

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021



The Shepherd's Way

"We have been given shepherding roles and strategies by the Lord so that we can direct others and especially ourselves along the path to our spiritual rebirth." From a Christmas sermon by the Rev. Philip B. Schnarr. (Page 451)

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New Church Life

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

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The Lord Was Born So We Can See and Love Him
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In This Issue

Editorials (page 442) include:

- *Christmas Counterpoint*: Every year our celebration of Christmas is happily given over to joy and gratitude – “peace on earth, good will to men.” But there is a sober side to Christmas as well, and it is every bit as essential to the meaning and the promise. There is a reason why John came first, preaching baptism and repentance from sin. There is a reason why the evil Herod menaces all that we love about Christmas. Understanding all that helps us to realize the true happiness and promise of Christmas in our lives.
- *Alone for Christmas: Is There Really a “Loneliness Epidemic”?* For many people feelings of isolation are magnified at Christmas. They feel set apart from that happy sphere. “But if we feel that way then we are in good company, for that very feeling is part of what Christmas is all about. The Lord was not born into a happy world where people felt joy and harmony. Just the opposite. That is the reason for the season.”

Perhaps no one represents loneliness in the original Christmas story more than the shepherds who were first to hear the “good tidings of great joy which shall be for all people.” In a sermon on *The Shepherd’s Way* the Rev. Philip Schnarr says the shepherds are there to teach us and to model for us our own spiritual journey. “May you be called to discover the Shepherd’s Way to becoming both a part of His flock but also to be a shepherd in your own right.” (Page 451)

In another Christmas sermon the Rev. Eric Carswell tells us *Why it is So Important to Turn to the Lord as Both Human and God*. It was absolutely necessary for the Lord to take on a natural body and mind to accomplish His mission. Through His birth and work in the world He made Himself visible to us in a way that had been impossible before, so that now we can more easily turn to Him as our Lord and Savior. (Page 458)

In a Charter Day address to Bryn Athyn College and Academy Secondary Schools students gathered at the Cathedral, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth gave them hope for what their New Church education could mean in their

lives: the opportunity to create true spiritual impact in a troubled world. “The educational philosophy of the Academy encourages each of us to be unique receivers of that life – people who are looking for, observing, reflecting about that which we each receive and consistently evaluating to see if it comes from the Lord and brings life, or not.” (Page 463)

A large part of the Rev. Jeffrey Smith’s focus is working with the young people of the church. In the third of a series on their role in its challenging future – *Solving the Problem* – he emphasizes the importance of building community within the church. He challenges them: “YOU are the church. The very survival of this organization is going to require a cultural shift in the way we do things, and a cultural shift begins with individuals who make a difference. You are that individual.” (Page 469)

In his message From the Bishop’s Office, the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs offers *Musings on Mercy and “Hard” Truths*. We may see some teachings in the Word and Heavenly Doctrine as hard to understand or accept, but “the reality is that there is no such thing as a ‘hard’ truth that doesn’t have the Lord’s mercy and love at the core of it.” If we find a teaching challenging and judging, “it is an opportunity for us to make a change and grow spiritually.” (Page 474)

Kathy Simons offers a review of a new book by the Rev. Michael Gladish: *Prayer and Providence – A collection of sermons reflecting the unique perspective and many challenging questions arising during a long pastoral career*. She says: “This book is addressed to those familiar with Swedenborg and to those who are not, to those who are old and bring many life experiences to it, and to those who are young and searching for truths to guide their lives in our challenging world.” (Page 479)

In another review of two new books by the Rev. Erik Buss – *Exploring the Path and Walking the Path* – the Rev. Jeremy Simons says they “show how our spiritual practices help to guide the life of charity, just as the life of charity gives meaning and substance to these practices.” He recommends reading both books together as “an important contribution to New Church literature in an area that deserves more attention. In an era that has devalued many of these practices it is good to be reminded of the important role they play in finding happiness and peace.” (Page 481)

Church News (page 489) includes:

- A report by the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr. on two sets of clergy meetings conducted in Bryn Athyn for ministers in North America. Other regional meetings are being held for clergy in Europe and Asia.
- A golden anniversary for the Hurstville Society’s church building in suburban Sydney, Australia, with the actual celebration postponed by covid

IN THIS ISSUE

- Highlights from an October meeting of the General Church Board of Directors
- Highlights from recent meetings of the Academy Board of Trustees
- Another Charter Day celebration in Bryn Athyn was impacted by the pandemic but still showed great love and support for the Academy. Highlights include Distinguished Alumni and a surprise 90th birthday celebration for legendary Academy teacher and coach Ronald Nelson.
- A new assistant pastor and a new elementary school building coming to Bryn Athyn
- More exciting progress at the New Christian Bible Study project

Editorials

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

CHRISTMAS COUNTERPOINT

And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. (*Luke 2:10,11*)

(Then) the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt, and be there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. (*Matthew 2:13*)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that walk in the shadow of death, upon them hath a light shined. (*Isaiah 9:2*)

This is the essence of the Christmas story. We celebrate the joy and the promise: the bright lights and carols, the happy anticipation, the gifts of love. Stories and images from the Word stir our remains and affections. But there is a reason why John the Baptist was born before Jesus – why the call to regeneration is part of the message. There is a reason why Herod – and the evil he represents – have a role in the great drama of why the Lord came on earth.

The dark side of Christmas cannot overshadow all that we love about the season, but it cannot be ignored either. We need to be aware of the full message of Christmas to find that light in our own lives and be led by His star to the “good tidings of great joy.”

The Lord was born on earth not just to give us a happy holiday but to show us the way to the peace and happiness in heaven – the ultimate Christmas gift. The world at that time had turned to spiritual darkness, corrupted with ignorance, falsity and evil. Humanity needed hope and a path to salvation. We still do.

The Lord came into the world to remove hell from angels and people, and to glorify His Human [to make one with God in heaven]. He brought hell under control and opened heaven so that from then on He could be present with people on earth, and save those who lived according to His commandments. Consequently, the Lord could regenerate and save them, for those who are regenerated are saved. Without the Lord's coming no one could have been regenerated. (*True Christian Religion* 579)

Because of the corruption of the human race, the hells had become so strong that they upset the essential balance between heaven and hell. People were becoming less and less free to make their own choices. This is what the Lord coming on earth restored to us: our spiritual freedom to choose God and heaven.

The Lord could have chosen to be born in a palace and hailed as a king. That is what many people expected from the prophecies – a natural king to reign over their world. But He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” So He was born in a simple stable, representing the still, quiet place where He can be born within our own hearts – every day. From that humble beginning – teaching among simple people and sinners – He became Our Savior, Christ the Lord.

People had forgotten God because they no longer knew Him. He came into the world to be seen and known in human form – understood and loved as a human God. That is why He needed to be seen not as a king, separate and elevated from the people, but an innocent, vulnerable baby – just like them. As it is with us, He had to be attacked and tempted by the hells in order to triumph over them. Then He could restore the balance between heaven and hell – and earth – that is essential to our freedom.

That is also why the similarly miraculous birth of John to the elderly Elizabeth and Zacharias needed to come before the birth of the Lord – because John's mission was baptism and repentance. We know that we must shun evil and repent before we can enter heaven. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (*John* 3:5)

This emphasis on shunning evil and repentance may seem counter to the Christmas message of peace and happiness, but this is what makes the peace and happiness possible.

The Lord came among us to teach us to love – to love Him by living His commandments and loving our neighbor. This is true innocence – following Him rather than our own selfish inclinations. But we have to make the effort to find Him first. And that baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger, points the way. We make room for Him – in our own lives – by seeking Him in His Word, sharing His love and living His teachings.

Then there is Herod. He is not welcome in this joyous story and we often gloss over him amid the happy distractions, but he needs to be there. He is essential to what Christmas is all about. He represents the evil that can come into our minds so that even the joy and promise of Christmas come with the enduring challenge to stand up against evil in the world – and in our own lives.

Herod felt threatened by this baby hailed as a king and ordered the murder of every male child under age two. Having been warned by angels in separate dreams, Joseph fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, and the wise men – charged by Herod to bring him news of where the baby could be found “so that I might worship Him also” – returned to their home by another way.

Just as Herod was a threat to the Lord’s mission on earth, the threat of the hells can afflict our lives too – even overwhelm us – if we let them. But the Lord, through His life on earth, showed us how to escape Herod and overcome temptation by nurturing His own “birth” into our lives.

When we stand against Herod we stand with Simeon, a man who was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” And when Mary and Joseph presented the young Jesus to Simeon, he blessed Him and said: “Lord, now let Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.” (*Luke 2:25, 26, 29-32*)

This is the redemption and peace the Lord gives to all who live with such love and faith. This is the hope and promise of Christmas.

We are blessed to know that the Lord’s unconditional love and mercy did not just visit the world 2,000 years ago but are with us every day. Even, and especially, in this hurting world He still heals and renews.

By coming on earth He reopened the pathway to salvation and heaven. John the Baptist came first to teach the hard truth: that heaven does not come without struggle – shunning evil, combatting temptation, overcoming Herod, pursuing regeneration. But “Fear not.” This is when we are ready for the ultimate Christmas gift: the birth of the Lord on earth and into our lives, the “good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.”

Just as our times are filled with chaos, division, anxiety and threats, the Lord came on earth in a similar time of trial and darkness. He came to overcome the hells and restore our hope of salvation by shunning evil and following Him. His presence – and His promise – were announced with a new light. Shepherds and wise men saw that star and were led to Him. May we also welcome that new light in our lives, guiding our way to the peace, love and joy of Christmas – every day.

(BMH)

ALONE FOR THE HOLIDAYS: IS THERE REALLY A "LONELINESS EPIDEMIC"?

According to media reports, America is experiencing a "loneliness epidemic."¹ Is this really true?

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays can present challenges for those of us who are not feeling the warmth of loving family and friends, or the easy availability of holiday food, gifts, entertainment and festivities. Are the number of us in this situation increasing? Does religion play a role?

Here are examples of how this is reported in American media:

- "A top doctor calls it a national health crisis. Not obesity, or heart disease – a condition that is so common, you actually may not think of it as a mental health problem. Loneliness. That's right, loneliness." (ABC Action News)
- Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General of the United States writes: "People who struggle with loneliness end up living shorter lives, and they also are at an increased risk for heart disease, depression, dementia, anxiety, and a host of other conditions."
- "Multiple studies have shown that loneliness is incredibly common. A study published by *The Economist* a couple of years ago pegs the percentage of adults in the United States who are struggling with loneliness as above 20 percent. The U.K. is in a similar range, between 20 to 25 percent. The number of people struggling with loneliness in the United States is, in fact, greater than the number of adults who have diabetes. It's greater than the number of people who smoke."²

What is loneliness? A common definition goes like this:

"Loneliness has been defined as that subjective discrepancy between our actual level of social connection and our desired level of connection. Loneliness and social isolation are not the same thing. People can be socially isolated but not lonely, and they can be lonely even if they are well connected."³

Since it is a subjective condition, it is hard to quantify with any real accuracy. Plenty of people live alone and yet feel very happily connected to family, friends and fellow workers. Many people also enjoy solitude.

For most of the history of the human race people have lived together

1 *Is There Really a "Loneliness Epidemic"?* Stephen J. Dubner, Freakonomics Radio podcast September 1, 2021

2 *Ibid*

3 *Ibid*

in groups out of necessity. Interestingly the Writings speak about the Most Ancient peoples living alone – not singly, but family by family, and that this is true of the best angels in heaven as well:

There are larger and smaller communities in the heavens. The larger ones consist of tens of thousands of individuals, the smaller of some thousands, and the smallest of hundreds. There are even people who live alone, house by house, so to speak, and family by family. Even though they live apart, they are still arranged in the same pattern as those who live in communities, with the wiser of them in the center and the simpler at the periphery. They are very closely under the Lord's guidance and are the best of angels. (*Heaven and Hell* 50; cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 471)

Historically it has been rare for individuals to live truly alone in a single house. But it has become more common.

Living alone is, in some cases, a luxury — or at least a choice, a preference. According to 2020 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, 28 percent of all U.S. households are single households. That compares to just 9 percent in 1950. . . . In Manhattan, 46 percent of households are single households; this trend is also strong in places like Denmark, Sweden and Norway.⁴

Is this trend a natural result of affluence? Does it indicate that people are failing to connect with others and get along with them, or does it only mean that when the means are available it is natural to choose the independence of living alone?

One indicator is to look at marital trends. In 1962 60% of Americans were married by age 22 and 95% were married by the time they were 40. In 2014 less than 10% were married by age 22 and 75% by age 40.⁵ Similarly the rate of births out of wedlock in the U.S. has increased from 5% in 1960 to 40% today.⁶

We could speculate as to how much trends like these affect people's sense of belonging, but the Writings are clear that conjugal love is a key component of every person's happiness. "All the delights of heaven flow from the delights of conjugal love, like sweet waters from a gushing spring." (*Conjugal Love* 229)

This does not mean that people need to be married to be happy, but rather

4 *Ibid*

5 <https://www.businessinsider.com/average-marriage-age-united-states-2019-2>

6 <https://ifstudies.org/blog/decades-long-rise-in-nonmarital-childbearing-reverses>

that we need to live lives that are consistent with that love, lives consistent with healthy relationships. By contrast, immoral thoughts and actions foster unhappiness, disconnection and loneliness. For “Hatreds of every kind gush forth from the love of adultery (or licentiousness), both against God and against the neighbor, and in general against every good and truth of heaven and the church.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 993)

No holiday captures the plight of loneliness, the reasons behind it, and its solutions more poignantly than Christmas. Not only do the prophecies and Gospel accounts picture the Lord’s birth as the coming of light and warmth to a dark and lonely world, but Mary and Joseph, with the baby Jesus, face danger and isolation from the very start.

This theme is perceptively taken up and brought home to us in countless well-known Christmas stories, which contrast the warmth and love of the season with the coldness of self-centered and unkind behaviors. From Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* to *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, we see the isolating effects of selfishness and materialism, and the happy results when these are overcome. Rather than point the finger at these people who are the victims of their own bad behavior, these stories often sympathetically look at the factors that have contributed to their isolated and lonely lives.

The Christmas spirit in all its complexity is found in the many Christmas songs, stories, films and even ads on television. The message of love, mutual aid, kind behaviors, generosity and selflessness is hard to miss. It is persuasive – and people really do act it out. It has become a cultural expectation. While marriage and family are implicit themes of the season, especially since children are such an important part of the celebration, there is seldom any element of preachiness about this aspect. Rather the theme is inclusive and accepting of everyone.

Yet many people do feel sad and lonely at Christmas time. We compare our messy lives with the cultural ideal, however we may conceive of it, and know that we don’t measure up. If we feel that way then we are in good company, for that very feeling is a part of what Christmas is all about. The Lord was not born into a happy world where people felt joy and harmony. Just the opposite. That is the reason for the season.

Is there really a loneliness epidemic? If there is not, then the New Church has little reason to exist. The purpose of the New Church has everything to do with love, connection, and service, and if these aspects of society were already healthy and thriving, then no change would be needed. Christmas is loved all over the world, and it seems to be a prime example of old traditions and the status quo. But it is really all about revolution – a revolution against selfishness and greed, a revolution against loneliness.

(JFS)

Letters to the Editors

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

Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna
We Besech Thee, Save Us

To The Editors:

Such were the cries of the people as Jesus rode into Jerusalem for the last time. The world we live in was about to be changed forever. The crucifixion and the glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ opened the heavenly light on the new church descending; for the new church forever.

“Hosanna” is the message inscribed on the banner of the Class of 1956. As we graduates stepped into the world, the road ahead seemed bright indeed. Little did we know that just ahead was the war in Vietnam, the New Age, and the turning to natural science and the space age as the hope for the future. The 21st Century loomed ahead.

The twin towers were destroyed. We no longer felt “safe.” We looked to our natural world leaders to help us build a new nation. We became involved in new wars and a movement toward natural science as our “savior.”

Today, dark clouds are covering the earth. We know “the truth will set us free” if we turn to the Lord and live a life according to the Ten Commandments. The world today is in a state of darkness we could hardly have imagined in 1956.

So, what is there to be happy about? Lots. The New Century translations are a gift; we can read them in a way we never could understand in the Green Book days of our schooling. The reality of the Holy City New Jerusalem descending is with us now. We have the means to communicate around the world.

Who knows how wonderful will be the banner message given to us by the New Church Class of 2056.

Michael A. Brown
Tucson, Arizona

A Link to Swedenborg

To The Editors:

Below is the last stanza of the poem, *The House by the Side of the Road*, composed by Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911):

Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by –
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise and foolish – so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban*?
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

*The word ‘ban’ may have the old-fashioned meaning of ‘curse.’

It seems to me that the moral basis of this poem is found in those Books of the Bible that constitute the Lord's Word and perhaps in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. For this poem sends a message, familiar to New Church people, of shunning contempt for the neighbor, of being content with the dispensations of Divine Providence, and of living the humble life of charity among humanity. Further, I suspect that Foss was aware of Swedenborg and the teachings revealed through him.

Concerning Foss we learn from the Internet: “He graduated in 1882 from Brown University. In 1898 he served as librarian at the Sommerville Public Library until his death.” And Sommerville, Massachusetts, is a mere 15 miles from Concord, where there was admiration for Swedenborg among some of its renowned residents, including Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888, father of Louisa May Alcott), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1835-1882).

When Thoreau died, Foss was four years old; when Alcott died, Foss was 30; and when Emerson died, Foss was 24.

Certainly Foss, a librarian, was aware of the eminence of these men. Also, Emerson's book, *Representative Men*, published in 1850, as we know, has a chapter on Emanuel Swedenborg. So I would be surprised if Foss was unaware of Swedenborg. In fact, he is likely to have had Emerson's book, as well as some of Swedenborg's books, in the Sommerville Public Library.

Searching to learn more about Foss's poem, I came across the *Hard-Copy and Internet* magazine, *Bits and Pieces*; the November 2011 issue, which notes

that this magazine has been “serving millions of adults and kids since 1983.” I found some information in it about Foss’s wise poem. This was followed by several inspirational quotations, the first of which is noted to be from Emanuel Swedenborg: “True charity is the desire to be useful to others without thought of reward.”

Richard Linquist
Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

The Shepherd's Way

A Christmas Sermon by the Rev. Philip B. Schnarr

Lessons: *Luke 2:15-20; Ezekiel 37:24; Zechariah 11:17; John 10:2-5; 14,16, Arcana Coelestia 3138; Apocalypse Revealed 383*

| *There shall be one shepherd for them all; and they shall walk in My judgments, and keep My statutes, and do them. (Ezekiel 37:24)*

Our focus is on the shepherd story as it explores both a natural and spiritual path leading to the birth of Jesus. We will seek to discern something one might call the Shepherd's Way as we meander down a trail from where the shepherds dutifully watched their flocks during the night, to the little town of Bethlehem where Jesus had just been born.

Already we have recited that portion of *Luke 2* which we know so well, and heard the musical version, adding so much joy and beauty to the praise and glorification of our Lord.

Shepherds are mentioned more than 100 times in the Scriptures. It's an important theme for many reasons. The birth of the baby Jesus is the focal point, as it should be, for all of the subplots in the Christmas story, but let's see how vital the shepherds are in connecting us to the heart and soul of the narrative.

Some of us love the shepherds because we have a romantic picture of people who are gentle, innocent, kind and especially willing to sacrifice to protect their flocks. This quality seems to come across in the parable given by the Lord Himself of the shepherd who leaves his flock of 99 sheep to go after just one that was lost. Sheep, and especially lambs, connote qualities of innocence and willingness to follow the Lord's leading. He is the Good Shepherd.

Or maybe we love the shepherds because there is part of us that simply wants to feel like we belong – belong to a flock and that we matter to others. For many people this is very difficult right now. It can feel like we are stuck and lonely in something like “the valley of the shadow of death.”

We have been given shepherding roles and strategies by the Lord so that we can direct others and especially ourselves along the path to our spiritual rebirth – a path we might call the Shepherd’s Way.

Perhaps like me, you can never get enough of the 23rd *Psalms*: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” In our readings we heard from the prophets: “There shall be one shepherd for them all.” (*Ezekiel* 37:24) “I will raise up over them one shepherd who shall feed them.” (*Ibid.* 23)

In *Isaiah* we read these tender words: “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.” (*Isaiah* 40:11)

So, let’s be clear: there is only one True and Good Shepherd. He is the

Lord Jesus Christ. We are “the sheep of His pasture.” Yet, we, as finite human beings, have been created by God to be images and likenesses of Him. As such, we have been given shepherding roles and strategies by the Lord so that we can direct others and especially ourselves along the path to our spiritual rebirth – a path we might call the Shepherd’s Way.

On a very practical, external level, shepherds can be looked up to for their leadership qualities. Shepherds are often portrayed in the Scriptures as great leaders who are in charge of maintaining order and safety for their people, defending them against violent enemies. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and David are connected to this leader-type function of the shepherd.

And so it goes throughout the Word. But shepherds are not always symbols of great leadership. After the kings came the prophets. And the prophets talked about shepherds who were not so good. They sent bleak messages to the religious and political leaders of Israel. At times they talked about them as worthless and evil shepherds.

Zechariah said: “Woe to the *worthless shepherd* who leaves the flock.” (11:17)

Jeremiah said: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!’ says the LORD.” (23:1)

So without a doubt, a shepherd kind of leadership was important in biblical times, even in a negative sense. And from the following teaching in *Heavenly Secrets* 343 we see that this pattern has relevance to our lives today:

A “shepherd of the flock” is one who applies the good of neighborly love to his or her life. This must be obvious to everyone, for the

shepherd is a familiar figure in the Word of both the Old and New Testaments. A person who leads and teaches is called a "shepherd" and those who are led and taught are called the "flock." A person who does not lead to the good of neighborly love and teach about it, is not a true shepherd; and a person who is not led to good, and does not learn what is good, is not of the flock.

Today is a good time to reflect and ask ourselves if we are trying to be this kind of shepherd? And are we also seriously trying to be "of the Lord's flock?"

So, by the Lord's definitions, leader-teacher types of people and true learning-types of people, are those who lead and learn from a desire to contribute to the common good and not just self. Today is a good time to reflect and ask ourselves if we are trying to be this kind of shepherd. And are we also seriously trying to be "of the Lord's flock?"

Let's look more closely at what is happening in the Christmas shepherd scene we enjoy so much at this time of the year.

Oddly enough, the shepherds at the time of the Lord's birth were both literally and figuratively on the outskirts of society. They do not appear to be leader- or teacher-type people. In contrast, they were very likely on the lower echelons of society. But looking more closely, the fact is that these people were *actual* shepherds. Simple folk, yes, but chosen because the Lord knew they had affirmative hearts and minds to the coming of the Messiah, their Savior and Redeemer. Their real physical job was in service to others and to the welfare of their flocks.

As we know well, from the story about the evil King Herod and later the religious leaders of that time, the leader-type shepherds were mostly corrupt self-serving individuals and groups. Many in their hearts were actually opposed to the coming of the One Good Shepherd who would lead the people out of their oppression and the dark times they lived in. Jesus, the Lord, was perceived as a real threat to the governmental authority and power of the day.

In contrast to these wayward shepherds, the actual shepherds who were faithfully watching over their flocks by night out in the field still had to put their physical lives on the line for their flocks. They needed real courage and commitment to the flock if they were to succeed. I wonder if we were to compare them to people today, who would they be? Who would you consider as this kind of shepherd in our society?

Are they the people we see doing routine uses all around us? Are they

The point is that shepherds are all over the place and they are us. In this sense we are all called to participate in the Christmas story.

the people watching over our food supply to keep the deliveries coming and the stores functioning? Are they people doing service jobs sincerely and faithfully in restaurants and sanitation? Are they teachers overseeing the education of our young? Most poignantly of all, are they the frontline health-care workers busy night and day ministering to huge flocks suffering from our present health crisis?

The point is that shepherds are all over the place and they are us. In this sense we are all called to participate in the Christmas story. On the individual level are we not all shepherds? Don't we shepherd ourselves through a plethora of routine uses just to get through each day? All the domestic tasks involving meal preparation, cleaning, home maintenance, transportation and so on? Physical shepherds manage this for their sheep: moving them to fresh pasture, finding a source of water, protecting from the dangers brought on by the weather, by natural and human predators, and by the normal ups and downs associated with surviving disease and natural disasters. Yes, everyone has to be a shepherd watching over the copious duties of simply living safely and well in the natural world.

So let's take a closer look at what exactly happened in the shepherds' scene of the Christmas story. Let's try to picture what they actually did and what led them down the path or Shepherd's Way to the place where the Lord was born into their lives.

It begins with the shepherds "living out in the fields." That means they lived and worked in the same place. People working from home can identify with this. Think about it. What is your field of work? It could be your line of work or your specific discipline but in the Heavenly Doctrines a field refers to the good fertile soil in your spirit where your spiritual mind can be planted with seeds of truth from the Lord.

Now, the shepherds lacked clear vision. It was nighttime. They had few truths to work with in this time of spiritual darkness. All of us begin the process of our spiritual rebirth, the Shepherd's Way, in some degree of obscurity. The Shepherd's Way unfolds slowly as we begin our spiritual journey.

But then a spectacular thing happened. An angel of the Lord suddenly burst forth, surrounded by glorious light from above. And the shepherds were afraid. "Feared with great fear" is one translation. And why? Were they afraid they would die? Was this sudden glory of God a sign of impending doom? The destruction of the world?

Fear often comes from the unknown. Who was this being of light? Fear in the internal sense of the Word can also be a healthy reverential fear on the inside – or it can be a more harmful scary kind of fear on the outside. Perhaps these shepherds had some of each.

The angel then said, “Fear not,” which surely helped to reassure the shepherds. But remember that angels are also regular human beings, like you and me. Only they have travelled far along the Shepherd’s Way and have been freed from evil through actually being good sheep and living by the Lord’s teachings when they were on earth. Overcoming our fears in life, both external and internal, is a huge step toward having the Lord born in our hearts and minds.

The angel brought good news, true news given from heaven. You could say some wonderful instruction/teaching was going on, too. In so many words, they told the shepherds: “Your Savior, who is also the promised King, has been born. Here are the directions. Find Him in the City of David. Look for the sign, He is a newborn baby dressed only in simple cloths and lying in a manger.” Very basic information for these folks who were in this moment more like sheep than shepherds.

And what is the most important and basic truth anyone could learn from the Word? The angel said it: “There is born to you this day . . . a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” The threat of a total spiritual and natural devastation was averted because He had come and He alone could take away the spiritual darkness and evil which threatened all humanity. He alone is the Good Shepherd, the One Shepherd whose Love and Wisdom were His legacy while in the world. And this same Divine Love and Wisdom are the means we have been given to overcome the power of hell in our lives.

Now before the shepherds went to Bethlehem came these words: “The shepherds said to one another.” These few words, “The shepherds said to one another” seem important. Another translation could be, “The shepherds spoke together.” Yes, they talked over the angel’s message and then they responded in freedom. They were not compelled to go to Bethlehem. The Shepherd’s Way can only be helpful when it is freely chosen. But when these shepherds agreed they went with haste and an affirmative expectation. “Let us now go.”

It is said that the shepherds “came in haste?” Why the rush? In teachings for

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May you be called to discover the Shepherd's Way to becoming both a part of His flock but also to be a shepherd in your own right.

the New Church, "haste" is described as being, "Excited by affection and desire." (See *Apocalypse Explained* 281:10, 355:27.) Their will had been touched and so they were excited to go.

The story goes on: "They found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in a manger." It might be better to say that the shepherds "sought out Mary and Joseph" so you can picture their eagerness as they swept through the streets on the hunt for the sign that the

long-awaited Messiah had come. Isn't this a great metaphor for how we too seek out signs that the Lord is being born in us? Have you seen those signs in your life? Mostly the signs come in retrospect where we see that the Lord has led us through the valley of the shadow and perhaps from prayers we feel He has answered.

When the shepherds finally arrived at their destination I picture them so enthused that they could not restrain themselves from sharing this good news with anyone and everyone. Perhaps they were reenacting the very teaching and learning experience they had just had with the angels.

So we might be tempted to think we have reached the end of the Shepherd's Way. It is a high point for sure to see the shepherds' hearts on fire with glory and praise for what they have learned and shared. But wait a minute. It says in the story: "Then the shepherds returned." (*Luke 2: 20*) With what we know about the path of regeneration – the Shepherd's Way -- it's important to know that this way, this path, is not a one-way street. It really has an upward, circular or spiral trajectory. It constantly returns upon itself as it leads us up to the mountain of the Lord.

Once we have been instructed by the Lord, have followed the signs He gives us, and caught a glimpse of our Savior, we must return to the field, our everyday life, our everyday thoughts and affections. But now we can come "with haste" with fresh and renewed motivation, "excited by affection and desire." We have learned from those angels (really the Lord) new principles about what it means to love our neighbor. And a rebirth is happening within us. We have been empowered to do a better job managing our sheep. That is the Good Shepherd's Way, the ongoing process of regeneration which is for us to be recreated in the image and likeness of our Maker.

So, this Christmas, may the Lord give His angels charge over you, may your angels bring happy and wondrous news of how the Lord has been newly born in your life. May you be called to discover the Shepherd's Way to becoming

both a part of His flock but also to be a shepherd in your own right. And along the way, don't forget to watch for signs of good tidings and great joy among our fellow travelers along the Shepherd's Way.

You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,' says the Lord God. (Ezekiel 34:31)

Amen.



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Why it is So Important to Turn to the Lord as Both Human and God

A Christmas Season Sermon by the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

Lessons: *Numbers 24:10-19, Arcana Coelestia 2034:5-*

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, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. (Numbers 24:17)

With these words the prophet Balaam foretold one of the most remarkable events in all time: the coming of the Lord. Some of us have been hearing these words every Christmas for years, often at the Tableaux service. They are a reminder of the ancient wisdom that had the wise men of the East studying the night sky. They were looking for a special star that would be a sign that a king had been born.

Think of the core of this prophecy: “A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Jacob and Israel are two names for the same person. Jacob was the name given to him by his parents; Israel was given to him following a remarkable nighttime wrestling match. The teachings for the New Church tell us this about Jacob’s second name:

Israel in the original language means “one contending as a prince with God,” and these words mean in the internal sense that [the Lord] overcame in the conflicts that accompany temptations; for it was through temptations and the conflicts which take place in temptations that the Lord made His Human Divine . . . And it is temptations and victories in temptations that make the spiritual person. This is why Jacob first received the name Israel after his wrestling – “wrestling” meaning to undergo temptation. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4286:8)

These two names for the same person, Jacob and Israel, are then associated with two items that are not normally thought to be a pair. Often one would associate a scepter with another sign of royalty, such as a crown. Stars are often spoken of with the other things created on the fourth day of creation, the sun and moon. (*Genesis* 1:16, see also *Revelation* 8:12) Nevertheless, the prophecy links these two names and two dissimilar items, a star and a scepter.

In the internal meaning of the Word Jacob and Israel refer to two qualities in the Lord's Church and two qualities in the Lord Jesus Christ:

In general, "Jacob" in the Word means the external aspect of the Church and "Israel" the internal, for every Church has an external aspect and it has an internal one, that is, it is internal and also external. And because that which constitutes the Church is meant by "Jacob" and by "Israel," and because the Church in its entirety originates in the Lord, both Jacob and Israel therefore mean the Lord in the highest sense – "Jacob" the Lord's Divine natural, "Israel" His Divine spiritual. Consequently, the external aspect of the Lord's kingdom and of His Church is meant by "Jacob" and the internal by "Israel." (*Arcana Coelestia* 4286:7)

Why is a star linked to the name "Jacob" and a scepter to the name "Israel"? A star is a twinkle of light in the night sky. It is a very small light and yet for centuries people knew they could find their way by using stars at night as a guide. The Lord was born into the world so that we could know He is a human God. He was the Word made flesh to dwell among us. (*John* 1:14) He came to show us examples of what it means to live our lives from love guided by wisdom. After He humbly washed His disciples' feet on the night of the Last Supper, He said: "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (*John* 13:15)

For those who read the Gospels and reflect on their stories of the Lord's life, enriched with greater meaning by the teachings for the New Church, there are powerful images of what it means to live a wisely kind life. These images show

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the Lord reacting to specific individual circumstances; they don't necessarily translate into clear instructions for what we are to do today interacting with the people in our lives, but they give guidance – perhaps like a star in the night sky – that keeps us heading in the right direction.

A scepter is linked to the name “Israel.” We are told that a scepter as a sign of royalty or kingship means power and control, in particular the power and control of truth motivated by good loves. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6371:1) The Lord came into the world as a newborn infant, with Mary as His

mother, in order to accomplish our redemption and salvation. It could not have happened in any other way. The explanations the teachings for the New Church give us of the Lord's life and mission in this world can be less than easy to follow. See what you can understand from the following quotation:

From good which is Jehovah's [or God's from eternity] the Lord united the Divine Essence to the Human Essence, and from truth united the Human Essence to the Divine Essence, and so achieved every single thing all from Himself. Indeed, His Human was left to Itself in order that of Himself He might fight against all the hells and overcome them; and because He had life within Himself, as stated, which was His own, He overcame them by His own power and strength, as is also clearly stated in the places quoted from the Prophets. So then, because He acquired all things to Himself by His own powers, He became Righteousness, cleared the world of spirits of hellish genii and spirits, and in so doing rescued the human race from destruction – for the human race is governed by means of spirits – and thus redeemed it. This is why the Old Testament Word speaks so often of Him as Rescuer and Redeemer, and also Savior, as His name Jesus describes. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2025:5)

The Lord while in the world battled the evil spirits in His temptations. Through conquering in these temptations He took on the power represented by a scepter, a sign of kingship. As He taught his disciples: “All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (*Matthew* 28:18) The Lord came to provide us the possibility of choosing the happiness and usefulness of a heavenly life.

While the details may not be as clear as we might want, anyone who knows and reflects on the teachings for the New Church about the Lord's first advent can have increasing awe for its significance. The process of His spiritual development from being an infant, knowing nothing more than you or I did when we were born, to having a mind perfectly able to receive the infinite love and wisdom of God the creator was the work of His life.

Without the birth of the Lord into the world by means of the Virgin Mary it would have been impossible for anyone to become an angel in heaven. It would have been impossible for anyone to experience true peace and happiness. The power of the hells had grown so great that the ability of any human being to resist them was gravely endangered. If the Lord had not come, everything good in each member of the human race would have been destroyed by the evil spirits of hell breaking the connection between heaven and the earth. We are told that a cataclysmic destruction of all human beings would have immediately ensued upon the breaking of this connection.

Although the danger of the situation at the time of the advent might fill us with a sense of an averted disaster, another aspect of the Lord's birth may bring us wonder and awe. If we reflect on the idea that the infinite God of creation, who has created and maintained two trillion galaxies, each averaging 100 billion stars, chose to clothe Himself in a finite body much like yours or mine in order to be born in this world in a small town, in a relatively primitive culture in order to save and redeem each of us and the human race as a whole, this is an amazing idea.

It was absolutely necessary that the Lord took on a natural body and mind, together with its hereditary inclinations toward evil, by being born of Mary in order for Him to accomplish His work. He could not have conquered the hells and reestablished the spiritual freedom of every human being to resist the power of evil loves and the false ideas that support them. It was absolutely essential that the Lord take on a natural mind with its limitations that allowed the hells to approach Him and tempt Him. By conquering in these temptations the Lord changed the influence and operation of both the evil spirits of hell as well as the angels of heaven. He provided a new order for each that saved and redeemed all of us.

Through His birth at the first Christmas and His life in this world the Lord made Himself visible to us in a way that had been impossible before. Each of us can turn to Him as our God and Savior.

May we be inspired by all we know of the birth and life of our Savior and Redeemer to live better lives, to follow His example and teachings, and to turn to Him for strength and hope.

Through His birth at the first Christmas and His life in this world the Lord made Himself visible to us in a way that had been impossible before. Each of us can turn to Him as our God and Savior. We can realize we are loved by this Human God with infinite perfection and with infinite wisdom. May we turn to this essential truth even in the dark times of our lives. May this essential truth guide us through the darkness like a star.

The Lord also came to gain the power represented by the scepter. If we face our own times of spiritual trial and temptation, knowing that we must fight as though we were doing it alone but that all the power that will allow us to conquer comes from the Lord, something of this scepter of truth motivated by good loves will grow within our lives.

It is this growing presence of the Lord within our own lives that He wants for each of us. The Holy Supper represents this growing presence of the Lord in our lives as we try to follow Him ever better each day. The bread represents His gift of love to warm our hearts. The wine represents His gift of growing wisdom to bring light to our minds.

The prophet Balaam spoke words of ancient wisdom when He foretold the Lord's birth into the world. 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, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult." (*Numbers 24:17*)

May this prophecy remind us of the Lord's purposes in being born into the world. May we be inspired by it and all we know of the birth and life of our Savior and Redeemer to live better lives, to follow His example and teachings, and to turn to Him for strength and hope.

Amen.



The Rev. Eric H. Carswell retired last year as pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church but agreed to stay on for a period of time as assistant to the new pastor, the Rev. Derick P. Elphick. He and his wife, Donna (Zeitzi), live in Huntingdon Valley, PA. Contact: Eric.Carswell@brynathynchurch.org.

CHARTER DAY ADDRESS

Creating True Spiritual Impact in a Troubled World

October 8, 2021

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

Lessons: *I Samuel 3:1-18, Divine Love and Wisdom 303*

Welcome Students, Faculty, Corporation, Board members and Alumni. In this weekend of celebration, it is appropriate to take a few minutes in this sacred space and have a serious talk about our impact in a world that is filled with a troubling level of brokenness.

I raise this because the Academy, together with the team of people who dedicate their lives to support its purposes, is uniquely positioned to make a permanent positive impact that brings sanity, truth, and spiritual peace to a world that seems to be struggling.

If I were a student sitting with you in these pews, looking at the conditions of our current culture, I would be concerned. I would wonder if I could discover and live a life that really mattered – a life where I could make a difference.

And with that concern in mind, I would like to assure that you, students, are in an environment that is unique in its ability to offer you a system for human spiritual impact. And I would suggest that true impact in life is caused by spiritual changes resulting in a more loving, charitable, compassionate world – one that bases its existence on eternal truths rather than lies.

The spiritually based educational system that is offered here at the Academy equips you to freely engage, evaluate and courageously act to impact your surroundings so that your community becomes more human, more life giving (instead of life sucking), more compassionate, and more responsive to eternal truth.

The system of compassionate intelligence that serves as the theological

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backbone of this institution will not only help prepare you for your launch into the world, but it will enable you to grow in wisdom, kindness and the ability to positively interact with others. You are being trained and equipped with everything you need to become truly, genuinely human, and then to share that humanity with others. The product of that human interaction is a deep sense of peace and fulfillment that will expand your life to eternity.

Let me focus on three key aspects of this system and how they work together:

First, You are Unique

Our educational system starts powerfully by recognizing you as an

individual. You are viewed as unique with a potential for performing useful service that is “*one of a kind*” and therefore is precious in the Lord’s eyes. In His infinite wisdom, each of you sitting here listening today has your own perspective and abilities to be human that give you a distinct personality. There has never been another you in the history of humanity, and God views you as having a special ability to contribute something to His human race that is marked with value and that only you can provide.

I like to imagine that when a person’s life in this world ends, and they begin life in the next, that the angels come running up to the person as they awaken, welcoming them with this message: “We are so glad you are finally here. We have been waiting for you, because there is something that has come up in heaven that only you can solve!”

Second: Nothing Originates from One’s Self

The most incredible gift the Lord gives to human beings (the thing that makes them truly human) is related to this concept of being unique. This gift is our experience of being alive on our own as individuals. This feeling is called the “*proprium*” or the “*as of self*.” Part of the beauty of this “*as of self*” is that we each experience that life a little differently from anyone else, a benefit of being unique. In addition, our experience of that life changes and grows stronger in the measure that we grow closer to the Lord.

We are receivers of this life. We are not the originators – even though

it may feel that way. This is important because we limit ourselves if we look inward to ourselves as the origin of our feelings, thoughts, insights, wisdom or even our ability to act. This distinction is echoed in Jesus' own words: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (*John 15:5*) This also aligns with the Lord's words: "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly." (*John 10:10*)

The educational philosophy of the Academy encourages each of us to be unique receivers of that life – people who are looking for, observing, reflecting about that which we each receive and constantly evaluating to see if it comes from the Lord and brings life, or not. This interaction with the life that the Lord gives us is what makes us human and allows us to bring value to the world.

The system of compassionate intelligence that serves as the theological backbone of this institution will not only help prepare you for your launch into the world, but it will enable you to grow in wisdom, kindness and the ability to positively interact with others.

Samuel

The story we read this morning about Samuel illustrates the process of learning to listen to the Lord so that we can receive and make good use of the unique gifts He gives us. This, of course, is at the heart of learning how to live a life of impact.

Think about yourself in the context of the story of Samuel. Ask yourself what the Lord might be saying to you. The voice might come to you as a feeling sparked by conscience, or a premonition, or it might surface as a sense of agreement, or it might be a choice in your life that honors principles that come from the Lord's Word.

In the story, it was late at night. Samuel as a young lad was a caregiver to the High Priest Eli who was old, blind and failing. Samuel woke from sleep hearing a voice calling him: "Samuel, Samuel!" He responded by mistakenly running to Eli to ask how he could help. This repeated three times. After the third time, Eli realized that the call must be the Lord Himself reaching out to the boy, and so he instructs Samuel that the next time he hears the voice, he should answer: "Speak Lord, for your servant hears!"

The educational philosophy of the Academy encourages each of us to be unique receivers of that life – people who are looking for, observing, reflecting about that which we each receive and constantly evaluating to see if comes from the Lord and brings life, or not.

I find this story powerful because Samuel's call illustrates the Lord's intimate way of reaching out to each of us, providing us with perfectly tailored leadership to help us move forward in our lives. Looking at the symbolism of the story, Eli represents the Word and how Scripture supports us to allow us to wake up and hear the call.

It is powerful to recognize that the Lord has personal messages for each of us. The challenge is to learn to listen deeply. The process of prayer is not only "speech with God," but it also includes preparing oneself to listen to the reply. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535) That reply, then, is to be taken in the light of the Lord's teachings in His Word, and looked at from the perspective of freely acting in harmony with the truths that appear there.

The Third Aspect of Spiritual Impact: Life Only Has Value in Community

Your uniqueness, together with your ability to receive life, makes you spiritually alive when you share your experience of the Lord's gifts in ways that help others. This is really the only definition of true impact. It is what makes a person human and it makes an angel angelic. This is also what makes heaven, heaven. Each angel adds their experience and wisdom into a shared pool of wisdom. So, the heavenly model for impact is interdependence rather than independence.

People with unique views and skills are drawn to community because they know we are stronger and better together. This is also reflected in heaven. There, instead of an individualistic, competitive environment, it is an atmosphere of mutual contribution – each giving what they have learned from the Lord to improve the lives of others. This is the origin of the definition of heaven as being a kingdom of uses, and it reflects in the teaching from *Divine Love and Wisdom* 43: "To feel the joy of another as joy in oneself, that is loving."

A Story

There are lots of examples of people who have used these three aspects of growth as a system to live truly meaningful lives. Let me speak of one. Carl

Bernard Wadström (1747-1799) was among the first to be baptized into the faith of the New Church on Christmas day, 1788. He had just returned to London from an assignment by the Swedish government to investigate the possibility of starting a colony on the Coast of West Africa in what is now Sierra Leone. While on this trip, Wadström witnessed first-hand the horrors of the slave trade. He immediately recognized the shameful contrast between his new-found system of faith and this accepted economic practice that was in all respects grossly inhuman and cruel.

When back in England, Wadström published a book – *Observations of the Slave Trade* – containing graphic illustrations still used in history books today. In that book, he introduces his subject with this:

“Would I were endowed with powers to represent in colors sufficiently striking, the frightful picture I have formed to myself, of the above-mentioned traffic, and thereby to prove, that these detestable markets for human flesh constitute the last stage of all false principles, the greatest of all abuses, the inversion of all order, and originate solely in that corrupted system of commerce which pervades every civilized nation at this day.” (*Observations* pref. p.5)

Wadström joined forces with Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce presenting arguments opposing slavery to the British Crown that resulted in the abolition of the slave trade. These same arguments formed the basis of a global movement that ultimately resulted in the United States and the rest of the world following suit.

Wadström wrote about his deep conviction that the faith he had discovered was intended to bring a new sense of spiritual humanity to the world. He viewed the Heavenly Doctrines as providing guidance that demanded reform of slavery as just one of many social evils. His willingness to listen to the voice of reason coming from the Lord, referencing it with the truths he had learned in Scripture, gave him the courage to make an impact which reformed the way life works on this planet.

By contrast, several years ago I had the opportunity to visit Ghana (also in West Africa). While there, we took a day trip to visit the “el Mina” slave castle that was built by the Portuguese as a holding pen and shipping point for slaves collected in the region. Built in 1481, it is the oldest existing European-

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These three basic principles of New Church Education will help you live a life of rich spiritual value.

built structure south of the Sahara in Africa. For the next 300-plus years this evil building served as a dungeon used to collect and hold human beings until they could be sent overseas.

Wadström had the courage to heed his inner voice of change. Because of his willingness to respond, today there are billions of human beings whose lives are forever changed by his willingness

to listen to that voice of truth from the Lord. One wonders how much longer Elmina would have existed to carry out its dirty work if Wadström had not risen to the cause. How many more people would have suffered?

A person does not often get the opportunity to initiate global change on such a visible scale as Wadström did. But I believe each of us plays a key role in daily contributing toward supporting and preserving the spiritual health of humanity. By listening, thinking carefully, and acting from our understanding of the Lord's purposes, we can have impact that is every bit as powerful as Wadström's stand for human freedom. For we can communicate the same truths and call for the same freedoms and the same qualities of love and compassion that enable others to enjoy a spiritually based life.

These three basic principles of New Church education will help you live a life of rich spiritual value. First, learn to know your unique characteristics; second, listen deeply to the Lord's compassionate voice of wisdom in the light of the Word; and third, act positively in a community with others. You are then in the stream of providence, participating in making the world a more human, more habitable place where all are free to engage in the true blessings of the Lord's eternal life.

Amen.



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Young Adults: Solving the Problem

The Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith

This is the third of three articles under the title *Young Adults*. In the previous two articles, I described how the church has an existential problem, and what some possible causes of that problem might be. Now, I would like to share some ideas in the way of feedback from young people and some possible solutions to our predicament.

As you read this article, I invite you to have an open mind, and then I will ask you to open it even bigger. The solutions for the crisis we are facing will not be solved with pizza dinners and camping trips; it's far bigger than that. *Hold on. Did he say, "Crisis"? Isn't that a little bit alarmist?* Maybe – but, given our consistent slow decline over the past several decades, and our failure to curb that decline through minor tweaks and modifications, and given also our strong hesitancy to make major tweaks, I think now is the best time to call our situation a crisis – before it's too late. If our choice is not to call it a crisis and remain on our current trajectory, or to call it a crisis and take some serious steps to do something about it, then I vote for calling it a crisis.

What is our goal?

In order to talk about solutions, we ought to have no less than a really good idea of what our goal is. I don't believe it is effective in our current situation to have specific goals like "bring people to church on Sunday," or "baptize more people," or "increase membership." Our goal ought to be something more general to the effect of "increase participation in the life of the church."

This ought to be our goal because it is no less important for a person to attend a doctrinal class or help out around the society than it is to show up at church on Sunday. With that said, participation in a society is only the apparent goal; the actual goal is that those people who participate are able to experience community and thus be supported in their spiritual life.

If we can find solutions that satisfy the more general goal of *participation*,

Participation in a society is only the apparent goal; the actual goal is that those people who participate are able to experience community and thus be supported in their spiritual life.

then our energy will be more efficiently spent than by trying to get people to take part in the specific ways. Another way to think of general participation is that we want people to feel like the society and church are theirs.

Feedback from Young Adults

Before we get to the solutions, I would like to share some thoughts from young adults regarding participation in church activities. The following three questions in italics are just a few that resulted from a number of one-on-one

conversations I had with them in an effort to get to know them.

Is it OK for me to have different ideas from the organization? One thought behind this question is that many love the ideas of the New Church but struggle to reconcile the spiritual ideals and the moral ideals they find within their cultural context. While they are in that in-between space, does our church make them feel welcome and supported as they figure things out?

That brings us to a second thought, that there are some who avoid church situations because of their experience with feeling judged. Naturally, a church that conservatively adheres to its sometimes counter-cultural doctrine is going to appear to be “judgey” for holding to its ideals. There is, however, the human tendency to use truth to shine a light on what we think others are doing wrong, instead of how we, ourselves, can be more loving. Yes, there is merit in helping others along their path, but that tends to be most useful when it is requested. Oh yes, and be sure to mind the plank in your own eye.

How is the church relevant in today’s world? Mobile devices are making everybody (young and old) aware of what is happening in the world, and they also make people feel like they can have an impact on world events by using their voice. You can like cancel culture or not, but it is an example of the power of the individual’s influence on social media.

More than ever before, people are likely to affiliate themselves with an organization that takes part in efforts to solve world problems like hunger, poverty, pollution and social inequalities. Does our church as an organization sponsor charitable entities or support its own? People are looking for that.

Do I make a difference/matter in the church? For one thing, a little appreciation goes a long way. It can be easy to lose track of all the helpers in a society when there are so many moving parts to even the most basic of events, but it would behoove us to find a way to express appreciation to everyone who

helps make it happen.

Another facet of this question is that young people especially may have the feeling of not belonging in the church setting. For one, there aren't many of their age group at church events. Two, older generations already blame many of the woes of the world on young people, so it makes for even more discomfort at a time when they already experience heightened anxiety. (See below for more about this anxiety.)

These three questions offer a glimpse into what might be considered some of the fixable roadblocks that keep many adults – young and old – from joining church life. Some roadblocks are as easy as improving our communication, while others require that we rethink the allocation of funds in our budget.

Be it noted also that there are certain roadblocks that cannot be fixed by the church, such as our beliefs that stem from our understanding of the Heavenly Doctrines. These ideological roadblocks to involvement can only be overcome by the person who differs in belief. With that said, maybe we can help overcome these roadblocks.

While I was in teacher training before going into the ministry, I learned the catchy phrase, “Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” If we get better at showing how much we care, maybe the people we are trying to reach will more easily hear the beautiful New Church truths that are quite literally life- and world-changing. And that brings us to the solutions.

Solutions

And now, the moment you've all been waiting for: the solutions to our (not young adult) problem. I invite you to open your mind as well as your heart. These are not just things that other people should do, or that the “church” should do. In fact, I hesitate to say that the church as an organization *can* do anything to fix the problem we have; at the very least it is not something that can be committed apart from the participation of people like you.

YOU are the church. The very survival of this organization is going to require a cultural shift in the way we do things, and a cultural shift begins with individuals who make a difference. You are that individual.

If we get better at showing how much we care, maybe the people we are trying to reach will more easily hear the beautiful New Church truths that are quite literally life- and world-changing.

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The main solution that involves each person in the church is one of the most essential human needs, and that need is *connection* with other humans. This is one of the most basic things our church (read *everybody*) can do that doesn't require a budget or a change in any other aspect of our church. Reach out to someone – a young adult, college student, or even someone of an older generation – tell them you are trying to get to know people and want to make connections.

When you meet them, you should have only one agenda: get to know them and show them you care. Don't

try to convince them to become members or straighten out their wayward world views. Just get to know them and understand how they think – without judging. Do they think differently than you? Why do they think that way? Be curious!

One of the reasons this connection idea is so important is because our world is less connected than it's ever been. It's quite ironic considering the amount of 4G, 5G, WiFi, and satellite signals there are bouncing around our world bringing messages and conversations directly to our hands.

The connections that *are* happening on social media are happening less and less in person, and people in general (not just the younger generations) are getting less and less support and are now experiencing more and more anxiety about life than ever before. Just because people are connected via their devices doesn't mean they don't want to meet in person.

After you get to know your new connection a little bit, you can invite them to a social event or to church and brunch. But remember that your relationship with them doesn't depend on their attendance. I believe personal connections will be our most impactful solution that carries with it the greatest effectiveness. It requires zero dollars, zero changes in our organization, and zero committees. But it does require personal energy from many people. If you would like any other connection advice, please email or call me.

There are other solutions as well, that do require dollars, and changes, and committees. But none of those solutions will matter or be lasting as long as our church membership is waiting for the church organization to do something without getting some skin in the game. We can hire a young adult outreach leader, and we can put on dinners and socials, but as long as people feel like

guests, or as long as they feel judged, or as long as they are disconnected, then no event is going to be effective.

Conclusion:

You may disagree with my belief that our church has a serious problem. You may also disagree with what the problem really is. That's quite all right. I am under no illusion that this article will be church-changing. I do, however, stand by and believe in personal connections. Don't let the mobile devices stop you from reaching out. People really do appreciate a reach-out. People really do like to know that somebody cares.

What can the church do? A better question is, what can you do? Feel free to reach out to me: Jeffrey.Smith@newchurch.org



The Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith serves young adults throughout the church, oversees several pilot congregations in West Africa, and ministers to congregations without a full-time pastor. He and his wife, Kelsey (Griffiths), live in Bryn Athyn.

FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Musings on Mercy and “Hard” Truths



The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

I have been interested recently in how many times I have heard people talk about the “hard” teachings or “hard” truths in the Word. I also must confess that at times I come across certain teachings and I think to myself: “Wow, did the Lord really just say that?” If you have had this reaction, you are not alone; in fact, you are in good company with the disciples.

When the Lord shared with them teachings about marriage and the rules for divorce, His disciples found that a very difficult teaching and exclaimed: “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” (*Matthew 19:10*) Later in the same chapter, when the Lord told them it was easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven, the disciples found that a hard truth to swallow and asked: “Who then can be saved?” (*Ibid. 25*)

I know some people who sincerely wish the Lord had not stated most of the Ten Commandments in the negative. They wonder, for example, why did He have to say: “You shall not commit adultery”? Couldn’t He have been more positive and said: “You shall honor marriage”? Why does the Lord use harsh terms in the Word, describing the people He created as “hypocrites,” “brood of vipers,” “stiff-necked” and “idolatrous”? Why does He call their evil actions “profane,” “adulterous,” an “abomination” and “wicked”? Perhaps today, many of the teachings from the Word around femininity, masculinity and marriage are viewed as hard sayings!

So, the question I ask myself when I encounter what I consider to be a “hard” truth is: “Why did the Lord give that truth and why did He state it the way that He did”? I start from the assumption that if the Lord said it, it must be true and it must be merciful, just as we read in the *Psalms*: “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.” (*Psalms 25:10*) It is a teaching throughout the Heavenly Doctrine that the Lord’s mercy and truth are always in perfect

balance as they come forth from Him. This concept is beautifully summed up in the words: “Mercy and truth have met together; justice and peace have kissed.” (*Psalm 85:10*)

The reality is that there is no such thing as a “hard” truth that doesn’t have the Lord’s mercy and love at the core of it. We’re told that “inmosty present within the truths of doctrine . .

. . . is the Lord in His Divine Love.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 933:1) It is remarkable to think that in every truth that we read or hear from the Lord, He is there inmosty present with His Divine love and His never-ending mercy for us! “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (*Matthew 5:45*)

The next time you encounter one of those seemingly hard truths, consider a few of these comforting teachings about the compassion and mercy the Lord has for each one of us:

- “He loves the universal human race, and desires to eternally save every member of it.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6495)
- “He cannot even turn Himself away from man, nor look upon him with a stern countenance.” (*True Christian Religion* 56:2)
- “‘For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has mercy on you.” (*Isaiah 54:10*)

So, if this is the case, then why do the Lord’s truths sometimes appear so hard, unforgiving, and judgmental? In the Lord, love and wisdom, good and truth, mercy and judgment, are one and never separated. However, we do not always receive them as one, depending on the state of life that we are in at any given point in time.

This is explained clearly in the following passage:

The Lord's mercy remains constantly with every individual person; for the Lord wishes to save all the people there are. But that mercy cannot flow into them until evils have been removed; for evils, and falsities arising from them, stand in the way and hinder it. As soon as evils are removed however, mercy flows in. . . . For the Lord's mercy is universal, that is, is directed toward all people, and is also particular toward those who refrain from evils. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8307)

Notice, His mercy is particular to those who refrain from evils. Why?

The reality is that there is no such thing as a “hard” truth that doesn’t have the Lord’s mercy and love at the core of it.

Because evils prevent His mercy from entering us, even though He would love nothing more than for us to experience it. It is fascinating to think that we have a direct hand in how much of the Lord's mercy we will receive. His mercy is always present, but when we are engaged in evils of life, we are in a frame of mind where we do not perceive it. It is in states of evil that we view the Lord's truths as difficult, because "where there is no good, truth is hard." (*Apocalypse Explained* 412:31) I know in my life when I am not living how the Lord wants me to be, that when I read His Word, sometimes His truths seem to be very judgmental.

We are told that "Divine Good adjudges all people to heaven, but Divine Truth condemns them all to hell." (*Arcana Coelestia* 2258:2) It then goes on to say that the reason people end up condemning themselves to hell is not that Divine Good is ever separated from Divine Truth in the Lord, but that when people separate themselves from Divine Good by choosing to do evil, they block themselves from the Lord's Divine mercy. Consequently, they end up viewing Him as a harsh and merciless judge who has turned His back on them. At times we may fall into the same false thinking, even though the reality is that "we are the ones who turn away from the Lord's mercy; the Lord never turns away from us." (*Arcana Coelestia* 588:3)

We can see this play out in the literal sense of the Word. When the people of the Church were in a state of evil and falsity, they placed the blame for their suffering on God. Instead of viewing His actions as merciful, they perceived it as the wrath of God whose anger was kindled against them. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that "those who are opposed to Him perceive Divine Truth as falsity, and Divine Good as evil; for the way in which everyone sees that Truth and Good is determined by what he really is in himself. So it is that the Lord's zeal, which in itself is love and compassion, is seen by them as anger." (*Ibid.* 8875)

Another reason for this is that in today's world there is a skewed perception of what the nature of genuine mercy really is. There is a belief that mercy is solely compassion, being kind, often turning a blind eye to things that may be really harmful, and thinking that the Lord will save everyone regardless of the life they live. The Heavenly Doctrine describes this concept as "salvation from immediate mercy" and identifies it as the "fiery serpent of the church" because it effectively abolishes religion, since repentance becomes unnecessary, and sins no longer condemn. (*Divine Providence* 340)

Contrast this anemic concept of mercy with this rich definition provided to the New Church: "It will be told what the Divine mercy is. The Divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing toward every individual, and is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved

except by Divine means, which means have been revealed by the Lord, in the Word. The Divine means are what are called Divine truths, which teach how people must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads people to heaven, and by them He implants in people the life of heaven. This the Lord does with all. But the life of heaven can be implanted in no one unless he abstains from evil, for evil obstructs.” (*Heaven and Hell* 522)

Notice again how it says that we need to abstain from evil because evil is what obstructs or blocks us from receiving the Lord’s mercy. This is why the Lord’s mercy is so much more

complex than just blind compassion or love alone, and why it is always married to His wisdom, truth and judgment in perfect balance.

This is described eloquently in the following teaching: “The Lord’s mercy includes every single thing which the Lord does toward the human race, whose condition is such that He has mercy on it, on each according to his state. He has mercy therefore on the state of the person He allows to be punished, as He does on that of the person on whom He confers the enjoyment of good. Being punished is a manifestation of mercy because it turns all evil that is being punished toward good.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 587:2)

The Lord, as a just and merciful judge, allows us to suffer the consequences of our poor choices when we act in a way contrary to His commandments, so that we will want to make better choices in the future. This is why He constantly presents us with His guiding truths so that we can avoid bringing unnecessary suffering upon ourselves.

One of the themes the Bishop’s Office is focusing on is “Living a Heavenly Life,” which not surprisingly involves two simple things: shunning evils as sins against the Lord and doing the good things that He teaches. As we strive to do these things, the Lord will be there pressing to be received and encouraging us to remove the evils that block the mercy He wishes to bestow upon us.

In the next issue of *New Church Life*, we will be focusing on another very important area where we need help in living a heavenly life, and that is marriage. The beautiful ideals of conjugal love are challenged in many ways today and we can probably notice within ourselves areas where we are falling short of the ideal. It is also hard not to look at the state of marriage in the world

The Lord, as a just and merciful judge, allows us to suffer the consequences of our poor choices when we act in a way contrary to His commandments, so that we will want to make better choices in the future.

All His truths come from His Divine Love and have His mercy at their core, so most likely if we find a truth challenging and judging us, it is an opportunity for us to make a change and grow spiritually.

today and not grieve a little at how far we are from what the Lord wants for His creation.

The challenge in our church seems to be: how do we deal with disorders when they arise? I hope this introduction about how the Lord's mercy works will provide a reassuring context for that discussion. I also pray that we don't fall into the trap of saying that the Lord gives us hard truths and view them as some sort of test or stumbling block in the way of our happiness. All His truths come from His Divine Love and have His mercy at their core, so most likely if we find a

truth challenging and judging us, it is an opportunity for us to make a change and grow spiritually.

I love the simplicity of this statement in *Micah* about what the Lord asks of us because it shows the need for finding the perfect balance between judgment and mercy in our own lives and in the life of the church.

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

BOOK REVIEW

Prayer and Providence

By the Rev. Michael D. Gladish

Reviewed by Kathy Simons

Prayer and Providence: a collection of sermons reflecting the unique perspective and many challenging questions arising during a long pastoral career. By the Rev. Michael Gladish. The General Church Press, Bryn Athyn, PA. Available from the New Church Bookstore in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, www.newchurchbook.org and www.amazon.com

Between the beautiful pictorial metaphor for the Lord's providence on the front cover and the powerful story about His providence in the Epilogue can be found many treasures to help us along the journey of life. Rev. Gladish brings us his experience of a lifetime with practical understanding and acceptance of wherever we are on the road.

Part One is filled with helpful insights into how we can meaningfully reach out to God as we frame each day in prayer. For one example from the book: "We know that it is inappropriate to pray for selfish reasons, especially for some anticipated worldly benefit. This business of prayer is not an insurance or investment plan, where we contribute now in the hope of some big payoff later. It's not just 'enlightened self-interest.' It's about seeking the power to do what the Lord says because He says so."

Part Two powerfully demonstrates how God in His providence is there with us each step of our way, supporting and guiding but always leaving us in freedom to accept or reject His gifts. As Rev. Gladish puts it: "Another difference between His government and ours, or His providence and ours, is that He knowingly permits a lot of bad things to happen so that we can see the consequences and learn from our mistakes and so freely choose to do the

right thing rather than being forced to do it by others. In this way His leading focuses primarily on the individual – every individual – internally, and not so much on external order or material well-being. And this is because the Divine providence, in everything that it does, looks to what is eternal and not to what is temporal (or worldly) except in so far as it serves or ‘accords with’ what is eternal.” (See *Divine Providence* 55, 214.)

“To understand what it means to be ‘in the stream of providence,’ we have to be clear about where it is leading and what we may be doing in it, for if there’s one thing the Heavenly Doctrines make perfectly clear, it is that we can’t simply drift into heaven without any effort. In fact, it takes a lot of effort, and yet, wonderfully, when we make that effort something happens that is entirely beyond our own ability: we are conjoined with the Lord so that He carries us along, and actually does most of the work for us – just as the current of a river carries a boat. . . . The point is that you are fully engaged in the process of negotiating your way down the river, but the river itself is doing most of the work. You are not rowing to make progress, you are rowing to stay in the flow.”

Part Three addresses many practical applications of prayer and providence in the ups and downs of our lives. Here we find ways to freely cooperate with the Lord in various situations. Just reading the chapter titles in the Table of Contents provides a tempting menu of interesting ideas. Consider “What We Can Learn from a Pandemic,” “Spiritual Alchemy, Understanding the Transformation Process,” and “How Unbelievers Can Get to Heaven,” to name just a few!

This is a book that can be read cover to cover as each idea builds a more complete understanding. It is also a book that can be read picking and choosing from topics that are current in our lives as each chapter can stand alone. It is a book to revisit again and again since you will get something new out of it each time you read it.

This book is addressed to those familiar with Swedenborg and to those who are not, to those who are old and bring many life experiences to it, and to those who are young and searching for truths to guide their lives in our challenging world.

Happy reading.

(See a photo of the book’s cover on page 504. The book is available from the New Church Bookstore, www.newchurchbooks.com and from amazon.com.)

BOOK REVIEW

Exploring the Path Walking the Path

Two new books by the Rev. Erik J. Buss

Reviewed by the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

The Heavenly Doctrine speaks clearly about the distinction between a pious life and a charitable one. Piety is an important aspect of a charitable and loving lifestyle. Here is how it is put in *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*:

A life of piety has value, and is acceptable to the Lord, to the extent that it is combined with a life of charity. For the latter takes first place and determines the quality of the former. (128)

The distinction between this and the life of charity is described this way:

Piety is thinking and speaking piously, giving a lot of time to prayer, also behaving humbly, going regularly to church and listening devoutly to sermons there, frequently each year attending the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and all the other religious observances prescribed by the church. A life of charity, however, is willing and doing good to the neighbor, acting in every task out of justice and equity, out of good and truth, and likewise in every public office. In short, a life of charity consists in performing services. (*Ibid.* 124)

Erik Buss' two new books on the subject of spiritual practice expand this description and show how our spiritual practices help to guide the life of charity, just as the life of charity gives meaning and substance to these practices. As shown in these two books, spiritual practices go beyond the

external observances of a pious life and include such things as repentance, kindness and service.

The focus is on eight spiritual practices. The first three are:

1. Looking to the Lord
2. Shunning evil loves and deeds
3. Doing what is good. These are the core practices of a spiritual life.

Then there are five that are described as the support practices of charity:

1. Attending church
2. Taking Holy Supper
3. Saying prayers
4. Reading the Word and other spiritual books
5. Thinking about spiritual matters and reflecting on one's life. In addition to these there are others as well.

While people may readily appreciate how essential the three core practices are, we might resist the idea that the five support practices matter. But how these actions support us may be surprising – and describing how they do this is a key purpose of these books. The explanations are clear and useful.

These two books may be seen as sequels to Rev. Buss' 2010 book: *Finding the Path: How to read the Word for direction and support*. *Exploring the Path* is an in-depth guide to the spiritual practices involved in becoming a loving person. *Walking the Path* is a brief handbook for spiritual practice. A review on the cover of each says:

“Generous and compassionate, this practical guide to spiritual living urges us to embark on the path to becoming a more loving, heaven-bound person. Erik Buss patiently and kindly encourages us to commit to regular spiritual practices while acknowledging the obstacles we'll face. He makes a convincing case for why it's worth our time and effort. Brimming with references for the curious reader to explore and digest, this book deserves a spot within easy reach, so we can be reminded of where we're headed and how to get there.”

The two books have the same table of contents, each describing the eight spiritual practices. The point is that, in our efforts to be kind and loving, love, by itself, is not enough. We need tools and practices to support us in our journey of becoming loving people. Each chapter includes activities and questions for discussion, making them ideal for small groups.

Although stories and anecdotes are not included, the prose is clear and well organized. The chapters beautifully and realistically guide us in the steps of a spiritual life – both how to approach them and why they are important.

I recommend getting both books together. They are an important contribution to New Church literature in an area that deserves more attention. In an era that has devalued many of these practices it is good to be reminded of the important role that they play in finding happiness and peace.

(See photos of these two book covers on page 504. Both books are available from the New Church Bookstore, www.newchurchbooks.com and from amazon.com)

Redemption's Wondrous Plan

The Rev. John Elliot

(Editors' note: This article originally appeared in *Lifeline*, a publication of the General Church Conference in the United Kingdom. The Rev. John Elliot is a Conference minister.)

Oh for a seraph's golden lyre,
With chords of light and tones of fire,
To sing Jehovah's love;
To tell redemption's wondrous plan,
How God Himself came down to man,
That man might rise above.

His creatures fell; no pitying eye,
No mighty arm to save was nigh,
To aid our feeble powers;
He saw, He came, He fought alone,
And conquered evils not His own,
That we might conquer ours.

Temptation's thorny path He trod,
In form a man, in soul a God,
And trod the path alone;
In vain the direst fiends assailed,

His mighty arm of power prevailed,
And hell was overthrown.

He passed the dismal vale of death,
The human frame resigned its breath,
And like a mortal died;
But death was crushed beneath His feet,
He rose both God and Man complete,
His Human Glorified.

Amazing mercy, love immense,
Surpassing every human sense
Since sense and time began;
That man might shun the realms of pain,
And know and love his God again,
His God became a Man!

Samuel Woodworth (1785-1842)

Samuel Woodworth was an American poet, recognized perhaps most of all for his poem, *The Old Oaken Bucket*. But he was also a playwright, composer of libretti, and by profession a journalist and publisher. In short, he was a master of the written word.

When he came to live and work in New York in 1808 he joined a group of people who had been gathering together for New Church worship, as well as

seeking to make known the teachings found in the religious works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Not long after his arrival among them his literary skills were employed in the publication of the first, but short-lived, American New Church periodical, *Halcyon Luminary*. His literary talents were called on again in 1823-1824, when he served as the editor and publisher of an equally short-lived journal, *The New Jerusalem Missionary*. This included, in 12 monthly parts, the English translation by John Clowes of the first nine chapters of *Arcana Coelestia*.

Woodworth's poem above soon became a hymn used in New Church services of worship. It has been included in four hymn books published in Britain, three by the General Conference (1880, 1946, 1986) and one by the New Church Sunday School Union (1936); and it was no doubt being recited or sung by the author's fellow Americans in the years before it reached our shores.

The whole poem is an expression of the author's deep feelings of awe and wonder when he considers "redemption's wondrous plan." He finds this theme so amazing that he calls for a seraph's golden lyre, an instrument far more beautiful to behold and listen to than any on earth. The image of an angelic being holding a golden lyre comes from the fifth chapter of the *Book of Revelation*.

True, verse eight does not specifically say that the citara or lyre in the hand of each of the four living creatures and 24 elders was golden, but it is assumed to have been such because each of the four and 24 was also holding a golden bowl full of incense. (One Christmas carol similarly speaks of "angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold.")

The theme of the poem or song is declared in simple, perhaps prosaic, words. Jehovah's love, the love of God Himself, was such that He "came down to man, that man might rise above." This sounds rather similar to what Irenaeus, a second-century Christian author wrote: "God became what we are in order to make us what He is Himself." But Woodworth was surely drawing on what is stated plainly in the heading above paragraph 82 of *The True Christian Religion*: "Jehovah God came down and took upon Himself a human form, in order to redeem and save mankind." And for the rest of the poem he was drawing on the teachings to be found not only in that last book but also in earlier ones published by Swedenborg.

The middle three verses poetically express the accomplishment by our Lord, when in the world, of the wondrous plan to redeem all human beings. That is, He came to rescue them from domination by the powers of evil that would have prevented them from freely loving God and leading lives in keeping with His will. To engage with those powers and defeat them He trod "temptation's thorny path," and He did so alone. They used all their wicked cunning and deceit to overcome Him but without success. "In vain the direst fiends assailed."

Direst fiends! The very expression sends shivers down the spine. In an effort to define the adjective "dire" *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

gives us: dreadful, dismal, mournful, horrible, terrible, evil in a great degree. And “fiend” denotes someone who is extremely wicked. John Bunyan’s poem or hymn about the Christian pilgrim includes the phrase “foul fiend,” and Shakespeare before him put into the mouth of Edgar words even more alliterative: “the foul fiend follows me.”

Alliteration is the use of words close together that begin with the same letter or sound, and Shakespeare again employs an *eff* alliteration to convey the thoughts and intentions of a wicked witch who declares: “Fair is foul and foul is fair, hover through the fog and filthy air.” Woodworth does not use alliteration in his poem, yet the single-syllable term *fiends*, preceded by the superlative adjective *direst*, has a sickening ring about it, more so than devils, satans or evil spirits. (The rhythm and metre of the poem demand that fiends must be pronounced as a single syllable – *feends*, not *fee-unds*.)

In the concluding verse the author returns to his wonder and astonishment that He who is the creator and preserver of all things “became a Man” to accomplish for human beings what no one else could achieve. It was an act of “amazing mercy, love immense, surpassing every human sense.”

The immensity of that mercy and love lies beyond all human powers of imagination; it is mind-blowing, to use a modern way of speaking. The triumph over hell or the powers of evil and the consequent redemption of all mankind was the work of the Lord alone, and our gratitude to Him must be at the forefront of all our worship and praise. Samuel Wordworth’s poem is rightly included among our songs of praise.

In July this year the Swedenborgian Church of North America, previously known as the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem, held its annual meeting or convention in a suburb of Philadelphia, 200 years after people had gathered there together for the very first convention.

Did Samuel Woodworth, I wonder, travel from New York city to Philadelphia to be present at that first convention? How long would the 80-mile journey by stagecoach have taken him and other travellers in 1817? Well, whether or not he actually attended that first convention he was certainly present at the one held four years later in New York, for he was elected to be its secretary. And did his poem – which I have entitled *Redemption’s Wondrous Plan*, since I do not know any other – feature in any way among the worship services, lectures, discussions, and so on, during these and subsequent annual conventions? Would it have any place during the annual meeting of the British Conference at the end of July, where the theme was heaven? After all, the work *Heaven and Hell* focuses on the Lord before moving on to various aspects of angelic life.

Contact: jnelliot@waitrose.com

Two Baptisms, Two Babies, One Story

The Rev. Chuck Blair

Life runs in circles. Recently the circle came around to two baptisms, two smiling babies and one Story.

Both families have grown. What was several years ago a single first-born is now a more raucous entourage, filled with many voices, including cousins. The noise was beautiful!

The preciousness remains the same. The moment to close the baptism – when the family gathers for a hands-on blessing – is still one of the most powerful a pastor ever witnesses.

This story, the story, thousands of years old, is a miracle to behold. Here are these families, committing to lead and teach the infants, given to their earthly care, to learn of God, to follow in God's ways, to love, to serve. To be Christians in the New Church, not as an esoteric add-on but as an actual lived moral experience. "Preach the Word every day and, if need be, use words."



We enter these stories for many reasons. They give meaning to our past and purpose to our future. They give us a weighted and seasoned perspective on authentic freedom – a freedom that moves away from individual license toward a truer freedom of giving, freely and lovingly,

toward the common good.

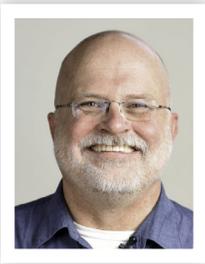
So the circle closed. Two baptisms. Two smiling babies. The Story. All of it blessed and beautiful!

Some additional notes:

- Both couples' first contact point with the church was via our wedding

ministry.

- Since their weddings they have jumped on board, each family choosing to have all their children baptized in the New Church.
- This has led to other weddings and baptisms in the extended family.
- Both families are online followers of NewChurch LIVE. Neither has attended a service in person.



The Rev. Chuck Blair is pastor of NewChurch LIVE in Bryn Athyn. He and his wife, Keene (Smith), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: chuck.blair@newchurchlive.tv

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

NORTH AMERICAN CLERGY MEETINGS

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

In light of the decision not to hold international Council of the Clergy meetings in Bryn Athyn in June 2021, the Bishop's Office instead arranged for a series of smaller meetings. Two of those sessions have taken place so far, both for North American clergy: one from August 16-19, and another from September 20-23. Both took place in Bryn Athyn, within the Council Chamber of Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Not including the current bishops, 31 clergy members attended in August and 26 in September.

The docket was largely the same for both sessions. Each day had a theme led by one of the three bishops.

The theme of the first day was *Living a Heavenly Life*, by Bishop Peter Buss. Also on that day was an overview of Central Office plans for the year.

The theme of the second day was *Supporting Marriage and Speaking to Disorders*, led by **Bishop Brad Heinrichs**.

The theme for the third day was *Toward Greater Clergy Trust*, led by **Bishop David Lindrooth**. Each day the bishops led small group sessions to allow for deep counsel and listening on the day's theme.

Other topics were offered, including: a paper on **Systematic Theology** by the **Rev. Prescott Rogers** at both sessions; a paper on *Divine Foresight and Human Free Will* by the **Rev. Bruce Rogers** at both sessions; a topic on *Worship – Online and In-Person* led by the **Revs. Pearse Frazier** and **Chuck Blair** at the August session, and on *Online Engagement* led by Pearse Frazier in the September session; and a paper on *States of Spiritual Growth* by the **Rev. Jay Barry** at the September session.

Worship services in August were led by the **Revs. Alan Cowley, Scott Frazier** and **Derek Elphick**, and in September by the **Revs. Mark Pendleton, Jong-Ui Lee** and **Jean Atta**. Two bishops led a Holy Supper service at each session, and all three bishops hosted clergy for dinners and open houses.

Both sets of meetings were a success, allowing for a high level of engagement and processing and the renewal of clergy relationships.

A GOLDEN YEAR IN AUSTRALIA

The Hurstville New Church in suburban Sydney, Australia, celebrated the 100th anniversary of its church building in November.

Hurstville had celebrated the 100th anniversary of the formation of its society in 2005. It was 1921 when the original church building was erected, and that is what is being celebrated this year. Local historian **Margaret Horner** notes: “This [1921] was a huge year for the Hurstville Society because from having no permanent place of worship a block of ground was purchased and a simple building erected. The cornerstone was laid in July 1921 on the 16th anniversary of the Hurstville Society.” The church building was dedicated in a service led by the **Rev. Richard Morse**.

To avoid confusion with the two anniversaries, this year’s observation – November 13 and 14 – was called the centenary celebration. The **Rev. Todd Beiswenger** presided over activities that included an afternoon tea, open gardens and open tennis court, and on Sunday a special worship service and celebratory luncheon.

For photos of the original and current church building see page 504.

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Highlights from the October 2021 meetings)

President’s Report

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

There have been meaningful strides in the vision casting process aimed at communicating more intentionally and effectively. Messaging campaigns will include attempts to create dialogue balanced with love and truth concerning sensitive life topics.

Progress has been made in organizational improvements and employee development, including programs aimed at supporting newly ordained ministers.

The bishop continues to work on his *Living a Heavenly Life* study, highlighting the value of worship and life that express our New Church faith.

Assistant Bishops’ Report

The Rt. Revs. Bradley D. Heinrichs and David H. Lindrooth

Bishop Heinrichs updated the status of translation projects, including a near-finished set of French translations of the Heavenly Doctrines.

Bishop Lindrooth reported on several successful pastoral moves, as well as ongoing efforts to strengthen community focus in England and West Africa.

Executive Director*David O. Frazier*

Financial results for FY21 included revenue at \$5.8M, expenses at \$5.2M and an operating surplus of nearly \$635,000.

His update included a head count of General Church employees across the world, allowing for a breakdown of full-time equivalent staff and budget allocations based on categories of employment.

Outreach*The Rev. Pearse Frazier*

Bergen Jungé has announced plans to retire from his role in Outreach after years of dedicated work.

The Outreach strategy was updated, including a recent decision to rebrand the Grand Human Project as New Church Groups. This reflects desires to merge with broader General Church branding and to clarify the religious opportunity associated with the program. Current work includes more developed training and resources for group leaders.

Another effort at improving online engagement involves making the physical location of New Church societies easier to find, aiming to connect more people to in-person worship.

Analytics on the Outreach YouTube channel and ad engagement are promising, making sustained funding for digital spaces a priority.

International Church*Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth*

A recently launched congregation in the Ivory Coast continues to evolve positively.

A related project in Togo has folded, bringing attention to refining organizational processes aimed at encouraging growth among young congregations.

General Church Education*Bishop Heinrichs, Charlotte Gyllenhaal, Rebekah Russell and Rachel Glenn*

Leadership from General Church schools now provides reports to the GCED committee on a rotating basis.

The central office is finalizing plans for a successor to Scott Daum when he retires as Assistant Coordinator to General Church schools next year.

Enrollment numbers have begun to bounce back following a drop due to the pandemic.

An overview was presented on a comprehensive Ten Commandments Sunday School curriculum – an 11-part project available as a series or a stand-alone lesson.

Children's gifts are being sent early this year in anticipation of delayed mail during the holiday season. Gifts are based on the birthdates of children in the database. To ensure that any individual is included, send an email to gced@newchurch.org.

Advancement

Mark Wyncoll

Fiscal year end numbers were favorable in all categories: dollars, number of gifts and number of donors.

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

(Highlights from the August 4 meeting)

Chancellor

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

The Chancellor supports recent work on mission evaluation and assessment, including an ANCSS Mission Retreat, which provide opportunities to process feedback, find a better mission success story and explore ways to improve.

Finding the most appropriate ways to respond to sexuality and gender (LGBTQIA+) issues remain challenging. But there needs to be a clear voice that ANC stands for marriage between one man and one woman.

Vice Chair

The board approved Board Goals for 2021-22 presented by the new Vice Chair, **Dr. Charles Lindsay**. The goals relate to:

- Mission and Governance (focusing on improving the function and use of board committees)
- The proper role of trustees
- Improving communication ahead of meetings, and finance (addressing “the revenue problem”)

The board discussed the different covid mitigation and prevention policies in various ANC institutions.

Bryn Athyn College

The board approved a resolution amending the College Board Committee's Governance Guidelines to allow any Corporation member serving on the

committee to vote on committee matters.

The pandemic significantly impacted enrollment and the college experience for freshmen. The College expected 114 new students, the second highest recruiting class. Total anticipated enrollment will be between 266-272.

Every effort is being made to return to normalcy. Student life has rebounded nicely, with 132 resident students. Grant Hall is reopened, with a new entranceway and maintenance updates. Chapel services have restarted. There is a robust social calendar. The College hopes to restore positive energy and spirit this year.

The President announced his new leadership cabinet.

ANC Secondary Schools

Student enrollment is expected to be 224, with 70 new students and 47 dormitory students. Student aid was over budget by \$275,000 and alternative ways to distribute and report that aid are being explored.

Jennifer Allen accepted the position of Director of Enrollment. Financial aid services will be moved from the enrollment office, with a part-time financial aid coordinator and part-time Bursar reporting directly to the Managing Director.

The Mission Retreat included consideration of concerns about politics in the classroom, gender issues, and the adequacy of New Church content in religion classes.

Classrooms are back to pre-pandemic configurations. There is a full athletic schedule. Daily health screenings have been eliminated. Hybrid teaching will not be offered this year. The dress code has changed.

Board Committees

General Counsel reported on current board committees, highlighting the differences and inconsistencies at times in structure and membership. Consideration should be given to harmonizing committee structure and reconstituting of the Education and Resource Committees.

(Highlights from the September 15 meeting.)

Vice Chair

Committee chairs will be examining committee membership and function as efforts are made to improve function in harmony with best practices.

Replacing College CFO **Dan Allen**, who will retire next June, is an enormous challenge but provides an opportunity to examine the roles he served and overall effectiveness, to have the Bryn Athyn College Board Committee participate in that assessment, and to get input from the Central

Office. Dan has given extraordinary service to the Academy for 23 years.

Bryn Athyn College

There is significant confidence that the College will meet the FY21 budget goal of a deficit of \$1.895 million, with a gift and stimulus reserves of \$3 million carrying over to FY22. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan forgiveness allocation to Bryn Athyn College is still under discussion.

There is reasonable confidence that the College will also meet the goal of a deficit of \$1.4 million for FY22 despite a shortfall in enrollment (resulting in a loss of \$370,000 in expected income). That revenue loss will be covered by reserves.

A search process has been initiated for Dan Allen's replacement, with the hope of having someone hired by February/March 2022 to transition with Dan before his retirement.

The 100+ page second draft of the self-study for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation is complete and explains how the College meets or exceeds accreditation standards and is fulfilling its mission.

Academy Secondary Schools

The board unanimously approved a 3% tuition increase for FY23. Enrollment is better than forecast with 225 students and 51 dormitory students. The budget was for 215 students and 40 in dormitories. Work continues on moving student aid to a tuition discounting model.

CHARTER DAY 2021

This year's Charter Day celebration again was impacted by the pandemic – notably without a banquet this year. But there was a full range of activities, including:

- The Cathedral procession and address by the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth: *Creating True Spiritual Impact in a Troubled World* (see page 463)
- Distinguished Alumni honored in Bryn Athyn College and the Secondary Schools (see below)
- Covid restrictions impacted class reunions (for 2020 and 2021) but alumni still met with great spirit and a sense of reconnecting with the Academy and each other
- A full slate of athletic competition in the College and Secondary Schools

- An Alumni Art Show
- The annual Student Scholarship Golf Outing
- See page 503 for photos

Distinguished Alumni

Bryn Athyn College



Each year Bryn Athyn College faculty select a former student they wish to recognize with the Distinguished Alumni Award. Last year they nominated **Marilyn Stroh**. However, the pandemic disrupted the usual celebration.

Marilyn attended Bryn Athyn College from 1954-1956, then attended the prestigious Juilliard School of Music in New York City, becoming its first student to graduate with majors in two instruments. In 1960 she was hired by the world-renowned Metropolitan Opera Orchestra for a lifetime appointment as a viola player, a position she still holds today.

Marilyn did not start playing the viola until she was at Juilliard. As a young child she lived in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and grew up in a very musical family. She started learning the violin when she was nine and continued her study of classical music on violin throughout her teens. However, when she attended Juilliard there was a shortage of viola players. The school asked all violin students to take turns playing the viola to help fill out their musical ensembles.

Marilyn's hard work, talent and dedication were recognized by her teachers. When the orchestra contractor for the Met called her in the spring of 1960 to ask her to audition, her Juilliard advisor encouraged her. She had always pictured playing in smaller groups but agreed to try out. The experience would be useful. Her musicality made her audition stand out and she was the second woman ever to be employed full time by the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

As a student at Juilliard, and especially as a member of the Met Orchestra, Marilyn traveled the world. She performed on several tours of Europe. She played at World Fairs in Seville, Spain, and Brussels, Belgium, and in Japan. Now the orchestra travels less frequently, but performances are broadcast in high definition to opera lovers in theaters all over the world.

Beyond her position with the Met, Marilyn has enjoyed playing violin and viola for many other audiences. She performed with the National Festival Orchestra in Stratford, Ontario, for six seasons. While still in school, she was Principal Viola for the Canadian National Ballet. During her free time

on tours, she would sometimes join colleagues in playing free concerts for children with disabilities.

She is still fond of playing in string quartets, her original vision for her career, and, when not rehearsing or performing, she frequently plays at weddings and funerals for friends and members of her extended family. For more than 60 years, she has played for regular and festival services at the Carmel Church in Caryndale, Ontario, and at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. She has been a long-time supporter of New Church groups in northern New Jersey, New York and Caryndale, Canada.

It is with pleasure that Bryn Athyn College faculty and administrators honor her lifetime of achievements in the art of musical performance and her generous service to so many people in communities both here and abroad.

Academy Secondary Schools

The Girls School and Boys School continued the tradition – since 1992 – of honoring Distinguished Alumni, often chosen from reunion classes. These women and men are invited to talk to the senior classes of the Girls School and Boys School about how their Academy experience has influenced their lives and careers. This year's Distinguished Alumni:

Academy Girls School



Astrid Odhner Arnott graduated in the Class of 1991, then earned an Associate in Arts degree from Bryn Athyn College in 1993. That year she opened her business – *Astrid's Flowers* – and began working toward a degree in Horticulture from Temple University. After several years of attending classes while also running her business, she graduated *cum laude* in 2021. She also was inducted into the National Honors Society for Horticulture.

For her senior project at Temple she created a curriculum for children's gardening classes for two age groups, with an emphasis on the spiritual correspondences in gardens. She taught gardening classes at Bryn Athyn Cathedral using that curriculum for a few summers after graduating.

Ever since high school Astrid has designed, installed and/or maintained many perennial gardens for private homeowners and small businesses. Having taken courses in floral design, she also created arrangements for events, including hundreds of weddings at the Cathedral, Cairnwood and other venues.

In 2006 she married Steven Arnott and after becoming mother to Raelyn

and Kyle, she cut back her business. Now she is taking on more clients with a new focus on Garden Rehab. She hopes to involve families and teach them gardening skills, while helping them in redesigning (or refreshing) and installing their garden beds.



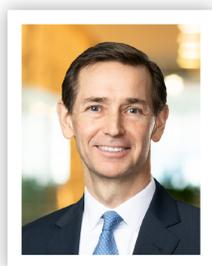
Christine Henderson Boericke (RN, CEN) was born in Sydney, Australia, and also lived in Canada before moving to Bryn Athyn at age 7. She graduated from the Girls School in 1961. After one year at Bryn Athyn College she attended Pennsylvania School for Nursing, graduating in 1965 with the highest award in Obstetrics. After completing her Pennsylvania State Board Exams as a Licensed Registered Nurse, she worked at Holy Redeemer Hospital in Labor and Delivery.

Christine suspended her career temporarily to become the mother of two sets of twins, born two years apart. She still managed to work part time at Fox Chase Cancer Center. When her children were in upper elementary school she returned to work in the emergency department at Warminster General Hospital for 10 years and earned a National Certification in Emergency Nursing.

Christine is a founding member of the Bryn Athyn Swim Team. She also served as a Lieutenant and EMT on the Bryn Athyn Fire Company Ambulance Squad, one of the first four women to do so.

She married classmate Peter Boericke in 1965 and in addition to those twins she is the proud grandmother to 19 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren – to date. She spends much of her time celebrating family birthdays and is a lifelong sports enthusiast who enjoys watching her grandchildren and their classmates compete in a great variety of sports.

Academy Boys School



Charles MacFarlan Cole graduated from the Boys School in 1981, then from Lehigh University, where he majored in Finance. He then worked as an Economic and Financial Analyst for five years at CSX Corporation.

He obtained his law degree from American University in 1994 and has been practicing law for the past 28 years. He represents clients engaged in financial transactions, including loans, restructurings and secondary market trading of commercial loans and other debt assets. In 2002 he founded the firm of Cole, Mink and Fransella PLLC in Washington, DC, where he serves as Managing Member.

Charlie has served as a member of the Academy Corporation since 2010, on the Board of Trustees from 2011 through 2020, and as Vice Chair of the Board for four years.

He and his wife, MaryLou, live in Clarksville, Maryland, and have three children: Erin, 25; James, 23; and Emily, 21.



Edward A. Simons was born at home on South Avenue, Bryn Athyn, in 1952 and attended New Church schools there for 14 years, graduating from the Academy Boys School in 1971, plus two years in Bryn Athyn College. He graduated from The Pennsylvania State University in 1976 with a degree in Finance.

He worked as a loan officer for three years. In 1979 he founded Safeware as an industrial safety distributor, which is now a national safety distributor with 110 employees in seven locations throughout the United States. The company is focused on state and local law enforcement and fire departments, with customers from some of the largest cities and counties in the country.

Ed, now retired, served as president from 1979 to 2021, and has served as Chairman of the Board of Safeware since 1979.

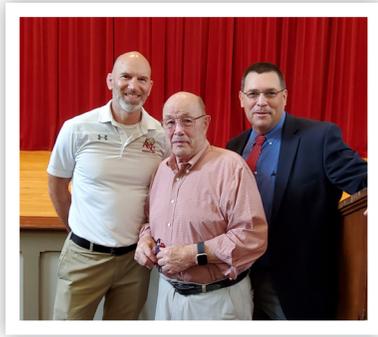
He has always been active in serving the Church and Academy. Over the past 44 years in the Washington New Church he has served on the Board of Trustees, as Treasurer and Endowment Treasurer. He also served on the Board of Directors and as Treasurer of Acton Park, Inc., the real estate arm of the Washington New Church. He has served on the Board of Trustees and Corporation of the Academy, and on its Finance Committee. He serves on the Board of Directors and as Treasurer of Spiritual Alliance Inc. (SWET).

He married Diane Pitcairn in 1976, and divorced in 1986 with two children, Daric, 43, and Scott, 42. Since 1991 he has been married to “my best friend” Wytan Gladish. They have four children: Bronwyn, 29; Owen, 28; Freya, 25; and Oskar, 23. He and Wytan now live in Bryn Athyn.

Celebrating Ron Nelson

Although not an official Charter Day function it was most appropriate during the weekend to celebrate the 90th birthday of **General Ronald K. Nelson**. Ron epitomized what it means to be a New Church teacher and coach during a long and storied career in which he positively influenced the lives of scores of young men.

Ron is a retired distinguished two-star general in the U.S. Marine Corps



(Photo: Left to right, Eyvind Boyesen, Ronald Nelson, Shawn Synnestevedt)

and he always brought that discipline, an abiding love of country and community, and an absolute commitment to New Church doctrine and education, to the classroom, the wrestling mat, the lacrosse field and the infamous “Circuit” that many a Boys School student remembers with a mix of pride and pain.

Former teacher, coach and athletic director **Shawn Synnestevedt**, together with current teacher and wrestling coach **Eyvind Boyesen**, put together a surprise 90th birthday party in the Benade Hall

auditorium, which was attended by many former students and athletes, as well as countless more online. The invitation said: “Whether a math student, athlete or ‘Circuit’ survivor, Ron had an enormous impact on those of us who came under his purview as he took vital aspects of New Church education to a new level of excellence.”

As emcee Shawn said they would be there all day if they opened up the floor for stories and tributes to Ron, so the program was limited to:

- An introduction by Shawn that paid tribute to Ron’s special talent for mentoring young men at the Academy with faith, character and integrity. (See excerpts below.)
- A fond tribute from long-time friend **Peter Boericke** for a treasure of shared memories, including many beautifully crafted woodworking projects that grace Academy buildings.
- A heartfelt portrait in words by art teacher Eyvind of Ron’s impact on his life – coaching him as a wrestler, then mentoring him as the current coach.
- Fellow Armed Forces veteran **Lach Brown** filling in – with good humor – what many did not know about Ron’s career with the Marines, rising to the rank of two-star general.
- **Kirk Pendleton**, who went on from a legendary wrestling career at the Academy to become a national champion at Lehigh University and credited that title to Ron alone. Kirk also presented Ron with a framed composite of photos and stories from the only Academy wrestling team to win the National Prep School championship at Lehigh in 1960 under his leadership.
- Finally, a wistful response from Ron himself, reflecting on the special privilege of teaching and coaching young men at the

Academy, amid many warm smiles and brushed away tears.

In his introductory remarks, Shawn talked about running cross country for Ron and how “his practices were really well organized, tough, and designed to bring out the very best in our team. And even when we failed to live up to his expectation, Coach Nelson had a way of putting his arm around your shoulder and making you feel as though you were the most important person on the team. His ability to mentor boys into young men is an educator’s gift which is difficult to replicate.”

Shawn said he became a New Church educator because of the influence of Ron and another powerful mentor. “And it wasn’t just me. So many other young men attending the Academy, even if they had minimal contact with The General, gained some measure of lifelong respect for and understanding of the man’s integrity and felt the desire to live up to the expectations which he set in their lives.”

He honored Ron for three special aspects of leadership: vision, character and a serving heart.

- “His vision has been and continues to be that the New Church grows in every student and every person he has ever had contact with, as they develop into useful servants of the Lord.”
- “As students, student athletes, colleagues and friends we have all worked hard to elevate ourselves to the character bar he has set and his expectations of us. He holds high standards for himself and those around him. The character instilled in the student was through living up to those expectations with honesty and integrity – adhering to a set of rules and not wanting to disappoint the teacher.”
- “A serving heart is what he has given to the Academy, to the New Church, and through his tremendous service in the Marines, to our nation, with incredible humility. A serving heart has always been at his core.”

With a sentiment echoed by many, Shawn thanked Ron for giving him and teaching him so much. “You helped mold my life, gave me strength when I needed it most and taught me that standing firm on your principles was the most important thing that a man can do.”

Shawn had invited “anyone who ever played a sport and struggled through the Circuit and PE, which benefited you in later life” to share their memories and tributes through emails. He collected these and later presented them to Ron, for many hours of happy, humble reflection.

PASTORAL MOVE

The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs, on behalf of the Episcopal Office, and with the strong recommendation of Bryn Athyn Society **Pastor Derek Elphick**, announced the appointment of the **Rev. Malcolm Smith** as assistant to the pastor of Bryn Athyn Church, effective July 1, 2022. With Malcolm's arrival the **Rev. Eric Carswell** will step down as interim pastor.

Bishop Heinrichs explained: "The reason Malcolm is being appointed to this role and is not being officially called yet as the assistant pastor simply has to do with timing. It will take significant lead time to get a replacement in Westville (South Africa) for Malcolm through the immigration process so that he can be ready to assume ministerial duties by July 12, 2022."



Malcolm was ordained in 2010 and moved to South Africa to serve as assistant to the pastor in Westville. His focus was particularly working with young people and at the Kainon School. In 2014 he was called to be head pastor and has now served Westville for 11 years.

Bishop Heinrichs said: "I have witnessed Malcolm connect well with children and he has shown an affinity for connecting with teens and young adults as well. When he was in school in Bryn Athyn he was part of the team that helped organize the 'Sunday Night Thing' which was designed to help connect students to the Lord and each other."

Malcom and his wife, Abby (Echols), have four children, ages 5 to 11.

A NEW SCHOOL IN BRYN ATHYN

At an October 13 society meeting, members of Bryn Athyn Church voted overwhelmingly (320-19) to move ahead with a construction project of a new elementary school and society building.

The church and school have been considering the need for updated facilities for decades and this project has been in the planning phase for four years.

The goal is for construction to begin in the fall of 2022 with completion by the end of the 2023-24 school year. The new building will be adjacent to the current school and society offices so there will be minimal impact on school and church operations during construction. The cost is estimated at \$69 million and a capital campaign will be underway shortly.

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY

Steve David, Director of New Christian Bible Study, reports a lot of progress, including:

- Speed on the website (www.newchristianbiblestudy.org) has doubled and traffic has topped a half-million visits per month for the first time
- Advanced Search has new options for sorting search results
- A new way has been added for visitors to ask questions – and get answers
- Big improvements to the hub pages for spiritual topics and Bible stories – faster, more informative and much more searchable
- We've added the first web-based Bible translation in Mara, the language of Southeast Asia. This is consistent with making the Word accessible to everyone, including a new Indonesian Bible.
- *Divine Providence* in Malayalam, a new Chinese translation of *Heaven and Hell*, *Conjugal Love* in Spanish, and two more of Swedenborg's works in Japanese.

“Things are looking good,” Steve says, “and there's lots more to come. We're working hard on more chapter summaries and beginning to enhance or roll out features that support more interaction, such as Q&A, notes, bookmarks, reading plans, verse of the day, and more.”

This growing effort always needs and welcomes financial support, as well as hands-on help with its offerings. Go to www.newchristianbiblestudy.org for information.

ADVANCED EDUCATION

General Church Education has announced that **Greg Henderson** has accepted the position of Assistant Coordinator of New Church Schools as of July 1, 2022. He will succeed **Scott Daum** who is retiring on June 30.

Greg has been serving as principal of Bryn Athyn Church School for the past seven years. Prior to that he taught eighth grade for 16 years and fifth grade there for one year. He received his degree in Elementary Education from Bryn Athyn College and has been involved in New Church education ever since.

The announcement from the **Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs**, head of General Church Education, and **Rebekah Russell**, Coordinator for General Church Schools, said Greg's experience “both as a teacher and leader, his ability to work with students and teachers, his understanding of the New Church and its application to life have prepared him for this next step of leadership for our schools. We are excited to have him join the team.”

As principal of BACS, Greg served on and led many committees, including the Covid Education Committee, General Church Education Committee and the Curriculum and Instruction Committee. Greg is known and appreciated for his upbeat reports to parents and the community, his slide shows of happy students, and positive glimpses into the school in his weekly reports in the *Bryn Athyn Post*.

CHARTER DAY 2021
(See report on page 494)

Photos by Serena Sutton and Holly Adams



This year's seniors



College procession

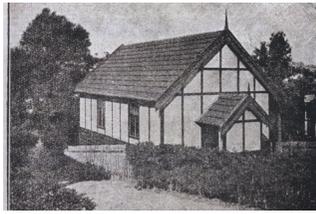


Secondary Schools procession

CENTENARY IN AUSTRALIA
(See report on page 490)



The altar at Easter



Hurstville 1921



The church building today

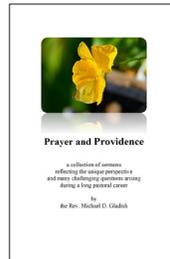
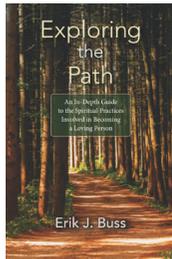


The chancel at Christmas

THREE NEW BOOKS BY NEW CHURCH MINISTERS



See a review on page 481.



See a review on page 479.

THE REV. CHRISTOPHER BARBER WITH THE REV. DAN AND RUTH GOODENOUGH.



Chris traveled to Minnesota this summer “to visit and spend time get to know Dan because I appreciated his wise perspectives that he shared when we served together on the Bishop’s Consistory. It was a really amazing trip and I’m glad I got to spend time with him and get to know Ruth and other members of their family.”

Life Lines

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

THE SHEPHERD'S CHRISTMAS

(Originally written as a newspaper column.)

A vast empty silence settled upon the plain and the little shepherd boy sat perched upon the brink of eternity. Before him stretched the sweep of darkened grassland, and over it the endless reach of sky. Stars filled the void with glittering remnants of the sun. And always there was the ceaseless shifting of the wind, ushering the chill of winter with mournful cries around tiny, jutting hills.

The shepherd boy was frightened and alone. There was nearby the old man with whom he tended the sheep. But the old man did not share his dreams and was no companion. The dogs were there but to seek comfort with them would ruin them as sheepdogs and was forbidden. The sheep were there but lambing time was at hand and they must not be disturbed. And so the little boy was alone.

There came a powerful awareness of his insignificance before the sweep of eternity. It was so vast and endless, he so small and limited. He wondered at its enormity and his own tiny place within it and found no comfort for his fear.

But as he sat huddled in his cape gazing with nervous fascination into the eerie darkness that threatened to swallow him, there appeared across the plain an exceeding bright light. He rose cautiously and stood in awe of it, his eyes transfixed, watching until it was no more, and wondered.

The old shepherd had slept. He dismissed the boy's excited tale as silly dreaming and walked off toward the sheep. So the boy was left to ponder the mystery alone. Days passed and the haunting memory gnawed at his soul.

One day he wandered far from the hermitage he shared with the old man in search of straying sheep and came across another shepherd. He came from where the light had been and the boy asked what was the meaning of so strange a sight.

"Ah, the light, my boy," and his face flushed with the memory. "It was

suddenly upon us, filling the night sky. We were sore afraid and sought to hide ourselves. But a gentle voice spoke to us from the depths of the brilliance and said, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.’ It is the Savior, lad. The Savior is come.”

“The Savior is come?” the boy wondered. “Come to whom?”

“Come to all people, lad. Come even to the shepherds.”

“Come even to the shepherds?” the boy whispered, and his throat tightened and his eyes grew wide. No one ever came to the shepherds. “But why the light?” he asked. “Why could not the news come up from the city?” “Ah,” the man said, “the Savior has knowledge of the shepherds. He knows of our loneliness in the plains and in the night. We who sit in darkness, abiding with our flocks, have the greatest need among men for comfort and for hope. He knows these things. And so He sent the light – to the shepherds, to all people.”

Came the night and again the little shepherd boy gazed into the endless darkness, and he was filled with wonder. When the lambing time was over, he would go down into the city to see this Savior who had come to all people – even to the shepherds.

He wondered that one still so small upon the land as a shepherd would be remembered. And not only remembered but the first to hear the news. The words echoed back to him: “We who sit in darkness have the greatest need.” And he did not yet understand why but he knew that no more would he feel alone in the night.

(BMH)

REMEMBERING GOD

The American Thanksgiving, formally proclaimed as a national holiday by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 for the fourth Thursday in November, was a call to remember God and to be grateful to Him.

We have many examples throughout history of how easy it is to forget the constant presence, love and leading of the Lord in our lives.

We recite as easily as the Lord’s Prayer:

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. (*Psalms* 103:1,2)

But how often do we forget?

The Children of Israel hold a mirror for us throughout the Old Testament as a people trying to follow the Lord but constantly backsliding – such as

worshipping the golden calf of Baal while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, then being put back on the path to the promised land. It is like the process of regeneration: two steps forward, one step back – constant re-evaluation and rededication.

I and II Kings chronicle an infamous band of rulers who “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” But Josiah, the 16th king of Judah, was a righteous king who “walked in the way of David his father and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.” (*II Kings* 22:2) He set about restoring the temple and rediscovered the lost “book of the law.”

He “rent his clothes” at the realization of many years of neglect and said: “Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.” (*Ibid.* 13)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great Soviet philosopher and dissident, mourned the long, slow descent of his homeland under communism, all because “we had forgotten God.”

Lincoln knew the history and inclination of the human spirit. He recognized that a grateful heart is first a repentant one. And he knew the danger of forgetting God. So he said in his proclamation:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord.

“We know that by His Divine law, nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world. May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?

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

“But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some

superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us.

“It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday in November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.”

We have much to be thankful for. It all begins with remembering God and not “forgetting His benefits.”

(BMH)

CHURCH POLITICS

Religion Means Nothing if You're Still a Jerk
 And a lot of people packing churches looking for a seed
 hoping for a higher love to patch up where we all bleed
 they're there to learn,
 it's a perfect opportunity to say, hey, we're all God's children
 and pump love and aid into the community
 but what they get is politics, us and them, and judgment of the sick
 and then we use God to hit each other, like God's some kind of stick
 religion means nothing if you've got it, but you're still a jerk
 for me you and the planet, buddy, it doesn't work.¹

These verses are the first few lines of a song by Curtis Childs. They speak tellingly of the tendency of religious institutions to argue and point fingers, to be “jerks” rather than “pumping love and aid into the community.” The Rev. Douglas Taylor comments on this same behavior in his book, *The Hidden Levels of the Mind*. He is talking about what is called the “natural rational state” of our spiritual development, in which people see and accept the principles of the Word, but tend to apply them to others rather than themselves:

I recall a very telling cartoon set in a monastery, where a novice monk is saying to his superior, “But Brother Juniper, I AM holier than thou!” Unfortunately, churches are often judged entirely by this

1 Curtis Childs, *offTheLeftEye*

state. People resign from churches or quietly give them up because of seeing these qualities in church members. It is unavoidable that in any given congregation there will always be some members going through this state or in the midst of it. But it is sometimes rather difficult to decide whether the members of the church are actually in a merely natural rational state, or whether those making the criticism are in it themselves!²

There is irony in this charge, since it challenges the idea of whether criticism of others is ever legitimate, or whether the critics would always do better to look at themselves in the mirror.

Criticism is not really at the heart of church politics, but it stands out in people's minds because it is an aspect of politics that seems especially inconsistent with what religion is all about.

Politics is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status. (Wikipedia)

Religion is about love and kindness, about usefulness, about the teaching of divine truth to make people's lives better. Religion preaches self-reflection, repentance and shunning evil for the purpose of becoming better members of the Lord's kingdom. For people pursuing these goals, and engaged in these practices, politics can be relatively painless and fulfilling. But no matter how sincere people are, differences in point of view and priorities are inevitable. It is one thing to teach the truth, it is another to fairly distribute a budget.

Working with a group of people to make something good happen, or to end some injustice, is a high calling of all religion. People engaged directly in this kind of work deserve our praise because it is difficult to do. Yet very often our efforts at reform are misplaced. We read:

How many and how great absurdities have crept into the minds of men, and thus into the church, through the heads of reformers. (*True Christian Religion* 52)

The truth is that good decisions are hard to make. It is even harder to convince others that a decision is a good one.

The book, *Team of Rivals; the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, by Doris Kearns Goodwin, clearly describes how Lincoln worked with people of many different opinions to reach goals that were good for the nation. Although the

2 Rev. Douglas Taylor, *The Hidden Levels of the Mind*, Swedenborg Foundation 2011, p. 55

modern reader – and many Americans in Lincoln’s day as well – would like to have seen him come out forcefully to abolish slavery from the start, that is not what he did. Lincoln’s argument was that if he had done that he would never have been able to succeed in the cause. Instead, he worked continually for the unity of the nation, moving it gradually in that direction.

It is easy to feel queasy at the very mention of politics, but anyone who wishes to accomplish anything other than going with the flow cannot avoid them. The Writings point to the need to “apply or adapt (ourselves) to others and study to bend their minds” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1949), which requires seeing other points of view and not simply asserting our own. Ideally, politics operates the way that governments work in heaven:

No one in heaven is given commands or orders. On the contrary one shares his thoughts and the other freely acts in accordance with them. The communication of thought, together with a desire to see something put into effect, is influx; and on the part of the receiver it is perception. . . . There is not in what they say any trace of an order given to another; for no one wishes to be the master and consequently regard another as his slave. Rather, each wishes to minister and be of service to another. From this one may see what form of government exists in heaven, the form described by the Lord in Matthew: “It shall not be so among you, but whoever has the wish to become great among you must be your minister, and whoever has the wish to be first must be your servant.” (*Matthew* 20:26, 27; *Arcana Coelestia* 5732)

(JFS)

OUR HOPE IN CHILDREN

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Lord – coming on earth to overcome the hells and grant us the hope of heaven – we hear more and more young couples deciding not to bring children into this world. It may be fear of climate change, crime, war, poverty, disease, injustice or a seemingly hopeless immorality.

One young woman recently proclaimed in a public forum that she and her husband would have no children because of the threat of climate change. Her own mother agreed.

People are entitled to their opinions and choices about what makes life “worth living” and what does not, or whether they want to bring children into such an uncertain world.

Throughout history people have been raising children in troubling environments. Their children are our hope – that they will find ways to

overcome our challenges and make this a better world. And because of this faith – and their efforts – we have triumphed over all manner of crises. But those crises keep on coming and seem all the more menacing.

So why did the Lord put us on earth in the first place? We all know His purpose: so that there might be a heaven from the human race. So, we should not be just earthbound in wondering about whether it is “right” to bring children into such a troubled world. We know there will always be tribulation – but that we should “be of good cheer” because the Lord has overcome the world.

Indeed, bringing children into this world is an act of love, trust and hope. Whatever the circumstances, the Lord assures that all can overcome the world and attain heaven – if we but follow Him there.

(BMH)

SPIRITUAL SUSTAINABILITY

As people think more and more about the environment, our throwaway lifestyle, and how to be better stewards of our planet, many are turning to “sustainability.” It’s a laudable goal: to eat and live to maintain an ecological balance that assures our natural resources and food supplies are not depleted or threatened. How best do we satisfy present needs without compromising future generations?

We are a consumer society, glibly assuming there will always be enough of whatever we need. But are we threatening our sustainability by consuming too much, too quickly? Are we being responsible enough and caring enough for future generations?

But as important as natural sustainability is, so is spiritual sustainability. There are plenty of warning signs here as well.

Religion is declining in most of the world, giving way to neglect, hostility and secularism. This is all part of the fallout of the Last Judgment on the Christian Church. There are encouraging signs that the New Church is growing (through the internet, social media, etc.) – just not fast enough in our eyes to counter the threats throughout the world. We hope the General Church is the Rock upon which the New Church is being built, but sustainability is a concern.

Then there is our own spiritual sustainability – the church within us – which is what really matters.

We know it is not enough just to believe. “Only to believe is not faith, but to will and to do what is believed, this is faith.” (*Last Judgment* 36) That means loving the Lord, loving the neighbor, living a good life – really living our faith.

It also means living with the knowledge that our spiritual life is already

a part of us – not something for the next life, but with us every day. It means being aware of our spirituality – through regular reading, prayer, instruction, reflection – and the need to sustain it.

It means being aware of the Lord's presence and leading in our lives – His constant love, mercy and providence. No matter our circumstances or our attitude, He is leading us to a good end. To keep that spirit sustainable, we follow.

Spiritual sustainability – like natural sustainability – takes conscious commitment. We know where our food and natural resources come from and can project supply and demand. Our spirituality is less measurable but is no less real and is all the more vital to our eternal well-being. It, too, begins with knowing where it comes from:

You cannot be spiritually reborn without some knowledge of the new or spiritual life, of the true things that you ought to believe and the good things that you ought to do. You cannot learn these things on your own, because on your own you can comprehend things only through your physical senses. Your physical senses give you information about the material world and yourself, not about heaven and God. Spiritual knowledge comes only from revelation. (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 117)

(BMH)

A NEW YEAR, A NEW CHAPTER IN YOUR BOOK OF LIFE

Some things in the Word can be downright intimidating:

I tell you that on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter. (*Matthew* 12:36)

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

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

That doesn't leave much wiggle room. Every day we are writing in our Book of Life, without much thought that the record remains with us. And by our actions, our choices – really the loves that motivate us – we shall be judged. But we are free, always, to evaluate and change our lifestyle. And as with anything we write, we get to revise, to rewrite, to improve our Book of

Life – even to change the ending. A new year is a good time to reflect on this book we are writing.

Yes, our Book of Life is real. There is no escaping the history and the choices that make us who we are. There is no escaping judgment. As we read in *Secrets of Heaven* 2474:

Our Book of Life “is opened in the other life, by which we are judged. People will have a hard time believing this, but it is absolutely true. All of our purposes (which are unclear to us), all our thoughts, all our resulting words and deeds appear in that book, or in other words, in our inner memory, down to the smallest detail. Whenever the Lord allows it, they lie open, clear as day for angels to view. I have seen several demonstrations of this, and such a large number of my experiences bear it out that I have not a shred of doubt left.”

That sounds threatening, doesn't it? All of us have parts of our lives that we would never want publicly exposed. But the point is not that what is revealed be cruel and humiliating. This is a positive and essential part of the spiritual cleansing process. Indeed, it is something we are encouraged to begin in this life through regeneration as we shun sins, turn to the Lord and do good – as we choose heaven. The further along we get in that process while on earth, the less we will have to endure in opening our Book of Life.

The focus is not on embarrassment over what is revealed about things said, thought and done but on getting all of that behind us and moving on. This is a gentle and loving process that frees us from hellish influences and eventually leads us into heaven. After all, the Lord knows everything about us – the good and the bad – and He never stops loving us or trying to raise us up to heaven. It is that perfect love that pervades this cleansing process.

As daunting as it may sound to have our Book of Life opened and to be judged by it, we are assured that we are not really judged “by God and His angels” but that we really judge ourselves through what we have chosen to love. If we truly love the Lord and heaven, there we will find our home. If we reject Him, we could never be happy there.

So you control what is written in your Book of Life. You can just let it write itself, without much thought where it is leading you, and deal with the consequences. Or you can pause every so often to evaluate, to revise, to change the whole trajectory so that you feel better about yourself and where your story is going.

The new year is already underway. So what will this next chapter say about you? What do you want it to say? You get to choose.

(BMH)



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



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