

THETA ALPHA JOURNAL



NOVEMBER 2021

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Theta Alpha

“Daughters of the Academy”



Named From the Greek:

Θυγατερες Ακαδημιας

Thugateres Akadémias

Founded in 1904 by graduates of the Academy of the New Church, Theta Alpha exists to provide a forum for women for the advancement and support of New Church education in its many forms, and to support each other in our personal spiritual growth. Membership is open to interested women aged eighteen and older.

Non Nobis Solum ~ Not for Ourselves Alone

Theta Alpha Journal

Volume 15

Number 17

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Google “Facebook Theta Alpha International” or visit
<http://bit.ly/fbthetaalpha>

Archived copies of the *Journal* are available at:
<http://bit.ly/taijournal> or newchurch.org/resources/publications/

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Please remember that your membership dues support all of Theta Alpha International's programs, including this *Journal!* Membership is open to interested women aged eighteen and older.

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You can join any time!

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Name: _____

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- I am also including an additional donation of \$ _____
to support Theta Alpha International

(\$15 donations are equivalent to paying the \$15 annual dues)

President's Message

Janet Krettek

Hello, Friends!

It has been a rough almost 2 years, though it feels like 5. We have made some progress learning new techniques to share and communicate, recalling what a good time you can have with your family, and breathing in some calmer air at home.

The Executive Committee is working on developing new uses in Theta Alpha. Fresh ideas are coming in and we are building on them. Our committee has decreased its median age by 30 years. Our 3 young board members are energetic and quite tech savvy. They are involved in numerous organizations and are bringing their skills and sensibilities into Theta Alpha. This generation is sensitive to women's needs in a different way and are more inclusive and tolerant. As we move ahead, I want to ensure that you are coming along with us.

I need feedback from you. As you are reading this, please take a minute to respond to the questions below. Email me at JMKRETTEKdo@gmail.com No email, you say? Send me a short note in the mail to PO Box 154, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009.

Is Theta Alpha International meeting your needs? Our stated mission is to *support New Church education in its many forms and support the spiritual growth of women throughout their lives.* We are here to perform uses for our members and need feedback to ensure we are doing so. Let us know if you have ideas that

you would like to see put into action.

Do you want to join the TAI Executive Committee? One thing the pandemic has taught us is that we can meet virtually or in a hybrid fashion. That opens up the ability to more fully embrace the “international” aspect of Theta Alpha International. No longer are the ladies of Bryn Athyn the only ones who can participate in the daily uses of this organization. All women who support New Church teachings can join together to bring these ideas to fruition. Please let me know if you would like to participate!

When you send me a note, please send it with your dues. Without funds, we cannot continue to print the *Journal*. Currently, we have approximately 42 people paying dues. The Journal is provided to 1500 readers in print, plus it is online. Thankfully, those that are paying dues are donating extra in addition to the dues. However, the amount is far from sufficient. If you are one of the 1458 not contributing financially, please consider pitching in; every little bit helps.

Speak to me. Let's collaborate. I look forward to having a mutualistic symbiotic working relationship with you all.

I am grateful to serve as your Theta Alpha International President.

Editorial

Helen Kennedy

In this Journal we have a piece submitted by Lisa Hyatt Cooper: her great-grandmother's story of conversion to the New Church. Those born and raised with the Writings may not have any idea of how fraught with temptations it can be for a person to accept the new religion, as in the case of Anna Margaretha Lechner, the progenitor of many Synnestvedts and Davises in the church.

Jennica Nobre writes about how Thomas Aquinas, an influential 13th century Catholic theologian, believed and wrote about how he thought the Bible contained inner meanings. In her article she parallels the approaches Aquinas had with those of Swedenborg. Lara Muth's "Echoes of Eden: A Daughter's Reply" is a daughter's way of seeing her father's gardens. Written in response to his "A Gardener's Work" in the April 2021 Journal, it is made all the more poignant because of her father's recent unexpected passing. Our sympathies are with Lara. "Above the Heavens" is a work of fiction by Laurel Odhner Powell set in the farmland she knows well. It raises an important theological question at the end, one that is close to the heart of many women.

As all the countries in the world continue to suffer during the pandemic, people across the globe are finding life contains new things which never could have been thought of or anticipated. Thanks to Gretchen Keith we have a compilation of eleven short articles by women from different countries telling us of these

new perspectives. In addition, there are companion articles by Heather Allais and Brita Synnestvedt Conroy, both teachers in New Church schools. This does not take away from our awareness of the deep suffering caused by the sickness, its aftereffects, or the deep sorrow at the loss of a loved one or friend. I am sure the hearts of our readers are with those suffering, and we pray for the Lord to give them comfort and healing at this time.

While reading *Neo-African Literature* by Janheinz Jahn, I was struck by a new concept, Nommo, which was described as asking deities to be with you. Simply said, in past times many Africans believed it was the responsibility of those here in this world to make invocations and draw spiritual help closer into their lives. A person brings the deities closer by indicating a task that needs to be done. This immediately made me think of Christian prayer, or asking God for help with a specific thing when we are in need. In this way I saw how the two religions touch one another in an important way.

All angels of heaven and all people on earth . . . are as one human, and the Lord is the life of that human (AE 1217).

I asked a man from Western Africa, when he was in Theological School in Bryn Athyn in the '90s, if Africans had a different approach toward religion and worship of God than Christians do. He smiled immediately and said, "Oh, yes, we feel we have to sing and dance to be happy people so that God will want to come and be in us. God will be glad to see us happy and joyful. We play music and drums, and if we show Him that we are happy, then He is glad to be with us."

"Is that why Black Churches here in the United States have such long worship services?"

"Yes, we are happy and singing with the Lord."

So this was a beginning for me to try and grasp how an group

of people have an approach towards religion that is different from me. I realize this is a generalized approach but it was enough to give me some insights about the ways the Lord Jesus keeps lines of communication open between Him and the people He loves, even if, at the time, they aren't aware that He is the only God.

Even with the Writings, we still know very little compared with all of heaven and its wonders and the many, many ways that God does things. At the time I liked learning about this happy connection through prayer.

This all leads to the following request. I would like to invite our readers to respond with insights about what prayer means in their lives. There is an *Off The Left Eye* program that I listened to recently, "What Does Prayer Do?", in which Peter Rhodes and Chuck Blair were guests. It was deeply moving to hear them talk about their own personal prayer. I look forward to reading your perspectives on the power of prayer for you.



Join the Conversation!

We would love to publish selected responses to articles, poems and stories in the *Journal*.

Tell us what you think! Contact information is in the beginning of this *Journal*.

Story of Conversion to the New Church

Lisa Hyatt Cooper

The following is part of a short life history written by my great-grandmother, Anna Margaretha Lechner, who immigrated to Pittsburgh from Germany in 1869.

Lisa Hyatt Cooper

Anna Margaretha Lechner (1854-1913)

My husband's father I did not know, but his mother was one of the sweetest mothers-in-law that ever lived, and the two shortest but happiest years I ever lived were the two years that the Lord granted her to stay with us.

I could fill pages of her, and her two last weeks were a most remarkable proof of her trust in the Lord, as she did not lose any of her sweetness amidst the most severe suffering, and talked to us, and bid us farewell as if she were only taking a little trip. She knew and felt that death means life, not knowing anything of our heavenly doctrine, she was sure she would live right after leaving this world.

Now my dear ones, I will not have to say much more.

I lived through many bitter days but the Lord was good to me to give me more sunny and happy days than sad ones for which I can never thank Him enough, as my shortcomings are great in number; may He help me to overcome some of them, while it is yet time.

The greatest blessing the Lord ever bestowed on me, was the finding of our beloved New Church, which happened in the year of 1876 the birth year of my third child, may he and all my children never leave our dear church, and try to be wiser and better than their ever loving Mother can ever be.

I will now tell you about my coming in to the Church on another sheet.

I thought these little notes and dates might interest you after I have gone to the other side to meet your dear father and all my beloved ones of whom my dear Katie is not the least.

I can never express how much I love you all. Amen.

Your Mother.

Story of her conversion, from the “other sheet” she mentioned.

Mr. Jacob Schoenberger learned about the church through a Mr. Weckesser and he gave me to read *Heaven and Hell* which I did not like so well, as I would not see how any man could tell us, so I then read *Apocalypse Revealed* which I could see was the only explanation there could be.

From that time on I was tormented with doubts whether it was right for me to forsake the Lutheran faith in to which I was born and confirmed and had sworn at the Altar to keep to the end. While I could see clearly that the new doctrines were from the Lord, I could not explain why He led me to be confirmed in the old.

So I was constantly between two fires, and my state became alarming to me, as two sets of spirits seemed to have a hold on me.

So one night, my husband being out of town, while getting ready to retire, I earnestly prayed to the Lord to give me peace of mind again, for all my family except my sister Lizzie were all

against me also.

I was scarcely in bed when I dreamed, for such it must have been, although I thought at the time that I was awake.

I was taken to a large assembly and I saw, as it were, all people I had ever known, but chief among them were my own near friends. There was much discussion, and all seemed to be displeased with me for some reason.

I was then taken by some one into another hall, and here were only my family, but these too were ill pleased with me, except my sister Lizzie, who led me away from them into a beautiful garden and left me there astonished and fearful. Withdrawing from me, she looked very happy, and bid me look forward in to the garden where it was very light all at once, though I knew right along it was evening.

As soon as I was left alone, a most humble state came over [me] and I felt more than ever my doubts. And I poured forth my heart in prayer to the Lord to help me, and behold the light in the front of the garden shaped itself in a large arch, in which I saw standing, at first dimly, then clearly, the figure of our Lord Jesus Christ, in a most shining garment, which so overpowered me that I fell down on my knees to thank Him for His mercy towards me, in such words as I before had never spoken nor ever could speak again. And all the while the Lord held His hands as in blessing over me, unworthy being as I was. Overcome by this, I came back to myself again, in my lonely bedroom, but the happiness that stayed with [me] I [have] never been able to forget to this day.

There was no more doubt nor fear in my mind as to my action towards the heavenly doctrine. I felt sure the Lord wanted me to break away from the old.

This paper was written by Mrs. A.M. Lechner, Pittsburgh, PA, April 21, 1910.

Anna Margaretha's youngest child was my grandmother, Margaretha Davis, who passed on to me a gold thimble [pictured below] of her mother's and this account of it: "My Father had to stop school when he was eleven, to support his mother, so he went to work in a cigar factory, rolling cigars. When he and Mother were engaged he couldn't afford a ring so he gave her a gold thimble. (At the time she was apprenticed to a tailor.) Many years later he bought her a modest diamond."



The Blessing Song

Anonymous

She sits in the pew
listening to the opening chords.
Rising, they add vocal harmony
to the well-loved lyrics.
She waits – will it come?
There it is. The reverie.
As if God has entered
and smiles on the congregation.
Others present sense it, too,
reaching for their partner's hand.
From heaven above, silent voices
join in the marriage blessing,
sent with heart-felt love
to the glowing recipient couple.
Bride and groom now joined,
and blessed this happy day.

The following lyrics inspired this poem: "O precious sign and seal of heavenly union, from day to day thy meaning dearer grows. An emblem thou of holy love conjugal, from God in heaven that love in blessing flows."

Thomas Aquinas and Emmanuel Swedenborg: A Comparison of Exegetical Approaches

Jennica Nobre

The Bible has long been a source of hope and direction to its readers, and yet it has also been a source of confusion. The beautiful, but cryptic creation story, the engaging and yet at times bizarre narrative of the children of Israel, and the incredible yet unbelievable account of the birth of Jesus Christ are all examples of ways in which the Bible is inspiring and yet puzzling.

Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century Italian philosopher and theologian, and Emmanuel Swedenborg, an 18th century Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian, were two individuals who dedicated decades of their lives to piecing together the biblical puzzle through exegesis. According to both, the Bible is not meant to be understood merely literally, but rather, the literal sense of the Bible contains a deeper meaning within. Comparing the ideology and methodology of these two biblical exegetes reveals that, though their viewpoints are similar, the message of the Bible that is unveiled through their individual approaches is quite distinct. Where Aquinas's methods arrive at an infinite expansion of layered and interconnected meanings, Swedenborg's methods arrive at an array of meanings grounded in a definitive structure.

Making sense of how the study of the physical world relates to the spiritual message of the Bible is one way in which the ide-

ologies of Aquinas and Swedenborg differed. Philosophy for both Aquinas and Swedenborg, and science for Swedenborg, played a part in forming their theological points of view. A medieval pioneer in “a new kind of biblical exegesis,” Aquinas “combines philosophical issues with sublime theological speculation” (Roszak p. 509), in order that the disciplines may mutually shed light on one another. Hanegraaff observes that Swedenborg, on the other hand, was aware that he had reached the limit of what his studies of the physical world could reveal to him about the spiritual realm. For his biblical exegesis he relied instead upon what he claimed to be “direct visionary insight” (p. 64).

In order to remain true to God’s message through the Bible to humankind, the exegetical methods of both Aquinas and Swedenborg required strict adherence to the text. In his commentaries Aquinas “makes reference to the Greek and Hebrew biblical texts . . . concentrating on words or terms that can point to the correct interpretation” (Roszak p. 525). Aquinas was careful to interpret accurately and to not add any meaning of his own. Swedenborg, as well, referred to original texts and was careful not to conform to popular “human opinions and traditions” (Hanegraaff p. 84).

With a firm foundation in textual accuracy, for Aquinas it was also important to note the style of the biblical text. He observed styles such as narrative, admonishing, encouraging, commanding, disputing, begging, and praising (Roszak p. 509). Roszak notes that, according to Aquinas, the narrative style is found in the historical accounts of the people in the Bible, the admonishing, encouraging, and commanding styles are found in the prophets and the law, as well as the books of Kings, the books of Job and Paul contain “elements of dispute,” while styles of begging and praising are found in Psalms. Like the headings of a compass, it is from the various stylistic starting points that Aquinas would delve deeper into the meaning hidden within the text.

In *Secrets of Heaven*, Swedenborg's eight volume exegesis of the books of Genesis and Exodus, he also notes multiple styles of writing in the Bible, which he divides into four categories: the style of the earliest church, the historical style, the prophetic style, and the style of the psalms (Hanegraaff p. 85). The style of the earliest church includes the stories from the beginning of the Bible up to the story of Abraham, and this style is not historical, but purely symbolic. The historical style tells of things that actually happened and is contained within the chapters of *Genesis* from the story of Abraham through to the end of the gospels. As Swedenborg puts it "the historical events in these books are exactly what they appear to be in the literal sense, but as a whole and in detail they still contain an entirely different meaning on the inner plane" (p. 86). Among the historical narratives is also found the prophetic style, which is loosely tied to a narrative and is best understood according to the inner meaning since it is often quite confusing on the literal level. Then there is the style of the Psalms which is a kind of mixture between the prophetic style and the way people spoke at the time it was written (p. 86).

Another aspect of Swedenborg's exegetical method was his reliance upon direct divine revelation (Hanegraaff p. 75). It was through divine revelation that Swedenborg became aware that not only every word of the text is important, but that "every single detail, even the smallest, down to the tiniest jot, means and embodies matters spiritual and celestial" (Swedenborg §2). In other words, every letter of the Bible in its original text is significant and contains meaning within. Swedenborg's biblical exegesis does not, however, detail the meaning of every letter of the text. He simply makes mention of this to demonstrate the immensity and intricacy of deep symbolism contained within the written word. His exegesis focuses on the correspondence of words and phrases.

In his writings Aquinas uses a quote from Pope Gregory I to describe the multi-level nature of scripture and how “in one and the same sentence, while it describes a fact, it reveals a mystery” (Aquinas p. 80). To reveal the mystery Aquinas relied on tools such as metaphor and irony to pry deeper into layers of meaning sometimes parallel and sometimes seemingly opposed to the text. Roszak observes “while in the case of metaphor we have to find similarity, in irony we have to pay attention to the opposite meaning, which hides under a layer of words” (p. 516). Using these tools Aquinas did not restrict his exegesis to only one meaning but held the belief that multiple meanings could be contained in a word or phrase. He writes that “since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting . . . if . . . one word in Holy Writ should have several senses” (Aquinas p. 80-81). To further reveal meaning Aquinas would use one part of the text to shed light on another, for according to his view “nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense” (p. 81). The result of such study was a dynamic expression of a myriad of possible biblical meanings. Insightful as he was, Aquinas was cognizant of an immensity of meaning still left untouched by all his exegetical efforts. A testament to the excellence of the divine message (Roszak p. 518).

Swedenborg also believed that one word or phrase of biblical text contained multiple meanings, however according to his view there are three distinct levels of meaning: the physical, the human, and the divine¹—the physical level being the literal meaning of the text, the human level being a level of meaning that can be

1 What Hanegraaff calls the physical, human, and divine levels, Swedenborg calls the natural, spiritual, and heavenly.

understood by humans who are spiritually enlightened, and the divine level being a deeply profound and barely conceivable level of meaning that is all about the nature of the divine. Here the difference in their exegetical methods is most apparent. Where Aquinas would employ metaphor and irony in a contemplative exploration of the text to connect the levels of meaning, Swedenborg used a type of symbolism he called correspondence (Hanegraaff p. 68). On the physical level a particular word or phrase means one thing which corresponds to something on the human level, and another thing completely different on the divine level.

Throughout *Secrets of Heaven* Swedenborg reveals how the words and phrases of the physical level of the Bible correspond to continuous parallel narratives of the human and divine levels. An example of the correspondence between the physical level and the divine level can be found in his exegesis of the story of Abraham in the book of *Genesis*. Swedenborg states that the details of the story correspond to the process that Jesus Christ would eventually go through when born into the world, of awakening to his divine self (Hanegraaff p. 78, 97). Since the perfect process Jesus went through is a mirror of the imperfect process that human beings undergo in their journey of awakening to their spiritual selves, this then is what comprises the parallel human level of correspondence (p. 75). Though a belief in a deeper significance may lead to a certain amount of insight into a corresponding level of meaning, one level does not prove anything about the other (p. 71).

In their search to understand the Bible, Thomas Aquinas and Emmanuel Swedenborg were definitely headed in the same direction. They walked a similar path in regard to their adherence to the original text as a foundation from which to draw meaning, and their attention to the different styles of writing found within the Bible. However, their paths diverged where Aquinas used his

knowledge of philosophy along with the tools of study and contemplation of the text to gain insight to a deeper meaning, and Swedenborg used his theory of correspondences independent from his knowledge of philosophy and science. The results of both approaches are biblical elucidations full of rich and layered meaning, one profoundly expansive, the other organized and clear.

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The above was written for a class at Bryn Athyn College: Religion 510: Studies in Arcana Coelestia.

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Thoughts About the Priesthood

Keith Rydstrom

He had told them He would come
to save them from themselves. . .

and when He walked among them,
a poor man speaking low—
the Jewish priests saw riches only
and the glories of mankind.
They did not believe.

He had told them He must go
to save them from themselves.
In helplessness they watched
their visions die
as soldiers gambled for his robe.

He had been gone not long,
when they wondered among themselves—
but then He stood before them—
a divine man speaking low:

All power in Heaven
All power on earth
Is given to Me—

Go now
Throughout the all of Earth
And preach to whom you see
The news that I have given—
Peace will then be to you
Whene'er you feed My lambs.

He left them once again;
at last, within themselves
they saw that they believed.



Call for Art Submissions!

As you can see from the beautiful cover art and line drawings, we are hoping that the *Journal* can present some of the visual art that Swedenborgians around the world are creating.

Please send us images you would like to share with *Journal* readers and feel free to write a few sentences about what you send in! Contact information is in the beginning of this *Journal*.

Book Review: *Facing Death*

by Jim deMaine, MD

Lisa Hyatt Cooper

What a marvelous little book is *Facing Death: Finding Dignity, Hope and Healing at the End* by Dr. Jim deMaine. If it were solely an informed meditation on the question of how to die well, it would be valuable enough, but it is in addition a practical handbook, a memoir, and, most compellingly for me, a collection of stories—five or six dozen of them (by my count) in its 169 pages.

The book is based largely on a blog—endoflifeblog.com—that Dr. deMaine wrote over the course of a little over a decade, starting in 2009. I first heard of it toward the end of that time, in 2019, when my mother-in-law was suffering the effects of a stroke, and death was on my mind. After reading two posts, I was hooked and binged my way through the entire blog. My own parents and my father-in-law had already died by that time, so the territory my siblings-in-law and I were traversing was not new to me; I was not looking for answers. But still, to feel that I was sharing in the journey taken by the patients of whom Dr. deMaine wrote so sympathetically was a real comfort.

Is the book worth reading if you've already read the blog? For me it most definitely was. For one thing, I found myself just as gripped by the stories the second time around. For another, they are now arranged under seven themes and woven together with reflections on their meaning, which unifies the whole and lends

even greater depth. And there's a one-chapter autobiography that creates a background for the author's experience of and attitude toward his life as a doctor.

Like the blog, the book includes a great deal of practical advice as well, on a multitude of subjects: how to make sure your wishes are honored at the end of your life, where to find forms for advance directives and other documents, what the elements of a "good" death are, where to acquire needed services, and so on.

One final note: Swedenborgians are not the target audience for the book, but Dr. deMaine does mention Swedenborg several times and briefly describes the impact the doctrines have had on his life philosophy. All the ideas he expresses seem to me to harmonize beautifully with belief in a spiritual world of the kind Swedenborg described and of life in this world as a preparation for it.

Facing Death: Finding Dignity, Hope and Healing at the End was published by Clyde Hill Publishing in 2020.

Call for Articles!

We need and want to hear from everyone throughout the world in the pages of our long-lived and well-loved Journal. Everyone has something absorbing, interesting, thoughtful or humorous to share. Contact information is in the beginning of this *Journal*.

Echoes of Eden: A Daughter's Reply

Lara Muth

My father asked, “What becomes of a gardener’s work after he is gone?”¹

I’ve walked in the faded horticultural footsteps of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens at *Le Bois des Moutiers* [Normandy, France] admiring the ghost of a grand design left behind. I’ve marvelled at outdoor rooms and epic arrangements abandoned, not yet entirely absorbed by the landscape.

But I never found the quiet joy of a more peaceful hour than drinking coffee in my father’s garden, my father with me, talking or not talking. Basking in abundance — always accompanied by birdsong — imbibing an impossible variety, a wealth of awesome blossom

My father is a sculptor of flowers. He places colour on a three-dimensional palette. He shapes the seasons, nudging the shy and reluctant Spring, extending Autumn’s embers into Winter’s ashes. Earth, air, water, warmth — my father is an alchemist of the elements and every garden is an echo of Eden.

In good weather his garden begins our morning, a space to spread a blueprint for the day — tasks, lists, projects, shopping Lunchtime and tea time it is an oasis of refreshment, energising as though each flower were a fuel cell, each leaf a solar panel — the hummingbirds seem to think so.

1 See “The Gardener’s Work” by Eugene O. Muth in the April 2021 *Theta Alpha Journal*

And in the evening, a pause before cooking or after dinner — a stolen moment in the gloaming — reflections of the day. Tranquil twilight rising with the fireflies — mosquito fizzing in my ear The far-off note of the tinkling stream . . . White turned to turquoise by moonlight . . . Spent blossoms nodding into sleep, so brief their life, and yet next morning colour reincarnated.

In bad weather my father's garden calls from out the window — like Catherine to Heathcliff — drenched, moaning, muted, like distant music asking me to dance, lashed so with wind and rain it is a wonder anything survives. Squashed and broken by fallen branches, smothered by the motherload of leaves, it regenerates, rejuvenates, pushing up, pushing through, on the march — in like a dandelion, out like the clock² — a flock of lambs-ear tumbling into another year.

'In my Father's house are many mansions . . .'

And my father's garden is a palace for the weevil and the wood rat, with space for every bird and beetle, the slug, the grub, the snail, the snake, worms that wriggle in the wake of the rake. It is tapestried by shining vines, tissued by spiders with hidey holes for toads and voles, richly carpeted with mould holding roots and springing shoots. Crevices between the brick keep the chipmunk and the field mouse, neighbours in my father's house.

What is the gardener's work?

Dig earth, carry water. Love, adopt and foster. Graft and plan and propagate. Prune and encourage. Tame and train and then let be. Stand back satisfied with a cup of tea, and let what is, grow into what it's meant to be. Nothing is lost when it has served its purpose. The work of the gardener is to embrace the rhythm of the seasons, observe the tides of the land with the attention and reverence only true love lends.

2 Dandelion clock (Britain) refers to a single stem of a dandelion when the downy covering of its head is intact. A children's pastime is to count the number of puffs needed to blow the filaments off. It is supposed to tell the time.

How do I know all this?

I'm not a gardener. But my father's garden is vast; he has laboured to make my whole life a garden. Everywhere I go, every street and seed and passing weed makes me stop and want to share it with him. Old shades in new shapes, familiar echoes of another place. Clever window boxes, copses of trees, crazy combos remind me where I spring from – that humble patch – where I first learned the names of things, where I picked violets for my grandmother's grave. My first memory was a garden. And when our time comes to be planted there ourselves, the memory of colour is the love we leave behind.

'What becomes of a gardener's work after he is gone?'

It blooms into a new season. Seeds flourish and take flight. Volunteers crop up from cracks in the pavement. The most unlikely magic rises . . . until all the world is a garden. As it was in the beginning

The above was written in May 2021

Epilogue

I wrote this response in May after reading my father's article in the April TAJ. I never set out to write a eulogy. I submitted it in secret and had in mind he might read it as a surprise in the October issue. But Dad surprised us all by leaving for the gardens of Heaven on 31 July, just after 9 p.m.

His body remains behind, planted on a bleak hillside, in the presence of purple mountains' majesty. I have been warned nothing grows there. But I do not subscribe to this agricultural atheism. Prepare the soil, plant a seed. Watch and wait. What is the body, but the seed of a vine that blossoms in a garden we can't see?

Lara can be contacted at frisland@hotmail.com.

People Helping People

Gretchen L. Keith

News of the new coronavirus first reached me in early 2020. I was in South Africa where Brian was serving the New Church Buccleuch congregation for five weeks. It was too soon to know how Covid-19 would affect our lives. And it was too soon to see the many ways people would reach out to help family, friends, neighbors and others in need. But seeing this has been one of the silver linings of this pandemic for me. I believe that the Lord leads us to find ways to help people who need us. At times, it might even seem as if we are being tapped on the shoulder and urged to help.

Back home in Bryn Athyn, I saw many examples of people helping. Some initiatives were specific to the pandemic: making masks and hospital gowns, gathering supplies for those who might become ill, and finding ways to provide help for people struggling financially. There were heroic efforts to continue educating students of all ages and to provide various opportunities for worshiping the Lord. We all tried to find ways to cope and stay connected—even during the times we were asked to stay at home. It was heartening to be able to do something to help other people.

I have been asked to tell you about a group of women in Bryn Athyn who helped people schedule appointments to get a Covid-19 vaccine. We were fortunate to have fairly early access to the vaccine in Pennsylvania, but initially it was in short supply, and the process for booking appointments online was quite difficult.

This story begins in February 2021 when Ingrid Herder created

a private Facebook group for people in Bryn Athyn interested in getting a Covid-19 vaccine. It started as a place to share information about how to do it. It became a place to ask for help. As people expressed frustration with the scheduling process, three women stepped up. Ingrid Herder, Rachel Layden and Holly Adams worked together to schedule Covid-19 immunization appointments, prioritizing residents of Cairnwood Village (a local retirement community) and other elderly people in the Bryn Athyn community.

It was quite the challenge. One had to stay up past midnight in the hope that some appointments would show up somewhere. Most pharmacies were only posting openings between 11:45 pm and 12:45 am, and they disappeared within minutes because the demand was so much greater than the supply. Being tech-savvy, persistent, and a fast typist were advantages but no guarantee. The team rejoiced on the rare evenings when they managed to schedule 15, 20 or more appointments. Within two weeks these three women managed to find appointments for 100 people. One woman dubbed them the “Covid-Buster Trio.”

As more people asked for help, Lianne Reese, Catie Junge and I joined the team. We all helped when we could. Some of us stayed up late to look for appointments when they “dropped” around midnight. Catie helped get appointments when they appeared before dawn at another pharmacy chain. We shared tips that helped other people find appointments for themselves and their loved ones. We all tried to pick up cancellations during the day. There was a lot of guesswork as to when and where one would be able to find open appointment slots. The only constant was that available appointments would disappear quickly. The team managed to help 200 people by March 10th and that number rose to 400 by April 5th.

Ingrid Herder did a lot of work behind the scenes, as well as booking appointments. She notified people in Cairnwood Village as the team booked appointments for them. She arranged rides as needed, calling on four people who volunteered to ferry people

to appointments: Gail Cooper, Meghan Keegan, LynnEllen King and Brian Keith. Ingrid also networked with a pharmacy in nearby Horsham, making it possible to book appointments for many more people. And she posted regular Facebook updates about the amazing work of the team. When praised for her own efforts, Ingrid would say, “I may be the band leader, but there is no band without its musicians!”

It was wonderful to work with these women to help family, friends and neighbors, as well as people we may never meet. Many of these people had spent days trying to book appointments on their own. People said they cried with joy when they received a text message or email confirming their appointment. One woman literally jumped for joy after receiving her second immunization shot, anticipating being able to hug her grandchildren. Some people asked what they could do to thank us. Ingrid replied, “We ask that you pay it forward! Do random acts of kindness. Donate to local causes! Help your neighbor! And stay safe!” The satisfaction of helping people was its own reward.

How many people have been helped? That’s hard to say. The team scheduled appointments for 571 people by early June. This includes 87 people who were vaccinated at a clinic held in Bryn Athyn—with the help of many more volunteers. But it goes beyond the vaccine appointments. The Facebook group shared tips and alerts that made it easier for people to book appointments for themselves and others. One woman wrote, “The impact you made is so much larger than your number reflects. Those 571 appointments improved the lives of thousands of people connected to those who received the vaccine.” There were also several dedicated people quietly booking appointments for those asking for help, working alongside the six women who formed this team. It takes a village.

As I write this, I know people who are recovering from Covid-19, experiencing lockdowns, dealing with quarantines, or facing difficult decisions. Some are still waiting for a Covid-19 vaccine to

be available to them. I am keeping my neighbors—wherever they live—in my thoughts and prayers.

My hope is that this story may inspire us to continue looking for ways to help others. And that those who need help will feel able to ask for and accept it.

*When people who are perceptive have feelings of compassion,
they know that they are being alerted by the Lord to offer help.
Arcana Coelestia 6737*

Gretchen lives in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, with her husband Brian Keith. She is grateful to have been able to join Brian on his episcopal trips (before his retirement) and get to know many New Church people around the world. Gretchen enjoys photography, writing, volunteering at General Church education, and connecting with family and friends. She can be contacted at gretchen.keith@gmail.com.



Silver Linings in Covid-19

Compiled by Gretchen Keith and Helen Kennedy

Gretchen Keith, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania: What are the silver linings we have experienced during this pandemic? It was one of my sisters who suggested this prompt for a Theta Alpha Journal article. Helen Kennedy agreed, and we decided that I would invite women in various parts of the world to share their reflections. In reaching out to them, I mentioned that one of my silver linings was the weekly zoom calls that my siblings and I have enjoyed these past months, connecting regularly in spite of living in three different parts of the United States. This way of connecting with family has been a blessing in my life.

A dozen women agreed to share their reflections, and their responses are thoughtful and heartfelt. We asked for a paragraph or two but were happy to get some longer contributions as well. (One of these, the response from Heather Allais, is being shared elsewhere in this issue.) We are grateful to all the women who accepted this challenge. Before reading these lovely reflections, it might be interesting to think about how you might answer this. “What silver linings or hidden blessings have you experienced during these past months?”

Chikako Matsumoto, Chiba, Japan: In Japan, during this year we also have been in the pandemic. Our daily lives have fully changed. Thanks to mutual help, we were able to sustain each other. Self-control and a calm mind, even during the Olympic games, allowed us to be grateful and find small joys in everything.

Chikako is married to Shiro Matsumoto, the national pastor of Japan in the General Church. She was born in Nagoya, Japan, and now lives in Chiba, near Tokyo. Chikako and Shiro have two daughters, and are waiting for their first grandchild this November.

Birgitta Amos, Colchester, England: Although the Covid-19 pandemic has been, and continues to be, a huge trial for the whole world there have been some positive outcomes as seen from the UK. In our country there has been more interest in religion and spiritual matters following family illness and bereavement, infection risks, and life uncertainty. Many churches have provided a source of support, services and advice, and a way of connecting people together, particularly through new digital technologies. For example, in the UK New Church, worship services, doctrinal, children's talks/classes have connected members and friends together irrespective of the geography of where they live (by Zoom, Facebook, Pow-wow-now, and telephone conferencing services).

Lockdown has given many families more time to spend together and to connect with one another more fully. Moreover, it has given them a chance to slow down their pace of life instead of rushing about as much as before. Home-schooling has also given parents a greater insight into the professionalism and work of teachers, and in many cases, resulted in closer bonds between children and their parents.

Covid-19's impact has resulted in people not taking things for granted as before, and to really appreciate and value such things as nature, culture, family life, work opportunities, being of use, and friendships. Many more people have stepped forward to volunteer to help others in need by providing support and assistance throughout the local community. In addition, people have had to find new ways of working and communicating, leading to advances in the use of digital technology. This has not only reduced the need to travel, but in turn has reduced carbon emissions and cut noise and pollution.

We have a national system of universal free healthcare (NHS) and everyone is extremely grateful and appreciative for all the hard work,

expertise and resilience of our health professionals and volunteers — particularly in hospitals, vaccination research, development and delivery. Every Thursday evening at 8:00 pm we all stood on our doorsteps and clapped, rang bells, cheered, played musical instruments, and put up ‘thank you’ signs to thank our NHS staff.

Let’s hope that as the world’s population gets vaccinated, protected and develops immunity, many of these silver linings will remain and provide a better future for the human race.

Birgitta Amos is a member of the Colchester New Church in England and was a school teacher, but is now retired. She can be contacted at patrick.amos@sky.com.

Eva (Fornander) Björkström, Stockholm, Sweden: Dear all you sisters in our Church!

The pandemic has changed the life for so many people. Those of us who live in affluent countries are so lucky! We so easily think we are in command totally of our lives. The pandemic has given us a chance to reflect on what is important, what we might need to change in our lives.

Covid-19 and the restrictions due to it here in Sweden have meant that all our church activities had to take place on internet. And this in turn has meant that people living in distant places from Stockholm have started “attending” Sunday church on internet. Josephine, wife of our pastor, has added “church coffee” on the internet after the service. It meant for us chatting about everyday things of the past week, and [talking about our] reflections after the readings or sermon. Also, the ongoing courses on Wednesdays have had more attendants than normally from all over Sweden!

Overall, in Sweden trying to protect each other has brought out so much helpfulness in our fellow men! Washing our hands, avoiding close contacts, offering help to strangers like picking up things from the pharmacy, shopping, etc., has been common.

For the Swedes being asked to stay at home Covid-19 has shown

us what we have, and should be grateful for.

- It has meant spending more time with the ones we live with.
- Working from home has shown to be more efficient than expected, and also less time spent on transportation to and from work!
- The extra time has given us a chance for reflection, to think thoughts through all the way!
- Many have used the time reading the books they have not gotten to before, and I hear many have used the time to clean drawers and corners they normally never get around to.

My life with work in the studio and in the garden has not been very different. No extra time for me, except perhaps when seeing people (most of the time outside, and never more than one or two friends). This has meant having really personal and interesting conversations. It has been fun getting to know friends really well!

This said I must end my reflections pointing out again how this has affected the whole world! My prayers go to people living in places where there is not enough hospital care or vaccine for everyone!

Eva is married, has two children and two grandchildren, and studied in Bryn Athyn in the 1960s. She has worked for 50 years as a professional artist. Her passion for gardening can be seen on YouTube. In Sweden she is responsible for the Swedenborg research library, a sister/daughter library to the Swedenborg Library in Bryn Athyn. Soon all their registered books, letters, sermons, etc., will be available on the internet. She can be contacted at eva@tulipanaros.nu.

Jill Brickman, Glenview, Illinois: It's hard to fathom anyone thinking a global pandemic is a good thing, but as we know, something good comes out of everything. For me, one of the good things to come out of this disaster has been the chance to reevaluate what's important in my life and what I can do about it. Working in a food pantry, early on I could see that the challenges would be overwhelming if I didn't make some changes. With the help of therapists who visited virtually with our staff as a group several times a week, I was able

to become much better about letting go of things I can't control. I'd always known that was true on an intellectual level but now it feels like knowledge that is really part of me. The realization that I need to distinguish between what I can and can't control makes life much smoother.

So much of what we faced felt completely random but there were aspects of my life where I could make adjustments to help get through the difficult times, like exercising, eating well and sleeping enough. It also led me to feel respectful of choices other people made regarding isolating that were different from my own choices. Staying on a more even keel by taking care of what I could and not falling into the trap of wasting energy on things I couldn't influence was a good exercise in trusting in Providence and brought me a sense of peace.

Jill Brickman grew up and lives in Glenview, Illinois. She graduated from ANC in 1978 and then from Knox College, and has just completed 20 years as a township supervisor where she was heavily involved in social services. Jill can be contacted at brickmanjill@gmail.com.

Bérengère Agnes, Côte d'Ivoire: Since the onset of Covid-19, bad news continues every day. We suffer from many people becoming infected, closures of schools, worship places, slowdown in the world economy, a lot of unemployment.

Although major pandemics are not new to the world, Covid-19 has given rise to a lot of anxiety and fears. Did God will this pandemic? "It is said that God permits, this does not mean that He wills, but that He cannot avert on account of the end, which is salvation" (*Divine Providence* 234). "It is believed that evils, too, are from the Divine because the Divine permits them, and does not take them away, and he who permits and does not take away when he is able, appears to will . . . But the Divine permits because it cannot be prevented, or taken away" (*Secrets of Heaven* 8227).

Thus, the Lord does not cause evils to overwhelm us, but rather provides opportunities to recognize and deal with these evils. For

example, God has not promised to keep diseases away from us. They are permitted because of the good that can come out of them, and according to our cooperation. We cooperate with Providence, if behind this Covid-19 pandemic we seek positive effects that help us to grow spiritually, but we go against Providence [when constantly] complaining about this disease.

Positive impacts of Covid-19 are:

- Entire lifestyle changes to practice better hygiene, for example, hygiene with hand washing.
- Decrease in pollution with especially the slowdown of factory activities and air traffic.
- Building genuine relationships.
- The confinement imposed to slow the spread of the virus has allowed us to have great moments with our loved ones.
- Getting closer to the Lord.

Béregère has a degree in gastronomy from Ecole Hôtelière de Bassam/Côte d'Ivoire (EHB). She is married to Rev. Sylvain A. Agnes. She can be contacted through him at sylvainagnes93@gmail.com.

Kelly Lucero, Valparaiso, Florida: The uncertainty of the Covid-19 storm has caught us all off-guard. Who doesn't recall a time when playgrounds were stuffed full of laughter, kids gathered for birthday parties or could even take sips from water fountains at school? Who among us rolled our eyes when someone walked past with a mask covering their face, judging them for their seemingly excessive health precautions? Will our children ever remember a time not having a mask in their back pocket, purse, or hanging from the car rearview mirror? Flip the script and fast forward to today and we have rewritten the "new norm." As we pause to reflect upon this unique shift in culture, there are many fears, uncertainties and worries. But peer in a bit further and you can clearly see the silver linings within the chaos. We have families, children, and adults connecting and learning from home. Schools and teachers on the

“drop of a dime” revamping and working remotely to reach more learners through flipped, hybrid or virtual learning. Their fast-working innovation has led to a virtual world where the classroom can be engaged from anywhere with internet access. Is this the best solution for our children? Maybe not, but nevertheless I’m dang proud of our educators and admin who have poured their hearts into our children. I see you and am so gratified to you all. But let’s pause and reflect on the real MVP’s, our children. Their resilience throughout this crazy time has surpassed most adults. They take their cues from adults but are still trying to figure out their role. Schools have changed, masks are now the norm, playdates were put on hold, and they all had to adjust. As they watch the world, listen to their parents, and follow the advice of their teachers, our children are trying to sort through it all and roll with the punches. From virtual school learning to mask wearing in public, they have consistently adjusted. I ask that you pause and reflect on their resilience. Encourage their questions and praise them for thriving during this Covid-19 epidemic. They just accepted the norm and rolled with the tide. So, here’s to our resilient blessings, our MVP kids! We salute you.

Kelly is a primary literacy coach turned education consultant facilitating professional development. She is also a children’s book author; her most recent book is “Zombie Mombie Saves the Day” released on February 15th. She can be contacted at kzlucero@gmail.com.

Judy Hyatt, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania: Silver linings of the Covid-19 pandemic — are there any? I think so; I’ve heard people (including myself) say, “I loved it,” “I want to go back.” The subject here is silver linings. There is no desire to refute the terrible trauma and tragedy that many people faced. Clearly each person’s perspective will differ. My husband and I have introvert tendencies that affect our feelings/opinions/attitudes. We felt that the whole experience brought us closer.

One silver lining for me was more time to do “projects.” I’m guilty of starting lengthy tasks that get partially finished, then wait — sometimes for years — for completion. Lots of extra time at home was a godsend in that direction. We still live in a big house, and since we’re in our 80s, I continually think about what we can get rid of — another eternal project that benefited from Covid-19 lockdown.

We normally watch the occasional movie on TV; otherwise, I don’t watch at all, and Garry enjoys sports. In 2020 when many of the sports events were canceled, he suggested that we investigate programs that we could watch together in the evenings. That was definitely a silver lining; we found many movies and shows and several series that we enjoyed.

Now that the limitations are easing up somewhat (in our part of the U.S., in August), I hope to keep in mind the realizations I had about the good things that came out of the lockdown time — new perspectives on what’s important in relationships, how we spend our time, what is meaningful in our life vs. what causes us anxiety — and use them going forward in the coming months and years. One challenge was how to be useful to others; many of the normal ways were impossible. A silver lining there was contemplating what is truly useful, both to our neighbor and ourselves.

Warm wishes to all. I’m eager to hear about the experiences of others.

Judy lives in Huntingdon Valley, PA, with husband, Garry; married 61 years. They are blessed with six children, plus grandchildren and one great-grand (so far). In addition to their marriage, her passions are family activities, relationships with friends, supporting elder siblings, working at the local thrift shop, reading (actual books), gardening, and being outdoors as much as possible. Judy can be contacted at judyhyatt1937@gmail.com.

Mary Alden, Washington state: My home is in the US Pacific Northwest, about 100 miles north of Seattle and about 40 miles south of Vancouver, BC. Prior to Covid-19, we attended services

intermittently in Seattle and Vancouver, neither of which have a church or resident pastor but rely on ministers traveling from some distance away. When the pandemic looked like it would halt the traveling ministers for more than a short time, a good friend from Vancouver Island asked me if I would consider leading a “Rise Above It” group by Zoom. My friend invited the people who attend church in Vancouver, and I invited several people from my northern area of Washington state. We began to meet in May 2020. When we completed “Rise Above It” everyone asked, “What should we do next?” We began to study a series of New Church Journey programs.

Now it is August 2021 and the group is still meeting almost weekly. Although I knew almost all of the people in the group from both Canada and the US, the Canadians and Americans had never before met with those outside their own country. We have a close and cohesive group of people, adults and children, who have gone through one Journey Program after another. So far, every participant has wanted to continue to meet and we even added one adult after the first program. Previous to the pandemic all of us had only occasional opportunities to attend church due to the length of time between traveling minister visits and the distance some of us had to travel to the services available. (Fun Fact: several families, both in the US and Canada, had to travel by ferry at least some of the distance to get to church.) Now we have our spiritual food on a much more regular basis.

Mary Alden is a retired RN and mother of 5 unique and adventurous middle-aged adults. Her spouse is Rev. Glenn Alden who has served in New Church organizations in the US, Canada, Australia and South Africa. Their temporary home is in South Africa where Glenn is serving the New Church Buccleuch congregation. Mary still uses the following email address: mary@sunrisechapel.org.

Lynnae Hyatt Duffalo, Avondale, Pennsylvania: My Covid-19 pandemic experience revolved around my roles both as a mother of two young girls and also as a pulmonary physician taking care of people sick with Covid-19 in the hospital. At times over the past year

and a half the clouds have seemed quite dark, but as with all dark times there have been shining points of beauty and clarity. For me these points center around finding a new appreciation for the many blessings in my life as well as the importance of caring for others.

One of my earliest opportunities to appreciate the hidden blessings of this strange time was actually when my family and I contracted Covid-19. Our illnesses were mild, but despite this my husband and I had to remain at home for a month before we could resume work in the hospital. During this month our hectic day-to-day life routine stopped, and for the first time ever we spent uninterrupted time together as a family. This time was precious, and I will remember it forever.

The pandemic has also helped me step back and regain an appreciation of the time spent with family and friends. The simple joy and comfort of celebrating shared history and experiences with old friends with whom I had not spoken in years was undeniable. I will also never forget the times our extended families were able to get together in person, spending fall and winter holidays outdoors (to keep everyone safe), hovering under heat lamps and in our garage with the doors open, but happily surrounded by their unwavering love and support. This was a true comfort in an uncertain time.

Finally, as a physician I was blessed to be in a position to help during a time of great need. I had the opportunity to be present for people who were sick and scared, while at the same time separated from their loved ones. Also, I provided support and guidance to their families who were unable to visit. I became part of a broad healthcare team in a new way, collaborating with other providers across my hospital and around the country in learning to combat this new illness. Truly this time reminded me why I joined the medical field in the first place, to be of service to others.

Through all these points I felt the Lord's love in a very real and present way, and feeling that and carrying it forward is my greatest silver lining.

Lynnae Hyatt Duffalo grew up in the Glenview New Church society and moved to Bryn Athyn for high school. She is now a practicing pulmonary physician in Delaware. Her husband, Chad Duffalo, is an infectious disease specialist.

Hannah Deckert, Vancouver, Canada: I moved to Vancouver when I married my husband in 2013 and I feel so deeply blessed to live in such a beautiful part of the world. When the pandemic hit in March of 2020 the US-Canada border closed. The border closure created a 20-month period of time in which I was unable to see my family. To put that in perspective, my youngest son is 2.5 years old and my siblings and parents have not seen him since he was 9 months old at Christmas 2019. This experience caused me to feel very isolated. It was in the depths of this isolation that I started going to a women's socially-distant outdoor bootcamp. I know for a fact if I had not felt so alone, I would not have joined the bootcamp. But I needed it for my mental health and to keep my body active. I went to class three times a week and made new friends. Two of the women I became friends with were in the same boat as me; living here with a husband and two kids and no other family. Over the last twelve months we have become family — the family we needed and couldn't have during the pandemic. Our children and our husbands have also become each other's safety net. We are one another's emergency contacts. We helped with unexpected hospital visits, feeding each other's families during a crisis and showing up for each other daily. We are forever bonded and these two women changed my life during the pandemic. My pandemic silver lining is friends that become family.

During the week Hannah thrives in her marketing career, finding new playgrounds with the kids, working out and making nutritious meals with her husband. On weekends Hannah enjoys finding adventures to go on, ranging from hiking and camping with her family to winery tours and exploring new places.

Margaret Horner Heldon, Sydney, Australia: At the time of writing, we here in Sydney Australia are well into our second Covid-19 Lockdown with no end in sight. This time it's the Delta strain and it is proving much harder to contain. Our little household consists of myself and my husband who are both seniors, and one of our grownup daughters who is studying a University degree online. We are fortunate to live in one of Sydney's most southern suburbs and are a five-minute walk from some delightful bush areas. Most days I can go there and enjoy the beauty and serenity. We aren't too badly affected by the Covid-19 restrictions unlike others whose life has been turned upside down. When asked to contribute some thoughts on 'Silver Linings' the following three blessings come to mind.

1. Live streaming of online church services. Our pastor Rev Todd Beiswenger has been live streaming our church services for many years so the transition for all of us in the congregation to experience these because of lockdowns happened very smoothly. For myself who plays the music practically every Sunday, this was a totally different involvement. Yes, I get a break from doing it but that isn't the silver lining I'm thinking of for me. It is the intimacy I have felt with the Lord. Whether it is at our worship cupboard set up with the Word and candles or at the kitchen table with the winter sun streaming through the window, I can sit with my husband and I can sing the songs! It is indeed a blessing.

2. More time. Because the normal routine of life is interrupted, each day I have the freedom to choose and think about what I should do. This has caused me to consider what is more useful, meaningful and purposeful. Initially I was enthusiastic to get to all the things that have been neglected over the years, but soon discovered I was following my heart, my loves and doing new projects.

One of the hardest things in lockdowns is not being able to see family and friends. We've all had to become creative in how we connect with each other. Video calls and messages are great but for the little grandchildren — my seven range from 1 to 5 years — it is fleeting.

A daughter who lives down the south coast from us mentioned on the phone one day that her two little girls were obsessed at looking at a photo of grandma and grandpa in a book we had given them for Christmas. It gave me the idea to make a Little Lockdown Book for each of them. I went out to my local bush and took many photos of things I thought would interest tiny children. Sometimes it was native flowers (there is always something blossoming even if it is winter) or a colourful gum (Eucalyptus) leaf or tiny steps in a rock. I had a lot of fun! Back home I hunted through my photos to find pictures of the girls with us from when they were newborn babies to the current time. I alternated pages of these with the bush discoveries and sewed them together on my sewing machine. It gave me great pleasure and the little ones loved them. Definitely a silver lining all round.

3. The big picture. Why is Covid-19 in the world? If you believe that good comes out of all situations then what is happening here? Arcana Coelestia 6303 says “When the Lord is with anyone, He leads them, and provides that all things which happen, whether sad or joyful, befall them for good: this is the Divine providence.” Is this a wake-up call for humanity? Is there an imbalance in nature? Are we abusing God’s creation by taking and not giving back? The planet is warming at an alarming rate since preindustrial times. It is becoming more and more polluted; animal habitats are being destroyed pushing many into extinction and now a virus is affecting every human being on the planet in one way or another. It makes sense to me that we all need to reflect on the way we live. The natural and the spiritual worlds are connected. Delta hasn’t finished with us yet. The silver lining here is more a hope and a wish that change will come to bring more clarity to how the Lord’s kingdom will be “as it is in heaven, so upon the Earth.”

Margaret and her husband Owen live in Loftus, New South Wales, Australia and attend the Hurstville New Church. Margaret loves bushwalking where she enjoys identifying native plants and flowers, meditating on the beauty around her and connecting with the Lord and others through creating bush art. Her email address is margaretheldon@optusnet.com.au.

Hidden Blessings

Heather Allais

*“My plans are not your plans, nor are your ways my ways,” says the LORD. “Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans than your plans.”
Isaiah 55: 8-9*

I have always felt the presence of the Lord guiding me through my life, but never more so than over the last eighteen months. With that has come the acceptance that as much as I think I can plan the course of my life, the Lord ultimately is the navigator, and all is within His Divine Providence. How did I come to this acceptance? This is my story.

I moved into my apartment in South Africa in December 2019. After owning it for three years and letting it out, it was finally time to live in my own home. Just as I was settling in to my “forever home,” with boxes still to unpack, I was alerted to a teaching position available at Carmel New Church School, Kitchener, Canada. The more I read and re-read the job description the more it seemed to be written for me. I submitted my application in February 2020. The only regret at the time was that, should I be offered the job, I would not be living in my home for very long.

Global news alerted us to the spread of Covid-19 infections,

and in early March 2020 the first case was reported in South Africa. By mid-March the writing was on the wall. New Church Buccleuch suspended onsite worship services. The school where I was teaching made the decision on the afternoon of Monday 16th March to close the premises and go online on Wednesday 18th March. The following weekend our president announced the commencement of a national lockdown on 27th March.

Over the next three months I was housebound. In April I interviewed for the teaching position over Zoom, a platform with which I had recently become familiar, and was offered the position shortly thereafter. Those months in lockdown were a blessing. I had time to live in my home. Make improvements. Unpack and repack boxes with immigration in mind.

During the months that followed I embarked on the process of visa applications, moving company quotations and a host of other tasks to secure my move to Canada. The pandemic had slowed the process down as many government offices both in South Africa and Canada were operating with a reduced staff contingent. At times it seemed frustratingly slow. At other times I was grateful for the additional time I was given—time to process the change of course my life had taken. I often found myself humming or singing the song “In His Time.” I had no control over the timing of events. It was all in the Lord’s hands.

My parents and I started to talk about “preparations” and not “plans.” Anything we planned was bound to be derailed by another delay, or lockdown, or such. But we could make preparations. We made preparations and waited for the Lord to open the door on opportunities. Which He did. I used the lockdown time to apply for a travel visa to the UK. Towards the end of 2020 international travel became possible again. At the suggestion of my sister living in the UK, and with travel visa in hand, my parents and I booked a flight to the UK to spend Christmas

with family. Within days of arriving in the UK the first Covid-19 variants were discovered in both the UK and South Africa, and international travel between the countries all but stopped. My two-week Christmas vacation in the UK extended to four weeks as I tried to secure a flight home. A blessing. A gift of additional time with my family in the UK.

My “plan” to have completed my mandatory quarantine period before the start of the new school year failed. The first day of teaching was from the UK via Zoom to my classroom in South Africa. An idea that would have seemed impossible in January the previous year, but lockdown and teaching online for months had shown us otherwise. As it turned out the children were only on site for the first three days of the school year before returning to online schooling. By then I had returned to South Africa, and I completed the mandatory quarantine period while teaching the children online. A hidden blessing. The start of each new school year is an adjustment time when the new students get to know each other, and me them. Online schooling during these first weeks made it possible for me to see each child’s face, without a face mask, and they could see mine. The return to onsite learning¹, although wonderful for interpersonal relationships, was a return to mandatory face masks.

New Church Buccleuch is presently in a transition period awaiting the placement of a pastor. The “plan” was for a rotation of international pastors to serve us for a month or more during this transition period. The pandemic put a stop to international travel, and we found ourselves without a pastor. In addition, in compliance with the strict lockdown restrictions, we had to suspend worship services. The Lord did not abandon us. He had a plan greater than ours. Pastors across the church adapted to the

1 The school year started on 13 January 2021 with 3 days onsite and then 2 weeks online. They returned to onsite learning on 1 February 2021.

global situation and made their worship services available online. I am grateful to them all, and particularly to the Revs. Malcolm Smith and Joel Glenn from our sister church in Westville, who invited us to join them for their online services. I also had the opportunity, like so many other New Church folk, to listen to the sermons of pastors across the world, sometimes attending more than one service on Sundays. A blessing and a treat for sure.

Unlike many others I was able to keep my job during lockdown and not have to take a salary cut. This enabled me to donate the travel costs I saved by working from home to our local orphanage. They suddenly found themselves with fewer patrons during this time and reached out to the community and to our church for assistance. Members of our congregation gave as they were able.

South Africans were all too aware of how the lockdown was affecting the livelihoods of small businesses and the incomes of ordinary South Africans. As these businesses looked for ways to stay afloat and pay their employees, so the public reached out to support their initiatives. I made a conscious decision to support local small businesses during this time and it is something which I continued to do after the restrictions were lifted. I was not alone in this.

In South Africa we have the concept of Ubuntu, “I am, because you are.” When times are tough South Africans pull together. We complied with the government restrictions and mandates, waited patiently in line to enter shops, wore face masks, sanitized our hands, and had our temperatures taken wherever we went. We gave where we were able. We prioritised the health and safety of others, especially the vulnerable. We faced our darkness as issues such as gender-based violence were exposed to the light. We learned to see the smiles in each other’s eyes. As it says in our national anthem, “. . . sounds the call to come together, and united we shall stand . . .”. Our rainbow nation has faced many

obstacles over the years, and in 2020 it was the pandemic. It was a blessing and an honour to witness and participate in the renewed community building efforts.

I was not in South Africa during the July 2021 riots and looting. The reasons for the situation are varied and complex, and will be unpacked by academics, historians and politicians over time. But what is clear is that the majority of South Africans from all races, genders, religions and cultures did not support the riots and looting, and came together with their Ubuntu spirit to support each other, and to rebuild their communities.

Where has the Lord been in all of this? Everywhere, and in everything. Through his Divine Providence He has been leading and guiding me every step of the way. As I write the final words of this reflection [August '21], I listen to the birds outside my apartment in Canada across the road from my new job at Carmel New Church School, anticipating my second vaccination in two days' time. The lyrics to the song "God is good" whisper across my lips. "God is good, all the time. He put a song of praise in this heart of mine. God is good, all the time. Through the darkest night His Light will shine. God is good."

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
Jeremiah 29:11*

Heather was born and raised in the New Church in South Africa. She says, "Over the years I have been an active member of Westville, Bryn Athyn, New Church Live and Buccleuch [societies]. It gives me great joy to serve my church community in a great variety of ways, from South African Corporation Representative for New Church Westville, to a New Church Live camera operator, to a member of the Bryn Athyn Choir, to holding the Outreach Portfolio on the New Church Buccleuch Executive Board, and a host of other offerings. I look forward to sharing my talents and useful service with Carmel New Church in the years to come." Heather can be contacted at hjallais@gmail.com.

Covid-19 Silver Linings in Education

Brita Synnestvedt Conroy

As we begin the 2021-22 school year, people all over the world and at all grade levels are well aware that the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic have had a significant impact on education. There are many articles available detailing the challenges teachers and students are facing. Before going into the “silver linings” that come to mind for me as an eighth-grade teacher, I’d like to acknowledge that teaching during Covid has been a difficult job. While school was remote, some were trying to teach their students how to form letter sounds correctly and how to use an online platform for the first time. Some were trying to teach chemistry without a lab. Others were trying to teach physical education or produce a play with everyone masked and six feet apart. We all did the best we could, and this year, we’ll do the best we can to catch up in areas where education got a little fuzzy.

At the Bryn Athyn Church School, I teach eighth grade girls, primarily, adding the boys for composition class and the annual eighth grade play. When BACS was initially shut down for two weeks due to Covid, we had just finished our play and were wrapping up a relaxing spring break. When the two-week closure was extended indefinitely, we teachers all started to scramble. There was a mad dash to find and learn to use remote tools with which we were unfamiliar. At the time, we couldn’t see any silver linings, but they were sure to come. Here are a few I have discovered.

Silver lining #1: increased communication and support among faculty. Lucas Mergen, with help from various tech-savvy teachers, presented the faculty with new online teaching tools and training sessions to learn how to use them. I supported others with what I knew about Google Classroom, and I received support from others about how to use Nearpod and Screencastify. I learned how to make PDFs from books using just my phone. I reluctantly learned how to create video lessons, and that video lessons over ten minutes long are too long. Covid became an opportunity for teachers to be learners as well, developing new skills that we can continue to use to enrich our courses.

Silver lining #2: the ability to meet remotely. While people in the business world may have been accustomed to holding online meetings, teachers at BACS were not. Covid introduced us to Zoom. What a useful tool! Over the past year and a half, I have participated in gatherings of students in classes, teachers in faculty and committee meetings, distant friends and relatives in chat sessions and game nights, and memorial services that some loved ones might not have been able to attend in person, even if the world were not under the cloud of Covid. Of course, there are limits to a good thing, and probably most of us have had our fill of Zooming. Still, having it in my tool kit means I can easily meet with parents “face to face,” even when they are unable to make it to an afternoon conference.

When summer break of 2020 began, we were all relieved, and I believed that we would be back to some sense of normalcy by fall. I couldn't have been more wrong. September of 2020 saw just a smoother, better-organized extension of the Covid protocols we had rushed to implement in the spring. We hopped in and out of remote and in-person school all year. This was jarring to say the least, but it did allow a few perks.

After getting acquainted with my new students, I was able to

spend a week in Oklahoma with my ninety-year-old mother and both my sisters, whom I had not seen altogether in a few years. I set up a computer in a back room with some closet doors behind me and taught my classes via Zoom at their east coast scheduled times. Drexel University's Zoom classes also enabled my twenty-one-year-old son to take a two-month road trip with a friend. They slept in an SUV, attended online classes at coffee shops, and visited several of the most notable National Parks the American West has to offer. Without the pandemic and remote courses, they would have missed out on a great adventure.

Silver lining #3: students gained new skills. There is a lot of chatter about skills students are lacking due to interrupted education. I'm not saying that's not true—they are. However, BACS students did gain some new skills too. Before Covid hit, the seventh and eighth grade students had already been using Google Classroom, a platform where teachers and students can share information back and forth online. The faculty had talked about perhaps including the sixth graders in this system at some point in the future. Well, lockdown brought the future to the present. Not only did sixth graders and their teachers start using it, but fifth grade as well. Sure, it was bumpy at first, especially with the teachers not having had a summer to train, but a spirit of camaraderie developed as everyone learned together. Now, the students entering seventh grade don't need to be taught some things that they normally would have been.

The eighth graders learned some new skills too. They were unable to prepare and present a traditional eighth grade play, so we had to come up with a Covid-friendly alternative. This resulted in a movie comprised of six short stories tied together with narrator/hosts. The students took well-known fairy tales and rewrote them as play scripts with their own personal flair. They collected props (many from the Bryn Athyn Thrift Shop), made props that could not be found (like a dead deer), acted out roles outdoors, directed and filmed each other,

and edited their clips together into a movie the whole community could watch from the safety of their own living rooms. The movie was received with great enthusiasm, and the students seemed to enjoy trying their hands at aspects of drama production they normally would not have experienced.

Silver lining #4: virtual field trips. In the spring of 2020, we had a big co-ed field trip planned for the eighth graders. We had to cancel, because it was not considered safe to travel close together in a bus. Then our destination shut down as well. Missing the trip was very disappointing, as you can imagine, so my co-teacher, Tony Griffin, and I sought out other opportunities for the '20-'21 school year. Our students enjoyed a virtual tour of the Tenement Museum in NYC and another of Chinatown in San Francisco. Both of them were very interesting and very affordable. Many new virtual tours are available since Covid, and they make it possible for a class to “travel” to locations we could never afford to go to by bus. This year, we have three virtual tours arranged, one for each term, in addition to safe local programs.

It's easy to focus on the hardships and losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It takes more intention to find the silver linings, but they are there. They are always there in the darkest of times. While the “numbers” right now are not good and could get worse before they get better, I am still optimistic that this pandemic won't last forever and that people will bounce back stronger and wiser than before, changed for the better in ways only the Lord can foresee.

For more than twenty-three years, Brita Synnestvedt Conroy has taught children (in Kempton and Bryn Athyn, PA, and in Tucson, AZ), ranging in age from preschool to tenth grade. She is currently teaching Language Arts and Social Studies. She lives in Bryn Athyn with her husband, Steve, and mother-in-law, Helen Kennedy, and has two twenty-something children. She can be contacted at brita.conroy@bacs.org.

Above the Heavens

Laurel Odhner Powell

The following is a work of fiction which presents an important question to the reader at the end.

*I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people:
and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.
For thy mercy is great above the heavens:
and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. (Psalm 108:2-4)*

Carly was Ora's only child. When Carly got married and the young couple bought a rundown farm, Ora was still young enough to climb the roof of "her kids'" old barn.

Ora herself had married right out of high school to Carly's father, a young Marine recruit. After a golden honeymoon, he bravely kissed his bride goodbye, and went missing in the early years of Vietnam.

Widowed, Ora raised Carly in her parents' house, among the big crowd of Ora's younger siblings. Ora's father was a busy research scientist, with a meager income. Commandeering his offspring to help grow a big vegetable garden was one of the ways he managed to feed them all, and was sometimes part of his research. Ora had grown up thinking that when her Dad sent her out to the tomato patch to dig thistles, it was cruel and unusual punishment. As an adult, her contribution to the family economy was her part-time job in a New Church college office.

But little Carly loved nothing better than following her Gram-pa around the garden pulling weeds.

Then, like the weeds she loved to pull, Carly was suddenly grown. She left the church school and the ancestral vegetable garden and went off to a far-away college. There she met Ruben, a real farm boy, though raised to have higher aspirations.

“Get off this farm!” Ruben’s father always said. “Be a lawyer or a doctor—do something you can make a living at.” And he laid by for Ruben a hard won college fund to back up his words. But Ruben didn’t share his father’s dream for him. He always loved working the farm, and had ideas of his own about farming, that his father thought were crazy. He and Carly dropped out of college together, worked a year or two on organic farming communes, and in time convinced Ruben’s father they were serious. He threw up his hands in disgust and gave them the college fund to buy themselves an old abandoned farm.

Ora had a tiny pop-up camper, bought for the camping trips of Carly’s childhood. She hitched it to her rusty little car, and took to spending her vacations on the kids’ farm, learning to patch shingles, replace joists, take out and rebuild a window sash. She studied with them the fine points of maintaining an outdoor privy, and cleaning out a well. She learned to turn her hatred of thistles into a love of catching them before they went to seed.

Carly and Ruben lived in a tent while they propped up the sagging floor of the kitchen wing, which was in better shape than the rest of the farmhouse; they fixed the steps down to the root cellar, and cleaned out the attic above the kitchen so they had some dry storage space. Then they moved into the kitchen with all they owned, which wasn’t much, and lived in that one room while they worked on the rest of the house.

The front rooms of the house had holes through floors, falling staircases, a crumbling chimney. The first year, the kids

worked mostly on stopping the rain coming in, patching the roof, repairing windows, replacing the worst of the siding.

A neighbor came over to help out, and Ruben introduced him to Ora.

“Halvor here is a carpenter. I do some work for him sometimes. He looked over this place before we bought it, and said it just might be worth trying to fix up.”

“Ya,” Halvor said, “I told these kids they was crazy. But they’re doing a good job. I give them a hand with that iron bedstead upstairs that was hanging right through the parlor ceiling. The floor below was rotten, too! But we lay planks across to walk on, and get it down. They got it in the kitchen now. But the walls is pretty good, and the foundation. It’ll be okay. A lot of work, though. I’ll come over when you get to those stairs, Ruben. But I was going to take another look at that barn.”

Out in the barn Halvor pointed out the good parts. “The old man, when he couldn’t farm no more, he rented out the fields, and I think the fellow tilling it did these repairs on the barn. It’s in better shape than the house, by a long shot. I don’t think that steel roof could a’ been more’n thirty year old. But if you don’t fix that,” he said, pointing straight up, “it’ll be as bad as the house pretty soon, you betcha.”

They were looking up from the middle of the barn floor into clear blue sky. Away out in the meadow lay a big, crumpled section of corrugated roofing, which must have blown off not long before they bought the farm, because the floor wasn’t rotting yet.

“Once you get the roof tight on the house, you better get after this,” Halvor said.

So the second summer Ora spent on Carly’s and Ruben’s farm, the three of them were crawling around on the barn rafters, harnessed with ropes to the ridgepole, ripping off what was left

of the torn-up side of the roof to make way for the new.

In between days of that, they also had to do odd jobs, painting for Halvor and field work for neighboring farmers, to bring in enough cash to keep going. They were working mighty hard, and for the few weeks Ora was there, she was working right along with them.

At the end of Ora's first morning of working with them on the barn, they all climbed down to get lunch. Then Ruben drove off in his rattletrap pickup to get some hardware in the village, yelling out the window, "Don't go back up on the roof till I get home! Take a break."

So Carly and Ora took their time clearing up lunch. They swept the floor, and then stood in the kitchen doorway with brooms in their hands, looking down into a big hole where a chunk of the dining room floor had rotted through. That's when Carly said, "Mom. I'm going to have a baby."

Ora looked up into Carly's shyly shining eyes, and back down at the chasm in front of them, then around at the circumstances her precious daughter lived in.

The iron bedstead Halvor had plucked from the parlor ceiling filled the far end of the kitchen. The near end was dominated by the big old cast iron cookstove. A tall cupboard was built into one side wall. There was barely room for the other furnishings the kids had found in the house or the thrift shop or a neighbor's trash: a battered chest of drawers, a small kitchen table, four broken chairs, and a coat tree. For the summer, the washstand was a bench on the back porch. In this secluded piece of wilderness, a bath outdoors by moonlight was pure & private delight; but where would they wash a baby, come winter? What would stop a crawling child falling through the dining room floor?

Ora looked back at Carly's face, absorbing its radiant joy. But under the radiance she could see a haze of weariness. Ora looked

at her with new eyes. She'd been admiring the toughness and strength Carly had developed, and that the baby fat she'd kept all through her teens was finally gone—but now Ora could see how very gone it was: she was really too thin, and there were blue circles under her eyes.

A voice in Ora's head wanted to shout, "Lie down, lie down! You're working too hard!" But she kept that quiet, and smiled and said, "Wow. My baby having a baby. I must be getting ancient." Carly giggled at her jest, and Ora's heart did a back flip for love.

"Oh, sweetie," she said, putting her arms around her daughter, "I'm so glad. Does Ruben know?"

"Yes. And we told his Mom and Dad. Mother's thrilled; Dad was furious, but he's coming round. I think he was still thinking he could talk us out of farming and get Ruben back into school" Carly sighed, ". . . and saw a baby as the final blow to his dream. Oh, and we asked the church lady who runs the thrift store to watch out for a baby coach, so the whole congregation probably knows by now."

"How long have you known?"

"We found out for sure last week when we went up to town, but it's a couple months I've been wondering. Doctor says it's probably about two and a half months along."

Again the voice-alarm went off in Ora's head: "It's too soon! You're telling too many people! It's bad luck, bad luck" Somewhere in the back of Ora's memory were stories from friends & relations who'd had sad experiences with first-trimester pregnancies that didn't last, and with the unwelcome advice and questions they'd endured afterward.

But Ora shushed the voice again, and said, "Well, to celebrate, how about you take a nap while I make a pot of tea, and we'll have a little mothers-only party?"

Carly looked out the back door toward the garden for a long

anxious moment, then took a deep breath and sighed, “Yeah, that sounds wonderful.”

Ora added a few sticks to the fire in the stove, and filled the kettle full so it would take a long time to boil, then left Carly resting and slipped out to the garden to try to erase a smidgen of her daughter’s anxiety. She mulched some wilting vegetable rows with their own weeds and a bale of moldy straw (Ruben had gotten several truckloads from a neighbor, in exchange for clearing it out of his barn and a few loaves of Carly’s brown bread thrown in). Ora came in from the garden with vegetables for supper and a bowlful of blackberries to go with their tea.

The month flew by, and the end of Ora’s vacation came looming up into next week. The tearing off of the barn roof was done, but Ora realized she wasn’t going to be there to see the new roof finished. Halvor hooked Ruben up with a farmer who had enough surplus roofing to cover the damaged part of the barn. They were unloading it off a borrowed trailer hitched behind Ruben’s truck, when Carly set down her end of the load, said, “I’ll be back in a minute,” and walked off to the outhouse. When she came back, she was crying.

“Honey?” Ora asked.

Carly whispered, “Mom, I’m bleeding.”

“Oh, no.”

They left the trailer hitched to the truck, and piled into Ora’s little car to drive up to town. All the way there, the voice in Ora’s head was wailing, “I told you so, I told you so!”

The doctor explained that the baby probably had not been formed right, and had already died some time ago, and the womb was now just getting rid of a false start.

Ora felt as if he were casually dismissing the child she already loved as an unimportant science experiment gone wrong. She hated him.

He said they should clean it out, just to be safe, and sent them to the hospital.

As the nurses helped Carly shower, and poked needles into her veins, and Ruben stood at the nurses' desk filling out paperwork, Ora sat alone in a steel and plastic armchair, thinking, "This is real. It is too late to save it. They are taking away my grandbaby.

"What if this were me, and the baby were Carly? What if my Carly had never been born? I would have nothing left of my brave soldier husband. Who would this baby have been if it had lived? This child we will never know now?"

Ora wanted to shout, "Lord, WHY?" But all she could say was, "I know You know why, and that's enough. Thy will be done."

When the nurses brought a sleeping Carly back and tucked her into the bed, she looked so clean and new and rested that the voice in Ora's head said, "Phew. Now you won't have to worry about a baby falling through those floors."

The breath of relief was followed immediately by a bitter flood of shame. "How could I think, even for a moment," she wondered, "of being glad that my grandchild is dead? My poor daughter!"

Carly was still coming out of the anaesthesia, confused and groggy, as Ora helped her dress and Ruben led her to the car. They were all pretty quiet on the way home. When they got there, Carly lay down to rest, and Ruben lay down beside her. Ora figured they needed time to themselves, and went off to her camper.

Ora didn't carry much of a library around in the pop-up tent trailer. For one thing, it was small, and even so, it was more than enough load for her tiny car. For another thing, it leaked. There was a serious limit to how much she could keep dry in

the storage compartment. This wasn't any of your new-fangled campers—it opened up into a canvas tent over a pair of fold-out cots, a storage box that doubled as a bench, and a piece of floor just big enough to walk on. But the box held her Bible, a stack of spiral notebooks, and whatever volume or two of Swedenborg she was studying at the time, tucked in beside beans and rice and camping gear for the long drive, and two or three changes of clothes.

Ora sat in the doorway of the camper, with her books on the floor beside her, and prayed for an explanation. Then she opened the Bible to a favorite Psalm:

My substance was not hid from Thee,
when I was made in secret,
and curiously wrought in the lower
parts of the earth.
Thine eyes did see my substance,
yet being imperfect;
and in Thy book all my members were written,
which in continuance were fashioned,
when as yet there was none of them.
How precious are Thy thoughts unto me,
O God! How great is the sum of them!
. . . Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:
depart from me, therefore,
ye bloody men.
. . . I hate them with a perfect hatred:
I count them mine enemies.
Search me, O God, and know my heart:
try me and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.
(*Psalm* 139:15-17,19,22-24)

The bitter anger Ora was feeling toward the doctors and nurses, and toward herself for not heeding the warning voices in her head, began to be washed away. It was not her job to be in control of this.

Back in her other life, her work at the New Church college often took her into the offices of bishops and professors of theology. Some member of the clergy there had once sneaked her a private copy of an unpublished doctrinal study on the souls of unborn babies. Ora couldn't remember now when or why; but the Lord seems to keep all these loose threads in His hands, and weaves them into the pattern. She picked up the volume of *Arcana Caelestia* she happened to have with her, and the folded sheets of those mimeographed notes fell out of the back of the book.

The pages where they had fallen from had this passage marked:

... Man's internal is that from which he is man, and by which he is distinguished from animals. By means of this internal he lives after death, and to eternity a man, and by means of it the Lord is united to man. The very heaven that is closest to the Lord is composed of these human internals; but this is above even the inmost angelic heaven, and therefore these internals belong to the Lord Himself. By this means the whole human race is most present under the Lord's eyes

Arcana Caelestia 1999:3

"There you are, my darling baby," Ora said, "right there in His arms, above all the heavens."

By then her eyes were too full of tears to read the pages of the minister's paper, but she remembered vaguely that he had gathered many passages to support his suggestion that the unborn child has a life and use in that realm of the inmost soul.

"Above all the angels, closest to the Lord," Ora said to Ruben

and Carly. “That’s the rumor I heard.”

A few years went by. With awl and wax and scraps of canvas, Ora kept patching the camper. She broke an ankle helping Ruben and Halvor fix the farmhouse’s front stairs; when Ruben and Carly started working on the chimney, Ora decided not to climb the roof this time. Carly had another miscarriage. Ora looked in a mirror and saw a streak of grey creeping through her dark curls. But a year came when Ora pulled into the farm with the camper, and Carly marched her up a sturdy flight of stairs, into a front bedroom where the iron bed stood tall on a solid floor—and laid a sleeping baby in Ora’s arms.

The baby opened its eyes and looked up into Ora’s.

“Oh, sweetie. You precious . . .” Ora paused, heart too full; “. . . you have a couple of very special angels hovering around your inmost soul.”

Postscript

*This telling of the story is fiction. It’s a story that often doesn’t get told at all, and maybe this will open some doors a crack for sharing. In real life, Rev. B. David Holm’s paper, *Eternal Life of the Embryo*, was presented to the Council of the Clergy in 1959, and published posthumously in *New Church Life* in 1990. I was given a chance to read it in the early 1970s, shortly before being witness to a miscarriage. The doctrine concerning unborn souls is still controversial; my story and the meager research that went into it do not pretend to give an authoritative answer, only one experience of taking comfort in one interpretation of what the Writings say. A lively exchange of opinions, stretching from 1891 to 2006, can be found in *New Church Life*’s archives by searching “unborn” and “embryo.”*

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Theta Alpha Scholarships

Theta Alpha International, the New Church Women's organization that champions the advancement and support of New Church education, is awarding financial aid scholarships for 2022-2023 to support girls attending the Academy of the New Church and women attending Bryn Athyn College of the New Church.

Bryn Athyn College Awards Five Scholarships

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

Three scholarships are available to women in the College who are studying Religion (major, minor, ID), who are in the MARS program, or who are international students. Two \$2,000 and one \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded to eligible recipients who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. These merit-based scholarships can be used for tuition, college fees, books or supplies.

Two scholarships are available to women attending Bryn Athyn College earning a Masters degree who desire New Church teaching and exemplify its teachings. Each award is worth \$2000 to be directly paid to the college for tuition, college fees, or books.

Applications are due February 1, 2022. Email anccdaughters@gmail.com, or phone Sarah Wong at Bryn Athyn College, 267-502-6085, or use the website, www.brynathyn.edu.

NEW Academy Girls School Scholarships

Two scholarships of \$2,500 each are offered for the 2022-2023 school year for up to two young women in the Academy Girls School who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. The money may be used toward tuition, books or fees. These are annual merit-based and need-based scholarships and may be applied for yearly. Applications are due March 15, 2022. Email anccdaughters@gmail.com.

Scholarship Winners

2021-2022 for BAC

- Jordan Brunne, \$2,000 Theta Alpha International Religious Studies Scholarship.
- Jade Deibert, \$2,100 Theta Alpha International Education Scholarship

2021-2022 for ANC

- Deirdre Bongers, \$2,500
- Angeliese Wahl, \$2,500

There were no Graduate level scholarships given out this year.

Websites and Blogs of Readers

*If you'd like your blog or website included here,
please send the information to the editor.*

Jenn Beiswenger – artist, wordsmith, carer: *beiswenger.net/renjenn*

Eva Björkström – her lovely gardens can be seen on YouTube by searching her name

Karla Buick – directory of artists who create specifically New Church-themed art: *silverbrancharts.com*

Jim deMaine – a doctor's thoughts and stories from his 32 years of practice: *endoflifeblog.com*

Diana Hasen – author children's books *stevieandharley.com*

Chandra Hoffman – writer: *chandrahoffman.com*

Helen Kennedy – writer: *hmk98.blogspot.com*

Kelly Lucero – Children's book author and storyteller:
KellyLucero.com

Lara Muth – writer: *twitter.com/lyramariner*

Abbey Nash – writer: *abbeynash.com*

Tiffany Perry – poet: *naturepoetrysite.wordpress.com*

Hilda Rogers – artist: *dailypaintworks.com/Artists/hilda-rogers-8286, hilda5462.wordpress.com*

Kerstin Sandstrom – artist: *kerstinsandstrom.wordpress.com*

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THETA ALPHA JOURNAL

Published by Theta Alpha International
P.O. Box 154

Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

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LANGHORNE, PA
PERMIT NO. 81