the physical world. When we think of the nightingale, do we see the spiritual bird it really is or do we see the mechanical bird the empire of China preferred, until it broke down?

Dr. Ian Thompson's presentation followed, continuing and expanding on the idea of discrete degrees:

From Triads to Enneads

We have learned that everything created receives influx for love and wisdom and use, in separate discrete degrees that make a trine. Let us apply the principle

to each of these degrees themselves. Since the “divine is the same in the thing greatest and least” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 79), each part should have its own trine of sub-degrees and functions. Altogether this makes nine distinguishable functions, which we call an “ennead” after the Greek name for nine.

The created world is a trine where the outermost degree is physical nature, where uses are finally accomplished, so having enneads makes nature itself to have three sub-degrees inside it. *Last Judgment Posthumous* 320 describes the atmospheres in these as gravity, magnetism and air.

Divine influx enters into these degrees both directly (*Arcana Coelestia* 7270[4]) and successively (*Ibid.* 5850) via many of the higher degrees. We can identify the lowest, air, as the quantum mechanics of particles, and the middle, magnetism, as quantum fields of electromagnetic photons and other forces.

The inmost physical, however, is not yet understood or interpretable in physics. We do not know how a quantum gravity would work, nor do we understand how these inner degrees fine-tune the parameters of the lower degrees. But let us study this and discover how, realizing that this is where the ends or purpose in creation finds its corresponding degree in the physical world.

*After this dual presentation we had questions and discussion from those attending, and one question in particular caught our attention: If New Church theistic science actually makes predictions which can be substantiated by scientific experimentation, would this not take away our spiritual freedom? A good question, which we answered to some extent at the time. But perhaps the best answer is found in *Divine Providence* 3 and *Divine Love and Wisdom* 46. The Lord will never take away our freedom to close our eyes.*

After lunch we had two more presentations followed by a panel discussion. The first presentation was by Dr. Stephen Smith, a retired osteopathic surgeon living in Upper Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Here is his summary:

Protein Synthesis and “Fine Tuning” Paradigms for the Discrete Degrees of Divine Influx

Protein synthesis was chosen as a target for inquiry by the Theistic Science Group in the fall of 2018 at the suggestion of Dr. Thompson. The focus of the group from its inception had been the nature of the nexus or interface between the natural and spiritual worlds, especially in regard to spiritual correspondences and the workings of Divine influx.

The biology of protein synthesis was believed to be uniquely suitable for study on the “natural side” of this discussion by virtue of the known science at the molecular, atomic and even quantum levels. It was anticipated that these physical states might be viewed as states sufficiently sensitive and subtle to receive immediate influx via “quantum fine tuning” at the ultimate interface of

the spiritual and natural worlds.

No less appealing was the idea that protein synthesis, considered from the perspective of spiritual correspondences, might be a window, however tiny, into the Divinely generated life force itself given the many roles of protein in cell structure and function as well as protein functions in the extracellular milieu.

And because there must be a continuous connection with the spiritual world in order that every single thing may be kept in being, or constantly come into being, it follows that the purer or more interior things within the natural order, and consequently within the human being, spring from that world, and the purer or more interior things are forms such as are able to receive influx. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4524)

In order to refine the task before us we pursued a more limited line of inquiry about protein synthesis, specifically *protein folding*. Remarkably, this is now considered by some to be a fourth branch of science, incorporating knowledge from the three other branches: biology, chemistry and physics.

The multiple atomic forces and interactions known to fold and stabilize protein each seem to have special electrochemical characteristics, making them ripe for speculation as to unique correspondential indexing, i.e. as targets well-suited for the spiritual forces of influx.

The best known intra- and extra-cellular roles of protein include: signaling, enzymatic action, structure, transport, regulation, storage and immunity. Clearly proteins are the basic building blocks and molecular engines of life at the level of the natural world.

Understanding the spiritual cascade of discrete degrees behind the physical degree of life may be a framework that is useful to better understand what is still unknown about protein structure, function and synthesis. *Ian J. Thompson, PhD*

This quotation reveals a core principle of New Church theistic science: using principles from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, in conjunction with contemporary science, enlightened inquiry can transcend the barriers currently facing science, leading to a deeper understanding of nature.

After questions and discussion, Dr. Thompson gave a presentation about a possible explanation of the amazing process of protein folding, using principles from New Church theistic science. Here is his summary:

How Influx into the Natural Shows Itself in the Physical

We know that influx occurs from the spiritual into the natural, but how does it show itself there? How would you notice it? Let us suggest how current laws of physics need to be modified if influx occurs.

The first influx into nature must be into the inmost sub-degree of the physical mentioned above – the one that deals with gravity. As well as universal

gravity, it must deal with mediate influx coming from the organism's inner spiritual nature that Andy described. The inmost physical must be able to receive "ends" into nature, and lead to actions to achieve those ends.

My specific proposal is that influx into nature modifies only those parameters that have to be tuned (or fine-tuned) in existing quantum field theories, especially the effectiveness of electric charges. There is some astronomical evidence that this might occur over millions of years, but now we want to consider changes within very small fractions of seconds for molecular motions in cells such as the protein folding that Steve talked about.

By correspondences, the inmost physical should function in the same pattern as the inmost mental, where loves of ends enter and lead the understanding to find a way how achieve those ends, and then the love and understanding act together to generate actual uses.

If we consider reaching for a cup of coffee, we alternately think forward from where we are now, and backwards from where the target is that we want to achieve. I suggest that there are similar processes in physics: the inmost physical receives targets by influx, and then the electromagnetic fields are adjusted alternately forward and backward so that molecules are led to their target arrangement.

I presented equations for how electrostatic forces are changed by local variations of what is called the electric permittivity, which modulates electric forces, and uses forward-and-backward iterations to find exactly how the permittivity should be varied. After solving these equations on a computer, I showed videos for how a simple molecule (only 100 atoms) could be made to move left, or rotate, or bend in a required place. In this way we can predict how the permittivities would need to change, and those changes should be able to be tested in experiments.

In summary, we have presented a proposal for how "spiritual influx" could have effects in nature, and how these effects on permittivity should be measurable. In this way, "final causes" could be active in nature, and we have a way to bring the future into line without time travel and without altering the historical past.

Using principles from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, in conjunction with contemporary science, enlightened inquiry can transcend the barriers currently facing science, leading to a deeper understanding of nature.

Now, no longer is the physical universe “causally closed,” so a much greater range of scientific explanations should be possible that link up in many ways with the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church.

Now, no longer is the physical universe “causally closed,” so a much greater range of scientific explanations should be possible that link up in many ways with the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church.

After a short break, we began the last session with a panel discussion, which, besides the presenters, also included the Rev. Stephen Cole and Dr. Dan Synnестvedt, who served as moderator.

Many questions were asked and discussed during this session. One point made by Dr. Synnестvedt, which should be highlighted, was that “theistic science” is not new; in fact,

most science was theistic up until a group of scientists, headed by Huxley in England, purposely worked to remove God out of science. And for now they seem to have succeeded, not only removing God out of science, but out of all public education in much of the world.

Ron Horvath closed the symposium with an invitation to join the Theistic Science Group, and what we hope will come of it: a new way to view the physical world with minds, rather than just our eyes.

We want to thank the Swedenborg Scientific Association for hosting this event, and especially those who attended for their participation and support of what we hope will continue with coming generations of the New Church, and future scientists of the world.

As was written in *Words for the New Church* well over 100 years ago:

May the glorious day soon come, when man will rise out of the darkness of self-derived intelligence and appeal to the Open Word of God for all that concerns his life, its moral government, its civil and political instruction, its philosophy, its science, its everything.



The Rev. Andrew J. Heilman is regional pastor for Brazil, pastor of the Fatima Society in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and assistant pastor in Kempton, Pennsylvania. He lives in Kempton with his wife, Kerry (Friesen). Contact: andyjh@knccs.org

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD

(Highlights of the March 20-21 meeting of the General Church Board of Directors)

These meetings occurred in the midst of the coronavirus shutdown and were conducted by phone and internet. A summary has already been widely distributed. These highlights extend the communication and also serve the official church record.

President's Report: **The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.** commented on the cancellation of the June 2020 General Church Retreat and General Church Clergy Meetings, both of which he hopes can be rescheduled. These decisions were prompted by the uncertainty caused by COVID19 and concern for the health and safety of everyone who might have attended. This is also in compliance with national, state and local government officials, as well as the reality of limits on international travel.

Thorough planning and initial positive response indicated the event would be successful and is worth rescheduling. The Retreat was planned to coincide with the 19th of June 250th anniversary of the birth of the New Church in heaven. Alternative plans are being considered.

Strategic Plan: Bishop Buss is working with a 10-person team on a planning process facilitated by Board member **Ned Uber**. The focus is on a 10-year horizon, with a three-year initial implementation. The team has made good progress on crystalizing a Vision and focusing on core strategies that will impact the Vision.

The top priority of the draft plan is vision-casting that promotes positive application on individual and organizational levels, focusing on why we are here and principles around which we all can rally. A key component is a vigorous communication mechanism, which is a top priority for the Episcopal Office.

International Committee: Executive Director **David Frazier** and the Rt.

Rev. David H. Lindrooth reported on pilot projects in West Africa to launch congregations and to develop standards for a systematic process for managing growth. This includes documenting the training of pastors and a project manager of the pilot projects as a foundation for future use.

Executive Director: David Frazier reported on actual mid-year financial results for the current fiscal year: revenue \$3 million; expenses \$2.5 million; overall surplus of about \$475,000.

General Church Education: New materials continue to be produced, including videos and Christmas mailings. Most materials are available online. Extended offerings are being provided to families in response to the coronavirus threat. Leadership training is continuing for school administrators. An update was provided on the New Church Teacher Competencies Program, with positive feedback and support from the Board.

Outreach – Grand Human Project: The project, while not previously being mentioned as such, is positioned to deliver spiritual community during the coronavirus crisis. Daily morning worship is provided by live streaming and meditation groups are being expanded. A journey program was launched on the Gideon story.

Advancement: Year-to-year results as of February 29, towards a goal of \$976,000 by June 30:

- Contribution revenue up 22%, totaling \$839,318
- Number of gifts up 5%, totaling \$1,421
- Number of donors up 9%, totaling 694

The April-June appeal program continues as planned. The Advancement Committee recommends communications featuring the many ways societies are helping church members, families and neighbors during the virus crisis.

General Church Membership: Early steps have been taken to create a New Church Career Network. A young adult program is being developed in Bryn Athyn, with six events since December and almost 200 attendees. Under discussion is how the church can effectively address unmet needs of women in the church, focusing on women-to-women support and connection.

Budgets: The Board expects a check-in by the administration by mid-May on the projected effect of the coronavirus on FY21, with a close eye on economic disruption and appropriate adjustments. FY 21 proposed budgets were

approved as presented,

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 further 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.

VIRTUAL CHURCH

With the coronavirus pandemic shutting down public gatherings – including churches – throughout much of the world, many of our New Church congregations have offered services through the internet. Some were already doing this, others stepped up with creative new efforts, through live streaming, Facebook and YouTube. Here is a sampling of their experiences. We welcome any personal comments on these efforts to bring services into homes.

Bryn Athyn Cathedral:

Pastor Eric Carswell reports: “Bryn Athyn Church is fortunate that we have been doing online services for many years. We have experience working with multiple cameras and controls to move them on the fly during services. We have a man (**Stewart Chapin**) who is doing all of the video and audio work and has developed a skill that many appreciate.”

Once public places – including churches – were ordered closed in Pennsylvania, Director of Music, **Graham Bier**, started planning how to support the music and singing with no congregation. He hired a group of young musicians to sing and sound quality was enhanced by **Keith Genzlinger**. Ministers have learned to know which camera is in use.

For the Palm Sunday service, 117 computers – assuming multiple viewers – were logged in for the family service and 234 for the adult service. For the Easter service there were 151 for the family service and 280 for the adult service. The archived services – for non-live viewing – rarely had fewer than 100 within two weeks and sometimes more than 200.

As for contributions, “It is too early to know what the net result will be of the online services but short term we are not getting as much offertory income as usual. (I expect) that we will see increased contributions outside of this because of the gratitude people have for these services.”

He adds: “For a number of reasons we have regular viewers around the United States and beyond, with people who have a heart connection to the Cathedral and the worship services we provide there. It is hugely fulfilling to hear appreciation from Connecticut, Minnesota, Colorado, California and many other places and to know that our efforts here in Bryn Athyn are serving the Lord as He builds His Church in people’s hearts, minds and lives.”

Some sample comments:

“Thank you for a truly beautiful and moving Vespers/Holy Supper service. You have outdone yourselves in providing a service in which we truly felt involved. In spite of the difficulties of presenting a service to an invisible audience, you made us feel as if we were there. Everyone involved did an amazing job, so thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“I so enjoyed the powerful, moving service that was conducted in the Cathedral this morning – the hymns and music just loaded with affections from the past. I could not stop from weeping on numerous occasions during the service. I wish I could have been there in person.”

“Thank you for all who continue to provide our spiritually essential service. To the pastors, the musicians and all behind the scenes! Thank you for putting yourselves out there to do these beautiful services while maintaining social distancing. I can’t imagine what a shift in so many details this must mean and the degree of coordination and cooperation involved.”

Bryn Athyn Church Informal Service:

Pastor Solomon Keal says online services have been a new effort and “it has definitely been a challenge.”

“As a pastor, I’ve had to learn new skills in a short amount of time, during one of the busiest religious seasons of the year. We’ve been pre-recording our services on Fridays and then uploading them to be available to watch online on Sundays.

“Some services have been recorded in our usual worship space in Heilman Hall, with musicians there as well. Other services have been recorded in people’s homes, and the talk and the music have then been combined in post-production. We’ve also used Zoom to facilitate the live discussions that we normally have as part of the Sunday services.”

These services are averaging 120 viewers, which is higher than the normal average in-person attendance of 100.

Sample comments:

“I’d like to thank you for the beautiful service and making me feel like I was in the room with everyone.”

“Thank you all. It was good to tune in and sing along with you. Helps to offset the isolated feeling.”

“I miss seeing everyone but am so grateful to have the ability to have church online.”

“What you and your team are doing is wonderful and so needed.”

“I was glad to be able to watch this and was moved by it.”

NewChurch LIVE:

Pastor Chuck Blair says they have always had online services. “It allows us to reach a far broader audience and a lot of our material is getting shared.” A challenge is that technology is not 100% bulletproof. There are challenges with platforms, loss of signal, etc. “Also, personally, I miss seeing the people week in and week out.”

Viewership is measured by the number of computers connected with the assumption that more than a single person is watching but this cannot be measured accurately. The average before coronavirus was 150, with total attendance in 2019 – online and in-person – at 293. “Since the crisis started we have hosted two services over 600.” So attendance is up about 34%.

Chuck says: “I do not expect this number to stay that high. We are serving people in a unique way – an umbrella during a storm.”

Contributions are down because they are missing the live service “bucket pass.”

“We had our first online funeral last Sunday. While obviously we wish we could have gathered in person, this format gave us the opportunity to have a lot of friends and family send in video testimonials that we were able to use. A lot of folks watched in groups across the country.”

Chuck included this comment from a viewer in Utah who shared a service with her mother in Florida: “My 78-year-old mother actually went online for your service and set up an altar and then sat outside with her friends in Florida. (They better have been at least six feet apart!) You are places you never knew you would be and I’m not surprised.”

Boulder, Colorado:

Pastor David Roth and his New Church at Boulder Valley have been providing online services for about 10 years.

He reports: “People have expressed appreciation for what we are doing and are very encouraging and supportive. We live-stream on Facebook and then have a gathering on Zoom afterwards for connection. That combination has been well received.”

There was a bump in viewers over Palm Sunday and Easter “but it seems like our reach has gone from about 100 to more than 1,000, with the highest being roughly 1,500 people reached.”

As for financial support, “Some people have had to drop off from giving

because they have lost their jobs, which is more than understandable, so contributions are down.”

The church is getting a lot of greetings from people wherever they are, with messages of gratitude.

Boynton Beach, Florida:

Pastor Alan Cowley reports they had been streaming on Facebook before the shutdown, then uploading an edited version on YouTube to separate the children’s talk from the adult lessons and sermon. The whole combined service can also be viewed.

“Generally it has been a great success. We do struggle to reach some of our regulars who are not into the technology but most everyone is connected.” Music is a challenge. The organ doesn’t sound good through live stream but Alan supplements with his guitar.

His best guess is that there are about 70 people watching live and about 50 who watch later. This is up from an estimated 20 viewers pre-virus. Alan has been running ads on Facebook which is drawing at least 15 new regular viewers from the area who have been commenting and sharing the videos. “That is pretty cool!”

Contributions are down. “For those who normally give through the offertory that has been significantly lower.”

Some comments:

“Thank you. May you and your family receive the blessings you send to others.”

“May we all be saved from this awful virus and may the Lord be with us.”

“Thank you. That was different from what I’m used to but I really liked it.”

“It’s going to take some getting used to going to church on my couch in my pajamas.”

Hurstville, Australia:

Pastor Todd Beiswenger says they have been providing online services for several years. A young woman training in photography volunteered to adjust the camera settings and lighting, which greatly improved the quality of the video.

Before the coronavirus restrictions live-streamed services would get 20-30 views over the course of a week. “The last few have been in the 80s.”

“Contributions are down. No question.”

“A couple of things have been working in my favor with all of this. One is that the Australian New Church recently put together a national Google group. The other is that our church is the only one in Australia offering live-streamed services on YouTube. Now it is easy to get people from around the country to

watch because I can reach them and they don't have a lot of other options."

One comment: "Thank you, pastor, Happy Easter to you from Chicago. Those children you give Sunday School to are so blessed to hear this doctrine that teaches correspondences. I came across your ministry as I was studying Swedenborgian material. The more I apply it I realize why God offered this knowledge. It contains so much wisdom and understanding of the Bible. It is simpler to digest and apply. It would be great to grow up in a family that knew all this and how to live a Christian life. I am reading *Divine Providence* now."

Ivyland, Pennsylvania:

Pastor Ryan Sandstrom: "We have been live streaming our services on Facebook for about three years now, so it was easy to continue with our current set-up.

"It has been going well, with a good number of viewers tuning in. We've been averaging 20-plus live viewers, then add several more who watch afterwards." He estimates that actual viewers are 40 or so.

"The challenge is that we can't reach every congregant with our streamed services because they either don't have computer/internet access or they are not on Facebook. Some did create a Facebook profile for themselves just so they could access our services. People are generally pleased that they can still attend services.

"One thing that has been working well is that people can post questions and comments about the sermon on our video feed and then I address them live at the end of the service. It's a way to continue our usual Q&A sessions when in church. It's also been fun seeing people interacting with each other online, so even though we are all remote there is still a sense of community."

Contributions have gone down, "which is expected, simply because people can't put money in the offertory basket each Sunday. There still have been checks coming in."

Some viewer comments: "Thank you for this sermon and for relating it to what is going on in our world today." "Happy Palm Sunday to you! Thank you for bringing this service to us at this trying time."

Kempton, Pennsylvania:

Pastor Brett Buick says, "We have been offering church via live stream for several years but now we offer daily chapel as well. We have also been offering doctrinal classes (including our Youth Group) over Skype and Zoom."

The experience "has caused us to realize the need for an upgraded computer to better support church streaming. For chapel we are doing things more simply, using an iphone camera and external microphone."

The average online attendance for regular services has increased by about

100 “views,” and for chapel services between 30 and 40.

Contributions are down, with the offertory negatively impacted.

Comments from viewers have been very positive but people are looking forward to worshipping together again.

Oak Arbor, Michigan:

The Oak Arbor Church in Rochester, Michigan, under **Pastor Derek Elphick**, has been offering live-streamed services on Facebook for several years. “It has been a very successful outreach tool for members and friends, providing a nice option for those who are shut in or live at a distance.”

He says they had been averaging about 150 views per week prior to the pandemic and since have been averaging 350 views per week.

Toronto, Canada:

The Olivet Church has been providing online services since 2017. **Pastor Michael Cowley** says, “We are fortunate to have a few very competent people running the show. So it’s been a great success. Our usual cameraman is an award-winning retired professional.”

Responses are extremely positive. But contributions are down significantly since the closing of live services.

Washington, D.C.:

The Rev. Mac Frazier, pastor of the Washington New Church in Mitchellville, Maryland, was already planning to live stream services before the shutdown but had not yet installed equipment. He had also been working on a YouTube channel – *The Big Idea with Mac Frazier* – as part of an outreach strategy. So he had some tools to begin offering a number of online programs.

This includes the Sunday service on the WNC channel, weekly messages for a general audience on *The Big Idea*, and a weekly contribution to a daily devotional series organized by the **Rev. Alan Cowley** and the **Rev. Pearse Frazier** on the New Church YouTube channel. They’ve also been using Zoom teleconferencing for church and school meetings, plus a midweek social hangout for members to check in with one another – and see familiar faces.

Mac says: “I’ve really enjoyed the challenge of delivering religious content online during these crazy times. At the same time, I find that I am operating at the limit of my ability to adapt and learn new skills.” So he’s sometimes frustrated but trying to be patient. “The congregation has been overwhelmingly supportive, and that helps lower the stress.”

He’s “extremely happy” with viewership of services, with almost 700 views – without any advertising. His strategy is to build up a library of content before spending on advertising.

They are focusing on serving existing members with Sunday services, averaging 60 to 75 live views and 80 to 105 total with those who watch later. “So in effect we seem to be reaching easily twice as many people with our online sermons as we were originally serving with our in-person worship gatherings.” Feedback has been very positive.

One of his biggest concerns is that this reinforces the mistaken idea that Sunday worship is all about the sermon. “We are called to worship together as church societies for several reasons, and the music, the prayer, the ritual and the social interactions that happen when we worship together are all extremely important and powerful parts of the overall experience as the Lord has ordained it.”

Without the weekly offertory contributions, “We are looking at helping people learn about our online donation tools, but also want to be really sensitive to the fact that right now a lot of people are feeling extra cautious about their finances.” Contact Mac.Frazier@gmail.com for links to the above resources.

SCHOOLS GO TO SCHOOL

Bryn Athyn College, the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools and the Bryn Athyn Church School all jumped into online education once the coronavirus shutdown order came in March. Some of our tiny General Church schools have also stepped up. Among them is the Pittsburgh New Church School, which is distinguishing itself – and increasing enrollment beyond church families – by offering trained specialists in teaching children with dyslexia.

Below are excerpts from an article in the April issue of *The Reporter* – the newsletter of the Pittsburgh society – written by teacher **Gabrielle Uber**. Gabby teamed with **Cindi Glenn** in anticipating what might happen with the pandemic and planned accordingly.

“I had a party in my living room today. The Stay at Home order just came through yesterday and today I had no less than 20 kids at my house. The youngest was 3 and the oldest was 16. We had a grand time! It was utter chaos for one hour as 12 windows were open on my computer at the same time.

“It was part of our PNCS *Learn at Home Program*. On the last Thursday school was in session before Gov. Wolf shut down the schools across Pennsylvania, we sent the kids home with a backpack full of equipment, books and worksheets and told them not to open it until we told them to. They all had fun on the following Tuesday when they got to do so and pulled out fraction dice, fruit loops, game cards, worksheets, notebooks and even a

sarcophagus.

“Since then we have been keeping in touch with our students and parents through video chats and email, giving them a modified learning curriculum designed to hopefully keep up their skills and maybe even learn something new.

“It is challenging. We are all working very hard at it.

“We have an added challenge that our students learn best with hands on, multisensory techniques and intimate learning conditions. Computer video chats are not like that! So, once again, we had to roll up our sleeves and get creative.

“With the support of the dyslexia community we may be able to do it. Three of us will participate in an online meeting with a tutor who has been doing online tutoring for years and will share her wisdom and knowledge of the video program we are using and how she uses it to teach reading. Once again, the Lord is providing a way, so long as we are willing to step up to the plate and try it.

“It is not clear when the kids will return to school, if at all this year. We are just beginning to get our feet under us with the PNCS *Learn at Home Program* while juggling our family and home concerns and adjusting to Stay at Home. But I have utter faith and confidence in the PNCS staff, that we will support this use together and rise to the challenge.

“We have always said that when your child attends PNCS, you join the PNCS family. Now that family is operating from our living rooms and school really has become an extension of the home. It has already been a humbling experience to work cooperatively with the parents to make this work. It gives me more people to pray for over the coming weeks. Always a good thing.

“I wonder what other lessons the Lord intends to teach us through this experience. It’s going to be hard. That’s the bare truth of it. But that bare truth is wrapped in a blanket of solidarity and love that is very comforting.”

BOYNTON BEACH SERVICE TRIP

Rev. Alan Cowley

This group of Bryn Athyn College students was awesome again! It is such a delight for the New Church at Boynton Beach society to host them year after year.

One of the things I would like to point out this year is how much these young humans look to live the life of usefulness as is described in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. They really take the message to heart, that the

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE SERVICE TRIP
THE NEW CHURCH AT BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA

(Photos by Justin Schorran and Liza Heinrichs)



Hayden King



Calvin Heinrichs perched on the stump of the downed tree



Oskar Simons



Bennett Buick



Alley Tait, Hannah King, Alisha Reid, Denali Heinrichs help prepare a well earned meal

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE SERVICE TRIP
THE NEW CHURCH AT BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA

(Photos by Justin Schorran and Liza Heinrichs)



Denali Heinrichs, Alisha Reid



Oskar Simons and Bennett Buick



Alley Tait in front, Alisha Reid in the back



The team's hard work!



Joram Heinrichs

Lord's kingdom is a kingdom of uses. And as you will read below in the soon to be **Rev. Justin Schorran's** report, they have learned this through the wonderful example of the great New Church people surrounding them, including the grandfather of one of the students on the service trip.

Bennett Buick, grandson of **Bill Buick**, was delayed in coming down so that he could attend his grandfather's resurrection service. The rest of the students joined in via livestream from the Cathedral. His life seemed to kickstart their energy to do everything they could to be of service to our church, and their work is deeply appreciated.

Thank you!!

A Report from Justin Schorran

Much of this trip was similar to last year in terms of the work we did. However, there were a few changes this time around.

First, we decided to leave Saturday morning, as opposed to Sunday, so we could take the day off with the intention of resting up for the full work week that was ahead of us. But that all changed when we spent the afternoon watching Bill Buick's memorial address. By the end of the service, we were all inspired by his life story and dedication to being useful that we practically sprung up from our seats and made ourselves busy outside for an hour or so. His life story helped set the tone for the primary reason we went down to Boynton Beach in the first place – to be useful.

We also got to spend more time with the congregation this year. We hosted a barbecue at the church with the whole community one night, which was a wonderful opportunity to meet the people of Boynton Beach.

Calvin Heinrichs and I took turns leading worship every night, giving all of us the opportunity to reflect on the Lord and His Word.

In terms of the work itself, we picked up our chainsaws and continued where we left off last year. A large portion of the overgrown trees were cut down and thrown into a loud industrial wood chipper. Also, garden beds were weeded, mulched and replanted, making the church even more beautiful than it was before. By the end of the week there was a great sense of accomplishment felt by all.

All in all, it was a refreshing and rewarding change of pace after a long term of busy schoolwork, and I look forward to returning to Boynton Beach in the future. Thank you all for giving us the opportunity to serve you!

Participating in the service project were: **Bennett Buick, Calvin, Denali, Liza and Joram Heinrichs, Hannah and Hayden King, Tommy Razier, Alisha Reid and Justin Schorran, Oskar Simons and Alley Tate.**

JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT CANCELED

Jamie Uber

The bad news is the due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have decided we must cancel our 2020 Jacob's Creek Family Retreat in July. This was not an easy decision. July just won't seem the same without Jacobs Creek!

The good news is that we already have our dates for next year. Our 2021 Jacobs Creek Family Retreat is scheduled for July 25-28, 2021. Please put these dates on your calendar and plan to join us for a fantastic time. We will carry over the *Ten Blessings* theme and hopefully our same staff of ministers can join us.

If you have already sent in your registration and deposit, please contact me directly about what to do since I have not yet deposited the checks. If you have any questions please call me at 412-782-2710 or email james.g.uber@gmail.com.

Laurelville, where we hold our Retreat each year, is really suffering. Like us, many of their groups this summer have had to cancel their events. They could really use our help right now. Julie and I have decided to redirect our annual Jacobs Creek donation to Laurelville this year to help them through their tough times. Whatever you can give them will be greatly appreciated.

They have been very understanding in dealing with the situation and have allowed us to cancel and reschedule without penalty. Please send any donations to Jeanette Lahm, Executive Director, Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, 941 Laurelville Lane, Mt. Pleasant, PA 15666. Please note in the memo line that you attended Jacobs Creek Family Retreat.

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE GRADUATION

With schools and colleges shut down by the coronavirus pandemic – throughout the United States and much of the world – one concern beyond providing online education was what to do about graduation. As Bryn Athyn College President **Brian Blair** put it: “No graduating class should be denied the opportunity to experience the joy and celebration of such an important accomplishment.”

The College commencement was originally scheduled for May 30. President Blair says: “We have been working on a feasible date when we could re-schedule graduation. In response to feedback from the Class of 2020, Bryn Athyn College plans to hold a face-to-face commencement ceremony during the 2020-2021 academic year.”

Plans are to hold the event on Saturday, September 26, “assuming we will be able to hold large gatherings at that time.”

If that is not possible the next option will be to hold the ceremony on January 16, 2021. If that still is not possible “we will hold a virtual (online)

event.”

What is assured is a virtual Class of 2020 Celebration and Presidential Address on the evening of May 29, 2020. “We will use this occasion to congratulate our graduates and wish them well until we can all meet again in person to hold the commencement ceremony. We are grateful for the input from the Class of 2020. Like them, we value the meaningful personal interactions we have with our campus community.”

To the graduating class he said: “We are so proud of you and your achievements and are impressed by your hard work and perseverance in the face of the extraordinary challenges of this spring. After all that has happened you certainly can add strength and resiliency to your list of accomplishments.”

OTHER GRADUATIONS

As this issue was going to print the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools were still working on plans for commencement, including a survey of the graduating class. Check the website (www.ancss.org) and the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ancss) for updated information.

The Bryn Athyn Church School is planning a unique drive-by ceremony for its graduates. We would be happy to hear from other General Church Schools about their graduations and hope to report on as many as possible in the July/August issue.

2020 SPIRITUAL VISION: TRANSCENDING TIME AND SPACE

2020 Spiritual Vision – Transcending Time and Space. This is our goal: to bring people together around the world who are interested in Swedenborg to learn and worship virtually. From the keynote address by **Rev. Dr. George Dole**, *From Here to Peace: the Pandemic and Divine Providence*, to seven mini-courses by the three professors at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, author and church planter **Rev. Anna Woofenden**, Helen Keller historian **Rev. Sage Cole**, spiritual entrepreneur **Rev. Rich Tafel**, and writer and theologian **Rev. Dr. David Fekete**, everyone will find something to enjoy and feast on. We will also share in worship services, including a special service by the Swedenborgian Church Youth League. Join us virtually from June 26–28, 2020. All are welcome.

Follow the Annual Swedenborgian Church Convention on Facebook for the schedule and updates as they become available: www.facebook.com/SwedenborgConvention/ Look for more information at www.swedenborg.org and in the June 2020 issue of *The Messenger*.

Life Lines

Bruce Henderson

A SPIRITUAL PANDEMIC

The worst of the coronavirus pandemic may be behind us but lessons endure.

We have had a number of excellent articles bearing on these lessons, including in this issue a sermon by the Rev. Eric Carswell, *Strengthening Ourselves in the Lord*, and *Doctrinal Reflections on the Novel Coronavirus* by the Rev. Michael Gladish. And in the March/April issue there was the article by the Rev. Jeremy Simons, *Why Do Bad Things Happen?*

Each of them talks about the underlying spiritual dimension to all manifestations of evil on earth, the role of the Lord's providence, and the need for us to trust in Him. This has not only been a natural pandemic – with a deadly virus loosed throughout the world – but ultimately a spiritual pandemic that needs to be fought by all of us on that spiritual plane.

We know all about the medical science of the coronavirus but need to be aware of its spiritual nature as well: a form of evil with a spiritual origin. W. H. Auden, a 20th century poet who often mused on morality and religion, felt we should not be surprised to find evil in our midst: “Evil is unspectacular and always human, and shares our bed and eats at our table.” Indeed, this virus brought home its insidious presence in our lives but also how our best hope – beyond isolation and washing hands – lies in Auden's universal advice: “Rest in God.”

What is ultimately comforting is that everything subject to natural laws – including disease – is also subject to the higher spiritual laws of the Lord's providence.

We need medical science to do all it can to eliminate – or at least mitigate – the diseases that plague us. Cancer and viruses illustrate how the natural order of cells can be fatally corrupted and we are desperate to find cures. But we must work just as diligently to eliminate spiritual disorders in a world that incubates disease and misfortune.

While questions echo around the world as to why a loving God would

permit such evil and disorder in His creation, we should also ponder why He allows us to harbor evil and disorder in our hearts. Because He loves us unconditionally, He allows us to be free – free even to violate His order and choose to bring disorder into the world.

God does not manipulate the world to suit our whims. Rather, He works through His love and providence to change us for the better from the inside out, and thus improve the world.

Novelist Henry Miller, hardly a moralist of his time, once said: “The world has not to be put in order; the world is order incarnate. It is for us to put ourselves in unison with this order.”

We do have a role in this. We are not idle spectators, wondering where God fits into our lives without doing anything about it. We are caught up in a great war between heaven and hell.

Wars always victimize innocent people – as we have surely seen in the “war” against coronavirus. The surging ripple effect of such evil is why bad things can happen to good people.

Because of this ongoing war between good and evil, we are challenged to take up the sword of truth and become soldiers. This is what gives our lives purpose and meaning, and should ultimately give us trust and hope. When we join in the fight against the hells that attack us, we will also be helping many more people than ourselves.

We know that the Lord came on earth with a clear mission: to overcome the hells for the sake of our freedom. He offered not just freedom from but freedom for – for the opportunity to elevate our lives into heaven. Indeed, He came down among us so that each of us could have the hope of becoming a better person, helping to make this a better world.

While He did this for all humanity, He did it very personally for each of us. And so we have a similar mission in life: to fight against evil and temptation, to suffer if need be, and to regenerate – to become “born again” by freeing ourselves from evil desires and inclinations.

One of the ironies of the war against coronavirus is that we have fought it through isolation – and within that isolation formed spiritual communities with real power.

As we work to improve ourselves spiritually, so that our lives might have a positive effect on the world, we all become safer from a virus of evil.

In the midst of this natural pandemic, the hope is for development of a vaccine to keep us safe. With a spiritual pandemic we already have the “vaccine” in our church. It’s called baptism. And every time we partake of the Holy Supper we get a booster shot.

GOING VIRAL

We know that the Lord's providence is in "every least particular" of everything that happens on earth.

Yes, Divine providence is operating even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. We don't always see the effect of turning bad into good. Indeed, we rarely grasp what's happening since providence operates on the spiritual plane and we don't always see those results. But from the first outbreaks of this worldwide crisis we have seen people instinctively turning to good – helping their neighbors, volunteering, serving in the face of danger, cheering the medical professionals on the front lines. And in the Church we see promising signs as well.

We have already seen how technology greatly extends our outreach, such as the hugely popular *offTheLeftEye* videos and the New Christian Bible Study website. And once the pandemic shut down churches, along with other public venues, our societies sprang to the challenge of providing services through the internet, which have brought more people onto screens than into pews.

The survey of pastors in Church News (page 243) is encouraging. Most were already providing online services – through live streaming, Facebook or YouTube – although doing so without a live audience was an adjustment. They've stepped up their efforts and are attracting viewers beyond their usual attendance.

The Rev. Eric Carswell says Bryn Athyn is getting messages of appreciation from Connecticut, Minnesota, Colorado, California and elsewhere. The Rev. Todd Beiswenger in Australia got an enthusiastic message from someone in Chicago. He says his church in Hurstville, outside of Sydney, is the only one in Australia offering live services on YouTube so he's picking up viewers all around the country. The Rev. Chuck Blair conducted his first online memorial service on NewChurch LIVE, with people tuning in across the country. And the Rev. David Roth now is reaching some 1,500 viewers from his church in Boulder, Colorado.

The Rev. Mac Frazier in Mitchellville, Maryland, is relatively new to this but has jumped in enthusiastically, offering not only live-streamed services but a YouTube offering, Zoom teleconferencing, and a daily devotional series in conjunction with two other New Church ministers.

There is enormous gratitude from congregations – real and virtual – for presenting services to an invisible audience and "making us feel as if we were there."

The pastors are learning as well: how to use technology effectively and how all aspects of the service – not just the sermon – are important to the overall experience.

It is all part of the Lord “making all things new” – even in the midst of an international crisis – and building His Church.

The Gutenberg printing press made possible the wide dissemination of the Bible and the revelation in the Writings. We are just on the cusp of all that technology can do now to continue to grow the Lord’s church on earth.

One online viewer in Boynton Beach wryly commented: “It’s going to take some getting used to going to church on my couch in my pajamas.”

That’s something our old efforts at evangelization never envisioned. But with the Lord “all things are possible” – even reaching out to people on their couches and in their pajamas.

HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER

Long before Julia Ward Howe – renowned for *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* – created the first Mother’s Day in the wake of the Civil War; long before Anna Jarvis established Mother’s Day on the second Sunday in May in the United States in 1907; and long before Hallmark institutionalized Mother’s Day and Father’s Day; long before all of this Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments for the Children of Israel – for the whole world and for all time.

Some of those commandments can sound harsh and challenging, but not the fifth:

Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God has commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (*Deuteronomy 5:16*)

That came easily for me, as it does for most. There are people in the church who still remember my father, the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson. He was a wise, gentle, thoroughly doctrinal man who helped so many to understand – as a pastor, teacher, Dean of the Theological School and editor of *New Church Life*. He died at the relatively young age of 64.

My mother, Eva (Sandstrom) lived a robust 97 years, so many more remember her. She was a stay-at-home Mom who never worked a day of her life – for a paycheck – and never stopped working. She was the model minister’s wife – always supportive, active, positive, caring. And she was the consummate volunteer – for General Church religion lessons and local hospitals.

They were also part of a special generation – who often did without and never complained, who lived their faith and values, and were bedrocks of stability in a dramatically changing world. Those who led us through World War II and the post-war boom indeed were The Greatest Generation. My parents were part of The Wonder Generation, who witnessed more change – and took it all in stride – than anyone in history.

It is easy to shunt seniors to the sidelines, welcome to their rocking chairs and memories, safely out of the way of our hellbent modern age. They deserve our respect and admiration – not only for what they experienced but for what they will always stand for.

We think today's young people have more thrown at them than any generation, that they grow up too quickly and watch the world changing like someone cable surfing with the TV remote.

But it is my parents' generation who saw more change than anyone in history. Today's changes are more dazzling, more rapid fire – with new smartphones and video games every year – but mostly built on the revolutionary changes that ushered in flight and space travel and computers and the whole high-tech industry.

They saw the Model T begin to change the country – from rutted roads to crowded super-highways.

They thrilled to the pioneering Wright brothers and Charles Lindberg – then watched us grow bored with space missions.

My parents never owned a car until their 50s. They walked and rode buses to stores and work and Christmas shopping. They had Sears catalogs. We have Amazon.

Theirs was a quaintly innocent age. Movies added sound and color, but never went blue. Now our culture is saturated with sex and violence and X-rated language and this is considered normal.

They were also the children of the Depression. They lived through two world wars – and fear, and rationing, and hope. They learned to accept life, to make the most of it, and never complain. It was not a bad ethic to be raised with.

My Mom came to America from Sweden as a young woman – on her own – to work as one of the “Cairnwood Girls” and attend the Academy College. She met a dashing young Scot in Theological School. They began married life in Australia, which they never left for 11 years, and where it took weeks to hear from home.

No one had much money. There were no refrigerators or washing machines. We had never heard of television or air-conditioning, so we never missed them – and had a wonderful childhood.

I attribute that to the attitude of my parents and their generation. They had the serenity to accept what they could not change, the work ethic to improve our lives, and no hunger for instant gratification. They were survivors, who overcame any hardships and never felt sorry for themselves.

In my widowed mother and her friends, I saw people slowed by age but not by spirit. They accepted their lot. They loved the church, their copies of the Word were creased with care and caring, and they were happiest when they felt

useful. They trusted in the Lord and were content in His providence.

Looking at the “progress” in today’s world we see a lot of discontent, weariness in trying to keep up, lives overly filled but unfulfilled.

We can still learn something from The Wonder Generation if we can just slow down to their pace, sit still, and be quiet enough to listen.

We honor the fathers and mothers of this generation as the “good and faithful servants” we all strive to be. They left this world with no regrets and “entered into the joy of their Lord.”

THE NAMES ON THE PLAQUES: THEY ARE ALWAYS WITH US

Another day of honor in the United States in May is Memorial Day – a recognition echoed in countries around the world for those who gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

We always join the Bryn Athyn community in a somber tableau of *Taps*, Boy Scouts raising the flag to half mast, and a veteran reminding us why we are there – and why we are grateful. It all plays out before a modest stone monument with familiar names carved in bronze – a dull reminder of brave men.

Among the names are of two of the finest young men I ever knew – my wife’s cousin, Capt. Dan Ebert, and Sgt. Richard Simons – who gave their lives in Vietnam. I remember how stunned the families and community were – but how proud we were of such sterling young men who cared enough about freedom that they died for it.

Another of those names on a simple plaque in a small town in Rhode Island is Sullivan Ballou. He was a major in the 2nd Rhode Island Volunteers who wrote a letter to his wife, Sarah, in July of 1861, on the cusp of the Civil War. It was quoted in Kenneth Burns’ epic television series on the war and became such a classic expression of what brave men risk and sacrifice in war that it has become known simply as “The Letter.”

It reads in part:

“Dear Sarah: The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days. I have no misgivings or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how American civilization now leans on the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing, perfectly willing, to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government and pay that debt.

“Sarah, my love for you is deathless. And yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly to the battlefield.

“If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I loved you, nor that

when my last breath escapes me it will whisper your name. If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be with you in the brightest day and the darkest night. Always. Always.

“And when the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air on your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead. Think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again.”

Sullivan Ballou was killed one week later in the first Battle of Bull Run. He did not live to see his small sons grow. But he helped assure that they would grow in a free, united nation, guided by principles that are still a beacon to the world. That was worth dying for. And it is nice to think that Sarah always felt his presence – and found him waiting.

Likewise, like a quick breeze stirring the flag in Bryn Athyn’s Borough Park, I remember those two names on that plaque – like names and plaques all around the world. I still see their smiles, feel their friendship, know again their caring and their kindness, their commitment and their courage. I know that they – and all the names on all the monuments and gravestones – are not far away. I know that the loved ones of all these brave men find them waiting and rejoice at the reunions. And I know they did not die in vain.

BEING WORTHY

In his sermon, *Walls of Crystal*, (page 201), the Rev. Nathan Cole says: “The internal meaning of the Holy City is not just a description of what we need to do to be worthy of heaven, but also a picture of the blessings for those people who do belong.”

“*To be worthy of heaven.*” That’s something to reflect on in our daily lives – being worthy in our marriages, in our use, worthy as citizens and as members of the Church.

I’m reminded of a story about the Stanley Cup, the championship trophy of the National Hockey League in the United States and Canada. It is often called “the People’s Trophy” because it is not sheltered in a display case but moves around openly in public. The legend is that every player on each year’s championship team is allowed one day with the hallowed cup, be it in bars or churches.

One time on public display fans lined up, eagerly but almost reverently touching it, tracing the names engraved from years gone by.

When a minor league hockey player got his turn he just let his hands hover over the cup, looking at it wistfully. When a guard told him it was all right to touch it, he said: “No, no. I am not worthy.”

Being worthy. It is an aspiration. It is a validation. It is recognition that something is required of us – “the things we need to do to be worthy of heaven.”

A FAREWELL GIFT

Donald Barber, a long-standing member and pillar of the Olivet New Church in Toronto, Canada, passed into the spiritual world on January 30. He was one of four such pillars to depart that church already this year.

I did not know Don well but always admired and respected him. Whenever he visited Bryn Athyn he stood out in a crowd – and not just because he was tall. He was an amiable but serious man, completely dedicated to the Church. I did not know he was also a poet.

Fran Raymond, a friend of his in Toronto, sent along one of his poems with this note:

“A few months ago Don sent me a poem he had written with the wish that I might set it to music. I began the project but regrettably did not fulfill his request before he passed on. At Don’s memorial service I learned that he wrote many poems over the years and I think I may have been the recipient of his last poem, sent to me from his confined room and bed where he lived in a long-term care facility in Toronto.

“As a tribute to Don’s life-long commitment to the New Church and his unwavering faith in the Lord, it is my hope that you will publish this poem in the upcoming issue of *New Church Life*.”

We are privileged to do so:

His Holy Names

He came to earth with many names, but as Jesus He was born.
His birth a celebration announced by angels’ song.
As Savior and Redeemer He kept us free to choose.
We are grateful for His blessing and try not to abuse.
Hallowed be His names.

Unto us a child is born – Isaiah prophesied.
Called both Son and Father, our God personified.
The Prince of Peace and Counselor show infinite potential.
We stand in awe and wonderment, in aspect reverential.
Hallowed be His names.

Sometimes He is called a Lion, sometimes called a Lamb.
He declared His infinite nature when He said I AM THAT I AM.
We marvel at His qualities shown by His many names.
We are thankful for His blessings as with Providence He reigns.
Hallowed be His names.

Our Savior and Redeemer, our Lord, Immanuel.
The Mighty One, Jehovah, God Shaddai, the ancient Hebrews tell;
Alpha, Omega, First, Last, Beginning and the End.
To God with many qualities our praises we extend.
Hallowed be His names.

Announcements

BAPTISMS

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

Agnes, Jael Yeble – At Bassam, Côte d’Ivoire, April 23, 2020 (born April 6, 2020) daughter of Sylvain Apoh Agnes and Naye Berengere Agnes, Rev. Rene Lasme officiating.

Atcho, Ambroise – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Atcho, Irène – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Atcho, Yoris – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Balotić, Dragon Darling V – At Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, February 16, 2020, Rev. Michael K. Cowley officiating.

Cole, Vera Rose – At Kempton, Pennsylvania, February 29, 2020 (born February 12, 2020) daughter of S. Dandridge and Tamar Cole, Rev. Stephen D. Cole officiating.

Dhemou, Nino Ablavi – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Dosseh, Merveile – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Houevi, Ana – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Kodo, Akouavi – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Nobimé, Honorine – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Savino, Elizabeth Teresa – At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, March 8, 2020, Rev. Solomon J. Keal officiating.

Segla, Denise – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Segla, Diane – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Segla, Francine – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Segla, Tatiana – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Soley, Efui Kosi – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Soley, Emanuel Tonyi Richard – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Soley, Gabriela Talè Ahouefa – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Soley, Joyce Edjoè – At Calavi, Benin, January 19, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

Tokpo, Elodie Natacha – At Calavi, Benin, January 18, 2020, Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs officiating.

DEATHS

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

Asplundh, Kurt Horigan – May 2, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 86.

Brefo, Benjamin – February 29, 2020, of Kumasi, Ashanti, Ghana. 51.

Cooper, Geoffrey – April 17, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 95.

Fehon, Margaret “Peggy” Umberger – April 2, 2020, of Davidson, North Carolina. 94.

Kloc, Michael Carl – April 2, 2020, of Topton, Pennsylvania. 85.

Muth, Karen Heilman – April 19, 2020, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 54.

Rambo, Mervyn B. – March 27, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 92.

Rydstrom, Hubert Keith – May 12, 2020, of Phoenix, Arizona. 68.

Smith, Marlyn Field – April 2, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 91.

Weaver, William Lafayette – March 29, 2020, of Largo, Florida. 89.



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



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