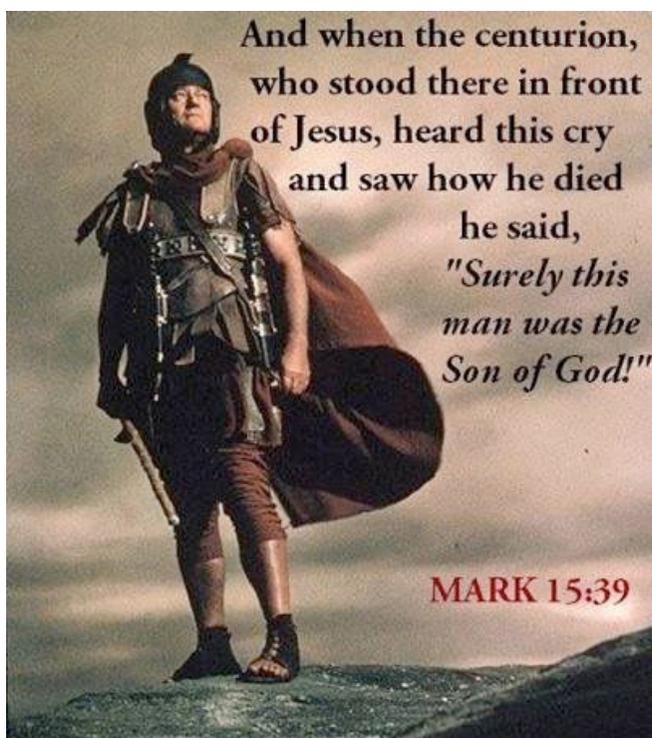


NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MARCH/APRIL 2022



The Centurion's Confession

When the Lord said on the cross, "It is finished," and the world devolved into earthquakes, a Centurion witness recognized that "Surely this was the Son of God," heralding the "morning star" of Easter's redeeming hope. (Read "The Centurion's Confession" on page 101)

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New Church Life

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In This Issue

Editorials (page 93) include:

- *The Hope of the Remnant*: Part of the message from the horror of the cross is that we are part of the remnant to guide and grow the church within us. That is the hope of what the Centurion witnessed – the true hope in the Son of God.
- *Signs of the Times*: Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we mostly fail to discern the signs of our times, but fortunately the Lord is the one guiding our spiritual path and overseeing our spiritual development.

The Centurion's Confession at the tumultuous death of Jesus on the cross is key to that final victory. In a sermon the Rev. James Cooper says "the Centurion stands for all those people who want to believe in the Lord, but for one reason or another have not yet found Him." (Page 101)

In a sermon, *Listening with Humility*, the Rev. Barry Halterman says: "Having an understanding heart requires intellectual humility. It requires us to look at other people's ideas with the sincere belief that we can learn from them." (Page 107)

In the first of a two-part series, the Rev. Daniel Goodenough offers Reflections on Divine Love and Sensing Life as Our Own: "Choose for Yourselves This Day." "If we are to love our neighbors in reality," he writes, "we need to do so from authentic love we receive from the Lord. This means to love others as He loves them. If our wishes for our neighbor are different from the Lord's wishes, we are not loving him as God loves him." (Page 112)

Writing From the Bishop's Office the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth describes the success of building online communities offered by the General Church. (Page 124)

The Rev. Erik Buss writes about the familiar teaching, Till Death Do Us Part Vs. the Forever of conjugal love in heaven. "Only what is from the Lord lasts to eternity. The challenge of our lives is to learn to place His values and His eternal perspective at the center of our lives and our marriages." (Page 126)

Part of *The Trouble with the Old Testament* writes the Rev. Michael Gladish is all the old laws that seem irrelevant to today's world. But some – such as teachings against homosexuality – never lose their power. “So we are left, in revelation and especially in the New Church, with this challenge: Will we have the courage and the patience to examine carefully the teachings that fly in the face of our contemporary culture, and will we have the integrity to apply the ones that still apply literally – in our own lives if not in what we honor and respect among others?” (Page 128)

Craig Bostock, a graduate of the Bryn Athyn College Theological School's MARS program offers a personal study on *What the Writings Say About Charity*. (Page 135)

The Rev. William Clifford asks, *Whose Wife is She?*—a study of the Lord's confrontation with the Sadducees. “One is filled with awe and wonder,” he writes, “when we see how the Lord brings out the implied teachings of the Old Testament and weaves in the eternal truths about marriage. It is wonderful to see how the Lord builds upon His previous teachings to present the truth more forcefully to His audience, both then and now.” (Page 152)

Church News (page 160) includes:

- Highlights from the Academy Board of Trustees meeting
- A report from Glencairn Museum on what a year of closure for upgrading will mean for ongoing programs
- A new Principal for Bryn Athyn Church School
- A new book on *Swedenborg's Principles of Usefulness*
- A guide to online services

Coming in the May/June issue: Responses to the article in the January/February issue by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.: *Standing for Marriage in Today's World – a Church Perspective*.

Editorials

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

THE HOPE OF THE REMNANT

The darkest moment of civilization occurred on the cross when Jesus accepted a sponge filled with vinegar, cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Imagine the fear and horror of His faithful followers – the women and the disciples. Suddenly the veil of the temple was rent in two and there were cataclysmic earthquakes. All hope from the Lord’s life on earth seemed lost.

But as the Rev. James Cooper describes in his Easter sermon, *The Centurion’s Confession* (page 101), this was the beginning of the Easter promise of our salvation – with all the built-up falsity being replaced with genuine truth from the Word. The Centurion immediately grasped the meaning – that there was no doubt Jesus was a “righteous man” and truly “the Son of God.” And although the world was plunged into terrifying darkness, the Centurion saw the promise for us all – “the morning star.”

This is the ultimate promise that revived all hope on Easter morning that “He is risen” and that forever we have a new light to guide us into “all truth.” The enduring promise – from the despair of the cross through all of the trials of our wayward history – is that the Lord only needs a remnant for the Church to descend “from God out of heaven” as “the crown of all churches.” It is our blessing – and our responsibility – to be a nurturing part of that remnant.

That may sound daunting, especially with the growth of the Church so agonizingly slow, against the prolonged cleansing of the Last Judgment. But hope is ever sustained throughout the Word.

We know that the Church exists only where the Lord is known and loved, and where the Word is truly understood. That is our role as the remnant.

We have the early promise in *Ezekiel* 14:22: “Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters.” But the remnant cannot just exist and drift through history. It must be nurtured through our own regeneration.

Arcana Coelestia 530 explains: “The situation with churches or doctrines

(is) that they dwindle away until nothing remains any longer of the goods and truths of faith. And when that point has been reached that Church is in the Word called vastated. Nevertheless a remnant is always preserved, that is, some people are preserved, no matter how few, with whom the good and truth of faith persist. And unless that good and truth of faith were preserved with those people there would be no conjunction of heaven with the human race.”

In *Revelation* the Woman Clothed with the Sun escapes into the wilderness to protect and nurture her unborn son from the serpent. This represents the New Church being preserved among a few while provision was made for it to be preserved and protected.

We are not told how quickly or slowly all of this will happen – just that “the Church should be at first among a few and that it should successively increase among many.” This is because for the truths of the New Church to be widely accepted, the falsities of the former church must first be removed – the long, arduous process of the Last Judgment.

Through all of this process it is our privilege and responsibility to be a part of the remnant that will grow the Church into the fulness of its destiny. Our role and responsibility is to grow the Church within us by living its truth – not to be discouraged but to keep the faith of the Centurion in the darkest moment on the cross that we all shall nurture the remnant that makes us human and forever reflect the glory and the promise of that “morning star.”

(BMH)

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

When the Pharisees and Sadducees challenged the Lord, asking Him for a sign that what He was saying was true, He replied:

“You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. (*Matthew 16.3*)

What He meant here is that they did not realize what was happening in the world. The same could be said about any of us because these things are hard to know. It is hard to know which of the many narratives that we hear about what is going on is accurate, or the best way of framing our situation. When people give their opinions, others will often challenge them to show evidence for their views.

Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, however, the Lord can discern the signs of the times:

“The Lord alone sees the state of each person's life from its inmost qualities to its outmost ones, including what the person was like from infancy to old age and what he will be like to eternity, as well as to what place he will be assigned in heaven or in hell. Moreover,

the Lord sees this instantaneously, and does so of Himself, because He is Divine truth itself or the Word. Angels and people, on the other hand, cannot do this in the least, because they are finite, and finite people see only a few, outward qualities; and even these they do not see of themselves, but from the Lord. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 262)

We do not see these things, and the few outward qualities that we do see we do not see from ourselves, but from the Lord.

If the Pharisees and Sadducees could have read the signs of the times they would have understood that the time was past for their religious views, that it was time to teach a different message. They would have understood that a judgment was happening, and that genuine religion was to be found in loving the Lord and loving the neighbor, and nowhere else. They would have seen that the Lord was the Messiah and that the people mostly did not recognize Him – but that those few who did would go on to change the world. They would have seen that there was a multitude of factors coming together that meant that the time was right for the Lord's coming into the world.

What would we see if we could recognize the signs of our times? According to the Writings we would see the truth about the state of the church, the truth about what is going on in the world. We would understand how it will happen that truth and justice will prevail, and how and where the New Jerusalem will be established.

Even though I am too blind to see these things clearly, as we all are, I still love to speculate about what is happening and what will happen. I love to look for patterns and form conclusions about the world from what I see, as we all do. For example, a colleague recently brought the work of a Christian commentator named Aaron Renn to my attention, and I was struck by his assessment of the recent history and current state of North American culture with respect to religion. He talks about how the world has changed in its attitude to religion over the past 50 years or so, moving from a world in which religion is considered a positive thing to one where it is seen as a negative:

1. **Positive World (Pre-1994).** To be seen as a religious person and one who exemplifies traditional Christian norms is a social positive. Christianity is a status enhancer. In some cases failure to embrace those norms hurt you.
2. **Neutral World (1994-2014).** Christianity is seen as a socially neutral attribute. It no longer had dominant status in society, but to be seen as a religious person is not a knock either. It's more like a personal affectation or hobby. Traditional norms of behavior retain residual force.
3. **Negative World (2014-).** In this world, being a Christian is a social

negative, especially in high status positions. Christianity in many ways is seen as undermining the social good. Traditional norms are expressly repudiated.

(*“Welcome to the Negative World”*, Aaron Renn, *americanreformer.org*; August 4, 2021)

These are time periods that most of those reading this will likely be familiar with, and you can judge for yourself whether his evaluation is accurate. You might even want to guess at the specific events or historical developments that led Renn to give these “worlds” the dates that he assigns to them. We have certainly seen signs of changes like these in the General Church and in our New Church schools at all levels. Christianity has somehow gone from being seen as a positive force to being one that is associated with misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, child abuse and racism. These things are signs of the times.

In an editorial in our September/October 2021 issue, we pointed to the Sexual Revolution, and specifically the invention of the birth control pill, as a recent cause of these kinds of changes in attitude. But we also pointed out that the real cause of the struggles that we see in North American and European Christianity has always been the Last Judgment of 1757.

It remains an open question as to what the best responses are to these kinds of developments. In many ways Renn’s Negative World is the one that the Academy Movement and the General Church were specifically designed to address. New Church Education, distinctive New Church social life, strict adherence to the Writings as the Word of God, are all parts of a strategy aimed at dealing with these signs of the times.

Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we mostly fail to discern the signs of the times. Fortunately the Lord is the one guiding our spiritual path and overseeing our spiritual development.

Again, as was said in the editorial above, through all of this process it is our hope and responsibility to be a part of the remnant that will grow the Church into the fulness of its destiny. Our role and responsibility is to grow the Church within us by living its truth, whether we are able to discern the signs of the times or not.

(JFS)

Letters to the Editors

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

We Live in Two Worlds

To The Editors:

There is talk going on about how someday we will be living in an Artificial Intelligence (AI) world. It can be assumed that this “other” AI world is a time-and-space world of artifice that is predicted to somehow get along with our present physical world of time and space.

The simple fact is we already live in two worlds simultaneously: the natural world of time and space and the spiritual world which is a “state of concrete being.” All creation begins with the Divine Love and Divine Wisdom of the Creator of the universe. At one time in the history of the world the understanding of this truth was believed. At some point, people started to turn away from believing the truth about the creation. That is the present situation, represented by a dark cloud of fear and terror hovering over planet earth.

At the same time, the world of natural science is hopeful of finding the beginning of the universe. The James Webb Space Telescope was launched into space on Christmas Day 2021. The goal, as reported: “Now, ‘webb’ is ready to help us understand the origins of the universe and begin to answer key questions about our existence, such as where we came from and if we’re alone in the cosmos.”

Natural science is based on the assumption that everything relates to space and time in a natural universe. [Question: Isn’t it possible that deep down we sense there is meaning in life and a sense that “we are not alone”?]

The teachings for the New Church are clear about the creation of the universe. And we have our guardian angels who are with us.

I think taking this point of view of there being two worlds of nature and Artificial Intelligence is going to help people discover how true it is that there

are two worlds – and one of these worlds is the Spiritual World of the Holy City New Jerusalem descended on earth.

It is essential that we humans have free choice. One of God's gifts to us is the freedom for each of us to choose for ourselves what to believe about things spiritual. We are blessed to be among those remnants in today's world believing in Holy Scripture and the teachings for the New Church. They contain love and truth offered to all.

Consider the following:

- What is Love? We are taught, "Love is Life." (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 1)
- What is Truth? Twelve aspects of Truth can be found in teachings for the New Church: Celestial, Spiritual, Natural, Divine, Eternal, Internal, Rational, Scientific, Intellectual, Sensuous, Truth of Good, Good of Truth. [The Truth will set us free]

As the dark clouds increase over the earth, we are given the gift of The New Century Edition of *Secrets of Heaven*. The light of the Spiritual Sun shines down upon us all. May we open our spiritual eyes and let in the Heavenly Light.

Michael A. Brown
Tucson, Arizona

Good Value for New Church Education

To The Editors:

(*From remarks made at a meeting of the Bryn Athyn Society, October 13, 2021*)

Re: Voting on a proposed new school for Bryn Athyn Church School at an estimated cost of \$70 million. From Richard Synnestvedt, age 83. I went to the Immanuel Church School in Glenview (Illinois) and to the Academy of the New Church (Bryn Athyn). I've read *New Church Life* most of my adult life.

I must ask what I've asked for some years: Do we get good value for the money we spend on K-12 schools and New Church education?

I don't think so. Let me explain.

The General Church has scarcely grown in the 50 or 60 years that I've been reading the annual reports. What little growth there has been has occurred mostly overseas.

I don't wish to be misunderstood. I have great admiration for most of our

teachers in the elementary and secondary schools. I do, however, question the devotion and commitment of more than a few parents of the students, judging from their church attendance and attendance at the September 29 Society Meeting here, where plans for a new school building were unveiled.

The sorry conclusion I've come to is, in a nutshell: our teachers and parents, too many other adults, AND our priests, are no match for the powerful, deceptive, seductive, secular culture that surrounds us and which too often influences our thinking and our behavior.

Can anybody seriously say New Church men and women have not fallen prey to the disorders that are rending the nation's social fabric: sex outside marriage, single mom families, abortion, adultery, divorce, acceptance of drug abuse, homosexuality, humongous personal and national debt, and wrong-headed, self-absorbed thinking about individual rights?

I believe our priesthood and lay leadership have been gravely mistaken in their efforts to avoid serious political discussions and debate, for it is in politics that many destructive social and cultural trends often gain respectability. Acceptance of pre-marital sex, abortion, gay marriage and pornography come to mind.

I'm no scholar but I have quite a list of teachings in the Heavenly Doctrines relevant to the disorders rending the nation's social fabric – teachings I seldom hear in sermons or read about in the pages of *New Church Life*.

So, I wonder whether some of the \$70 million proposed for a new school building might be put to better use. For example, trying to find out why so many who have attended New Church grade schools and/or the Academy do not become contributing members of the General Church.

How is it that the Mormon Church grows without having religious schools?

Richard Synnestvedt
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Golden Rule or Silver Rule?

To The Editors:

In her retirement years, my mother, Mae Soneson Linquist, found a comforting sense of being useful by sewing needlepoint embroidery. After she finished a picture I would make an oak frame for it, complete with acid-free backboard

and glass front.

One framed picture that still hangs in my home displays the words: DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO UNTO YOU. This, of course, is from the Word: “Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (*Matthew 7:12*)

This is known universally as The Golden Rule. Yet the name, Golden Rule, does not occur anywhere in the Lord’s threefold Word. We can read this information about that name on the Internet: “The term, ‘Golden Rule,’ began to be used widely in the early 17th century in Britain by Anglican theologians and preachers.”

Further, the words Golden Rule seem to me to be an appropriate reference to the love of the neighbor.

Consider this quote from *Heaven and Hell* 23: “Celestial love is love to the Lord and spiritual love is love toward the neighbor.”

Since gold is generally considered to be a more precious and valuable metal than silver, just as love of the Lord is a more exalted love than love toward the neighbor, I am inclined to think of the Divine command to love the Lord, as the Golden Rule and the injunction to have love toward the neighbor as the Silver Rule.

So that we may see first the Golden Rule and then the Silver Rule, I would suggest, in the following quotation from *Matthew 22:37-39* (Kempton Translation 2002):

And Jesus said to him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God in thy whole heart, thy whole soul, and in thy whole thought. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Richard Linquist
Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

The Centurion's Confession

The Rev. James P. Cooper

It is usual during the Easter season to focus on the joy of discovery when the disciples and others came to the tomb and found that the Lord had risen, as He said. We might think of this as the fully developed dawn of the Christian church: that beautiful moment when the truth of His ministry first dawned in the minds of His disciples. But today, instead of the full dawn, we would instead focus on the "morning star" of the Christian church (*True Christian Religion* 379:e), the most fundamental and basic thing that the Lord taught while in the world: that idea first recognized and expressed by the Centurion who witnessed the crucifixion, that Jesus Christ was not a man, but He was the Son of God. Without this most fundamental and basic doctrine there is no Christian faith.

Each of the four Gospels tells the story of the Lord's life on earth in a slightly different way, in much the same manner as several witnesses to an event will each remember the things that stood out for them, but not necessarily exactly the same things that others saw. However, we must also remember that the authors of the Gospels were inspired to choose to write the way they did so that each Gospel contains in its internal sense the story of the Lord's life for a different spiritual state, or from a different spiritual point of view. For the purposes here, we'll briefly review the main historical events as recorded in the *Gospel of Mark*.

Mark records that after His trial, Jesus was brought to Golgotha, a hill outside the gates of Jerusalem. There He was offered wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He refused it. He did this, we are told, because wine mixed with myrrh represented the truth from the Word mixed with falsities of evil. This represented the spiritual state of the Jewish Church at that time and was not acceptable to Him. They stripped Him, crucified Him, and cast lots for His garments. A sign was placed over Him, saying: "The King of the Jews."

All the Gospels record that there was darkness over the earth from the sixth hour to the ninth. In Mark, it is reported that at about the ninth hour of the day, He cried out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (*Mark*

After this final symbolic act, the Lord cried with a loud voice and breathed His last. It was at this point that the Centurion (said) there was no doubt this was a "righteous man," and proclaimed Jesus Christ as "the Son of God." And although there was darkness over the land, the gentile Centurion saw the "morning star."

15:34) Obviously, the end was near, and someone filled a sponge with vinegar, lifted it up to Him with a hyssop reed, and He drank from it.

We are told that He accepted this drink because it represented the falsity of the gentiles, in which there is something useful and good, that is, false ideas from ignorance held for the sake of good to the neighbor. This kind of falsity can be accepted by the Lord because it looks to the good of others as an end. The hyssop represents that the false ideas are cleansed by good intentions. The Lord is easily able to replace such falsity with genuine truth from the Word. This is why the Lord accepted the vinegar on the sponge.

After this final symbolic act, the Lord cried with a loud voice and breathed His last. The Gospels record that at that moment the veil of the temple in Jerusalem split from top to

bottom, and that there were earthquakes. It was at this point that the Centurion is recorded in *Luke* as saying that there was no doubt that this was a "righteous man," while in both *Matthew* and *Mark* he is recorded as proclaiming Jesus Christ as "the Son of God." And although there was darkness over the land, the gentile Centurion saw the "morning star."

The first principle of faith in the Lord is the acknowledgment that He is the Son of God. We know this because it is repeatedly taught by Him in the Word of the New Testament. It was repeatedly taught because unless men had first acknowledged that He was the Son of God, and thus God from God, the work that He and His disciples set out to do would have been in vain. (See *True Christian Religion* 342)

The Heavenly Doctrines define the Son of God by saying that "there is no Son from eternity; but that the Lord is from eternity. . . . The Human conceived of God, and born of the virgin Mary, is what is called the Son of God." (*Lord* 19) They further explain that Jehovah Himself "put on the Divine Human, from which He called Himself the 'Son of Man,' and also the 'Son of God'; and by the 'Son of Man' He signified the truth itself, and by the 'Son of God' the good itself which belonged to His Human essence when made Divine."

(*Arcana Coelestia* 2159:2)

Here reference has been made to both the "Son of Man" and the "Son of God." Jesus used both terms to describe Himself many times in the Word. Names signify qualities, and these names were used to describe the different qualities of the Lord that were dominant at various times and in various states.

The Lord referred to Himself as the Son of God when the main subject was God's love of His people or when He was teaching, healing, or leading the disciples; thus, when He was feeling the power of Jehovah within Him. He referred to Himself as the Son of God when He was in a state of Glorification, or unity with the Divine.

When He was in this state, He was expressing the Divine Love of God toward the human race, and since the Divine Love is pure and above any fault, the Lord was never tempted or tested as the Son of God. He could never be tempted as to His love, for His ruling love is the salvation -- that is bringing into heaven -- of the universal human race.

On the other hand, when He refers to Himself as the Son of Man, it reflects those states where truth was dominant, where falsity and indecision in the human from Mary could enter in, where He could be tempted as to how He must go about expressing His love for the human race. As said above, the love itself could not be tempted, but there were options, different paths that could have been taken, and the Lord agonized over these.

These were the times when He prayed to the Father as if to another, when He felt the burden He had taken upon Himself, when He felt unequal to the task of saving the human race while at the same time preserving their freedom of choice in spiritual things.

When the Lord was on the cross, the hells, His friends, and even the angels of heaven were all imploring Him to use His powers to come down off the cross. But instead, He let go of His human body, and by so doing seemed to fail. But He actually won. His love of the human race was conjoined with His Divine plan for their salvation. The hells were forced back into order. He could no longer be tempted or tested in any way for His victory was complete. He was no longer the Son of Man, because truly He was fully the Son of God, one with Jehovah.

We might ask ourselves why, at the moment of the Lord's final victory,

It was repeatedly taught (that) unless men had first acknowledged that He was the Son of God, and thus God from God, the work that He and His disciples set out to do would have been in vain.

The Centurion stands for all those people who want to believe in the Lord, but for one reason or another have not yet found Him.

it was a gentile, a Roman soldier, who proclaimed the truth that the Lord had in fact won the battle, who first expressed the fundamental truth for all Christianity, that Jesus Christ was not a man, not the Son of Man any longer, but that He was truly the Son of God?

For this we must look to the internal sense of the Word, for only in the Word will we find the answer this question. First, consider the other place where a Centurion is mentioned

in the Word – the Centurion who asked the Lord to cure his sick child, but who told the Lord that it was not necessary for Him to travel to his home, that it was enough for Him to merely say the word, and it would be done.

That Centurion was used to giving orders to those in his command and having them done immediately. It was his simple belief that the Lord commanded the spiritual world in the same way, that His physical presence was not needed to heal the boy: all He needed to do was say the word. The officer's faith was well founded, and the boy was healed.

Centurions, being Roman officers, were not Jews, and therefore by definition used in the Gospels (anyone who is not a Jew is a gentile) they were gentiles. We are taught that except for a small faithful remnant from the former church, the Lord always raises up a new church among the gentiles – those who have not been blinded by the false doctrines and corrupted by evils. And so, the Centurion stands for all those people who want to believe in the Lord, but for one reason or another have not yet found Him.

A Centurion has this representation in the Word because he is a commander over a hundred men, and the Latin root of "Centurion" means "one hundred." In the Word, one hundred represents "a full state of union." (*Arcana Coelestia* 2636) And one hundred is ten times ten, and since ten represent remains, or those affectional states that remain with everyone from earliest infancy to eternity, one hundred represents a fullness of remains.

This shows us that all gentiles, all those who seek to do good no matter what their doctrinal background or whether they associate with a church, can reach out and accept the doctrine of the Lord's Divine Humanity – that in fact the Lord has provided each one of us from birth with the ability to receive this doctrine with joy.

It was often said by the Lord, when the sick were healed, that they should "have faith," and it would be done unto them "according to their faith." The reason for this is that the most important thing of all is to acknowledge that

the Lord is the Savior of the world. Without this basic, fundamental idea, no one can receive anything of good and truth from heaven.

The reason why you cannot receive any good and truth from the Lord if you don't believe He is the Savior of the world is simply because you won't ask for it. Why would you ask Him for help if you did not believe that He could help? This is why, when the Lord came into the world and healed the sick that He questioned them about their faith before He healed them.

Only those were healed who believed that He was the Son of God who was to come into the world, and that He had the power to heal and save. This "acknowledgment of the Lord is the first of all things of spiritual life, and the most essential thing of the church, because without it no one can receive from heaven anything of the truth of faith and the good of love." (*Arcana Coelestia* 10083:5)

The Centurion, a gentile, ignorant of ideas that would blind him, was the first to understand the true meaning of the Lord's crucifixion. He knew that Jesus had healed the sick. He knew that Jesus had cast out demons. He had heard of all the signs and miracles that He had performed in the course of His ministry. He, like many others had suspected that Jesus would have miraculously saved Himself; perhaps he and many others had come to the crucifixion hoping to see just such a miracle. But when Jesus passively allowed these things to be done to Him and awaited death, it caused the Centurion to wonder, to think to himself, "What man would let this happen to himself?" And by asking that question he opened himself up to the truth that this was not a man.

Jesus Christ was willing to allow His body to die because it was true that His kingdom was not of this world. Like a morning star, that bright beacon of light on the horizon that foretells the coming dawn, the Centurion gave voice to the first characteristic mark of faith: that the Lord is the Son of the Living God, and on this faith all else of heaven and the church rests.

So, in this Easter season, as we think of the joyful discovery of the empty tomb, as we think of the Lord in His Glorified Human ruling as King of the heavens today, let us not let our faith be distracted by complicated doctrines,

Like a morning star, that bright beacon of light on the horizon that foretells the coming dawn, the Centurion gave voice to the first characteristic mark of faith: that the Lord is the Son of the Living God, and on this faith all else of heaven and the church rests.

but remember this simple truth that was first seen by the Roman Centurion: "Truly, this Man was the Son of God." (Mark 15:39)



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Listening with Humility

A Sermon by the Rev. Barry C. Halterman

Lessons: *1 Kings 3:5-15; Matthew 7:1-5; Secrets of Heaven 1079*

Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours? (*1 Kings 3:9*)

This is the third sermon in a series at Bryn Athyn Cathedral focused on listening -- “Listening with Humility.” The first two sermons were focused on “Listening with Awareness” and “Listening with Patience.”

Some key ideas brought out in those sermons were that there are many things that get in the way of truly listening and being present with each other, like feeling too busy, always being in a hurry, being disinterested, being distracted (hello smartphones!), being impatient, being tired, being annoyed, and just generally being so focused on our own concerns that we may not even be aware of other people’s needs around us.

We learned that a way to combat these tendencies and become a better listener is to be sure to spend time with the Lord in His Word to help calm our spirit and better align our purposes with the Lord’s purposes, and to focus on the greater good of loving the neighbor to help us not get dragged down by the demands of the day.

This week we look especially at learning to listen with humility. Our text comes from the story in *1 Kings*, Chapter 3, where the Lord appears to King Solomon in a dream and says to him: “Ask! What shall I give you?” What a tremendous opportunity the Lord was giving Solomon, offering to give him whatever he asked for. Solomon was clearly overwhelmed by the enormity of the responsibility of ruling and said to the Lord: “But I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in, And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.”

Solomon’s response that he is “but a little child” is not meant literally as Solomon is not a child but a young man who has recently made a treaty with the

Like all stories in the Word, the Lord isn't telling us this as something only Solomon had. It is something that He promises to give to each of us if we truly want it and work for it.

Pharaoh of Egypt, married the Pharaoh's daughter, and was now working on building his palace and the great Temple in Jerusalem. Instead, it shows his deep humility and an awareness of his own limitations as a new ruler with no experience. He feels like a little child in the face of great responsibility. And in saying he "does not know how to go out or come in" he is acknowledging that he has no experience and no idea of how to be a king.

When asked by the Lord what he wants, rather than ask for great power and wealth as many kings would have done, Solomon asks instead for the gift

of wisdom: "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

An "understanding heart" – other translations call it a "listening heart" or a "heart that hears": what a fascinating request! And what an incredibly humble and insightful request! Solomon wanted to be able to lead his people and be their judge with the wisdom that comes from a heart that listens. And we are told the Lord was so pleased with this request and so pleased that Solomon did not ask for great power, or great wealth, or a long life that He would give them all to Solomon along with a "wise and understanding heart."

How often could you have used a wise and understanding heart – as a parent, as a spouse, in your job? What a gift it would be to be able to truly listen to and deeply understand the people we live and work with so that we could help discern the best ways to love and help them. But, like all stories in the Word, the Lord isn't telling us this as something only Solomon had. It is something that He promises to give to each of us if we truly want it and work for it.

Let's look at some of the ways we can receive the gift of an understanding heart. This is a heart that learns by connecting with other people's hearts. It's easy to have a heartfelt connection with each other when we are in full agreement. But what if we don't agree? What if we don't like their opinion? What if we think they're wrong? What if we don't like their style – too opinionated, too closed-minded, too judgmental, too whiny, too whatever!

That's where we often go straight into judgment mode: "THEY are wrong," "THEY need to change." It's now us vs. them. And when we are judging we are no longer listening because we think we have heard all we need to hear.

That's when the Lord's words we read in our second lesson from the Sermon on the Mount need to come into play: "Judge not, that you be not judged. . . . Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

If we are judging – and hopefully we are only judging them on the natural level, not spiritually – even our natural judgments are obscured by the planks in our own eyes. Our biases are like a plank that blinds us to seeing other ways of thinking and blocks us from striving to make heart-to-heart connections with people we deem different. We like to think we have great judgment, that our ideas make more sense and will lead to a better world. But we are all biased by our will, by what we love. We see what we want to see because our will is actually the driver of our decisions, not our intellect.

The Heavenly Doctrines put it this way in *Divine Love and Wisdom* 422:2: "The intellect does not lead the will, and wisdom does not produce love, but the intellect only informs and points the way – informing the person how they should live and pointing the way they should go. It follows, too, that the will leads the intellect and causes it to operate in harmony with it, and that the love which resides in the will calls wisdom anything in the intellect which accords with it. . . . It is the will that, by flowing into it, takes the intellect into partnership with itself, and not the reverse."

This is fine if our will is good, if we are truly motivated by charity and neighborly love. But how many of us can claim to be at that level on our spiritual journey? Don't we all still have planks to remove? Can we really see evils in other people as we often think we can? Should we even be looking for their evils in the first place?

The passage we read from *Secrets of Heaven* 1079 says we should not: "People with whom faith is separated from charity . . . see nothing else but errors and perversions residing with a person. But those who have faith that comes from charity are different. They notice the good qualities, and if they do see evils and falsities they excuse them, and if possible endeavor with that person to correct them." And further: "Those who are guided by kindness . . . hardly even notice evil in another but pay attention instead to everything

Having an understanding heart requires intellectual humility. It requires us to look at other people's ideas with the sincere belief that we can learn from them.

Listening with empathy is an act of humility and love.

good and true in the person. When they do find anything bad or false, they put a good interpretation on it. This is a characteristic of all angels – one they acquire from the Lord, who bends everything bad toward good.”

That can seem like an almost impossible task when we see people doing and saying things that seem so obviously wrong and harmful to us. But the Lord asks us not to look for their evils but to look for their good qualities; not to judge them but to excuse them and put a good interpretation on what they say or do. This is what angels do.

This especially requires humility. As it says in *Secrets of Heaven* 8873: “Life from the Lord flows only into a humble and submissive heart, since it is fitted to receive. And it is fitted to receive because when a heart is truly humble no self-love or love of the world stands in the way.”

We love our own ideas and our own interpretation of events. If we didn’t think they were correct we wouldn’t believe them. But we are all affected by conceit and pride in our own intelligence. (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 502) Having an understanding heart requires intellectual humility. It means we have to accept that our understanding of things is only one of a variety of ways to interpret things. It means we have to accept that we are not always right and that other people are not always wrong. It requires us to look at other people’s ideas with the sincere belief that we can learn from them.

Having an understanding heart means we have to listen to other people with empathy. Empathy seems to come more naturally to some of us than others, but it can be cultivated. We have to learn to listen with our heart, not just our head. It means we have to listen to *their* heart. We have to listen for the love, the concerns and the values behind their words. We have to try to walk a mile in their shoes. Even if we have had some similar experiences, we don’t have *their* exact experience. Each person is unique and their experience is unique. We don’t know all the things that transpired to lead them to this point. We have to hear them before we can know how to help them. Listening with empathy is an act of humility and love.

As a teacher, I don’t know if I am actively being humble as much as I might, but I certainly get humbled all the time. My great plans to communicate some profound truth fall flat if I come across as arrogant and inflexible, and if I don’t show respect for students’ responses and different ideas. I need to ask the Lord to help me cultivate a humble and listening heart.

I like to remind myself that I don’t teach curriculum, I teach people. Curriculum is not really the end goal, it’s only the means. The goal of New Church education is to work with the Lord to create loving and wise human beings who love the Lord and love their neighbor. An old adage says: “Students

don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." If I can't make a human connection with my students, the ideas I want to teach won't be received. They might be memorized for a test, but they won't be taken to heart.

Having an understanding heart doesn't mean we will always agree with each other. But even when we disagree, that shouldn't stop us from listening and striving to make deeper connections. The key is to put charity first in all our discussions and disagreements. It is a core New Church teaching that "doctrine divides but charity unites."

From *Secrets of Heaven* 1799: "If we would make love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor the principal of faith, doctrinal matters would then be only varieties of opinion concerning the mysteries of faith, which truly religious people would leave to everyone to hold in accordance with their conscience. Thus, from all the differing churches there would be made one church; and all the dissensions that come forth from doctrine alone would vanish; yea, all hatreds of one against another would be dissipated in a moment, and the Lord's kingdom would come upon the earth."

We can share similar values, similar hopes, similar goals and still not always agree with each other. But if charity and humility are put first, different views don't have to divide us. When humility is put first we can allow differences to be varieties of opinions.

Better connections with each other take an understanding heart. It takes a heart that listens to others with humility; a heart that does not judge but listens agenda-free; a heart that values and respects people as the children of God they are; a heart that seeks to listen to the love and concerns that lie beyond people's words and actions; a heart that is willing to learn, not just teach.

The Lord tells us to ask and it will be given to us, to seek and we will find. May we all, like Solomon, ask the Lord for an understanding heart.

Amen.

The goal of New Church education is to work with the Lord to create loving and wise human beings who love the Lord and love their neighbor.



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“Choose for Yourselves This Day . . .”

Reflections on Divine Love and Sensing Life as Our Own

(First of two parts)

The Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough

I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (*Deuteronomy 30.19*)

Jesus said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” (*Luke 12.14*)

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served . . . , or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (*Joshua 24.15*)

The Heavenly Doctrines often show the close relation between human free choice and the appearance that we live on our own. My questions in this study center on what this means about God’s purposes in loving us, and about our human goals in loving our neighbor.

The following passage explains how closely human freedom is connected with our feeling of self-life:

Freedom makes one with life; for without freedom a person could not feel and perceive that he has life, as it were, in himself. . . . For it appears to a person from freedom, that every action of his life is his own and belongs to him, for freedom is the power to think, to will, to speak, and to act from one’s self, here as if from oneself. And it

is chiefly the power of willing . . . Freedom . . . is never taken away from him; for in the measure that it were taken away or lessened, a person would feel and perceive that he does not himself live, but another in him, and so far the delight of everything belonging to his life would be taken away and diminished, for he would become a slave. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1138.3)

Human free will is very closely related to our feeling and sensation of self-life. Yet we may think more about our freedom, and focus more on its importance, watching especially for threats against it. We may take for granted our perception and sense that life is our own. But from the Lord’s omniscient (all-knowing) standpoint, maintaining the human sensation of life as a person’s own is as basic as preserving freedom. In fact, the two seem so close as to be distinguishably one – distinguishable in thought, but one in fact. Our feeling that we live from ourselves, and our free will in spiritual matters, can easily be seen as two sides of the same coin, two ways of looking at one reality.

The Lord our Creator wants all human beings to perceive that we have our own life, and to feel life as though it belongs to us. In reality God is life in essence, and God is the only being who truly lives: **Divine love is life itself**, and love from God **is** the life of every human being. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 1)

In addition to feeling life as our own, God wants us to be regenerating, to respond and use His love wisely, to love others and do good – so that we will come into heaven and enjoy happiness forever in His kingdom by living usefully for the good of others. “The Lord’s Divine providence has as its purpose a heaven from the human race.” (*Divine Providence* 27; repeated in many passages) Still, His universal goal, His purpose for every human being, is that we have a life that we feel is ours and enjoy this in ourselves.

This is a little like wanting and having a baby: we want our child to have its own life and become his or her own being. If we truly love our child, we don’t want her or him to have someone else’s life, but to develop in her or his own ways. (The love of self can corrupt this good wish by seeing children as expressions, even copies, of their parents’ lives and qualities. See *Conjugal Love* 405-407.)

In fact, God will never do anything to us to destroy or threaten our sense of life that He gives us to feel as ours. Let us suppose for a moment that this is **not** His universal goal for humans, and that His primary purpose for us is something else – such as spiritual rebirth, or loving others, or being spiritually useful, or receiving heavenly happiness. Certainly He does wish these Divine goals for us too, and these goals cannot be separated from His will to give us life as if it were our own. Still, when we freely choose in opposition to one of these other goals, He does not shut down our free will, but He allows us to

choose badly and feel it as our own life, if that is our actual free decision.

Now God does limit our free will in a number of ways according to His laws of order, but He does not take away our ability to choose against His goodness. Our freedom **to act and to speak** is certainly limited, but our **will and understanding** are free – and these make us who we are. (See *True Christian Religion* 497-498) God allows us to go on feeling our own life, to keep the essential thoughts and wishes of our choices, even if they oppose His Divine love – even if our choices are very stupid. His order does not allow bad choices to have unlimited rein, but our essential willing and thinking are allowed. Otherwise our sense of having life of our own would disappear – and the bad chooser would cease to exist, because he would have no freedom and no life of his own.

The worst profaners come closer than anyone else to destroying the sensation of living on their own, because their free choices almost annihilate free will. Their decisions work to negate each other, by mingling good and evil, and mixing up truth and falsity with each other. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9818.27; *Divine Providence* 231.7; etc.) But rather than forcing them to some “better” state, God allows them to be essentially as they freely choose to be – and to feel as their own the self-contradictory life they have decided on.

Angels see them as skeletons (*Divine Providence* 226) – a stark illustration that the Lord gives us to choose freely in spiritual matters, and to sense and perceive life as ours. (He also does everything He can to prevent anyone from entering this worst level of profanation – except to take away free will and human perception of self-life. (*Ibid.* 232-233))

The Heavenly Doctrines link permission of evil closely with human free will:

From the permission to do evil, granted to the internal man of everyone, it is clearly evident that man has free will in spiritual things.

That man has free will in spiritual things shall first be confirmed .

...

7, [The Israelitish] nation was at length permitted to crucify the Lord; and Mohammed was permitted to establish a religious system in many respects not in conformity with the Sacred Scripture.

8, The Christian religion is divided into many sects, and each of these is driven by heresies.

9, There are so many ungodly people in the Christian world and so much boasting about ungodly acts; and also trickery and deceit

practiced on godly, just and upright people.

10, Injustice sometimes prevails over justice in the law courts and in business.

11, The ungodly also are advanced to honors and become leaders in civil and religious life.

12, Wars are permitted, in which there is so much slaughter of people and ravaging of cities, nations and families; and much suffering besides.

Is it possible to account for such things except from the fact that every man has free will? The permission of evil, which is recognized throughout the whole world, has no other origin. (*True Christian Religion* 479; see also *Divine Providence* 234-274.)

Though human freedom is limited in various ways, the Lord's love for human free will and sensation of self-life leads Him to allow many evils, brought about by perverse human decisions. (The permission of evil was a well-known concept during Swedenborg's time. At least this is what the Word of God teaches. Could God be speaking falsely to us, granting us an illusion of self-life while not actually allowing authentic free-will decisions? See *Appendix 2* in Part Two of this article.)

Now it is true that Divine providence does not allow evils unless they can be turned to good in some way, or unless good can result from the evils. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489, 6574.3, 6663.2; *Divine Providence* 296.8-12) The passages do not say that good always **does** result from evil that God permits. This depends partly on human decisions afterward. Nor do the passages say that the good coming out of permissions of evil is better than if there had been no evil at all. Certainly nothing happens for the worst, but neither does everything happen for the best (as some people say).

The existence of permanent hells is a clear illustration that a universal goal of Divine love is for humans to enjoy life as their own through free decisions. The reason God allows hell to continue is not to punish or hurt. His love wishes human beings to feel a life of their own, and He will not take that away. If it were better for any humans not to exist at all than to be in hell with life of their own, Divine love would eliminate evil people at death. (Seventh Day Adventists believe evil people are annihilated, burnt up in the lake of fire, citing *Revelation* 20.14-15.)

Why does Divine love allow permanent life in hell to those who become enemies to good?

| The reason why those immersed in evils and falsities, that is, those

Hell is not as bad as Christian tradition has generally pictured it, primarily because punishment occurs not for past sins, but only for evils that recur.

who are in hell, continue to be alive is that they were born human beings and consequently have the ability to receive life from the Lord. And they **do receive life from the Lord, as much life as will enable them to think, reason, and speak, to make their evil look like good, and their falsity like truth**, and so to give the appearance of life. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9008e; emphasis added)

I am sure devils are big complainers about their own plights (read C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*), but in actuality they like to have their own life. (See *Divine Providence* 340.6 and *True Christian Religion* 570.6-7; also *Divine Providence* 298.2; *Conjugal Love* 269.4-6, 461.7-8; *Five Memorable Relations* 2-3 from *Posthumous Theological Works*, Vol. 1) 521-532)

Hell is not as bad as Christian tradition has generally pictured it, primarily because punishment occurs not for past sins, but only for evils that recur. Evil spirits are punished only so long as they try to harm others. Also, hell's inhabitants can learn practices to improve their lives, and limits to stop at, and they have to perform some useful activities (e.g., see *Spiritual Experiences* 231, 404 and numerous descriptions).

Vengeance for past evil is not a goal of governance in hell. (*Heaven and Hell* 543, 545, 550, 581, etc.) The hells' separation from heaven allows some freedom to be one's bad self, especially through fantasies. The sensation of self-life is given to the extent that evil spirits do not deprive others of their own life. Life is love (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 1-6), and in hellish conflicts between evil loves there is both limited enjoyment of self-life, and frustration that one cannot get more life for oneself (at others' expense). There are limits, but the Lord allows some life and pleasure that they feel as good, however obnoxious these pleasures may seem to angels.

A helpful illustration is given in a description of greedy spirits in the lower earth, sitting around a table, each with fantasized purses bulging with gold coins. "We do each possess" all the riches of the kingdom, they believe. "Each one of us knows that all his are mine. No one is allowed to think, still less to say, 'Mine are not yours,' but it is allowed us to think and say, 'Yours are mine.'" (*Conjugal Love* 268.2) They are allowed some life of their own through fantasy, but are not allowed to claim, "Mine are not yours." They enjoy this

fantasy, while the limits prevent harm to anyone.

The permanence of hell is basic in showing that God’s universal goal is to give all created humans a feeling and enjoyment of life as their own. Traditional Christianity has taught that God requires punishment for every sin (following Anselm, d. 1109); this is a central assumption in the false doctrine of the Son of God’s substitutionary atonement on the cross. The Heavenly Doctrines penned by Swedenborg deny this notion of punishment and reject retribution as a purpose of hell. Hell is real, but let us distance ourselves from the old notion that its essential purpose is to punish.

Why are we created to perceive life as our own, and free to choose?

Why did God make us this way? He wants to love others outside Himself so that He may be one with them, and make them happy from Himself. (*True Christian Religion* 43) Love consists in this, that its own should be another’s. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47) But unless we have our own will, and an inner life that is not determined by God, we are not truly outside God – as objects for God to love beyond Himself. For God to love others outside Himself, those whom He creates must be **truly other** than God. We are not really **other than God** unless we are free and have a life that we perceive as ours. In fact, I believe that having a life that we are granted to feel as our own is **the same** as being free.

Divine Love and Wisdom 47-49 carefully explain why God creates beings who have nothing of essential Divinity in them. Then Paragraph 50 says further:

On a perception and concept of this secret depend a perception and concept of the origination or creation of all things, as well as of the maintenance or preservation of all things by God – that is to say, of all the works of God in the created universe.

In other words, unless we understand how created humans are created truly **other than God**, we cannot understand anything about creation, about providence, or about God’s works!

Seeking to understand this principle more fully, let us look at how a key *Arcana* passage defines the essential being (esse) of humanity as the **process or activity of receiving life**:

The being [esse] of man is nothing else than a recipient [recipients] of the eternal which proceeds from the Lord. Indeed, men, spirits, or angels are nothing else than recipients – that is, recipient forms – of life from the Lord. The actual reception of life is what the term *existere* [expression, manifestation] refers to. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3938.2)

The *existere* (form or expression) of receiving refers to **how** a human being chooses to receive life, and what qualities of inflow he decides to be affected by, what affections he returns to, what spheres he prefers, and especially what he makes habitual in his living.

This concept of human life is distinctive to the Heavenly Doctrines and the New Church: our own life is a gift given every instant; it is not innately or inherently ours. Our life inflows every moment, and we are recipient vessels – receptacles of inflowing life according to different inflows that we choose to favor or not favor. Every sensation of life comes from beyond us, and our choosing of some inflows, rather than others, comes from the actual choices we make continually through life. And within limits the Lord gives us to enjoy what we choose as our own life, though it does not come from ourselves.

This is the only way God can create beings who are truly **other than God** – creatures outside Himself whom He can love, become one with, and make happy from Himself – fulfilling the essential wish of Divine love. From our human standpoint this surely is a wonderful blessing, and begs the question: how can we respond to this gift?

Thanks for the gift of life felt as our own: loving others as God loves

Two basic responses to God, to show thanks for His gift of self-life and freedom, are well known in the New Church:

- Worship Him, understand His written Word, and live as He teaches
- Acknowledge truly, within ourselves, that all goodness and truth are from Him

See *Appendix 3* in Part Two of this article for more about these two ways to respond with thanks to the Lord.

Please consider also a third response to God’s blessing of human life – to be guided by Jesus’ many examples in expression and tone when He spoke to different kinds of people.

The Lord’s life in the world was an example according to which the people of the church are to live, as the Lord Himself teaches in John: “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. . . . If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 254.2, citing *John* 13.15,17, and adding further “example” passages)

In other words, it is implied in God’s love that we seek to love others **as He loves them**, and to think of and treat them **as He thinks of them and treats them**. Note also these words of Jesus to His disciples, including us, right after He told them to follow His example:

| Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor

is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (*John* 13.16)

Even without this teaching about Jesus as an example, consider that for a human to love others truly, we need to love them from the only authentic and true love that exists – God’s love. If we are to love our neighbors in reality, we need to do so from authentic love we receive from the Lord. This means to love others as He loves them. What other real love exists? (Note *John* 6.68) Our love for others needs to have the same qualities – but on a finite scale – as the Lord’s love for every individual. If our wishes for our neighbor are different from the Lord’s wishes, we are not loving him as God loves him.

So if we are to love others from the Lord’s love, I believe we will love their free will and their perception of living as from themselves – even if their choices are not what we would like. This means to love others **because** God loves us, and **as He loves us**, so that on our finite level we emulate His love for others. To see and love our neighbors truly, we should recognize that they need to feel life as their own – from being able to choose freely, using their own understanding and feelings, their own heredity and history, their own experience of success and failure, their own light and changing states. This is how the Lord loves all people.

Can we love our neighbors in this way? If we are going to love others as God loves us, can we wish them to have free will and choice? Can we want them to have their own life, and be truly free, and able to make their own decisions? Can we rejoice in their free will and choosing, and feel their joy – as joy in ourselves? (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47) If we think their joy is stupid or bad, or very evil, or just misguided, then can we love and appreciate their freedom, and respect it, even while we wish they decided differently?

Personally, I find it easy to affirm other people’s freedom and sense of life when their decisions and deeds agree with my own thinking. When I dislike how they use their freedom, it is difficult to appreciate their freedom and choosing, especially if their decisions affect me in some way, and even more if I have strong opinions. And what about far-away choices that seem extremely bad – such as cruel acts of terrorism, brutal attacks on innocence, and reckless

If we are to love our neighbors in reality, we need to do so from authentic love we receive from the Lord. This means to love others as He loves them. . . . If our wishes for our neighbor are different from the Lord’s wishes, we are not loving him as God loves him.

How should we feel about life in hell? . . . If we remain angry or annoyed (vengeful?) about their life in hell, our discontent will not change hell's inhabitants, but will disturb our own peace of mind and lessen our trust in Divine providence.

legal decisions that oppose God and human reality? I find these extremely difficult to see positively. I want others to decide correctly and wisely more than I want them to be free, and I feel anger about their badness, as I see it.

Of course, we can speak out and encourage better choices from those we see as evil-doers – but how to trust in providence? Of course, we endeavor to stop evil, but how do we avoid wishing for retribution, vengeful pain on some, or a humble apology? Evil experienced around us, close and distant, prompts us to respond in kind – seeking punitive revenge, rather than offering mercy and charitable, thoughtful instruction.

How should we feel about life in hell? Contentment that they have some enjoyment of life seems too accepting of evil. Yet should we wish they be annihilated? Or want them to feel more punishing pain and torment? If we remain angry or annoyed (vengeful?) about their life in hell, our discontent will not change hell's inhabitants, but will disturb our own peace of mind and lessen our trust in Divine providence.

We need some level of acceptance that people in hell enjoy self-life within limits, and tolerance that they exist – distantly separated from the good. *Debates with Devils* (edited by the Rev. Donald Rose) suggests thoughtful ways to respect devils as human, and how to offer true ideas that can be heard. In actual life we should be willing to communicate fairly with evil forces, according to spiritual need.

Examples and applications, near us and distant

In raising children, should we not prepare them for adult freedom by gradually enlarging the areas where they decide for themselves? Many parents seem to do this, and it encourages the young to think for themselves, and to respect freedom. It is sad to see children grow up with a dominant feeling that they are stupid, bad and incapable of making good choices. And the most hurtful abuses of children come from violating their child-levels of free will.

When children come into young adulthood, New Church parents typically allow them freedom. I have also observed parents who wish to direct their sons' and daughters' key life decisions, such as education and career choices, social

life and friendships, when and whom to marry, etc. If God’s universal wish in creating us is that we have a life we feel as our own, and we try to follow this principle of love, then our first wish is that our child grow and learn gradually to choose freely on his or her own. Of course, this includes their knowing our own belief in the Lord, our spiritual and moral values, including honest self-examination, and examples in our lives of moral love of the neighbor.

In raising children, should we not prepare them for adult freedom by gradually enlarging the areas where they decide for themselves?

Surely this principle is basic to a great many human relationship questions, especially with people who are important and close to us. The challenges come when we dislike others’ choices, especially as their unpleasant decisions ignore our own input. When we are torn between our own vision of goodness and truth, and respect for someone else’s feeling of self-life and free choice, how noisily do we argue? Do we show persistent emotional turnoff about their “bad” wants? Can we, inside ourselves, learn to love their life and free decision even while we wish they had chosen better? The Lord does this, or He would not allow bad choices on earth and the fruits of bad decision in hell.

Inborn, we have a tendency opposite to letting others decide for themselves. We all know how life would feel “easier” and “better” if people would follow our own wise counsel. The Heavenly Doctrines teach a great deal to expose the love of ruling from love of self, and remark how people like to command others:

It is a remarkable fact that it is easy for anyone to rebuke another who is intending evil, and say to him, “Do not do this, because it is a sin,” and yet it is difficult for him to say the same to himself. For in the latter case it is a matter of will, but in the former a matter of thought, easily communicated. (*True Christian Religion* 535)

The merely natural man can see what is evil and what is good in others, and can also reprove others; but as he has not looked into and examined himself, he does not see any evil in himself; and if any is pointed out to him by someone else, he covers it over. (*Ibid.* 564.3, and see 566)

The love of commanding illustrates human indifference to individual free will and perception of self-life; and it makes a top priority of other people’s correct behavior – placing their deeds above their thought and will, and their own decision-making.

Inborn, we have a tendency opposite to letting others decide for themselves. We all know how life would feel “easier” and “better” if people would follow our own wise counsel. The Heavenly Doctrines teach a great deal to expose the love of ruling from love of self.

Loving others as the Lord loves will affect also how we personally feel about life and events around the world – the daily “bad news” category. If the goal of our love includes acknowledging human freedom and people’s sense of having their own life, I think it is easier to feel love for enemies and opponents – and also easier to trust in Divine providence. We wish for the Lord’s truth and good to be accepted. But trust in Divine providence also asks us to respect people’s freedom, whether or not they accept God’s gifts. Seeking to love others as the Lord loves them, we become more accepting of His providence and more willing to love our opponents, even if they have hurt us.

On the other hand, the more we get upset with evil and insist it be corrected NOW, the more easily we may slide toward seeking control over our neighbor – even if our cause is good. This is how early Christian churches fell into selfish dominion – by trying to force Christian behavior and goodness, and gradually taking control of repentance and forgiveness, through church rituals of penance, confession and priestly remission of sins. Of course, we need to preach the truth, and urge actual repentance and living by Divine precepts, but without forcing or insisting on immediate acceptance of our vision of truth. Respecting the lives and free decision of others is central to learning patience.

The Lord taught this principle when He heard Peter’s question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Was Peter learning patience with human sin? Forgiving seven times sounds magnanimous. Jesus’s answer, “seventy times seven” centers on forgiveness, and suggests patience with human folly, and a willingness to live with persistent failings. (*Matthew* 18.21-22)

Patience, with ourselves and with others, is truly needed because regeneration takes place gradually over extended time – differently from how many Christians see spiritual change.

Regeneration is not hurried but takes place slowly. The reason for this is that all the things a person has thought, intended, or done since early childhood have entered into the composition of his life.

They have also formed themselves into a network which is such that one cannot be moved without all of them together being moved.

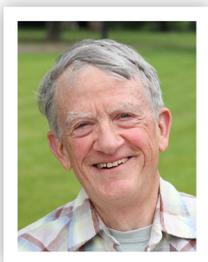
Moreover, these elements of the inner spiritual lives of all people, both good and evil, are “interconnected” with communities in the spiritual world. Our inner affections and ideas extend spiritually in both worlds far beyond what we can know. It is due to these interrelationships that

the evils and falsities with an evil person cannot be removed suddenly from where they are. They can be removed only in the measure that forms of good and truths in their proper order have been implanted more deeply with the person. . . . If the removal [of evils and falsities] were done suddenly, the person would pass out, for the whole network of things, every single one, would be thrown into confusion and deprive him of his life. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9334.2; explained more fully in 9332-9337)

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Part Two of this article will appear in the May/June issue, including four Appendices:

- The background of this study
- Could God be speaking falsely to us?
- Two important responses to God’s gift of life
- Does true discipleship diminish or increase the sensation of self-life?



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Online Community Offered by the General Church



The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

Imagine a young couple living in Southwest Texas trying to raise their two kids in their new-found faith. They discovered this faith while watching a YouTube video describing teachings of life after death offered by General Church Outreach in its “Big Spiritual Questions” series (<https://youtu.be/ICPv6jgfHUg>). Echoing the words used by many people like them, they felt they had discovered a faith that “articulates exactly the principles of the faith they have spent years searching for.” The video was great, but the real discovery was the online community that they found by following the links at the end of the video.

This community is a great relief for them because there they find the affirmation that their daughter, who died in a car accident several years earlier, still lives. In fact she lives a normal human, thoroughly joyful life in heaven. But what really resonates for them is the idea that that the Lord truly loves all human beings whom He has created and wishes to bless all with a heavenly life to eternity.

This story illustrates some of the benefits of what the General Church has been learning through these challenging COVID times. Increasingly, there are geographically isolated people living in various corners of the world who would like not only to learn, but now are able to participate in a New Church community where they can talk about faith (and address its challenges), learn, grow and talk about life's challenges together.

Not only are there many different congregations that are offering their worship in online formats, but there are groups that meet with the help of the website we call “New Church Groups” (www.groups.newchurch.org). This

gives these isolated people the chance to turn to the Lord together and deepen their faith by interacting with others walking similar paths by attending online small groups.

I find it remarkable to discover that many of these people maintain that the quality of their online group experience is better than their experience in a group that has met face-to-face. I'm not sure of all the reasons for this. Some say that the fact that each person is presenting from their own individual homes brings a sense of familiarity that doesn't normally occur outside of the home. Some have suggested that having each participant interact through the media of their home computer and camera creates an environment that places each participant in equal footing that make groups run more smoothly. Whatever the reasons, the result is that the General Church is growing in its ability to serve people in ways that are not bound by geographic location. People are not limited any more by the amount of time and energy it takes to get into a car and drive (sometimes hours) to reach a brick-and-mortar New Church building.

At the end of the book of *Revelation* we find the encouraging words: "Let whoever thirsts come. And to whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." (*Revelation* 22:17) As difficult as the COVID era has been, it has enabled us to take some important steps toward realizing this encouraging offer that the Lord puts before us.

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Till Death Do Us Part vs. Forever

The Rev. Erik J. Buss

*(Reprinted from the February issue of the General Church Newsletter
for Great Britain)*

I want to talk about an aspect of marriage, and by extension an attitude all of us can use to make our lives happier, whether married or not: thinking about our current lives with eternity in mind.

In traditional marriage vows, people promise “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.” There’s so much good in these vows, which is why they have been used for 1500 years. All except one phrase, “till death do us part.”

This phrase is based in the common Christian belief that people are not married in heaven, from a literal understanding of the Lord’s words that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” (*Matthew 22:30*) Christians today still strongly teach that angels are genderless and unmarried.

The New Church teaches a different view: that human life continues after death, and that marriages in this world can last forever. If we don’t find our forever partner in this world, all good people are given partners with whom they live for eternity. In fact, the idea of eternity is inherent in true married love: “People who are in a state of true married love look to eternity in their marriage because eternity is inherent in this love. . . . If one were to snatch away an idea of eternity, therefore, or if by some chance it should slip from their minds, it would be as though they were cast down from heaven.” (i 216) This is strong language!

Consider what happens when we subtract the forever part from human life or from marriage. The passage above continues: “A clever-talking scoundrel managed to take away [a married couple in heaven’s] thought of eternity in regard to marriage. On being deprived of this thought they began to lament, saying that they could not go on living and that they felt a sense of distress as never before. When their fellow angels in heaven perceived this, the scoundrel

was sent away and cast down. As soon as this happened, immediately their thought of eternity returned to them, and rejoicing with heartfelt joy on account of it, they tenderly embraced each other.” This dramatic story illustrates how important that one idea is to both happiness in marriage and to happiness in general.

The same is true of other aspects of our lives. If we give up lying or stealing for a month or a year, we have not significantly changed our character. But if we commit to never lying or stealing again, we will become a different person.

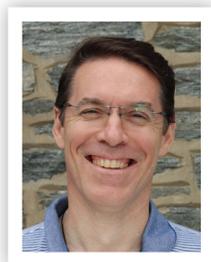
All the qualities in us that define us are ones that we decide we will strive for without exception, not just in the present but forever. That means building our lives around things that will last beyond this world.

Likely you have said, or had someone say to you, that some present trouble will not seem very important in 10 years. That kind of thinking is heading us in the right direction. All the Lord’s teachings call us to look at life from the perspective of eternal values – the Ten Commandments, love for the neighbour, serving others, forgiveness, the Golden Rule. Each time we choose them over some present pleasure, we look more and more toward eternity in our choices, just as a couple thinking of their eternal path together make different choices with that long-term view in mind.

For some, the idea of eternity is frightening. Yet when you think of the possibility of a tender love that “becomes more clean and pure to eternity” (*Married Love* 64), or of a trust and safety that will never end, it becomes a lot more appealing.

Only what is from the Lord lasts to eternity. The challenge of our lives is to learn to place His values and His eternal perspective at the center of our lives and our marriages. At times this feels like foregoing present pleasure, but in reality, it is the choice for goodness and pleasure than last. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.” (*Isaiah* 40:8)

Only what is from the Lord lasts to eternity. The challenge of our lives is to learn to place His values and His eternal perspective at the center of our lives and our marriages.



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The Trouble with the Old Testament

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish

In Leviticus we are told: “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.” (*Leviticus 19:27-28*)

This is a great example of instruction coming out of the Old Testament that seems totally irrelevant to modern life – especially to spiritual life. The trouble for many with these ancient books is that they require so many things that seem irrelevant today. A faithful adherent of these teachings, for example, isn’t allowed to eat pork (*Deuteronomy 14:8*), rabbit, crab or lobsters (*Leviticus 11:6,12*), may not consume the blood or fat of any animal, may not wear any garment of mixed wool and linen, may not plow with an ox and an ass yoked together or sow any field with mixed seed (*Ibid.* 19:19). He is also forbidden many other simple, natural things and, of course, if a male, must be circumcised.

These might not be problematic for us, since we can simply ignore them, relegate them to the past, or treat them as symbolic of rules that apply to us only on a spiritual level. Paul himself in his Epistles clearly said that these things were not necessary for a Christian life. (*Romans 3:28ff*) But the trouble for many is that if we set these aside or treat them as purely symbolic, the implied logic is that all the other teachings can be treated the same way.

So, for example, there are various laws about what to do with indentured servants, or with someone whose ox gores a man or woman, and extensive rules about avoiding lepers. Some statutes famously require “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” (*Exodus 24:24. Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21*) and, of course, a crime like adultery was punishable by stoning a person to death. Literally, it’s hard to see how any of these rules are relevant or appropriate in our lives today. Who even owns an ox or an ass among the millions living in western cultures? Who has even seen a leper in America today? And who these days would dream of stoning anyone?

Other improbable teachings in the Old Testament include all the rules about sacrificial offerings, ritual purification, and what today we would call genocide – the complete annihilation of enemy peoples. Who thinks they ought to be making animal sacrifices? And who besides the most depraved thinks genocide is OK?

But we shouldn't dismiss any of these teachings out of hand: there are principles involved. Thus, while the idea of any sort of sacrifice is not very popular today, it's still important. And with regard to leprosy, naturally it's about avoiding contagion, and that is something we have all been doing every day, especially in these last two years. But can we really just destroy our enemies? Who are we talking about? Not Amalekites or Philistines, that's for sure, but the principle of ridding ourselves of what is evil and false still applies. And we know that if we don't do that, it will come back to destroy us. (*Numbers* 33:55, *Joshua* 23:13. See also *True Christian Religion* 436, 511, 604, etc.)

Then there are the teachings about tithing (giving 10% of one's income to the Lord). In the New Church we know that the tithe merely represents a whole-hearted contribution (the meaning of ten or a tenth is "all"), but if we dismiss the literal 10% as irrelevant, we may all too easily neglect a real, careful analysis of what is possible, even on a limited income, for the support of spiritual, as distinct from material benefits.

Granted, these are teachings that ought to be applied "in principle," if not literally. But one of the most challenging examples that should be applied literally is the teaching that homosexual unions are forbidden, (*Leviticus* 18:22, 20:13, *Deuteronomy* 23:17, *Judges* 1 19:22-25, *I Kings* 14:24) so we need to consider that carefully. It is very common today for people, even in the New Church, to cite any number of those other rules that no longer apply to us and dismiss this as equally out of touch with contemporary thought.

In the Heavenly Doctrines, where we find an explanation of the sin of Sodom, the teaching includes the statement: "Although [in *Genesis* 19] it seems as if Sodom means the evil that consists in the worst form of adultery, nevertheless nothing else is meant by it in the internal sense than evil that stems from self-love." (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220) There are many who say that Sodomy is not even about homosexuality! But that's not what the passage says. Rather it simply says that it means one thing on the literal level and another thing on the spiritual level. It certainly does not say that sodomy is not a form of adultery.

But again, what are we to do with such teachings, given that homosexuality can be ranked among all those other teachings that many people feel perfectly free to ignore in the literal sense?

For a start, we really shouldn't ignore any of those teachings. Since they are part of the Lord's Word, we have a responsibility to take note of them and

reflect on why they were given to the Jews – and to us. When we do that, in many cases we can understand why adherence to the literal sense is no longer necessary or even reasonable, but in some cases we can also learn why it IS necessary and reasonable. The laws of sex and marriage beautifully illustrate this, because the more we study the principles of true marriage with all the correspondences of the human body, male and female, the more we can understand and appreciate what’s wrong with homosexuality.

But these are just illustrations of the problems we can encounter in the Old Testament. Other passages suggest that God is angry and vengeful, capricious in judgment, and inconsistent in what He does or doesn’t require of people. Often He is shown as willing to condemn entire households or even tribes of people for the sins of one or just a few individuals – even to the destruction of all that they possess. Then again, He seems to tolerate or forgive the most egregious sins of individuals for whom He has some special purpose in mind.

These are serious problems, and there are possibly millions of people who simply ignore or pay little attention to the Old Testament because of them.

It is, therefore, worth noting that even the New Testament presents similar challenges. In the Gospels, for example, the Lord plainly says that if your right hand offends, you are to cut it off, and if your right eye offends, you are to pluck it out. (*Matthew* 5:29-30) He says that if we have even a little faith, we can move mountains (*Ibid.* 17:20), walk on water (*Ibid.* 14:29), heal the sick, cast out demons, handle serpents and drink poison, all without any harm. (*Mark* 16:17-18) And by the way, the Epistles of the New Testament also condemn homosexuality.¹ Some of this feels a lot like what we read about radical Islam, or the sort of Christian fundamentalism that most people simply can’t follow.

Again, a New Church person may simply say that these things are all written according to correspondences, and that the real meaning for us today is in the spiritual sense. But we need to be careful not to dismiss the importance of what is literally stated. For example, while it is important to understand what is meant by “killing” or “murder”² in the spiritual or celestial senses, the doctrines are clear that the commandment against it is just as relevant as it ever was in the literal sense today. The same applies not only to that commandment but to all of the Ten Commandments and many of the other laws and statutes referenced in the chapters immediately following the decalogue.

To make this clear, one particular passage, *Arcana Coelestia* 9349, makes a big point of the fact that the words of the literal sense are holy and powerful

1 *Romans* 1:27, *I Corinthians* 6:9-10, *I Timothy* 1:9-10, *Jude* 1:7. These literal teachings are also confirmed in the Heavenly Doctrines, as for example in *Scriptural Confirmations* 101.

2 The literal sense of this commandment is explained in *True Christian Religion* 309 and 407, *Apocalypse Explained* 1012 and *Charity* 164-165.

because of the spiritual sense that is within them, and that although this means they do not *all* have to be obeyed literally today, still, the literal sense is their foundation, and as such it is to be honored as stated, and in many cases “observed and done” literally. In fact, we read, there are three classes of these laws and statutes:

Some of them have been abrogated in respect to present use where the church is, which is an internal church. Some of them, however, are of such a nature that they may serve a use if one so pleases; and some of them are to be altogether observed and done.³

If you look up those that still apply to us, you will find some challenging statements, like the one that says, “You shall not permit a witch (or sorceress) to live.” (*Exodus* 22:18) Much harm has been done in the past based on that idea, but in the end, what does it mean not to permit a witch to live? A simple explanation is that a person should not be given the freedom to practice witchcraft, which, by the way, is a serious problem in some cultures.

Another: “He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death,” (*Exodus* 21:15) may strike *us* as completely unreasonable, but a closer look reveals that the word, to strike, is not simply a slap in the face, but a thorough beating, and in a battle situation it can mean a complete slaughter.

That said, although there is no explicit passage in the doctrines that abrogates (i.e., does away with) a literal adherence to such biblical teachings as those against homosexual relationships, neither are there any that condone those teachings, but there are dozens of passages that explain why it is wrong.⁴

So we are left, in revelation and especially in the New Church, with this challenge: Will we have the courage and the patience to examine carefully the teachings that fly in the face of our contemporary culture, and will we have the integrity to apply the ones that still apply literally – in our own lives if not in what we honor and respect among others?

Of course, many will say (and we hear this all the time in the New Church), that what we believe is not nearly as important as how we live, and the fundamental principle of how we should live is captured in this one

3 There we read, “Regulations which must be altogether observed and done are those contained in chapters 20:3-5, 7, 8, 12-17 and 23; 21:12, 14, 15 and 20; 22:18-20, and 28; 23:1-3, 6-8, 24, 25 and 32.

4 See, for example, “The Word and Homosexuality,” by the Rev. Willard Heinrichs in *New Church Life* for 1993, pp 397-407 and pp 442-453. At the Council of the Clergy meetings in June, 2017, the Rev. Jeremy Simons also presented a 33-page paper on “Four Myths” about same-sex marriage that drew on numerous passages detailing the problems with this practice. More recently, see also the several articles in *New Church Life* for September/October, 2021, the article by the Rt. Rev. Brad Heinrichs on “Mercy and Truth” in November/December 2021, and the article by our executive bishop. “Standing for Marriage” in the January/February, 2022 issue.

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priceless message in *Matthew*, where the Lord said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (*Matthew* 22:37-40; see *Arcana Coelestia* 7262)

Therefore, whatever you want people to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (*Matthew*. 7:12)

Of course, this is literally true!⁵ It's a bedrock principle of Christianity, and like other Christians, we accept that ultimately the whole of the Word, both the Old and the New Testament, is not about anything other than love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor. So, as we read over and over again in

the Writings for the New Church, when we begin with that principle in mind, everything else in the literal sense can be seen in a higher light and understood to some degree according to its internal or spiritual sense.⁶ But what does it mean to love the Lord and the neighbor? Remember: there is no genuine love without wisdom, no genuine good without truth, no genuine use apart from

5 See *Arcana Coelestia* 1799, 1834, *Life* 1, and *Divine Providence* 101:3, which plainly states: "In the spiritual world into which everyone comes after death, it is not asked what your belief has been, or what your doctrine has been, but what your life has been, that is, whether it has been such or such; for it is known that as one's life is such is his belief, and even his doctrine; for the life makes doctrine for itself, and belief for itself."

6 *Arcana Coelestia* 7233:3, for example, is one of many passages showing essentially that from this principle "anyone can see" that literal statements in the Word, especially those that contradict rational thought or seem to support selfishness or cruelty, actually mean something quite different in their spiritual sense, all of which has to do with our spiritual lives, and not necessarily with the circumstances of our natural lives.

the teachings of the Word – the whole Word. The question is simply how we understand and apply those teachings.

So, for example, in the *Psalms* we find the statement that if we trust in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts (*Psalms* 37:3-4), but the meaning clearly is that believing in the Lord creates the space for Him to work in our lives, so that in His providence “the Lord gives (us) to ask, and what to ask.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 376) In other words, we’re not going to get whatever we want, we are going to want what the Lord gives us.

Again, in all the Gospels we find the statement that whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we will receive.⁷ But again, it’s the same idea: if we believe in the Lord, we will ask that HIS will be done, and so if we cooperate with Him – which is what sincere asking implies – it will.

Returning to the issue of homosexuality, it is certainly true that this represents something spiritual in our lives, but to think that the literal sense has no bearing on the conduct of our natural lives is to neglect the critical doctrines about the distinctions between the sexes, the use and purpose of those distinctions, and the real nature of the bond between a husband and wife. It is certainly true that there is a legitimate (and beautiful) love of one man for another, and of one woman for another, but as some angels explained to Swedenborg: “These loves . . . do not enter deeply into the breast, but stand without and merely touch each other; thus they do not inwardly conjoin the two.” (*Conjugal Love* 55:6)

This being the case – however it may seem otherwise – the Writings confirm that a relationship between two men or between two women simply reinforces the intellectual or affectional characteristics of the individuals involved and does not inwardly conjoin them. Indeed, whole books have been written about the competitiveness that naturally occurs between men, and the natural rapport that can exist between women. However, a same-sex love relationship literally confirms and strengthens each individual’s sense of self, rather than challenging or complementing it. That is why, as noted earlier, the doctrines inform us that homosexuality actually represents a form of self-love.^{8,9} And that is one of many reasons why a sexual relationship, the most intimate possible relationship between two people, is at best inappropriate for two of the same sex.

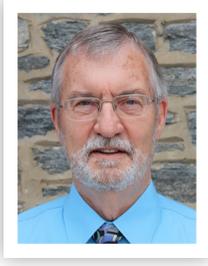
In conclusion, recalling the essential Christian principle of love toward the neighbor, it’s important to note that none of the above is intended to judge,

7 *Matthew* 21:21-22, *Mark* 11:24, *John* 16:24, e.

8 *Arcana Coelestia* 2220, 2322, *de Conjugio* 86, etc

9 See also *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47 on the nature of unselfish lov

least of all condemn any person. It is simply an exposition of what the Writings say about the matter, and a further demonstration of the principle that the teachings of the literal sense of the Word very often do apply to us literally as well as spiritually, even though they may not seem relevant in our culture today.



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What the Writings Say About Charity

By Craig W. Bostock

(First in a series of occasional articles on aspects of charity.)

I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (*Matthew 25:34-40*)

Charity is a term that is widely used. Its contemporary meaning is to act in a way that is caring and beneficial to others. The concept of charity traces back to early civilizations. It has both a secular and religious connotation. Views of charity have evolved over time as societies and religions have evolved. Often, there is disagreement on which actions reflect charity based on the differing views of individuals. From a religious perspective there can also be a conflict between actions driven by natural views of charity and those resulting from a spiritual or genuine view.

In contemporary American Society many view charity as actions intended to help others in need to alleviate their challenges, or to act in a way that others will view as kind, caring or compassionate. Many also view charity as being tolerant of others' beliefs and actions, though not universally so. As there will never be complete agreement on which beliefs and actions are charitable, individuals will always be left to judge. An evolving society is constantly balancing traditions of the past against new perspectives which often can be in

conflict with each other.

Religious views of charity can be found in both the Old and New Testaments; usually in how people should treat their neighbors. The Old Testament books of *Exodus* (Chapters 20-23) and *Leviticus* (especially Chapters 18-20) set forth how the Jews were to treat their neighbors and the consequences of treating them badly.

The New Testament contains many teachings on good treatment of the neighbor, such as when Jesus says: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (*John* 13:34) Acting in ways charitable to the neighbor is often viewed as synonymous with acting in a “moral” manner, which makes a distinction between what is right or wrong rather than merely acting according to what the law states.¹

The theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg provide new insights into “spiritual” or “genuine” charity which flows from love to the Lord and love of the neighbor. Several of the Founders and later Presidents were known or believed to have been readers of Swedenborg’s works including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Calvin Coolidge.

Swedenborg’s Writings form the foundation of the New Church² which refers to them as The Heavenly Doctrines or more commonly The Writings. These new teachings open the internal or spiritual sense of the Old and New Testaments resulting in a much deeper understanding of Christianity. Similar to the way the Lord spoke in parables while He was in this world, the stories of the Bible have a spiritual meaning. (*Sacred Scripture* 9,17) We know this from the Bible which tells us that the Lord opened up the spiritual sense of the Scriptures to His disciples after His resurrection. (*Luke* 24:27,32,45)

As an example, the story of creation in *Genesis* in the spiritual sense describes the process of a person’s regeneration, or being born again. Also, the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve are representations of the first, or Most Ancient Church that the Lord established on earth, and the Promised Land of Canaan that the Lord led the Children of Israel to corresponds to heaven.

Swedenborg’s Writings contain many new and unique ideas that may be challenging for those not familiar with his works. However, these ideas or doctrines are in most cases compatible with and complementary to traditional teachings on charity in the Jewish and Christian Churches. Specifically, these

1 Dictionary.com defines “moral” as “1. of, relating to, or concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong; ethical...3. founded on the fundamental principles of right conduct rather than on legalities, enactment, or custom.” Website: <http://www.dictionary.com> accessed 19 March 2017

2 Members of the New Church are referred to as New Churchman or sometimes as Swedenborgians.

doctrines build on the basis of the earlier doctrines since they have the Lord as their common source, forming successive revelations as needed by the human race during its evolution and development.

One of the many works of Swedenborg dedicated to charity is *Doctrine of Charity*, as are large sections of *Arcana Coelestia* and *True Christian Religion*. In fact most, if not all of the books of the Writings, address the concept of spiritual charity to some degree. Charity is the foundation of all religions according to Swedenborg. (*Doctrine of Charity* 212)

One of the passages that helps to define genuine charity states:

It is believed that charity toward the neighbor consists in giving to the poor, in helping the needy, and in doing good to everyone without exception. Nevertheless genuine charity consists in acting prudently, and to the end that good may come thereby. He who helps any poor or needy rogue, does evil to his neighbor through him, for by the help which he affords he confirms him in evil, and supplies him with the means of doing evil to others. It is otherwise with him who gives assistance to the good. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8120)

Here we see the potential conflict between natural and spiritual charity. By acting prudently we focus our efforts to achieve positive results through our charitable actions. If we do not purposefully focus our efforts on those who are pursuing good ends, we can actually help evil-minded people to injure others. For instance, if we were to indiscriminately invite a stranger into our home who appeared to be in need of food and shelter without having some indication of the stranger's background and intentions, we could inadvertently put our own and our family's safety and property at risk. This would be an imprudent act of natural charity.

On the other hand, if we were to help a family in poverty with the costs of a child attending an educational institution otherwise unaffordable, the potential result would be a quality education leading to the ability to be useful to others and in the intellectual growth of the student. This would be a prudent act of charity. Since our time, effort and finances are limited, it is very important for us to use prudence in applying these resources.

Another important teaching is that genuine charity has as much to do with a person's own spiritual growth and diligence in his or her occupation as it does with directly giving aid to others. This is set forth in the *Doctrine of Charity*:

1. The first of charity is to shun evils because they are sins.
2. The second of charity is to do goods because they are uses.
3. The essence of charity is good, which is use; and the objects of charity are, in a narrow sense an individual man, in a wider sense a society, in a

still wider sense one's country, and in the widest sense the human race; and these are the neighbor.

4. Charity itself is to act honestly, justly, and faithfully, in every work that belongs to anyone's occupation; and, through this, a man becomes *a charity*.

Applying an understanding of spiritual or genuine charity to contemporary issues has the potential to influence positively the application of solutions on an individual, local, national and worldwide level. However, given that the source of these solutions is based on genuine charity, there is the potential of misunderstandings about whether the solutions are truly charitable with those who view charity through only a natural perspective. Also, since imperfect humans are the ones who conceptualize and implement these solutions, these will not always completely align with genuine charity. But, for those who are believers in the Word of the Lord, there can be no better basis for the application of charity to the contemporary challenges that a nation faces.

Defining Charity

The first of charity is to shun evils because they are sins. (*Charity 0*)

The first thing of charity is not to do evil to the neighbor; and to do good to him holds the second place. (*True Christian Religion 435*)

The idea that we need to first focus on shunning evil for the performance of charity might not be obvious. Some might suggest that performing acts of charity for others is what enables us to become better people, both naturally and spiritually. The concept of shunning evil may be foreign to those who do not have a religious faith. And wouldn't any act that is intended to help another person be a good deed? Just why is it important for us to first focus on shunning evils?

To understand this, we must first understand the nature of the human race. People are born with inherently selfish wills³. (*Apocalypse Explained 675.9, Charity 2*) This can be hard to accept. We like to think that people are inherently good and fall into evils through bad choices. However, the Writings say the opposite is true. We are in fact born into hereditary evil tendencies of all kinds, with a will focused on what benefits ourselves. Fortunately, we also have the good of innocence and charity – referred to as remains or remnants in the Writings – implanted in us by the Lord in infancy and childhood to guide us away from these evils. (*Arcana Coelestia 7493*)

The good news is that the Lord created all of us with the goal of becoming

3 In the Writings a person's will refers to the proprium, or what the person loves and desires.

angels who will live in heaven forever, after our short time on earth. (*Ibid.* 2335.3; *Divine Providence* 322-3); *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 223; *True Christian Religion* 13,729) He has also given us the process we need to follow to achieve this outcome. This process is regeneration, or being born again, through which the self-focused will we are born with is replaced with a new will that is good – that is able to accept good from the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8036) For all good is from the Lord; none originates in man.

The process of regeneration is the shunning of evils because they are sins and conflict with the Lord's commandments. It requires that we examine our interior nature to find affections and thoughts that do not align with what is good and true. We then must ask for the Lord's help to root out these evils so that our desire to commit them is replaced with a desire to do what is right, which is defined by the Lord's commandments. Keeping the commandments is synonymous with loving Him. (*Joshua* 22:5; *John* 14:21; *Spiritual Diary* 5975; *True Christian Religion* 458) The importance of following the Lord's commandments and regeneration as these relate to charity is stated in these passages:

Charity toward the neighbor is nothing less than a life according to the Lord's commandments. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3249)

So far as anyone shuns evils as sins and looks to the Lord, so far he is in charity, and therefore, so far he is in faith. (*Faith* 23)

True faith and genuine charity are not attainable without repentance. (*True Christian Religion* 509)

It is important to understand that it is the Lord who removes the affections for evil and falsity from us rather than something we do for ourselves, although it appears that we are making it happen. This is by design, and it is OK for us to *feel* like we are fighting these evils ourselves, as long as in the end we acknowledge that it is really the Lord. However, the Lord cannot do this for us unless we let Him by opening up our hearts to Him and making a choice to be led by Him. This is the meaning of the passage: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." (*Revelation* 3:20)

Evils are rooted out by means of temptations, through which we are exposed to our hereditary tendencies toward evil. When faced with this we must first see that they are evil and ask for the Lord's help in not acting on them, and over time to remove the affection for them. To the degree that these evil affections are removed, we become receptacles of good and truth from the Lord.

Prior to regeneration we are characterized by love of self and the world.

We focus on what we perceive to be in our own self-interest – whether wealth, worldly possessions, power over others, praise for our actions, or having others provide for our needs and desires. This is in contrast to what the Lord teaches – that we should love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. (*Matthew 22:37-39, Divine Providence 94, True Christian Religion 458*)

This is also the message of the Ten Commandments -- that we should not commit acts such as murder, adultery, theft, slander or coveting. (*Exodus 20:1-17*) In fact, it is not enough for us just not to commit these acts – to avoid a loss of reputation, financial penalty or imprisonment – but we need to fully remove the *desire* to commit these acts as the Lord teaches. (*Matthew 5:21-28*) If we have not truly repented of the desire to commit these evils we will rush into the them when the constraints of the natural world are removed after death, since these evils remain as part of our ruling love.

Why is it so important for us to remove sin as it relates to performing acts of charity? It is because the quality of our good is part of every act we perform. If we are primarily in a state of love of self and the world, our actions may appear to be out of a desire to help others but will really be based on a desire for our own personal gain, such as being rewarded with praise or a position of prominence. (*Arcana Coelestia 803.3*)

In fact, to the degree that a person is in love of self and the world he is not in a state of love of the neighbor and the Lord, for these loves are diametrically opposed. In love of self and the world, a person also does not know what charity is, since it is in fact love of the neighbor. (*Ibid. 7489-90, New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 105*) A person in such a state may also harbor hatred against others, which is incompatible with charity. (*Ibid. 106*) In such a person the remains of innocence and charity recede more interiorly as if in hiding since they cannot tolerate the presence of love of self and the world. (*Arcana Coelestia 7493*)⁴

If, on the other hand, we are primarily in a state of love to the Lord and neighbor, our acts will originate from good with a true focus on helping others and not on our own gain. Only in this way are we able to perform acts truly focused on benefitting others, which are genuine acts of charity.

It is evident that a person cannot be in genuine charity and perform acts of genuine charity unless he first shuns evils as sins against the Lord. This is because the quality of a person's will is contained within his deeds. If his will

⁴ See *Arcana Coelestia* 7367, 7369 and 7373 for illustrations of the incompatibility of the love of self and love of the neighbor.

is a vessel for evil, this will flow into his acts and prevent them from being genuine charity. But if his will is a vessel for good from the Lord because he has rejected evils as sins, his acts will be genuine charity. This is because the door is open for him to receive influx from the Lord which guides his acts so they are truly charitable.

Genuine charity

It is believed that charity toward the neighbor consists in giving to the poor, in helping the needy, and in doing good to everyone without exception. Nevertheless genuine charity consists in acting prudently, and to the end that good may come thereby. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8120)

We should want to help other people in need. Feeling compassion is the means by which the Lord alerts us to offer help to those in need. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6737) We should get a good feeling when something we do improves the condition of another. But what if our efforts intended for good actually enable someone to commit evil acts? What if we were to give money to someone who claimed he was going to use it to start an organization that collected and distributed food to families in poverty but later learned that he ran off with money for himself without helping a single family?

Would we feel good about our contribution? Of course not. We would feel cheated, disappointed that we were not able to help those we had intended to and would be wary about making similar contributions. But how did an act of charity intended to help others turn out badly? It was due to a lack of prudence. If we had taken the time to research the person's true intent we may have seen that our contribution would not be an act of charity. The Writings make this point in many passages including:

Anybody who gives help to some poor or needy person who is a wrong-doer does ill to the neighbor through him, for through the help he gives that wrong-doer he strengthens him in evil and supplies him the wherewithal to do ill to others. It is different with one who supplies help to the good. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8120)

At some point in our lives each of us has probably experienced a situation where we thought we were helping someone truly in need and later found out that he had misrepresented himself or had not used our assistance as we intended. These situations result from natural or spurious charity. Spiritual or genuine charity is very different from natural charity in that it considers the good within a person before deciding whether to provide help, what form it should take, and how much assistance to provide. It also looks to the greater good of society and country so that we do not harm people through acts

intended to be helpful.

The Writings illustrate this point with the example of a judge who lets a wrongdoer go free without punishment. (*True Christian Religion* 407, 459.15) Such an act is likely to have negative results. While it is possible that a wrongdoer might decide to correct his ways, he might decide that since he got away with it he could do so again, perhaps in even more nefarious ways since there was no consequence for his law breaking. So, by letting this person go free, the judge could be contributing to future harm against other individuals.

The wrongdoer is also harmed since facing the consequences of his actions might have made him see the error of his ways, or at least prevented further progression into evil. Of course, situations like these are complex and the correct approach is not always obvious. We can see how important it is for a judge to use his prudence wisely in dealing with those who break the law.

The Writings refer to “genuine charity,” “spiritual charity,” “true charity” and “real charity” in many passages but generally are referring to genuine charity when using the term “charity” on its own. The Writings also refer to natural or spurious charity, defined as charity that is primarily for the sake of self and the world rather than the neighbor.

Another distinction is the difference between charity and good will, benefactions or good works. The latter are actions that may result from either genuine or spurious charity. These can be mistaken for genuine charity, especially by those who do not understand genuine charity. Fortunately, the Lord’s Divine Providence always works to guide actions made of a person’s free will to the benefit of the person and others. Therefore, there can be usefulness in natural acts of charity by introducing others to charity which can lead to an understanding of genuine charity through learning from the Word about faith and charity. (*True Christian Religion* 426.2)

Genuine or Spiritual Charity is characterized by the following qualities:

- Serving others without thought of reward (*Arcana Coelestia* 3419.3, 3956, 6393, 8033, 9210; *Apocalypse Revealed* 86; *Last Judgment* 39.11-12; *Luke* 14:12-14; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*.106, 153, 154; *True Christian Religion* 425)
- Treating the neighbor differently in accordance with the good in them, and in a way that will truly help them (*Arcana Coelestia* 2425.3, 3419.3, 9174.3; *Charity* 50, 52, 54; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 100-1; *True Christian Religion* 421, 425)
- Believing in the Lord and being born again or regenerated (*Arcana Coelestia* 5354, *True Christian Religion* 459.17)
- Doing what is right in every task and in one’s employment (*Arcana*

Coelestia 4783.5, 8121; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 101; *True Christian Religion* 422, 425, 432, 459.17)

- Sharing a knowledge of good and truths with others (*Arcana Coelestia* 9174.3-5)
- Not being in need of the goods of others (*Ibid.* 9174.5)
- Having a desire that the neighbor will fare as well as ourselves (*Ibid.* 3956)
- Conjoining Good and Truth, or what is the same charity and faith (*Ibid.* 2839, 4783.5, 4956, 7757-9; *Apocalypse Revealed* 130; *True Christian Religion* 450)

Natural or Spurious Charity is characterized by these qualities:

- Performing acts for the purpose of personal gain (*Arcana Coelestia* 3956, 9174.4, *True Christian Religion* 421)
- Giving to every poor person and relieving every one that is in need, without previously inquiring whether they are good or wicked or what their true need is (*Arcana Coelestia* 8120, 9174.3-4; *Charity* 51, 52, 54; *True Christian Religion* 428)
- Not conjoining Good and Truth (*True Christian Religion* 450, *Charity* 54)

Examples of Goodwill, Benefactions and Good Works include:

- Giving to the poor and needy (*True Christian Religion* 425)
- Donations to churches and charitable organizations (*Ibid.*)

Genuine charity requires that we understand and embrace truths from the Word, that prudence according to the good in the recipient is required when performing acts of charity, and that charitable actions must be devoid of a desire for merit or reward. If all of these qualities are not present, the actions are of natural or spurious charity regardless of the apparent positive results they might provide.

Contrasting natural and genuine charity and the benefactions of charity

A clear distinction must be made between spiritual good and natural good. As before said, spiritual good has its quality from the truths of faith, their abundance, and their connection; but natural good is born with the man, and also arises by accident, as by misfortunes, diseases, and the like. Natural good saves no one, but spiritual good saves all. (*Arcana Coelestia* 7761)

The contemporary view of charity focuses primarily on indiscriminately

providing assistance for those less fortunate or in need and in being tolerant of a large diversity of viewpoints. It is a natural form of charity because it does not discriminate based on the quality of good in the neighbor. Genuine or spiritual charity originates from love of the neighbor and may appear contrary to actions resulting from natural charity. Some may read the Bible and conclude that it is telling us to indiscriminately perform acts of goodwill according to the natural needs of others.

I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. (*Matthew* 25:34-40)

From this statement made by the Lord while He was in the world it is clear that we are to attend to the needs of others. To practice genuine charity it is important to understand the internal or spiritual sense of these phrases in the Word. The Writings tell us that this passage (and others like) refers to the spiritual states and needs of others. The “hungry” represent those with an affection for doing good and being useful. The “thirsty” represent those with an affection for and a desire to learn truth. A “stranger” represents a gentile – someone outside the church who wants to learn doctrine and approach the Lord. The “naked” represent those who acknowledged there is no good or truth within themselves and often feel lost and vulnerable, even worthless. The “sick” represent those who are trapped in evils and falsities from a love of self. Those “in prison” represent those who are trapped by misunderstanding and false assumptions. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4956, *True Christian Religion* 427) This distinction between the spiritual and natural meaning is further illustrated in these passages in *Arcana Coelestia*:

It is a truth natural not spiritual, within the church, that good ought to be done to the poor, to widows, and to the fatherless, and that to do good to them is the charity which is enjoined in the Word; but truth not spiritual—that is, they who are in truth not spiritual—understand by the poor, the widows, and the fatherless, only those who are so called; whereas truth spiritual natural—that is, they who are in this truth—do indeed confirm this, but put in the last place this meaning of the poor, the widows, and the fatherless . . . that by the “poor” in the Word are meant those who are spiritually such. . . . The same is true of the “widows” and the “fatherless,” with a difference in respect to state. (5008.2)

The spiritual man says, just as the natural man does, that good

should be done to the poor, widows, and orphans; but the spiritual man thinks that good should not be done to the poor, widows, or orphans who are evil. . . . From this the spiritual man is led to deduce that the poor, widows, and orphans mentioned in the Word mean those who are spiritually so. But the natural man thinks that good should be done to the poor, widows, and orphans who are literally called such, and that none other than these are meant in the Word; nor is he interested in whether they are evil or good people. (5028.2)

It is evident in this passage from *Matthew* that the Lord is telling us that we should attend to the spiritual needs of people, according to their specific condition, just as a physician would attend to the needs of an ill person in accordance with a diagnosis of the cause. For instance, if a non-religious person were to “thirst” for the truth from the Word, we should facilitate their access by inviting them to church, giving them a copy of the Bible or a book of the Writings, or simply having a discussion about our religious beliefs.

Still, there can be little doubt that the Lord is also teaching us to treat others with compassion and to provide assistance to those in need on a natural level as well. The challenge is to do so in a way that aligns compassion with genuine charity. If we do not do this our acts of compassion could lead to harm on a natural level, and possibly even on a spiritual level. (*True Christian Religion* 428)

For instance, if we were to give money to someone knocking on our door who said he needed help, without understanding how he plans to use it, we might enable him to purchase a gun he then uses in an armed robbery with an innocent person harmed or killed. Another example, which the Writings cite in several passages, is a judge who lets an individual who committed a crime avoid punishment. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8121, *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 106; *True Christian Religion* 407, 422, 459.5)

This can have the effect of teaching the person who committed the crime to think there is nothing wrong with breaking the law, or that there is no negative consequence, despite harm to others. The errant judge could contribute to preventing an individual’s regeneration by sending a signal that evildoing is acceptable. This is a very real issue as we often hear rationalizations about why a person who commits a crime should not be held accountable due to various societal factors.

Genuine charity is not something new to the Writings and the New Church but has been present in the doctrine of all of the Lord’s churches as it relates to love of the neighbor. Its basic tenants are contained in the second tablet of the Decalogue which are acknowledged by the Jewish and Christian Churches and are found in some form in most other religions. The most basic

element of charity is to shun evils as sins, which is called repentance. (*Charity* 8, 27) This concept was well known at the start of the Christian Church as it was preached by the Lord, His disciples and by John the Baptist. (*Ibid.* 26) However, the Writings give a new revelation that allows us to have a much deeper understanding of genuine charity which has the potential – indeed the promise – to elevate the human race’s love of the neighbor to previously unknown heights.

The Writings give unique insights into genuine charity not available to prior churches. While the people of the Most Ancient Church, who had “the law engraved on their hearts,” practiced genuine charity, they did so from innocence rather than the in-depth understanding made possible after the Lord gave the Writings. (*True Christian Religion* 422-3)

This is like the innocence of a young child who obeys his parents without question because it is what they have told him, compared with an adult who has grown into innocence out of understanding the truths of faith. The subsequent Ancient, Jewish and Christian Churches also have doctrines concerning genuine charity, which provide the foundation for the depth of insight now available in the Writings.

Charity is synonymous with good as faith is synonymous with truth. Just as there is natural and spiritual good there is natural and spiritual charity. Natural good originates with man, whereas spiritual good flows from the Lord into man. A person who views good as originating from himself can only be in a natural form of charity. Since such charity relies on a person’s own intellect or perception of truth, it does not have the true benefit of the neighbor as its end, even if the person desires it. This natural form of charity is also referred to as “good deeds.” (*True Christian Religion* 421) These good deeds may appear as genuine charity and may align directly with acts that are of genuine charity, but there is no guarantee this will always be the case, as they rely on a person’s own perceptions. Worse still, while these deeds may benefit others, they may really have as their end the benefit of the person performing the deeds for the merit he receives.

It is the person who looks to the Lord as the source of truth and good who develops genuine charity. By realizing that all good and truth, and through them charitable acts, can only originate in the Lord, we open ourselves to His influx. We then become the conduit for His good and truth to be put into action. Indeed, this is the very purpose for which all people are created. When performing charitable acts a person grows more and more spiritual and practices ever more genuine forms of charity.

But all of us are born into a natural form of charity from the hereditary tendencies of our ancestors, which has as its real end our own benefit. It is only through the process of shunning evils as sins (regeneration) that we are able

to transition from natural to genuine charity. This is why the first of charity is to shun evils as sins.

In most cases our parents instill the concept of morality in childhood. But this is a natural morality as it is something we are told we should be and how we should act, but until later do not fully understand or embrace from a rational understanding. Initially, acting morally includes abiding by the laws of society and being considerate of our neighbor. It may even be for only selfish reasons, such as not having a negative reputation or being incarcerated. As we become more rational and spiritual, this morality changes from natural to spiritual, as with charity.

Another distinction we need to make is the difference between genuine charity and the benefactions or kindnesses of charity. Genuine charity involves the shunning of evils as sins and performing one's occupation faithfully and with dedication. Benefactions of charity are the acts we commit for the benefit our neighbor in addition to shunning evils and performing our occupation. These benefactions are what we ought to do but are not acts of genuine charity. But if we are in a state of genuine charity it will flow through these acts with positive results.

In contemporary society, most people mistake these benefactions as genuine charity in the form of charitable contributions and caring for those less fortunate. However, if these do not originate from genuine charity, they are selfish acts with a view to personal reward. Some believe this will earn their salvation in the next life and supersede the evil acts they have committed on earth, not understanding that it is a person's ruling love (love of the Lord and the neighbor versus love of self and the world) that determines his future life in heaven or hell. However, in the Lord's Divine Providence, the benefactions, whether originating in natural or genuine charity, still provide benefits for those receiving them. Not only are physical needs provided for but recipients are also shown the example of caring and giving by others so that they can follow these examples. (*True Christian Religion* 425-6)

Some people erroneously believe that charity consists in giving indiscriminately to everyone in need. From the letter of the Bible it is understandable how a person could develop this misconception. However, it is vital to act with prudence in giving aid so that harm does not result from indiscriminate acts. For the person who helps another commit evil acts due to a lack of understanding how the aid will be applied, or not wanting to know, is partly responsible for the evil committed.

These people mistakenly believe that the Lord only cares about the act of giving itself. (*Ibid.* 428) But common sense dictates that helping another person commit evil acts does not benefit society. We have laws against aiding and abetting wrongdoers because of this. And while these laws typically

focus on whether a person knows of the harm being committed, it should be considered negligent not to attempt to understand the ends of the person given aid.

While there are risks associated with relying on natural charity, there can also be a benefit. The Writings (e.g. *Arcana Coelestia* 561, *True Christian Religion* 425-6) discuss how there is a benefit to children and those without an understanding of genuine charity when they help a needy person without determining his or her true state and level of need, resulting in the implanting of remnants which are goods and truths from the Lord in our subconscious. This helps form a habit of giving to others and caring about the neighbor. To reduce the risk that this could be turned to evil purposes, we should provide items of necessity rather than money, such as hygiene products, clothing, blankets and food.

It is evident that genuine charity requires a person to act prudently according to the good in the neighbor. In this way a person tailors his actions depending on the good within the recipient and does not commit acts of indiscriminate natural charity.

The importance of use in charity

The love of uses is charity. (Divine Wisdom 11)

The life of charity consists in the practice of uses. (*Arcana Coelestia* 997, *Charity* 0, *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 124)

Charity is the act of doing good to others. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8033) As such it involves use. (*Heaven and Hell* 112) Just to want good things to happen to other people is not charity. Charity requires that an act as a means of helping others. (*Arcana Coelestia* 7038, *Apocalypse Revealed* 875.6-7) One of the most basic forms of charity is in how we approach our occupations and other obligations. We practice charity when we approach these in a positive manner, work conscientiously in an upright manner, and treat others in an honest and ethical way. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8253; *Charity* 158; *Spiritual Diary* 6105; *True Christian Religion* 432) This benefits others within the organization and society in general. This results from a “love of God and love of the neighbor, and it is what binds society together and makes its goodness.” (*Conjugal Love* 9.4)

Our occupation provides a use in many ways. There are the direct benefits others receive. A minister provides for spiritual growth and health. A teacher helps develop children to be useful. Farmers grow food to feed the masses. Merchants distribute goods and services from providers to consumers. Those in the military and law enforcement protect our country and individuals. Doctors and nurses attend to our health.

To act charitably, individuals must dedicate themselves to doing the best that they can in their occupations or they could harm others. A doctor who does not approach patients with a desire and commitment to understand and remedy their ailments will be less useful than one who does and could cause more harm to those he is treating. A police officer or member of the military who does not approach each day with a commitment to doing what is right and in line with his training can cause great harm. The farmer who does not consider safety measures could accidentally harm those who consume his products. Even the teacher who is not giving his best each day could impart false or less knowledge than needed in his students, thus harming their development. (*True Christian Religion* 422-3)

Performing uses as part of our occupation also has the benefit of providing income, which allows us to provide for the needs of ourselves and our families. Income lets us make charitable contributions to our church and other benefactions. It enables us to pay taxes for local, state and national government initiatives. To the degree that our efforts help improve the organization we are part of, they help to increase jobs and production.

Our employment provides an opportunity to be useful to others. The importance of use cannot be overstated. We were created by the Lord for the sole purpose of being of service to others, first in this world, then in the spiritual world. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1103.2, *True Christian Religion* 67) Therefore, we should take pride in and receive pleasure from the uses we perform because they benefit other people. (*Charity* 126) The Bible speaks to the dangers of not being useful in many passages, particularly in *Proverbs* (chapters 12, 13, 14, 19, 20 and 31), *Ecclesiastes* 10:18 and 2 *Thessalonians* (chapter 3).

While we are in this world our occupation may not align directly with our affections and skills. However, in the next life it will. Performing uses in this world actually prepares us for our place in heaven. There angels receive happiness in proportion to the uses they perform. (*Arcana Coelestia* 454; *Heaven and Hell* 403; *True Christian Religion* 735.5, 736.3; *Spiritual Diary* 4773) They also receive food, wealth and status in proportion to the uses they perform. They take joy in these, not for the benefit they receive but by the increasing uses they are able to perform through them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6073.2) Indeed, heaven is a place of use and not eternal idleness.

The heavenly form is such that every individual there is in some ministry, some function, some office or employment, and in work. Such are all the heavenly societies, that no one may be useless. One who does nothing and who wishes to live in ease, or only to talk and walk and sleep, is not tolerated there. (*Charity* 137)

It is different with evil spirits in hell. Their goal is to steal what they need

and want from others, rather than having to work for it themselves. However, because we are all created to perform uses, evil spirits are required to work for their own basic necessities. But, unlike the angels, evil spirits do not derive joy from these uses. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1194, 1226.3; *Apocalypse Revealed* 153.10-11; *Spiritual Diary* 6088) Evil spirits who refuse to work to provide for themselves are “cast out into deserts, where a morsel of bread is given them daily, and water to drink, and they dwell by themselves in huts or in caves.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1226.3)

In the natural world this scenario is not so clearly segregated. Here people are able to obtain wealth and status without performing uses, or sometimes in performing harmful acts. Those who work the hardest for others are not always rewarded. This may seem unfair, but we need to keep in mind that the events and conditions of this world result from the freedom to choose between good and evil which can lead to results that are not in order or are perceived as unfair. But the Lord’s Divine Providence is always guiding everything resulting from this freedom toward the good for ourselves and others, even if it is not directly obvious to us.

A person who practices charity in his occupation will conscientiously apply himself to the responsibilities it entails. He will act in an honest and upright manner, will help and team with his coworkers, take pride in a job well done, and take pleasure in the benefits that his labors provide. He will be happy for the income he receives so that he can provide for himself and his family, pay taxes, contribute to his church, and assist others.

On the other hand, a person who is not practicing charity in his occupation is constantly looking out for his own benefit. He may scheme to take credit for work that others perform or do as little work as possible. He seeks increases in income and status, not for the uses that he can perform but for his own selfish greed and dominion over others. In this way he violates the Lord’s seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” (*True Christian Religion* 317) Fortunately, through the Lord’s Divine Providence, even these nefarious motives can provide benefits for others whether or not it is the desire of the person performing them. (*Ibid.* 412.3)

Of course, not all uses result in income for the individual performing them. Many people perform uses as volunteers. Some families choose to have one spouse remain in the home to raise children or care for the elderly. Those who are retired may still perform important uses with the knowledge they have gained over a lifetime. And some people who are unable to find paying employment due to disabilities or other limitations may still be able to perform uses in other ways.

We see that use is an essential element of charity. We are all created to perform uses and will do so in the next life also, with joy if we choose heaven,

and grudgingly if we choose hell. We should faithfully apply ourselves to our occupations and interact in a truthful, straightforward manner with others.



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Whose Wife is She?

The Lord's Confrontation with the Sadducees

By the Rev. William H. Clifford

Three times in the *Gospel of Matthew* the Lord spoke directly about marriage.

- The first was in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord contradicts Moses and says that the only legitimate cause for divorce is adultery.
- The second is when the Pharisees challenge the Lord to explain this.
- And the third was when the Sadducees used what the Lord had previously taught about divorce and the resurrection to ask, “whose wife is she,” seeking to make the Lord contradict one of His teachings.

Here is a table showing these three events in Matthew and their parallels in the other Gospels:

Divorce	<i>Matthew</i> 5: 31,32		<i>Luke</i> 16:18
Pharisees	<i>Matthew</i> 9: 3–12	<i>Mark</i> 10:2–12	
Sadducees' I	<i>Matthew</i> 22: 23–33	<i>Mark</i> 12: 18–27	<i>Luke</i> 20: 27–40

To understand the challenge behind the Sadducee's question “whose wife is she,” we need to examine the Lord's words in these earlier events. Let us do so in their order, since each lays the groundwork for those which follow.

In the Sermon on the Mount

It has been said, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (*Matthew* 5: 31, 32)

The Lord acknowledged that Moses taught that the Jews could divorce for any cause by giving their wife a certificate of divorce. But He was saying that

the only legitimate cause of divorce was adultery and that a man should only have one wife. There is no passage in the Old Testament that explicitly teaches this. It is, however, implied. This is revealed in the Heavenly Doctrines where the Lord says concerning the parallel passage in *Luke*:

Since marriages on earth correspond through truly conjugal love to the heavenly marriage which is that of good and truth, the laws laid down in the Word concerning betrothals and marriages correspond completely to the spiritual laws of the heavenly marriage, such as the law that men were to marry one wife only, *Mark* 10:2–8 [a parallel passage to the Lord’s confrontation about divorce with the Pharisees]; *Luke* 16:18; for in the case of the heavenly marriage the situation is that no good can be joined to any but its own truth, or truth to any but its own good. If joined to any truth other than its own, good could not possibly be held together but would be torn apart and so would perish. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4434.8)

There is no place in the Old Testament that explicitly teaches that a man should be married to one wife. But it is implied, which is brought out in the Lord’s dispute with the Pharisees.

The Lord Answers the Pharisees

Sometime after the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount the Pharisees challenge the Lord to explain why the only legitimate grounds for divorce was adultery, when Moses taught otherwise. We read:

Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

Jesus replied: “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (*Matthew* 19: 3–9)

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord declared that the only legitimate

cause for divorce was adultery. This, however, was not understanding of the Pharisees, or even of the Lord's own disciples! The Pharisees understood *Deuteronomy 24:1*:

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,

as teaching that a man could divorce his wife for any reason that suited him.

The Lord began His reply by saying:

Haven't you read, that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'? (*Matthew 19: 4*)

This refers to *Genesis* (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2740):

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (*Genesis 1:27*)

When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, He called them "man." (*Genesis 5: 1,2*)

The import of these two passages is that it is the male and female together that is the image and likeness of God, and not either one individually. This is the joining together by God, that man shall not separate. This is the ideal and why virtually everyone in heaven is married.

To reinforce this, the Lord adds a reference to *Genesis 2:24*:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. (*Matthew 19: 5,6*)

This states that by marriage God joins a man and a woman so that they may become one, and that the two become "man." This joining of man and woman into one is a Divine activity, and as such man should not seek to undo it. This not only argues against divorce for any reason, but it also argues against polygamy.

It is worth remembering for us in the New Church, that from the beginning means the Most Ancient Church. The most ancients were celestial and had love truly conjugal. (See *Conjugal Love* 75)

This conjunction of a man and a woman into one is meant to be permanent because what God creates from the beginning is very good.

The idea that marriage could exist in the other life is one of the reasons the Sadducees structured their challenge to the Lord the way they did.

Before we take up the Lord's dispute with the Sadducees, we need some background.

Jewish Beliefs in Life after Death

Let us begin by taking a quick look at the various beliefs about life after death at time the Lord was on earth. For the Sadducees, only the books of Moses (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*) were Scripture. The books of Moses have no teachings about life after death, or any teachings about the resurrection of the body. The Sadducees therefore did not believe in life after death. Concerning this:

Another reason is that people whose thought does not rise above the level of the senses suppose that life itself resides solely in the body, and think that if this were not restored to life the person would be no more. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10595)

The type of external worship which is called "Canaan" is similar to that of the Jews before the Lord's Coming, and after it as well. They had an external worship, which they also celebrated meticulously, yet they were unaware of what is internal, indeed so unaware of it as to imagine that they lived solely with a body. Of the soul, or faith, or the Lord, or spiritual and celestial life, or life after death, they were totally ignorant. Consequently very many in the Lord's time said that there was no resurrection, as is clear in *Matthew* 22:23–33; *Mark* 12:18–27; *Luke* 20:27–40. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1200)

By the time of the Lord's advent, the Pharisees had come to believe in the resurrection. Based on the second chapter of *Genesis*:

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (2:7)

They concluded from this that life adheres to the physical body. Any resurrection had to include the physical body. Concerning this idea, we read in the Heavenly Doctrines:

On being asked whether they are sure that they will all come to the land of Canaan, they reply that all will then come, and then the dead Jews will rise again and leave their graves to enter that land. When it is objected that there is no way they can leave their graves since they are already living after death, they reply that they will then go down and enter into their bodies and live like that. On being told that that land is not large enough to hold them all, they reply that it will then be enlarged. When told that the kingdom of the Messiah,

since He is the Son of God, will not be on earth, but in heaven, they reply that the land of Canaan will then be heaven. (*True Christian Religion* 845)

The idea of a resurrection appears in some of the last books of the Old Testament to be written and in some of the literature written between the Old and New Testaments, such as *1 Enoch*.

Life after the resurrection would be a life in the physical world in their physical bodies. The big difference is that with the resurrection, the Lord would destroy the evil who would then cease to exist. The righteous would live on in the same manner they had before they died. The resurrected life would be better since the righteous people would no longer be tormented by the evil.

Now that we understand the beliefs Pharisees and the Sadducees about the afterlife, we can begin looking at the argument Sadducees were making.

What the Lord Taught About the Resurrection

The Lord frequently spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, thus affirming eternal life. The Beatitudes, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, are one example:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (*Matthew* 5:3–12)

A Pharisee hearing this could not be faulted for understanding that the Lord was teaching that the good would be resurrected with their physical body and enjoy eternal blessedness with the absence of evil being inflicted upon them. The Lord's words do not actually say this, but they do not contradict it either.

The Sadducees did not believe in life after death. Clearly the Lord was

teaching that there is life after death. The Sadducees needed one more teaching of the Lord's to entrap Him. They found this in the Lord's teaching on divorce in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Argument of the Sadducees

The Sadducees knew four things about what the Lord taught:

1. He taught that there was life after death
2. That a man should only have one wife
3. The only legitimate cause for divorce was adultery
4. That there was marriage after death

The Sadducees constructed a hypothetical situation that would force the Lord to deny one of these teachings. This involved the teaching of Moses about the Levirate marriage:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. (*Deuteronomy 25:5,6*)

The first-born son of this Levirate marriage would be the offspring of her deceased husband, and that son would inherit the deceased man's property. This was a common practice in the ancient Near East, "including Babylon, Assyria, the Hittites, Nuzi, and Ugarit."¹

Marriage in the ancient Near East was transactional. It was usually arranged. The groom's family paid the bride's family for the wife to be. And the bride's family paid the bride a dowry which went to the bride's husband or his family.

The transactional nature of Jewish marriage can be seen in the story of Jacob having to work for Laban for 14 years so that he could marry Laban's two daughters: Leah and Rachel. And Rachel's and Leah's remarks to Jacob:

Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you." (*Genesis 31:14,16*)

¹ Fleenor, R. (2016). *Law, Levirate*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott . . . W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Whose Wife is She?

The Sadducees proposed a situation where a woman is married to a man who dies without offspring. She then marries his brother, who also dies without offspring. This is repeated for a total of seven times.

According to the Lord's own teaching God joined a husband and wife into a one, and this marriage was supposed to be indissoluble except by adultery. And no adultery had taken place.

The Lord could have resolved this issue by denying the resurrection. If there was no resurrection, then whose wife she was is immaterial. The Lord, however, had taught that there was a resurrection, so He could not choose this option.

On the other hand, picking one or more of the brothers to be her husband made a mockery of everything that the Lord had taught about marriage. This was the trap that the Sadducees had set, and either answer would have made them happy and accomplished their objective.

The Lord, however, did not step into this trap.

You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; [but] they will be like the angels in heaven. (*Matthew 22:29,30*)

We know from the Heavenly Doctrines that there are marriages in heaven. Marriages in heaven, however, are not arranged by the parents, nor are they transactional. There is no bride price. There is no dowry. So, it is true that at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Nor are there any Levirate marriages in heaven.

Had the Lord simply said that "at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage," it would make sense to understand the Lord's words as teaching that there is no marriage in heaven. The Lord, however, added "but they will be like the angels in heaven."

The Greek word used here for "but" means a strong or emphatic contrast. So, the Lord is contrasting earthly marriages with how the angels live. The Lord did not go on and explain how the angels live.

The only reason Christians believe that there are no marriages in heaven is because of their interpretation of these words. There are no Scriptural passages that teach that angels are sexless beings. Throughout the Word angels always appear as human beings and are frequently mistaken for being men.

It is far more likely that the contrast the Lord was making was between the state of transactional married love of the day with the state of marriage love that was in the beginning, and which continued in the other life. This was implied in

the Lord's answer to the Pharisees about divorce. This contrast is fully illustrated in the five memorable relations in *Conjugal Love* about marriage love in the Golden, Silver, Copper and Iron ages, and the age that followed. (See *Conjugal Love* 73–79)

The Resurrection

Having responded to whose wife she would be, the Lord went on to respond to the question of the resurrection:

But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.
(*Matthew* 22: 31, 32)

The interesting thing about the Lord's response here is that He not only showed that the Sadducees were wrong in denying the resurrection; but that the Pharisees were wrong in thinking that physical body would be resurrected. The Pharisees saw the dead having vague existence while they waited to be returned to their bodies. But if they were living now, without physical bodies, then clearly there was no need for resurrection of their bodies.

Conclusion

It is fascinating to see in the *Gospel of Matthew* that there is an interconnected series between the Lord's teachings about marriage and divorce.

First, in the Sermon on the Mount, that the only legitimate reason for divorce is adultery with its implication about eternal marriage, and that a man should only have one wife.

Second, when the Pharisees challenge the Lord on the proper grounds for divorce. Here, the Lord teaches about the purpose of marriage and more clearly brings out its eternal nature.

And third, when the Lord dealt with the Sadducees. Here the Lord teaches that there is an eternal life, that marriage is not a mere transactional relationship, that it continues into the other life.

One is filled with awe and wonder when he sees how the Lord brings out the implied teachings of the Old Testament and weaves in the eternal truths about marriage. It is wonderful to see how the Lord builds upon His previous teachings to present the truth more forcefully to His audience, both then and now.

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Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

(Highlights of the December 15, 2021, meeting)

With the consent and approval of members of the Michael Pitcairn family and the Glencairn Foundation, sale of the Michael Pitcairn property (on Huntingdon Pike in Bryn Athyn) was approved by the board.

The sale terms include giving the Academy the right to reacquire, at its election on sale or transfer, either the entire property or a 17-acre buffer parcel contiguous to Cairnwood.

The board also approved the use of the sale proceeds to include establishing a dedicated permanent endowment for Cairnwood Estate; reimbursing the Academy for its carrying costs and loss of return on those funds; and setting aside funds to reacquire either the entire property or the southern 17-acre buffer parcel, which, if not used for the repurchase, will be added to the Cairnwood endowment.

Bryn Athyn College

The College is back in full operation. Several fall sports teams advanced to playoffs or had a championship season.

The Middle States accreditation process is moving forward, with a virtual visit by the Visiting Team scheduled in April.

Challenging work has begun to find ways to fund and better assist middle-income students.

An Information Technology (IT) security audit was performed recently. Work has begun to address its numerous findings and recommendations. IT security is a paramount concern.

Academy Secondary Schools

Enrollment is at 221, above the budget forecast. Reorganization of the Admissions Department resulted in productive changes.

Next year may see the largest incoming class from Bryn Athyn Church School in many years.

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE PRESIDENT RETIRING

Brian Blair has announced that he will retire as President of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church at the end of the 2022-23 academic year. At that point he will have served as President for eight years. “My time here,” he says, “has been both an honor and privilege.”

This advance notice allows for an orderly succession within the President’s Office.

Chancellor Peter M. Buss Jr. expressed gratitude to Brian for his years of service and his “continued commitment to work with him” through his remaining term. As his letter indicates, “we have important accreditation, budgetary and educational processes that need his and our full attention.”

To provide for an orderly succession Chancellor Buss has initiated an Executive Search Process. “Brian’s formal notice of retirement triggers that process (which) includes the appointment of a Presidential Search Committee with representatives from the Academy Board, College Board Committee, Corporation and Faculty, among others. It is chaired by me as Chancellor. We expect a full review of the mission and needs of the College, the competencies of desired candidates, and the platform of support into which we are inviting this key leader.”

“A time of transition has us pause and reflect in important ways. We note that the College has been faithfully serving its mission as a valued part of the Academy family since 1877. The Lord has blessed us with capable leaders over that long span and we can trust that He will provide once again at this juncture.”

Brian Blair assures that once a new President is appointed there will be a period of transition as the new President gains sufficient familiarity with the office.

In his letter to the Bryn Athyn College community he said: “As we continue to emerge from the pandemic and the uncertainties imposed onto our everyday lives, rest assured the Bryn Athyn College spirit of perseverance and progress are evident throughout the campus and the community. This spring students are able to return to campus showing their smiling, mask-free faces, and ready to learn.

“Bryn Athyn College continues to provide an excellent New Church-based education in a close-knit setting, and I look forward to how the College will be invigorated this spring. From Admissions open houses and students taking advantage of fresh graduate opportunities, to celebrating graduation, there will be many ways that the campus will be showing Lion Pride.”

GLENCAIRN MUSEUM

(Highlights from a report to members by Brian Henderson, Director)

Christmas at Glencairn

Museum staff welcomed more than 3,800 visitors of all ages during the *Christmas at Glencairn* season. This year marked the 13th *World Nativities Exhibition*, featuring 60 Nativities from 39 countries. An accompanying seek-and-find activity – available in five languages – encouraged younger visitors to study details in each setting. Two sold-out homeschool days offered more than 200 children and young adults the opportunity to explore the Nativities, learn about the countries represented, and engage with three different hands-on activities.

Visitors on the popular *Christmas in the Castle* tour were not only introduced to family traditions when Glencairn was a home but enjoyed examples of Nativity themed works of art throughout the Museum. Some of these were featured in this year's daily advent calendar, which included paintings, illuminated manuscripts, sculptures and stained-glass windows from the Museum collection.

The *Christmas Sing*, a tradition since 1937, went on with limited seating. An online presentation was also made available.

Infrastructure Replacement Project

There was a lot of work throughout the fall and early winter in the parking lot adjacent to the Cathedral parking lots and on the hill leading up to Glencairn. The first phase of the comprehensive replacement is nearing completion. A new main electrical supply has been run from Huntingdon Pike, a new exterior transformer and interior switch gear have been installed, and new interior conduit and wiring is being installed in the lower level of Glencairn. Soon each of its major electric components will be transferred over to the new main electrical feed, staged to prevent any major interruption to operations.

The geothermal wellfield has also been completed, with 28 wells drilled under the Glencairn parking lot adjacent to the Cathedral. The main lines running from the wellfield have been penetrated into the building, pressure tested and capped, ready for the next phase of the project. Unfortunately, the amount of rock encountered, along with other obstacles, prevented the completion of the wellfield in time to repave the parking lot before winter. The plan is to resurface the lot in the spring.

Contract bids for the major second phase of the project have been received. This phase, which includes installing new heating and air conditioning and removing or replacing all domestic water throughout Glencairn, is scheduled for late spring or early summer. Installing lines and pipes within the granite structure of Glencairn, while preserving the aesthetic beauty and integrity of

its original finishes – including its many mosaic walls – is complex and time consuming. Regrettably, the Museum will be closed for roughly 12 months to complete this work.

Programming During Closure

Planning and development are underway to ensure that the Museum continues to offer programming and to share its collection and mission with members, students and visitors throughout the closure. In addition to online resources, video lectures and other digital programming, the Museum's Education Department has begun testing traveling educational classrooms, which include safely taking Museum objects to students in their classrooms.

Plans for a significant exhibition of treasures from the Museum's medieval collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is well underway and discussions have begun of a possible loan of Glencairn Nativities to another museum next Christmas.

The Museum will continue to offer lectures and programs for members, as well as trips to regional museums during this period. Plans are underway to host adult workshops and several small, intimate concerts elsewhere within the Bryn Athyn Historic District and Academy campuses.

Contact: Brian.Henderson@glencairnmuseum.org

NEW PRINCIPAL FOR BRYN ATHYN CHURCH SCHOOL

The Rev. Derek Elphick, Pastor of the Bryn Athyn Society, announced that the Bryn Athyn Church Board of Directors has unanimously affirmed **Kiri Rogers** as the next Principal of Bryn Athyn Church School and Preschool. Kiri brings extensive administrative and educational experience, as well as first-hand experience working with teachers and parents at Bryn Athyn Church School.

She will be taking over July 1 from **Greg Henderson**, who is retiring June 30 as Principal and going to work for General Church Education.

Kiri has been a part of Bryn Athyn Church School since 2002, serving as a school counselor for 10 years, transitioning into providing services as a mental health consultant to the present. She worked 10 years prior in a variety of roles, including as a Behavior Specialist in Philadelphia, Abington and Upper Dublin school districts, and as an administrator for Salvation Army Children's Services.

For the next 20 years, she continuously worked in New Church education, teaching a variety of Psychology and Education courses, including Introduction to Special Education, Educational Psychology, and Child Development at Bryn Athyn College and Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools. Administratively, she was Dean of Students at Bryn Athyn College for six years, and Department Chair of Psychology for five years.

Pastor Elphick expressed gratitude to the Principal Search Committee that

provided counsel and institutional knowledge throughout the whole process.

The Rev. Solomon Keal	Rob Andrews
Beth Bochneak	Caira Bongers
Sheila Daum	The Rev. Kurt Asplundh
Drew Hyatt	Kayne Lermite
Linda Kees	Brooke Brown
Lisa Synnestvedt	

He also expressed gratitude to the Administrative Committee for providing additional support and counsel during the interviewing phase of the selection process.

The Rev. Solomon Keal	Lisa Synnestvedt
Joanne Hamilton	Stewart Asplundh
Kirsten Huff	

BOOKS ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD

Rev. Michael D. Gladish

The Rev. N. D. Pendleton was Bishop of the General Church from 1916 to 1937 and during that time wrote many deep, interesting papers and addresses on the doctrine of the Lord. Two of those books – *Selected Papers* and *The Glorification* – are classics of New Church literature worthy of every earnest reader’s attention. Though first published in 1938 amazingly we have hundreds of brand new copies available for just \$7 each, plus postage.

They can be ordered easily from www.newchurchbooks.com, or anyone visiting Bryn Athyn can pick them up at the Cathedral.

Liturgies

The Bryn Athyn Cathedral Bookstore also has thousands of copies of the blue 2005 edition of the Liturgy for just \$8 each. To order, see above or call Meg Keegan at 215-947-0266, ext. 4922.

NEW BOOK ON SWEDENBORG

The Swedenborg Foundation has published a new book, *Swedenborg’s Principles of Usefulness* by John S. Haller Jr., with a forward by Dr. James F. Lawrence.

The book highlights Swedenborg’s “widespread influence on an impressive host of historical figures, from poets and authors to philosophers

and statesmen. His idea that our purpose in life is both to love others and to find practical ways to improve their lives led many to take on social reforms that vitalized the American landscape during the 19th and early 20th centuries.”

Haller “draws a magnifying glass to those intellectual titans whose fortitude in the face of psychological and social adversities stands as a testament to the robustness of Swedenborg’s concept of usefulness.”

The book is available in hardcover and Kindle at <https://swedenborg.com/bookstore/>

ONLINE SERVICES

In addition to live services returning to most of our societies, online services are available from many churches, with most archived for later viewing. The style of worship varies from congregation to congregation. Among the services available:

Bryn Athyn Cathedral

Bryn Athyn Church broadcasts several traditional format services on Sunday mornings from Bryn Athyn Cathedral, including a Family Service at 9:30 a.m. and adult service at 11 a.m., Eastern Timezone. www.brynathynchurch.org or www.brynathyncathedral.org

Bryn Athyn Informal Family Service

A contemporary 9 a.m. service with a talk aimed at children and adults: <https://brynathynchurch.org/worship/worship-services/informal-family/>

NewChurch LIVE

This service has a contemporary format, with a large online following for its live services at 10:30 a.m. www.newchurchlive.tv

The New Church of Boulder Valley (Colorado)

Livestreams on Facebook at 10:30 a.m., Mountain Time. <https://www.facebook.com/BoulderNewChurch>

Phoenix New Church

Also provides a livestream service over Facebook at 10:30 a.m. <https://www.facebook.com/NewChurchPhoenix/>

Sunrise Chapel (Tucson, Arizona)

Livestreams on YouTube at 10:30 a.m. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGn4fTARHJx66Lhwp_kEmJw

Many other New Church congregations broadcast live services. See a full list: <https://newchurch.org/get-involved/find-online-services/livestream/>

Life Lines

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

THE THEATER OF OUR FAITH

Part of the joy of the Christmas and Easter seasons is witnessing these great dramas of the human spirit play out all around us. They are set against a harsh backdrop that inevitably gives way to bright promise – a triumph of light overwhelming a darkness of the spirit.

We may wonder in the wintry Northern Hemisphere why Christmas occurs in the coldest, darkest time of year. But it is because the world was trapped in the darkness of falsities that the Lord came into the world as a whole new light that we might see and know Him as a visible, knowable God. This is the gift of Christmas – every year – heralded with bright lights and a new star.

Easter is the manifestation of that new light overtaking the bleak hopelessness of winter with sprays of crocuses and daffodils. All hope seemed lost in the earthquakes roiling the earth after the Lord said “It is finished” on the cross. But every Easter morning He is risen – and our spirit is renewed,

Nature provides the theater for our faith. It is that simple, that profound, that life-changing and inspiring – a triumph of hope every year.

(BMH)

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE GREAT WEST WINDOW

The way that history is told can go a long way toward shaping popular attitudes. “The 1619 Project” attempts to affect American attitudes about our cultural origins by looking at our history from a different point of view:

The 1619 Project is a long-form journalism endeavor developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones, writers from *The New York Times*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, which aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of the United States' national narrative. (Wikipedia)

This is part of the larger “Critical Race Theory” approach to racial justice. As long as we tell ourselves a story about our origins that ignores our major moral flaws, we will struggle to correct those flaws and fail to unify around that story.

In “The Invention of Yesterday: A 50,000-Year History of Human Culture, Conflict, and Connection,” Tamim Ansary asserts that our understanding of history is a key to forming our identity and bringing us together:

The shape of the narrative is what it all comes down to in the end. History deals in facts, of course, but in history, those facts fundamentally serve a narrative.

It may seem like a lost cause trying to tell a single human story that we all agree on. But knowing who we are and being able to visualize where we're going is based on where we've been. So maybe a common history is a key to bringing us all together.

I think there's a global we that is trying to be born, and that inevitably will be born because we can't all just be in the same space without eventually speaking the same language. That's what humans do. But if you're trying to tell the story of this emerging global we, then you have to look past the details.¹

“Looking past the details” does not mean ignoring them; it means seeing the larger context of those details. Ideally that larger context is a narrative that includes everyone on earth, showing where we have come from, what has happened to us, and where we are going. Since there is no larger context than the spiritual one, understanding humanity’s spiritual history is a worthwhile goal.

The Heavenly Doctrine provides a simple and compelling narrative that describes the spiritual history of our planet. It is described in numerous passages. For example:

There has been a progression of Divine truth from inmosts to ultimates, thus from wisdom to mere ignorance; and now there is a progression of it from ultimates to interiors, thus from ignorance again to wisdom. (*Apocalypse Explained* 948)

That is, over the course of history we have fallen from a state of wisdom to a state of ignorance, and now we are progressing from ignorance again

1 “The Invention of Yesterday: A 50,000-Year History of Human Culture, Conflict, and Connection” by Tamim Ansary; in NPR: Throughline “A Story Of Us?” February 3, 2022

to wisdom. Another way of saying this is that we have gone from having an interest in internal spiritual things to being interested only in external and natural things, but that now there will be progress back to an interest in spiritual things.

Another way that the Writings describe our narrative arc is to see it as one of continuing progress:

If the successive states of the churches on our earth are considered, it is evident that they have been like the successive states of a person who is being reformed and regenerated. For in order that he may become a spiritual person, he is first conceived, afterwards born, then he grows up, and is subsequently led on further and further into intelligence and wisdom. (*Apocalypse Explained* 641)

In this narrative the world grows up the way that every person grows up. It may seem to conflict with the story of decline and restoration described in *Apocalypse Explained* 948, but it would seem that in some ways humanity has progressed, and in other ways it has declined.

The most complete and best-known New Church account of our history is that of the five churches.

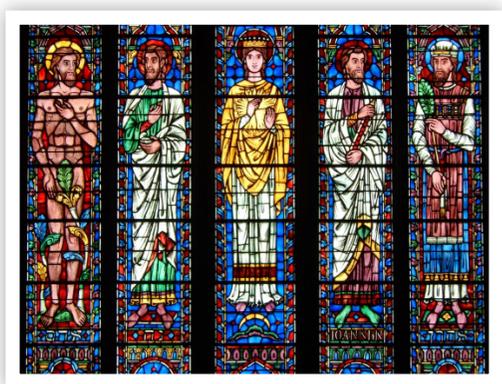
To speak in general terms there have been four churches on this planet since the beginning; there was one before the Flood, a second after the Flood; the Israelite church was the third, and the church called Christian was the fourth.

All churches depend on the recognition and acknowledgment of the one only God, with whom the individual in the church is able to form a partnership. Yet all four churches so far on this earth have lacked this truth. Therefore it follows that after these four will come a church that will recognize and acknowledge the one only God. God's divine love had no other purpose in creating the world than to unite humankind to Himself, unite Himself to humankind, and live with us in a partnership like this." (*True Christianity* 786)

These five churches are five universal spiritual eras that describe humanity's journey from the beginning, as well as its path forward. Although it might seem that they only apply to portions of the world's population, they can be understood as including everyone.

In the Bryn Athyn Cathedral these eras are depicted in the Great West Window in the nave. In one look a person can see the entire story of our world. The eras are represented by five biblical figures shown in the window, from left to right: Adam, Noah, the Woman Clothed with the Sun, the Apostle John, and Aaron. Here is a description of each one:

1. **Adam** stands for humanity's original, innocent spiritual state, when religion was purely internal and intuitive. There were no churches or doctrines but instead an inborn love of God and for one another. The Word was written on their hearts. These were among the first humans, at an unknown period before there was writing or technology. It is called the Most Ancient Church.
2. **Noah** stands for a spiritual era, the Ancient Church, characterized by myths and symbolism, the remains of which are found in many religions worldwide today. It may be that this kind of religion was found everywhere on earth and can be seen in the myths, legends and symbolic worship of many different peoples.
3. **Aaron** stands for the gradual replacement of myths and symbols with specific teachings and laws governing people's behavior, written and preserved in the books of the Old Testament. The Jewish Church was based on these written accounts and carried forward by the miracles and practices described in them.
4. **The Apostle John** stands for the Christian era, when the laws given to the Jewish church were expanded and explained by the Lord Himself at His Advent into the world. Islam is described in the Writings as a kind of parallel religion adapted to the people to whom it was given. The same might be said of some other religions that sprang up in other parts of the world.
5. **The Woman Clothed with the Sun** stands for the world's spiritual future, when all of the teachings given previously will be fully understood and practiced, and love will reign worldwide. The vehicle for this era will be the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, and it will come into being as these teachings are recognized and practiced. This is the New Church.



These eras tie all of the world's histories into a single narrative. It can be understood as explaining not only what has happened in the past, but also what is going on in the present day and what will happen in the future.

As Tamim Ansary says:

It may seem like a lost cause trying to tell a single human story that we all agree on. But knowing who we are and being able to visualize where we're going is based on where we've been. So maybe a common history is a key to bringing us all together.

“The 1619 Project” is an effort to reframe history from a different point of view than that found in history books, which are written, as is often said, by those in power. The New Church reframes history from the spiritual point of view described in the Writings, a point of view that is explicitly about love for all people. Will this ever be the single human story that we can all agree on?

(JFS)

OUR COMMITMENT TO NEW CHURCH EDUCATION

Richard Synnestvedt read his provocative letter (*Good Value for New Church Education?* Page 98) at an October 13, 2021, meeting where the Bryn Athyn Society voted overwhelmingly to build a new elementary school and society offices. He is a product of New Church education but wonders if we get good value for what we invest in our schools.

It is a vexing question. Of course we are committed to our New Church schools and have been from the beginning. But as Mr. Synnestvedt asks, why is the church not growing and thriving from the effort?

It's a challenging question without easy answers. It is distressing that many New Church graduates don't seem to join the church or get involved, although most, we hope, carry it in their hearts.

Some years ago an educational consultant visiting the Academy Secondary Schools told the principal: “You do everything right here – but you don't close the deal!” He could not understand how a religious school so committed to its mission would let students just walk away.

That, of course, is wrapped up in our commitment to personal freedom, but it remains a relevant challenge.

Mr. Synnestvedt wonders if we would do better to focus our efforts and resources on combating all of the insidious threats in our culture, which clearly are threats to the church.

Surely we can and must do both. And it all starts not just with the church, and not just within our schools, but within ourselves. How do we make ourselves better, through the ongoing process of regeneration? How do we grow and nurture the church, not just its presence in the world, but within our hearts and lives?

(BMH)

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

We live in a 24-hour news cycle, bombarded with constant reports and “Breaking News.” It is all important to being informed, responsible citizens, guided to good decisions by our understanding of the Word.

But it is nice to think of the deliverance of heaven, where there is essentially no “news,” no weather reports, no updates, no ominous developments – just peace, tranquility, and the joy of serving others.

Often the news is too much with us and we long for escape. That comes in heaven where no news truly is good news. No commercials either.

(BMH)



ADVANCEMENT

A Planned Gift is a special way to support the uses of the Academy and the General Church.

A planned gift to the **General Church**, your local society, the **Academy Secondary Schools** or **Bryn Athyn College** can help for generations to come. These kinds of planned gifts are simple to arrange and often return benefits back to you.

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



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