

# NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023



**W**hy does the Lord tell us in the Sermon on the Mount to “**look at the birds of the air**”? Why are we told that those who wait upon the Lord “**shall mount up with wings as eagles**”? The Rev. Derek Elphick explains in a sermon that birds in flight correspond to freedom – **the freedom the Lord gives us to rise above our earthbound existence and see clearly with a new, spiritual perspective.** (Page 360.)

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# New Church Life

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

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# In This Issue

Editorials (page 348) include:

- *Solace and Sanctuary*: The Psalms offer the poetry and passion of the Word. We find in them all the troubles of the world, all the doubt, all the hope and trust in the Lord. The 94th Psalm captures it all as a mirror for our lives – leading to peace.
- *Arguments from Appearances*: It is all too easy when we defend our own actions or point of view – and when we criticize the actions and thinking of others – to justify our prejudices. We tend to interpret the political and cultural debates around us according to our bias. The Lord teaches us how to guard against appearances and fallacies.

The Rev. Derek Elphick asks in a sermon why the Lord wants us to “look at the birds of the air” – and to “mount up with wings as eagles.” It is because “a bird’s ability to take flight and rise above the earth corresponds to human freedom – the freedom the Lord gives us to rise above the limitations of our earth-bound existence.” (Page 360)

The Rev. Robert Jungé, who passed away in May after being a widower for 43 years, submitted an article shortly before his death on a subject of great interest to him – and many others: *Why Some Live Long and Some Not Long*. This is all within the Lord’s providence and we need always to trust in Him. “Whether our lives are long or short, we will be able to freely give our love to the Lord and to each other forever, or not. It is up to us.” (Page 366)

In an Independence Day address in Bryn Athyn – reprinted for its message to people of all nations – Leah Rose talks about what it means to be *A Nation Under God*. In this turbulent world, she suggests, “it’s useful to consider that the very One who created us equal also gave us the essential instruction on how to live into that equality: by loving each other as He loves all of us; treating each other as we all wish to be treated.” (Page 377)

In a paper written for the Council of the Clergy the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith examines what the Writings say about *Sex in the Spiritual World*. As we might

expect, the promises for angels in heaven fulfill all the sublime blessings of conjugal love, while the outlook for people in hell is chilling. He writes: “One can always hope these teachings about the fate of those engaged in sexual deviancy and abuse will encourage at least some to refrain from these hellish desires and seek a genuine conjugal partner.” (Page 381)

In *Smoke*, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth draws on forest fires in Canada clouding the air – and our ability to see clearly – in much of the United States this past summer as a reminder that we cannot see spiritually without elevating our perspective. “To see and understand heavenly realities, one has to have information that comes from heaven. To see and understand who the Lord is, one has to have information that comes from the Lord.” (Page 391)

The Rev. Eric Carswell, new President of Bryn Athyn College, offers to students, faculty and friends a vision of *Choosing to Make Bryn Athyn College the Best that it Can Be*. Part of the College’s mission is developing a spiritual purpose in students, which means “consciously choosing to live from a set of principles and values that you recognize produces a useful life.” (Page 394)

*What is The Most Important New Church Belief?* The Rev. Erik Buss says it is all about knowing the Lord and who He is. The first commandment is that the Lord is one and we are to love Him. And the Heavenly Doctrine says that the New Church is the crown of all churches because we can worship the Lord as the one visible God. (Page 401)

General Church Education hosted the first education conference for New Church teachers since 2010 this past June, and teachers and administrators from the United States and Canada celebrated the opportunity to *Reconnect and Rejuvenate*. In addition to morning worship, plenary sessions and workshops on professional development, the conference offered opportunities for mutual support, the sharing of resources and ideas, as well as friendship. (Page 405)

**Church News (page 407), includes:**

- Reports on regional clergy meetings in Sweden and Bryn Athyn
- Highlights from a June 23 meeting of the General Church Board of Directors
- Elections to the Board in the annual meeting of the General Church Corporation
- What’s new about New Church Vineyard
- The outlook for the 2023-24 school year in the Academy Secondary Schools, including an update on plans for boarding students
- The schedule for this year’s Charter Day celebration
- A report on Jacob’s Creek Family Retreat
- A report on curtailed activities in Kenya

# Editorials

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

## SOLACE AND SANCTUARY

*(Psalm 94) O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs, show Thyself. Lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud.*

*Lord, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?*

The *Psalms* are the poetry and passion of the Word. They roil with despair and lamentation. They confess our tribulations and shortcomings. They lift us up with hope and trust. They hold up a mirror for our lives – through a glass darkly, or rose-colored glasses. What we see depends on where we stand.

All of history traces through perilous times. The threat of the hells is intense and insidious. Hope is easily overwhelmed. In 1919, in the desolate aftermath of World War One, Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote *The Second Coming* – as insightful then as it is prescient today:

*Things fall apart, the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity. . . .  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.*

Indeed, the Second Coming was at hand – is still at hand. And 100 years later, still we recoil from chaos and moral squalor, still “the ceremony of innocence is drowned,” still we wonder: How long, Lord?

*They break in pieces Thy people, O Lord, and afflict Thine heritage.  
They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.  
Yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob  
regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people and you fools,  
when will you be wise?*

Always there are lawbreakers and evildoers. But our culture seems at a flashpoint. The news trumpets daily a crushing culture of violence, with no respect for life and property. Looters are unrestrained and unburdened by conscience. Violence erupts on street corners and subways. Good will toward men gives way to lust for power and control. Good people remain always our hope but often feel powerless and intimidated. Visions in the popular imagination are apocalyptic – from mutual destruction to climate catastrophe. The hells are rampant. We are buoyed by Michael and his angels among us – but the battle is grim.

*The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.  
Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teaches  
him out of Thy law. That Thou mayest give him rest from the days  
of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.*

The Word is our roadmap to heaven. It winds from the Garden of Eden, with its seductive serpent and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, to Babylon, the dragon, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun – all to the ultimate redemption: the Holy City New Jerusalem descending to earth. The Children of Israel, drifting between atonement and backsliding; the evil kings, the Philistines, the Prophets and the Lamentations; the coming of the Prince of Peace, the path-guiding Sermon on the Mount, the crucifixion, all leading to Revelation. And all of it speaks to our own lives and struggles and hopes.

When we read the Word we are one with Abraham Lincoln, who knew his own trials and torments, and confessed: “I am busily engaged in the study of the Bible. I believe it is God’s Word because it finds me where I am.”

*For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? Or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?*

We have all that we need – for our own lives, for the salvation of the world. The Lord gave us the Ten Commandments – the framework for all law and morality – and the Two Great Commandments: loving the Lord and loving the neighbor. “On these two commandments hang **all** the law and the prophets.”

It is easy to assume that of course we honor the commandments: we do not kill, we do not steal, we do not covet. But it is easy to malign another’s character – to kill; to take credit for another’s success – to steal; to give in to the siren song of TV ads – “I want that, I need that” – to covet. It is all too easy to judge our neighbors, not to love them. Surely, we put no other Gods before His face – but what we love above all else becomes our God. Still, the Lord never stops showing us the way to regeneration, is always helping us to find the way, is ever striving to lift us up to heaven – if we will but follow.

*Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the magnitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with Thee, which frameth mischief by the law?*

The Lord sees all of His creation – from mankind’s first hesitant steps on earth, through all the wanton history of war and evil, the struggle for meaning and redemption – in one spiritual continuum, without limits of time and space. We are impatient and quick to doubt. He has seen the fall of the churches, the inevitability of the Last Judgment. And He has given His promise: “the crown of all churches that have ever existed on earth.” He sees, He knows, He leads. He just asks us to do our part and follow.

*They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the Lord is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And He shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yes, the Lord our God shall cut them off.*

The Word is our mirror and our guide. There we find the Lord – leading, loving, giving hope. “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*”

In His *Psalms* are our solace and sanctuary.

(BMH)

## ARGUMENTS FROM APPEARANCES

At this time of year we are often subjected to political debates of all kinds, both



in the civic arena and in the church.

In a discussion of a certain controversial topic, Swedenborg writes:

*But please, I say to the natural person, write two books and fill them with plausible, probable and likely arguments, arguments you judge to be solid . . . and then put them into the hand of any angel; and I know that the angel will write at the end these few words: "They are all appearances and fallacies." (Divine Providence 213)*

What kind of arguments is he talking about? What are appearances and fallacies?

The Heavenly Doctrine discusses appearances and fallacies at length, describing how our impressions and assumptions, based on the way that things seem to us, blind our sight of how they really are. This is especially true when we are defending our own actions and point of view, and when we are criticizing those of others.

*There are people who acknowledge God and worship Him according to the customary rituals and maintain in themselves that some evil that is a sin is really not a sin. For they color it with fallacies and appearances, and so hide its egregiousness. And when they have done this, they become favorably disposed to it, and make it their friend and close companion.*

*But let examples illustrate. A person eager for material gain, who makes allowable, with justifications, some types of fraud that he devises, regards the evil as not a sin. So, likewise, one who justifies to himself revenge against his enemies, and one who justifies the plundering and looting of people who are not his foes in war. (Divine Providence 278)*

When we do or believe in something, for example, that might be seen as egregious we will tend, as this passage says, to “color it with fallacies and appearances, and so hide its egregiousness.” We might, for example, characterize a perpetrator as a victim, or describe the activity in the most favorable terms possible, making it seem plausible that the activity is innocent.

Conversely, if we disagree with what someone says or does we may find ways to characterize it in unfavorable terms that seem credible in order to make it seem egregious to others, even if it is actually innocent or true.

When these characterizations are not fair and accurate, but appear to many people as right, they are called “fallacies and appearances.”

This kind of speech and reasoning is common in public debates of all kinds.

For example, political slogans usually rely on some widely held public opinion that may be unfair and wrong even if popular – such as ascribing credit or blame to some individual or group for something good or bad.

Another example is the way that correlation is often assumed to imply causation. For example, since odors are often associated with illnesses it was at one time held that epidemics were caused by miasma, or “bad air” emanating from rotting organic matter. Pointing to correlations, especially when the examples are dramatic, can be very persuasive.

One of the most common examples given in the Heavenly Doctrine is the appearance that we live from ourselves, or that our life is our own, and that therefore we are the ones who do good and determine outcomes and not the Lord. This leads us to deny Divine Providence and put our faith in ourselves and material things. It is because of this appearance that we are so easily persuaded by materialistic assertions and arguments. We read:

*There is nothing that cannot be defended, and falsity more easily than truth: What cannot be defended, when atheists argue that God is not the creator of the universe, but that nature is the creator of it? That religion is simply a shackle, and one for the simple and the masses? That man is a species of animal, and dies the same death? When they argue that adulterous affairs are allowable, and so, too, secret thefts, fraudulent practices, and deceitful schemes; that guile constitutes intelligence, and maliciousness wisdom?*

*Who does not defend his own heresy? Are there not volumes full of arguments in defense of the two reigning heresies in the Christian world? Concoct 10 heresies, even abstruse ones, and tell an ingenious person to defend them, and he will defend them all. If you were to then view them in the light of his arguments alone, would you not see falsities as truths?*

*Since every falsity shines in the natural self with its appearances and illusions, and truth only in the spiritual self, it is apparent that falsity can be defended more easily than truth.*

*(Divine Providence 318)*

False ideas are often more easily defended than true ones because so often they are based on the way that things appear to be, often with vivid examples. The existence of the spiritual world is easily doubted, for example, because evidence for it that is acceptable to science is hard to come by.

Another example of appearances commonly found in the Heavenly Doctrine is of those found in the letter of the Word. There the Lord is said

to be angry and punishing, charity seems to mainly consist in giving to the poor, financial success is seemingly condemned, even self-defense seems to be prohibited, and marriage lasts only until the end of life.

*Corroborations of falsity involving the use of interpretations made from the sense of the letter of the Word are in every case appearances, by which the simple are normally led astray, falsity being presented as truth, and truth as falsity. (Arcana Coelestia 4768)*

How do we get past these fallacies and appearances? One passage gives this advice:

*Intellectual truth is not open to view, that is, it is not acknowledged, until illusions and appearances have been dispersed, and these are never dispersed as long as a person reasons about truths themselves on the basis of sensory evidence and factual knowledge. But the moment he believes in simplicity of heart that it is the truth because the Lord has declared it to be so, the shadows of illusions are at that point dispelled, and then there is nothing to stop him apprehending it. (Arcana Coelestia 1911)*

That is, look for guidance about moral and spiritual truths in the Word, and “believe in simplicity of heart that it is the truth because the Lord has declared it to be so.”

Still, appearances are both necessary and useful. For one thing, all of our truths are appearances:

*Pure truths are not to be found in us or even in angels, but only in the Lord. (n. 3207, 7902) Any truths that we have are only apparently true. (n. 2053, 2519) The first truths that we have are appearances of truth from the fallacies of the senses; we gradually shed these as we increase in wisdom.*

*(New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 27)*

We are only able to grasp the truth because it can exist with us through appearances that we can understand and love. We are even told how important it is that the Lord works this way:

*The Lord joins people to Himself by means of appearances. For it is an appearance that a person from himself loves the neighbor, does good and speaks truth. Unless these things appeared to people as if they were from themselves they would not love the neighbor, do good and speak truth, and therefore they would not be joined to the Lord. (Divine Providence 219)*

That is, we are able to see ourselves as trying to do the right thing, and if not for that appearance we wouldn't try to do the right thing. Yet by living that life according to those appearances we do the things that join us to the Lord, things that put love in our hearts, and dispel these appearances as we grow in wisdom.

So, we listen to the debates that seem to go on continually around us. Most of us may feel that we are unlikely to fall for arguments based on appearances and fallacies. But the power of persuasion and propaganda is strong. We can all benefit from trying to look past the appearance and base our thinking on something stronger. Then maybe the angel would not write about our thoughts: *"They are all appearances and fallacies."*

(JFS)

# Letter to the Editors

Letters to the Editors may be sent to the Editors of New Church Life  
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009  
or email [Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org](mailto:Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org)

## *The Threat of Gender Studies*

To The Editors:

Every day I read a little from the Word, and a few days ago I was reading from *Jeremiah*. If you have read that prophet's work you know that he is continually telling the people of Judah about their sins, and the sins that the exiled Israelites had performed, because they had forgotten Jehovah and had worshiped other gods, which were idols. There are only a few bright spots in the whole of his book, which is 52 chapters long.

Later in the day the mail came with the July/August issue of *New Church Life*, and as I leafed through it, I came upon a letter from Barrie Ridgway (*The Attack on Religion*). When I read it I felt in complete harmony with him. It is about the actions and ways of thinking of the LGBTQ society and the parallel between his letter and *Jeremiah* that I found striking.

The apparent attitude this group has toward marriage is so far from the ideal that exists in heaven as to be its opposite. They are apparently so far from thinking about what Jehovah might think about their actions because they don't think there is such a being, and that there never was. And I think they would like to convince the rest of us that they are right because it is all about personal "freedom."

I am going to concentrate on one particular part mentioned in Mr. Ridgway's letter. This action is, I think, the most evil of all – really evil because it is aimed at innocents. Most of this group are adults and if they are acting in a way that shuts them out of heaven then that is their own doing. But there is a program that some group members have thought up that concerns children, which they call "Gender Studies."

I have not seen this in person, but I have been told that several teachers

are brought in from outside and give classes in public schools to children of kindergarten age on up. They teach that children are not fixed in their sexual type but can switch to the other sex if they wish. This idea of switching is seen as freedom for young children to do what they wish. Parents are not invited to hear about this teaching, nor to express their opinions.

At some point, if any children seem interested, the teachers will suggest that hormones can be supplied, and then later maybe that there can be surgery. I did see on the news where five 10-year-old girls had signed up for this. There were no comments made about what their mothers said about it. Such an idea about a sexual choice is wrong both from our doctrine and from biological science. And such an idea of the freedom of children to make such decisions appears nowhere else.

From doctrine we are taught that the Lord created mankind as male and female to represent and correspond to the Lord's wisdom and love, and that marriages between the two represent the conjunction of the Lord's wisdom and love, which is the power that created our universe and all that is in it.

We are taught that all angels live in chaste marriage with one, and that the sphere of love thus generated pervades all of heaven. We are also taught that every person is born for a specific use in heaven, so the deliberate change would destroy the Lord's intentions. And then there is the warning of the millstone. (See *Matthew 19:14*, also *Mark 10:14* and *Luke 18:16*.)

Scientifically we know that the sex of a person is set at conception because it is carried in the DNA that guides the production of the fetus. The genital area of the baby is complete enough by 12 weeks that it is easily seen on a sonogram. And since the root of masculinity or femininity is really in the soul, no amount of natural treatment can change it.

How any local or state department of education can be talked into allowing such nonsense is beyond me. Some don't allow it. Living as I do in Indianapolis, I saw a notice that the State of Indiana just made a law that no

*Since the root  
of masculinity  
or femininity is  
really in the soul,  
no amount of  
natural treatment  
can change it.*

sexual matters may be taught in the schools to children below the age of nine. Nine is still too young. Children are not really interested until they come into the general love for the opposite sex, maybe 11 or 12? If you have children in public schools, I think you should ask about this, and take steps.

Joseph S. David  
Indianapolis  
Indiana

*Trees of Life*

To The Editors:

In the beginning, a person, just like a tree in the earth, springs forth from good seed out of God's love and wisdom – kindred to the implant of seed by a man and a woman as one. Then sprouts a delicate stem diverging as two leaves, one leaf as our heart, and one leaf as our lungs – the dawning of personal life!

With a smoothing of bark, tender branches yearn urgently toward the sun of their life; to our Lord the Creator of all. Each year adds its ring of increase.

The branches grow strong and the bark grows rough, while the surge of life blossoms yearly, proclaiming the infinity of God. And wondrously, the blossoming tree brings forth its unique fruit, its new seed-bearing life, and its leaves giving shade, food and healing to the dwellers and trees of the forest – to the uses of all mankind. And it is good.

Swedenborg has revealed that the life of a tree represents the life of a man or woman. When I stand before the throne of the Lord will I stand as a tall, proud cedar in a forest of noble trees? Have I become a bountiful provider of fruit; a beautifully flowering dogwood; or a gracefully shading willow? Would my service be as the lovely but thorny bougainvillea, or might I just be a common bramble?

In what garden or forest will I be when I find my eternal home?

Martin E. Klein  
Huntingdon Valley  
Pennsylvania

*Women in the Church*

To The Editors:

I am a senior citizen – a very senior citizen.

The General Church has been my spiritual home for my entire adult life.

It has offered me community and comfort. It has given me instruction, advice and counsel and has done so in an environment of love, caring and goodwill.

Having said that, I am troubled by the negative trend in our attendance. I am not referring to a statistical measurement of births and baptisms versus deaths and/or resignations.

I am referring to an attitude of apathy and indifference. This is particularly true of, but not exclusive to, our young people. I am aware of the two most voiced comments about why this is happening: a) attendance is down throughout the Christian world; and b) young people simply “are not joiners the way their parents were.” These two points are proven facts and along with other important things like the LGBTQ+ issue (which I acknowledge but do not address here), represent significant challenges to our church.

There seems to be a general feeling that attending church is not important, nor is involving oneself in the life of the church. While some are worshipping online, many are not and express their malaise as “I love the teachings, but feel the physical organization does not represent me.” This is a strong feeling and evidence would suggest it is not going away.

I have absolutely no doubt that the Lord in His providence will provide for a New Church on earth. In what name or format only He knows. My concern is the future of the General Church as we know it. How can we protect and preserve it?

The solution is complicated, and I have no easy remedy to offer. I’m bringing this up in the hope that discussing it church-wide may bring enlightenment.

This brings us to another area that I believe needs attention/discussion/debate. Despite some changes, the General Church still seems to me a very much male dominated church and as such it turns off a significant portion of our population.

While I am a reader of the Writings I am not, nor do I pretend to be, a scholar but I do wonder whether our beautiful and unique teachings about marriage and our wonderful Doctrine of Use might offer a clue to our attitude toward the priesthood.

Marriage is a union of two uniquely created people, male and female, different in their very being, each one offering love and support to each other under the Lord’s guidance, each working toward the goal of true marriage love in which they complement rather than compete with each other.

As men and women work together in marriage, could they not also work together in the priesthood where the primary use is the salvation of souls leading to a heaven from the human race? Even as they now bring their unique gifts as male and female to committees, boards and a variety of church uses? A short while ago a good many in our church were convinced from doctrine that it was disorderly for women to be on lay boards. The doctrines have not changed but our view of how those principles work has.

Another area that needs debate is governance. We have, via the Church of England, an episcopal form of government. As a consequence, the office of the Bishop has a significant and necessary level of authority. The election process



## LETTER TO THE EDITORS

of that office, however, is troublesome for many. It starts with a nomination by a small group of men and men only. It then passes to the Board of Trustees, which includes women, but this is more of a counselling session rather than an up and down vote. It is then offered to the total membership of the Church for an affirmative or negative vote. Being allowed on the final vote but totally uninvolved in the nominating process is inadequate, if not unfair, to both men and women and most certainly unrepresentative.

Is it any wonder that a significant portion of our population does not feel a meaningful part of the membership?

I don't want to be negative or harsh. I am hoping to encourage a more thorough discussion of the subjects in this letter. The discussion should be open to all thoughts. It should be inclusive of clergy and laity, male and female, and should be in the public forum.

Bob Smith  
Glenview  
Illinois

# ‘Look at the Birds of the Air’

*A Sermon by the Rev. Derek P. Elphick*

(Adapted from a sermon delivered in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, July 9, 2023)

*Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25-26)*

Our fascination with flight goes back to the earliest civilizations. Human beings have looked at the birds of the air and imagined what it must be like to have wings and to be able to “lift off” from the ground and soar up into the sky. Many people report flying in their dreams, which they describe as calm and delightful.

Early pioneers of aviation closely studied the anatomy of birds to learn their secrets of flight. Many thrill-seekers today use hang-gliders and paragliders – and more recently “wingsuits” – to experience the closest thing to flying like a bird.

Birds are also prized for their unique characteristics: colorful plumage, hunting skills, keen eyesight, beautiful songs, even their ability to mimic human speech.

As a result, birds have always held a prominent place in art and literature. But it is a bird’s ability to rise up and fly effortlessly above the earth that stirs something deep within us.

## **Correspondence of Birds**

The Scriptures are full of stories and references to birds, which is our first clue that there is something significant here. Doves are mentioned the most, such

as Noah’s ark, with the Holy Spirit seen as a dove. Sparrows and ravens are referenced quite a bit. Less often are mentioned owls, vultures, hawks, storks, herons and even bats! But eagles are exalted and prized the most – primarily for their keen eyesight. There is strong imagery of eagles in *Ezekiel and Revelation* – strange creatures with the head, eyes or wings of an eagle.

The correspondence of birds is closely connected to their sight. Many references in Scripture to “birds of the air” – or the heavens – have to do with higher thoughts:

- Truths or intellectual things
- Spiritual affection for truth (*Arcana Coelestia* 142)
- Understanding of truth (*Ibid.* 477)

Birds correspond to the ability “to look down, to see clearly” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 626), and “to attend. And to think.” (*Ibid.* 831)

So we get this kind of definition about birds:

*To fly in the Word means circumspection and presence, because when a bird is flying on high it sees clearly on every side, and thus is present everywhere by its sight. (Apocalypse Explained 282)*

*Birds that fly in the midst of heaven represent all who are in the spiritual affection of truth, and so think about heaven. (Apocalypse Revealed 831)*

The Lord invites us to “look at the birds of the air.” Why?

In our text, it’s because they don’t have to struggle and worry in the same way human beings do – that is, they don’t have to “sow” or “reap” or “gather into barns,” and ye they are taken care of. (*See Matthew 6:26*)

Why don’t they struggle and fret the way we do? Spiritually speaking, it has to do with their unique vantage point. They fly above the earth and from that height look down below. They see things we can’t see. (Eagles can spot their prey from two miles away.) They are also “above the fray” – above the noise and commotion of the world below.

## **Wings and Flying**

So we can start to see why the Lord invites us to look at the birds in the air. It’s because a bird’s ability to take flight and rise above the earth corresponds to human freedom – the freedom the Lord gives us to “rise above” the limitations

of our earth-bound existence.

One teaching explains why this ability is so important:

*If there were no separation between our will and our intellect, and if the intellect could not ride above the will (like a bird in flight), we would be unable to think. (True Christian Religion 588)*

And so in the Scriptures we find frequent references to wings and flying, as in our readings this morning:

*Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest. (Psalm 55:5)*

*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself/ (Exodus 19:4)*

*The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness. (Revelation 12:14)*

*So we can start to see why the Lord invites us to look at the birds in the air. It's because a bird's ability to take flight and rise above the earth corresponds to human freedom – the freedom the Lord gives us to “rise above” the limitations of our earth-bound existence.*

We are taught that “wings” represent the truths of the Word. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 245) These truths give our rational mind the power of “flight”: the power and ability to rise above our earthly troubles and difficulties into the light of heaven.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8764) And the point of “rising up” is that we get a new perspective – an eternal perspective – on our earthly troubles and difficulties.

This is why the Lord says we shouldn't let worry consume us as much as we do; we have a powerful option at our disposal. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 282:6)

### **The Rational Degree of the Mind**

I noted earlier that eagles are exalted and prized the most over all the birds mentioned in the Word and that this is because of their keen sight. Eagles correspond to the rational level of our

mind. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3901:2 and *Apocalypse Explained* 281)

“To mount up with wings like eagles” is to grow in the understanding of truth, thus as to the rational. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3901:2)

By turns the understanding elevates itself, like an eagle. (*Married Love* 495:2)

What is the “rational”? It is not what we think – to be cool, calm and collected, or intellectual, cerebral or brainy.

Think of the word *ratio*. The rational level of our mind enables us to see the “ratio” between heaven and earth – the “ratio” or relationship between what goes on “below” and “above” us.

The rational level of our mind is our saving grace. It is our gateway to freedom – true freedom. If we couldn’t access this level of the mind, we couldn’t be reformed or saved. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 247) It’s that important.

The rational level of the mind:

- Is the highest point of understanding in the natural mind (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 237)
- Is the part of our mind that gives us the faculty of understanding what is true and good (*Ibid.* 240, 404)
- Is the part of our mind that is capable of receiving spiritual sight (*Ibid.* 247)
- Is not our own but is God’s gift to us (*Ibid.* 23)
- Distinguishes us from animals (*Ibid.* 413)
- Enables us to think and speak (*Ibid.* 247)
- Is never taken away from us (*Ibid.* 247)
- Can be abused, however, and when it is a person becomes no different than an animal (*Ibid.* 255)

## Rise Up

So now, with a full working knowledge of the correspondence of birds – and with an understanding of eagles, in particular – let’s consider the application of these teachings to our lives.

As adults, in one way or another, we are constantly battling our old self, our old will, and defaulting to old thought patterns and behaviors. We are besieged with regrets and guilt. And we may find it extremely hard to “move on.”

This is frustrating because we have all the knowledge and truth from the

Lord's Word that we need: to live good and useful lives, and to put us on the path toward heaven.

And yet, as soon as we hit an emotional trigger – as soon as our will is thwarted – negative thoughts and feelings rush in. We get stuck – really stuck – and lose our objectivity. This is when the Lord whispers in our ear, “Look at the birds.”

Consider: The Woman Clothed with the Sun was given the wings of a great eagle so that “she might fly into the wilderness.” (*Revelation 12:14*)

We are in a wilderness **and** we are protected: “protection while the New Church is as yet among a few.” (*Apocalypse Revealed 561*)

All of the evil, hatred and confusion we experience, all of the angst and hurt, keep our eyes – our focus – on the ground. This shuts down our rational mind and we forget to look up.

Evil and falsity become much easier to identify and reject when we understand what is happening to us. As with a serpent, selfish, material wants and needs keep our belly on the ground. Hell seeks to persecute us, wants nothing more than to keep us stuck here on earth, fixated on petty, superficial things. (*Married Love 440*)

The Lord is here to protect us:

*For this purpose, we have been granted the ability to lift our intellect almost all the way into the light enjoyed by the angels in heaven. This lifting allows us to see what we ought to will and what we ought to do in order to be successful during our time in this world and blessed with happiness after death to eternity.*

*(True Christianity 588)*

*The Lord  
is working  
constantly,  
unceasingly, to  
raise us up. It is the  
Lord who gives us  
the courage to take  
a risk – to  
“take flight.”*

The flight of birds feeds something deep inside our spirit. It represents the desire of the human spirit to rise above adversity – to overcome the things that pull us down and keep us planted on earth.

Let us take flight. Let us “mount up with wings like eagles.”

The Lord is working constantly, unceasingly, to raise us up. It is the Lord who gives us the courage to take a risk –

‘LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR’

to “take flight.” It is the Lord who inspires us to go back to Him in prayer; to go back to His Word; to let the truths of this new revelation “lift us up.” For then we can think clearly and freely about the things that matter most: God, heaven, love, faith, marriage and family. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3901)

Then we can pursue our higher calling – in service to the Lord and in service to our neighbor, for purposes greater than ourselves.

*Have you not known?  
Have you not heard?  
The everlasting God, the Lord,  
The Creator of the ends of the earth,  
Neither faints nor is weary,  
His understanding is unsearchable,  
He gives power to the weak,  
And to those who have no might He increases strength,  
Even the youths shall faint and be weary,  
And the young men shall utterly fall,  
But those who wait on the Lord  
Shall renew their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.  
(Isaiah 40:28-31)*

Amen.



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# Why Some Live Long And Some Not Long

*The Rev. Robert S. Jungé*

(Editors' note: This article was submitted shortly before Rev. Jungé passed away on May 26, 2023.)

*Spiritual Diary* 5002 and 5003 are often very usefully read at funerals, but I think they are also very useful to think about when we are just quietly reflecting on where we are in life right now. It is something of a “comeuppance” to remind ourselves that we, or any of those close to us, could be called at any time. The Lord says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” (*Isaiah 55:8*) But understanding and accepting His Providence is an integral part of accepting Him in our daily lives. Part of accepting the Lord’s leading is understanding and accepting the time of death, both ours and of those we love.

Here are the passages, and afterward there follow some of my reflections, which perhaps you can think of like a conversation, even if only one-sided.

## 5002. CONCERNING THE DURATIONS OF THE LIFE OF MEN: WHY SOME LIVE LONG, AND SOME NOT LONG.

The life of every man is foreseen by the Lord, as to how long he will live, and in what manner; wherefore he is directed from earliest infancy with a regard to a life to eternity. The Providence of the Lord, therefore, commences from earliest infancy.

5003. The reasons why some die boys, some youths, some adults, some old men, are:

**First**, on account of use in the world to men.

**Second**, on account of use, while he is in the world, to spirits and



angels; for man, as to his interiors, is with spirits; and he is there as long as he is in the world, in which all things in the spiritual world terminate.

**Third**, on account of use to himself in the world, either that he may be regenerated, or that he may be let into his evils lest they lie dormant and afterwards break out, which would result in his eternal ruin.

**Fourth**, therefore, on account of use afterwards in the other life, after death, to eternity; for everyone who will be in heaven has his place in the Grand Man, or, on the other hand, he has his place in hell. Wherever forces fail, they are balanced, and, of the Providence of the Lord, men are brought there. Thus also the kingdom of the Lord is cared for, the welfare of which is universal Providence.

*Spiritual Diary 5002* lays an important foundation for thinking about how long or short life is. Life, both natural and spiritual, is a gift from the Lord, Who is life itself. Bodily life is only part of that eternal picture – and death is just one brief pause in an eternal purpose. Yes, the “life of every man is foreseen by the Lord as to how he will live and in what manner.” It would have to be so, in order to provide the conditions for and protection of our individual freedom. Only the Lord has the love and wisdom to handle the timing of death. There may be times when we don’t see clearly how to cooperate with Him. But the general rule is what a little child once told me: “Who’s going to argue with the Lord?”

Whether our lives are long or short, we will be able to freely give our love to the Lord and to each other forever, or not. It is up to us. The daily choices we make have eternal consequences, but the time for choosing can be long or short. We don’t know, but there is a truth in the injunction: “Live every day of your life as if it were your last.”

The choices we make “have regard to eternal life.” There are lots of times in life when we need to cling to the basic truth that the Lord came into the world to prepare a place for us. (*John 14:2*) “The providence of the Lord, therefore, commences from earliest infancy.” (*Spiritual Diary 5002*)

If you like, you can reflect on the question of freedom and foresight that this passage might raise in your mind. But let’s just think of our being in the Lord’s hands, and that those hands let us choose to make ourselves eternally free in heaven, or eternally enslaved in hell.

Let’s just assume spiritual freedom and think about the four reasons that determine the time of death. As you think about them, try to remember that “the providence of the Lord commences from earliest infancy.” Individual deaths or massive tragedies are all in the Lord’s hands. Death is just one step in His plan to provide eternal love and happiness to each one of us, if we let Him.

People can die at any state in life, from a tiny newborn to extreme old age.

Let's look at how the four reasons might apply to the death of someone in each of the following stages: infancy, childhood, youth, adult life, mid-life, and old age. In doing so our goal is simply to increase our confidence in the Lord's love and mercy in determining the time of death.

#### INFANCY:

An increasing number of fathers today are present at the births of their children. But present or not, imagine a tiny little body turning pink as it takes each little breath. The gift of life! Perhaps he or she gives a kick or two. Is this the beginning of life as if one's own, life as if of self?

Then look at the mother's face, tired, but expressive of a very special kind of joy. I don't think we men really understand, but we catch a continuing glimpse at something special as later we look across the room and watch "our child" snuggle against mother's breast and take its life sustaining nourishment. It is a chance to glimpse love in a special way – to glimpse life in a special way. Let all that wonder, so poorly suggested here, sink in....

And now try somehow to picture how a loving, all-wise God, could allow the natural death of that infant – seeming to take away a life that He has just created! For starters, we remember the general teaching that only the body dies; the spirit lives forever. But the Lord invites us to have some understanding of the timing of this step we call death.

In explanation in *Spiritual Diary 5003*, the first use the Lord provides is "on account of use to others." This immediately begs the question: where is this infant's opportunity to be of use to others in this world? How can the grief of losing this little one, which hits all involved so hard, be "of use"?

Yet an infant's passing provides others with a chance to offer consolation to each other. When we try to console one another, does it not show love in a special way? When a father tries to understand a mother's special grief and draws her close, is there a unique opportunity to strengthen conjugal love? Tears can provide a window into what we care deeply about.

It is just possible that an all-wise God, knowing that He is providing for the infant, also knows that shared sorrow can draw a marriage closer than almost anything else. Shared grief reveals in a unique way just how deeply we care for each other, not just in marriages but in other friendships as well. And that caring has eternal consequences in every heart it touches.

Babies are innocent, and innocence is willingness to be led by the Lord. All in the heavens are led by the Lord, whether from love in the highest heaven, or from obedience in the lowest. In a strange way, the death of an infant can inspire deeply in our hearts a desire to be led by the Lord, with a longing for confidence in His promise that we will see that child again.

But there has got to be more in the Lord's wisdom than even the profound

impact on family and friends. And there is! Three more reasons that are within our grasp, though the Lord has infinitely more.

The second reason is on account of use, while in the world to spirits and angels. We get all of our affections through our association with angels and spirits. Special guardian angels are even assigned to each one of us. And most of us are familiar with the teaching that celestial angels are associated with infants. These angels love being with mothers and little children. We feel their sphere powerfully, when we hold the little bundle close, or a mother ponders the forehead of the one snuggling with her.

Think of the delight the angels must feel as they observe the effect of their presence, and the complete trust it inspires. It is their use, and I think we can be confident that they know when it is best that their use with infants be transferred to the hands of angel mothers. They may not know all the reasons, but they always cooperate with the Lord's will and love! They know that the Lord knows best when a baby is called. From their love and trust in the Lord they know. And in time, we too can know from love and trust.

But what about the third reason, the regeneration and freedom of the individual himself or herself? We do not know the hereditary tendencies toward evil that lie dormant in an infant's life. And we do not know the circumstances that an infant might be called to face if his or her life continued here. But the Lord knows, and the freedom for regeneration is precious in His eyes. We are taught that some infants do not live long because their hereditary tendencies would be overwhelming. (*Arcana Coelestia* 828) But we do not know how many infants this teaching might apply to.

We turn then to the fourth reason: on account of the person's eternal use in heaven or hell. At funerals perhaps one of the most common themes is to think of the person's eternal use in heaven. With infants we usually think of celestial uses, angelic mothers and fathers – those who serve the Lord from the deepest love for Him, serving in the highest uses of His kingdom.

These uses are not easy for us to picture, but being associated with infants during their lives here and how deeply their spheres affect us, we can perhaps glimpse some of their eternal uses. Perhaps they are involved in raising other little children who die. Perhaps they are present at weddings, and other times that touch us deeply, such as in prayer.

Whatever the uses are, an infant is called out of our hands into the hands of angels to preserve their freedom, which they exercise freely in the world of spirits when they reach maturity.

So all four reasons help us to accept the love and wisdom of the Lord Himself when He calls one of these little ones to heavenly life. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of God". (*Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14*)

## CHILDHOOD

In order to understand Providence further, we turn again to the first of our four reasons, but now as a reason for the permission of a death of a young child. Think of the little boy pushing his trucks back and forth on the floor and making truck sounds. Or ponder the little girl carefully holding and talking to her doll. For most it is a secure and happy time.

I don't think I will ever cease to wonder at the birth of the imagination inspired by the spiritual angels, the way spiritual affections inspire thoughts! It is a sense of wonder, and so much more.

They run. They climb. Sometimes they refuse some food that is good for them. And sometimes they just sit quietly, and we wonder what is going on in their little heads. It is a time for collecting all manner of sense experience and forming marvelous pictures in their minds. The foundation for future reflection and rational understanding is being laid. Sometimes they ask profound questions. Most do not yet ponder their future career in this world and what they will be, but we do. We watch and wonder.

But turning to our theme, we can picture the hole it leaves when that excited young voice is silenced. The father misses the scream of delight and greeting when he comes home from work – misses stooping down to get his hug. Mother misses the incessant question, “Why?” And in countless ways that same question – “Why?” – comes up for us adults again and again. The thought from childlike affection often answers simply: “The Lord is in charge.”

Again, mother and father may turn to each other, and turn in a special way to the Lord. Sometimes the words of siblings or friends touch deeply, for they come from childlike confidence in heaven. We almost wish we could be a child again. Once again, the impact on all left here is profound.

Angels and spirits are assigned by the Lord to watch over children (*TCR* 677:5). So often we wonder at close calls—the guardian angels seem to be really on the job! I wonder, what does a spiritual associate angel feel when a little child “discovers” something special? Is it similar to the delight a teacher feels as a child learns to read? Yet perhaps more profound!

How are those associate angels and spirits with a young child affected by the death of that child? They must understand when it's time for a child to move on to a new state while growing up, or even move to the other world.

Angelic teachers are waiting on the other side. New little arrivals need careful watching, discipline, and care as they explore their new spiritual homes. Is it perhaps like a perfectly matched adoption? The impact on spirits and angels may elude us, but if we compare it to the change in our use – our loss and the angels' gain – perhaps we can catch a parallel picture. After all, it just takes imagination.

Then there is the third use, the child's own spiritual growth and regeneration. Ultimately, they will become adults and in the world of spirits take full responsibility for the choice of their eternal place in heaven. They will feel their loves as their own, even as they have felt them growing within their hearts in spiritual childhood. The key, I think, to understanding and accepting this use, is the sure knowledge that the Lord has protected their freedom, their ability to love and act as if of themselves throughout their whole journey, both here and in heaven.

Each of us has a unique path to our eternal uses. The path of a child who is called "early" and educated by angels is clearly different from the paths you and I have been called to tread. But if we try to lift our eyes to think of heavenly uses in the body of the Grand Man, perhaps we can imagine a special place for such children, uses unimpaired by imaginations limited by sense experiences here. Perhaps we can even think of specific organs in the body of the Grand Man of heaven as we try to imagine their possible place, even as we might sometimes wonder about our own places. Is there something of truth in imagining "Heart Spirits," "Eye Spirits," or even "Kidney Spirits?"

Will we join these children when our time comes? We will surely see them again. And if our states are compatible, as the most ancients were who live together eternally in wonderful families, perhaps we can be a family again. Or perhaps we will live at a spiritual "distance," visiting occasionally; or perhaps the memory of natural kinship will gradually fade. We will be satisfied however it turns out, provided we find our true place among the varied uses in the Grand Man.

## YOUTH

The birth of reason is yet another wonder in human growth. Inspired by natural angels, the question "Why?" runs deeper now. Reason is being born, and a sense of wonder leads to wanting to know and understand more. How? Why? Who? What? Inquiry can lead to questioning, not only of rules, but of many aspects of life. Sometimes young people seek answers from teachers, sometimes from trusted friends, and sometimes from not-to-be-trusted friends. The interest in the other sex arises, and the need for instruction and self-control. Often there is the driver's license test, and the responsibility that wheels require. And too often the lack of responsibility in this regard is the ultimate cause of death.

Because the circle of their friends is usually wider and often closer, the impact of a death of a friend can have a profound effect on those "left behind." In some cases, it leads to significant self-examination and change in behavior. They may do all they can to cover their affections, but they need sympathetic

understanding. And that very impact is in the Lord's clear sight.

Parents often feel that they have their hands full – for example, staying up waiting for the late ones to come home, listening to endless excuses and arguments. It's a vivid memory for some of us. And perhaps one wonders how just a couple of guardian angels can handle all the ramifications.

But if a youth dies, it affects his or her associate angels as well as the spirits they have begun to invite. This relates to the second cause: why some die younger.

Now as temptations begin to confront more harshly, the picture must include the presence of evil spirits as well as angels. Character really begins to take form as one learns as if of oneself to resist evil. Often, as "mistakes" are made, we wonder: at this age, are they really responsible? We do our parts to try to help, but the Lord controls just how powerfully He lets the hells challenge. The freedom to cultivate loves and to feel love as our own is the challenge, and the balance or equilibrium is in the best of hands. This involves both the second and third reasons for the timing of death. Getting into real trouble impacts both one's spiritual associates, and also our eternal welfare.

The four reasons are not easy to distinguish. If the choice is truly free, then the third reason comes into play: the youth's state of regeneration. An action may be forming a bad habit that will have to be overcome later in life. Some "habits" involve drugs or other addictive behaviors, which can profoundly influence judgment. While we need to offer all the help we can in this world, we also need to accept the Lord's Divine wisdom if an addiction ends up in the call to the spiritual world where freedom can be restored.

It is perhaps not too big a leap to picture the enthusiasm and vigor of use that youths can bring to heaven, for all are in the springtime of life. But it is also fun to imagine their seeking and finding their conjugal partners, with wonderful perception. If we focus on this, perhaps we can more easily see and accept the fourth use, their place in heaven.

## ADULT LIFE

Two things seem to dominate entrance into adult life: one's work, and one's marriage.

Employments, even in this world, are more diverse than most of us can imagine. What interests one would bore another beyond imagination. Some people work essentially alone, though their use, if genuine, impacts others. For other uses teamwork is imperative. I think it helps to think of our use as a part, even just a cell, in a human body.

Some find a use (employment) that lasts throughout life. Others change jobs frequently. But it is also important to remember that our use is more than

employment; it involves our whole active relationship with others – married partner, family, friends, etc. But in the whole body, whether we think of a family, a community, or other group, the loss of a person's usefulness is evident. Genuine uses support others; we notice the loss of such support.

Our uses support the lives not only of family, but of society, country, and church, both by our daily work and a host of “benefactions.” The death of a young adult usually has a far reaching and divergent impact socially on others. The first reason why most do not die young is because of their impact on others.

We need to say a special word about feminine usefulness, not only as a married partner, but also in establishing the essential sphere of the home. In today's world, having children and raising them as best we can to become potential angels is a use that is under stress in public opinion, even almost forgotten. But just a moment's reflection can tell of the home's place in inspiring patriotism, one's place in society, and in the church.

The use of wife and mother has a profound effect. The cry for such things as equality in the workplace should pale before the primary use of marriage, family and home. Conjugal love comes to the marriage solely through the wife. The understanding of the teachings of the church comes through the husband. It's a marriage of good and truth, the most fundamental of human relationships.

So, we also need to think of the impact on the married partner remaining in this world. The loss is profound. Even those who experience it do not understand its impact fully. The work *Conjugal Love* explains the basic choices, but they run very deep and it is outside of our purposes here to probe them.

And, we must note, there is also the enormous impact on children if they are to be raised by a single parent; or if they must adjust to a new father or mother. But the Lord considers all of these circumstances, unique and challenging as they may seem to us. He is here with us in all our sorrows. Part of this whole line of thought is to recognize the role of the Divine wisdom, if we are to enter with understanding into the mysteries of the time of death (see *True Christian Religion* 508:3, 6), and if we are ever therefore to understand the purpose of life.

As to the second reason, association with angels and spirits, I wonder if the fact that there is no natural time and space in heaven makes changes in associations as people die both simpler and easier. In any case we can be confident that the associate spirits move on to serve others, and that people left here can open their hearts to receive the influence of those who have gone on, inspiring affections to help them in their trials. With angelic help, married partners, for example, can find not just memories, but strong feelings of love and closeness.

Regarding the third reason, the use to ourselves, and the fourth, our use in the spiritual world forever, we are not in a position to judge the spiritual states of anyone, including ourselves, as to whether they are in good or evil. But the Lord not only carefully makes sure people find their eternal home, but He also provides for the states that will lead to the eternal welfare of all. All receive the best that their free choices permit.

Finally, it is interesting to ponder the special eternal uses of those who die as active men or women. For some it may mean waiting and preparing for their partners to join them. For others we can imagine the impact that their youthful enthusiasm might have on a heavenly society, even though all are active in their uses. And perhaps those uses are taking a unique shape, free from the burdens of old age that a longer life in this world might have involved.

### MIDDLE AGE, ACTIVE AND REACHING TOWARD RETIREMENT

As we come to consider the four reasons for a longer or shorter life in their application to midlife and later stages, the time of death fits more closely into the regular order of life.

Approaching what we think of as retirement age, there can often be times for quiet reflection on questions such as: “What have I accomplished in my life? What am I going to do in retirement?”

With such reflection on use, and perhaps a little more time to relax, comes the opportunity to share experiences with others, such as with one’s children or grandchildren and of course one’s spouse. The budding reflective and perceptive wisdom of this age is also invaluable in society and church affairs. The reflection on one’s own usefulness can turn the mind to the reflection on use itself. So, we can glimpse the impact on those left here if someone is called to the other world in mid-life or early retirement age.

Death can also bring very real sadness and disappointment as long anticipated retirement plans are aborted. But if we will, many of these dreams can simply be postponed until we can join the loved one again. I may be wrong, but I suspect there are some pretty fabulous vacations in heaven. Imagine visiting and talking with spirits and angels from other planets, for example.

As to the use while on earth to spirits and angels, perhaps some of the spiritual lumps are a bit harder to smooth out in the world of spirits if someone dies while in this most fruitful stage of life, but I think we can be safe in imagining an exciting use that awaits him or her, and the angels rejoicing over it.

In regard to use to ourselves that we may be regenerated, as we have noted before, we are not allowed to judge the spiritual state of anyone. So perhaps at this point we might just take a moment to reflect upon the eternal mercy of



our Heavenly Father, who is mercy and justice itself.

When someone who is active, known and loved is called, part of the process of coming to accepting this loss often involves imagining his or her use in heaven. It often seems well established. We easily picture a loving grandmother, now young again and full of energy, perhaps with rich perception, entering into the care of infants or children who have been called to eternal life.

When we see a life of use beginning to reach its completion, it is easier to picture a use in heaven for them when they are called.

## OLD AGE

And now we come to old age and somehow I tend to claim to be an expert on it. But we all know that experiences can be deceiving, so be careful as you read.

Doctrinally speaking, the age of wisdom begins at 60. And it is of order that man should live to a ripe old age and die peacefully. Peacefully might even mean saying goodbye to the family. Recently, for example, a 94-year-old grandma knew that she was on her death bed, and she gently told those at her side, "You cannot rush these things."

First, it is hard to describe the feeling as you watch one after another of your friends get called. Happiness for them! Anticipation? Wondering? The effect of one's passing on others is pretty clear.

Often one of the dominant features of old age is the multiplication of doctor's appointments. Often they lead to depending on others for part or all of the elderly person's care. That can be a hard adjustment. Your needs providing a use for others to perform doesn't sit easily. But such needs can lead to valuable exchanges of thoughts and experiences. We can learn from the past, and even from somewhat exaggerated memories. Often too, there are special relationships of grandkids with grandparents.

I remember being fascinated with Grandpa's recalling watching (President) Lincoln's funeral train. It is the age of wisdom, and the memories often have a reflective point if we listen for it. Still, when those conversations are taken away in old age, there is more a feeling of something missing, rather than grief. And if there has been suffering there is a sense of relief.

I have to not let my imagination get carried away as I think of the angels greeting an old person. "At last we have got ahold of him." Or when they ask, "What news from earth?" their getting more than they bargained for.

More seriously, as we noted above, it is of order that all of us should live to a rich and full old age, the age of wisdom! Perhaps it is called such because you finally realize just how little you know. I like to think of the loss of the natural memory as being that you forget the things from the past that you really shouldn't take credit for; but you also forget those for which you might

foolishly take too much blame. Is it wrong to think of the guardian angels feeling a sense of relief and even taking a brief vacation when someone passes on? In any case the changes for them are obvious as they turn “the case” over to the welcoming angels in the world of spirits.

And we have noted in every case that while the minister says nice things about the one who dies, we really do not know. Yet despite “our opinion,” we do know that we should think well of others and look for the good in them. (That is not a special appeal for when my time comes.)

And the fourth use is really fun to think about as we reflect on the “graduation” of someone who has lived a full life here. They have their diploma. There are usually so many affections and interests, so rich a basket of experiences, we hardly know where to turn in picturing their possible use in heaven. Often at the reception after the service it is both humorous and inspiring to piece together the anecdotes and tales from the past.

It is a time of joy and renewed confidence in the Lord’s Providence and eternal life.

## CONCLUSION

Whether the death of a loved one comes unexpectedly or after a gradual decline, the timing of death has a fourfold impact whenever it occurs. But in reviewing all these things, the real lesson is simply: the Lord is in charge, and it is imperative that we try our best to acknowledge this. The usefulness of these temporary, but really only apparent losses, are all permitted for the sake of the eternal happiness of all touched by them.

As we noted at the beginning, the Lord says: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” (*Isaiah 55:8*) But He has provided His Word, and in our limited and finite ways he allows us to see something of His loving care and purpose in human life.

Death is just one step, even just a baby step in establishing a relationship with our Creator, and if we are willing, lasting and loving closeness with our loving Redeemer. Through all of life’s ups and downs, His invitation is clear:

*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

# A Nation Under God

## Living into our equality

*Leah H. Rose*

*Editors' note: This Independence Day Address was delivered July 4, 2023, in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. It is reprinted, with permission, for its universal message for all of us.*

**W**e have entered an era of accelerating change. The political winds have grown fierce, the economic landscape is trembling, cultural battles are escalating, and institutional trust is crumbling. So today I want to spend a few minutes reflecting on what it means to live as a nation under God.

You may recognize that phrase from the (U.S.) Pledge of Allegiance and know the words “under God” were not added to the original text until 1954. But that phrase “nation under God” was used nearly a century earlier by Abraham Lincoln in the closing lines of his Gettysburg Address, where he honored those who had given “the last full measure of devotion” in the cause of preserving our nation. I think it’s worth pondering the implications of that phrase as we celebrate the birth of a country unique in human history because it was formed around an idea.

Consider, for a moment, the strangeness of that. The improbability. It was nothing so basic and unifying – so *natural* – as shared language or geography, as shared ethnicity or culture or religion through which America came into being. Rather, this country was shaped through a singular concept that emerged out of the Enlightenment about human beings and our relationship to our Maker. In a nutshell: God doesn’t play favorites; He creates every human being equal in His eyes.

This means each of us arrives in this world Divinely endowed with “certain unalienable Rights” among which are the well-known “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Also, specifically implicit in this concept of *de facto* human rights – and extending from their Divine endowment – is our right as individuals to be recognized and treated as equals under the law. Because God doesn’t play favorites.

Of course, we all know that from its inception and throughout most of its

relatively brief history, America has fallen conspicuously short of that inspired ideal. But as birthday celebrations are arguably not the moment to dwell on the failures of the honoree, let's simply acknowledge that America's record on respecting those unalienable rights has been tragically flawed, egregiously so, even while we recognize that America's foundational concept has been a game-changer for humanity. Millions upon millions of lives have been uplifted out of oppression, out of poverty, out of hopelessness by its impact. By its fundamental truth resonating around our world and across the distance of two-and-a-half centuries, opening minds and changing norms.

Truly, a gift of Providence to humankind.

So, what does it mean for us today, in 2023, to live as a nation of equals under God? I ask because in our current moment, and with a new election season approaching, we can – and do – find a lot to disagree on. Around America, within our churches, communities and families, diverging perceptions of history and conflicting notions of virtue vie for space and primacy. A lot feels at stake.

I think it's useful to consider that the very One who created us equal also gave us the essential instruction on how to live into that equality: by loving each other as He loves all of us; treating each other as we all wish to be treated. Which is to say: by offering one another the generosity, patience, forgiveness and mercy that He extends to each of us – that we all would have others extend to ourselves. The question for each of us is: How seriously do I take this instruction on equality? Do I lead by example – *His* example?

But – we might wonder -- what about right and wrong? What about protecting innocence, standing against hate, defending the weak? How do we fight the power of falsity, of lies, with love? How do we live in charity with everyone but still stand against the destruction and suffering we see others cause?

*The question for each of us is: How seriously do I take this instruction on equality? Do I lead by example – His example?*

An important answer can be found, I think, in a truth that was painfully realized by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet exile who, for the “crime” of privately criticizing Josef Stalin, went from serving as a decorated Red Army officer to languishing for a decade in the brutality of a Soviet prison camp. In his famous work, *The Gulag Archipelago*, he says:

In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either –but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts.

So, we are equal in this, also. And it's worth remembering. Because as the personal increasingly becomes the political, we're seeing fellowship and goodwill receding into camps, withdrawing behind the lines of tribal dogmas. We can feel the rising tide of antipathy around us, of righteous othering, with its rip currents of blame and contempt that seek to pull us under.

Solzhenitsyn's words are important because they recall us to the most basic level of our equality: the shared imperfection of our being. They bring home the truth that no one can claim the side of good who fails to look for it in others; no one can claim to stand against evil who cannot find it in himself. The most important battle to be won is not any of those raging around us. The line we most need to hold is in our own hearts.

Living as a nation under God is a call to recognize our spiritual equality, and embrace it. This does not mean pretending our conflicts don't exist, that everything's good and there's nothing worthy of dispute. Being a nation under God means *attending to the ground we stand on as we engage*. Can we keep spiritually awake to that boundary within ourselves? Can we mindfully cultivate the humility of spirit that looks for the humanity in our adversaries? Find the courage of heart to reach out and connect with it across our tribal divides?

America's unique legacy as a nation is that we coalesced around an inspired idea. That belief, in our Divinely endowed equality, was the philosophical seed out of which grew the American ethos of liberty and justice for all. Being unavoidably flawed human beings, we will not – we cannot – live our ideals perfectly. But we can uphold our legacy by seeking to walk the path our Maker has outlined for us . . . as individuals, as a society, as a nation under God.

*The most important battle to be won is not any of those raging around us. The line we most need to hold is in our own hearts.*

*He has shown you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justly,  
And to love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with your God?*

Thank you. And may God bless America.



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A few years later, at the invitation of the Bishop, she assisted for three years in teaching senior girls Religion – then the first female to teach in the Academy's Religion Department. In 2006 she joined the Bryn Athyn Fire Company, serving for 10 years -- first on the ambulance as a medical assistant, driver and EMT, then in the office.

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# Sex in the Spiritual World

A paper for the Council of the Clergy 2023

*The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith*

A fairly standard teaching of all Christianity, except apparently for the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, is that after death we become sexless beings. While many Christian married pairs expect to be together after death, their formal teachings indicate it will be more of a friendship than the fullness we expect in a marriage here on earth, with conjunctions of both mind and body.

Of course, the emphatic teaching of the Heavenly Doctrines is that there is marriage in heaven, and this includes sexual relations. We are taught:

*As regards love for the opposite sex, this is universal in all people, for it is implanted from the moment of creation in a person's very soul, from which comes the essential nature of the whole person. (Conjugal Love 46)*

We can smile at the experience of some young men in the other world, who had expected to be sexless beings, surprised at seeing beautiful young women there, and experiencing some sexual interest. They were told: "Step aside, if you like, and investigate in your own case whether anything is missing to keep you from being the man you were before." (*Ibid.* 44:2)

And, of course, while there are not natural children born of sexual relations in heaven, there is the birth of love and wisdom in the marital relationship. (*Ibid.* 44:9,45,51)

## **Sexual Relations in Heaven**

While the Writings do not go into any graphic detail, there are many statements which suggest sexual relations among married partners are more frequent and more delightful than on earth. A typical teaching is that "love truly conjugal . . . remains to eternity, and increases in potency, and in the same degree

in delight.” (*Divine Providence* 296:4; see also *Conjugal Love* 55:3, 115:5; *Continuation of the Last Judgment* 77; *Spiritual Experiences* 6096) “Potency” here means sexual virility – the ability to engage in sexual relations with one’s spouse. We are even told it “increases daily” (*Spiritual Experiences* 6110:7), “until it becomes perpetual” (*Ibid.* 6110:3), and “increases even till it becomes constant.” (*1 Marriage Index* 83; see also *Spiritual Experiences* 6110:75) Further:

*Those men who are in conjugal love, are in such a state that they can enjoy intercourse with their wife as often as they please: the ability never fails, inasmuch as all parts of their body are in that love and, after intercourse, they are affected with joyfulness, and never with dejection, so that they are invigorated by it.*

(*Spiritual Experiences* 6055)

It is also possible that this potency and delight are increased more in the higher, as opposed to the lower, heavens. (*Conjugal Love* 55:3, 77:3, 105)

It would also seem that this desire for sexual intimacy is present with both husbands and wives. We are told that angels in heaven,

*declare that they are in continual potency, that after the acts there is never any weariness, still less any sadness, but eagerness of life and cheerfulness of mind, that the married pair pass the night in each other’s bosoms as if they were created into one, that effects are constantly open, that they are never lacking when they have desire, since without these their love would be like the channel of a fountain stopped up. The effect opens that channel and causes continuance and conjunction that they may become as one flesh; for the vital of the husband adds itself to the vital of the wife and binds together. They declare that the delights of the effects cannot be described in the expressions of any language in the natural world, nor be thought of in any except spiritual ideas, and that even these do not exhaust them. (Apocalypse Explained 992:3. See also *Conjugal Love* 331)*

With wives this might be expected because “a desire to unite her husband to her is constant and continual in a wife.” (*Conjugal Love* 160) That constant desire with the wife from her love would heighten her receptivity in heaven, and presumably this would increase with her regeneration (as, of course, a man’s potency would with his regeneration, and their growing mutually closer).

The source for this increased sexual intimacy and delight is based on a couples’ internal spiritual development. An angel noted that with those in a heavenly marriage,



*the husband's power of insemination would continually be in the spring of youth, and he would therefore remain in the effort and power to transmit his truth, and the wife, out of love, would be in a continual state to receive it. (Conjugal Love 115:5)*

We are also told that “insemination corresponds to the power of truth.” (*Ibid.* 127; see also 183:6) That is, as a man develops his unique masculine wisdom, it results in a greater ability to be sexually potent. This is further explained:

*So then, since truth in the soul is the origin of the seed or sperm, it follows that the sexual abundance men have is according to their love of propagating the truths of their wisdom. It is also according to their love of performing useful services, because useful services are the good effects which truths produce. (Conjugal Love 220:3)*

Thus, there is a direct link between husbands' wisdom expressed in use and their focus on their wives alone, and their ability to engage in sexual relations in marriage. And as his wisdom is what a wife is conjoining herself to in her husband, this should increase her desire and delight.

The frequency of sexual relations among a married pair, rather than becoming boring as might be expected, is actually a source of increased delight.

*On several occasions, there was with me a woman who said, and believed, that it is impossible to love one's married partner for long, for the reason that it becomes a usual thing, and is constantly permitted; but she received answer that, in heaven, where there are no adulteries – for they are abominated – that very usualness becomes delightful, and that they love the married partner because it is always permitted, and because the deliciousness of heaven enters at such times. (Spiritual Experiences 6106)*

Further, an angel said:

*With him who loves his partner alone, virtue or potency is reserved for one and so is gathered and concentrated, as it were. It then becomes like a noble quintessence purged of defilements, which otherwise would be dissipated and scattered in every direction. (Conjugal Love 105)*

### **Sexual Relations in Hell**

It is somewhat difficult to present a cohesive picture of sexual relations in hell. For one, we are given various vignettes of individual situations which may or may not be able to be generalized to all. Also, sometimes it is not clear whether

the episode is taking place in the world of spirits or in hell. And since they are usually descriptions of a point in time (or one should say “state” since it is in the other world), we do not know if they represent an ongoing state or one that is temporary – a step on the way rather than a final condition.

That said, certain general things can be stated. There is not marriage in hell. There appears to be periodic comings together, sometimes living together of a man and woman – one can’t really say “husband and wife.” But these seem to be temporary. For men, especially those who engaged in sexual disorders in this world, there is the desire to have sexual relations with many in houses of prostitution. And for women, who are often termed sirens, their promiscuity appears to satisfy their lusts and torment adulterers. Over time, after indulging in sexual lust with a variety of partners, there is a lessening of delight. And the final state of devils and satans is the loss of any sexual desire at all. (So, perhaps Christian doctrine is correct after all – at least in hell!)

Hell is described as being “whoredom and adultery” (*Ibid.* 6103:3), “whoredom at pleasure” (6110:6), and “in hell there are not marriages, but there are adulteries.” (*De Conj* 54) Thus “in some of the hells there are nothing but brothels, disgusting to the sight and filled with every kind of filth and excrement.” (*Heaven and Hell* 586) One can imagine a devil spending his entire day in such places, indulging in various lusts. However, there are restrictions on their regular use. For those in the lust of variety,

*brothels on the side of hell are open to them, where are harlots with whom there is opportunity of varying their lusts; but this is granted them with only one harlot a day, and it is forbidden them under penalty to be with more than one on the same day.*

(*Conjugal Love* 510)

And we should not imagine sexual lust exists only with the males. It would seem that the women who inhabit the houses of prostitution and are otherwise engaged in promiscuity are not only manipulative sirens, but also women who are “in the heat of their fiery lust.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 825; *Apocalypse Explained* 1005:3; *Spiritual Experiences* 3207).

We are also told that those who are only natural and are internally ruled by evils and falsities, are compelled to work. One was told:

*everyone, after his task is done, is permitted to walk about, to talk, and afterward to sleep. And he is conducted further into the cavern where there are harlots, and each one is allowed to select one of these, and to call her his woman; but promiscuous harlotry is forbidden with penalties. (True Christian Religion 281:11; this memorable relation is also found in Apocalypse Revealed 153)*

Intriguingly, there are at least some societies in hell where the harlots are in charge:

*There are infamous societies there, where harlots and adulterers resort. There are gatherings where harlots, every night, choose themselves males: they are not gatherings where males choose themselves harlots. The harlots there are able, by means of phantasies, to render themselves beautiful. [7] . . . Wherefore, such females are set over them as hold them in obedience, and compel them to labor. (Spiritual Experiences 6106:6)*

It also appears that men and women are largely separated in their hells, only coming together occasionally.

*In infernal societies there the men are separated from the women, and when they think that they are to speak with a wife, from a habit acquired in the world, he goes to the women and a persuasion is given him then that this or that one is his woman, with whom he then consociates himself; but that persuasion is varied, because it makes no difference, since in hell there is no marriage but adultery. (De Conj. 54 See also Apocalypse Explained 1005:3; Spiritual Experiences 5466ff, 1354)*

### **A Longer-Term Relationship in Hell?**

There are also a few examples that might suggest a longer-term relationship. Swedenborg was once speaking with a satan and woman who had arisen from hell.

*I asked the satan if she was his wife. He replied, 'What is a wife? I do not know and my society does not; she is my harlot.' Then she inspired him with lascivious desire, which sirens can do with great skill; and on receiving it he kissed her, and said, 'Ah my Adonis!' (True Christian Religion 80)*

It does not say they lived as husband and wife, and she is said to come from a group of sirens, perhaps suggesting they do not live together, and that they are only together temporarily. Yet, him calling her his "harlot" and her inspiring him with lascivious desire may suggest something longer term.

There is also a curious episode of an empress of Russia:

*Afterwards, the Empress came to speak with the Bishop in Lubeck to whom she had been engaged; but she was not pleased with him, particularly as there appeared with him a pretty-faced woman, who was his mistress, whom he loved much and whom he had not*

*abandoned in the world. It was afterwards shown where his home now was; which was down in hell, where it looked bad, and he had low work to do, as is usual there. Thereby her fancy for him was dispelled. (Spiritual Experiences 6027)*

This does not say that the bishop has his mistress with him in hell. One could suppose either that is the case, or that since he is in hell they have separated, or only come together occasionally. Or it could be that this episode occurred in the world of spirits, and he was raised there temporarily for the conversation with the empress.

Finally, there is also the case of Charles XII, king of Sweden. Under a section entitled “Concerning the Infernal Marriage,” we are told he “had for a wife, in the other life, one who was of a similar disposition, but more stubborn than he,” (*Spiritual Experiences 4745; see also De Conj 62*). While the title says “infernal” it is not clear whether this is in the world of spirits or in hell. And we do not know if it was a lasting relationship.

### **A Progression Toward Hell**

As one might expect, there is a progression for those adulterers who will eventually wind up in hell. One episode involved men who thought sexual relations outside of marriage were allowable and had violated virgins indiscriminately. (*Spiritual Experiences 4756*) Shameless women are sent to them, pretending to be virgins. If they violate them, which they invariably do, they are severely punished. This process is repeated for a “long, long time” until at last they cease – from fear of the punishments. This appears to occur in the world of spirits, but illustrates the steps of their downward spiral.

The progression is also seen here:

*All those married partners who are merely natural, separate after death. The reason is that the love of being married is cold in them, and a love for committing adultery warm. Nevertheless, following that separation they still sometimes form associations with others as married partners, although after a short time they part from each other. Quite often this happens repeatedly, with one person after another. And finally, the man is handed over to some licentious woman, and the woman to some adulterer, which takes place in a prison in hell. . . . There, promiscuous licentiousness is forbidden to both under pain of punishment. (Conjugal Love 54)*

An even fuller description of the process with those in the love of deflowering virgins is found in *Conjugal Love 505*. After first appearing

outwardly orderly, their inner lusts begin to emerge. Those whose lusts were not a ruling love experience shame and apparently are able to go to heaven. Those who continue to embrace lusts seek out whorehouses. They quickly leave because there are only prostitutes there, and they wanted virgins. Then, they are taken to other prostitutes who can feign a girlish virginity. They make an agreement with them, “but when they are about to consummate the arrangement, the mirage assumed from heaven is removed and the alleged virgins are seen in their ugliness, monstrous and dark.” (*Conjugal Love* 505:2)

So, their lust is foiled, but they are required to remain with them for a while. There apparently is still hope for some to withdraw at that stage, but those who will not are then cast down into hell. “They loathe the opposite sex, and turn away from any they see, for they have no desire.” (*Ibid.* 505:4)

This is the final state for such – a complete loss of any interest in sexual relations, a hatred of the opposite sex, and complete isolation from others. This should not be terribly surprising because a general teaching is that with confirmed adulterers “the ability or virtue called virility decreases in vigor to the point that it is lost, and after that coldness sets in towards even any of the opposite sex, followed by a kind of loathing that approaches revulsion.” (*Conjugal Love* 433; see also *Spiritual Experiences* 3453:2, 3896-3900, 4092, 5469, 6096, 6110; *Conjugal Love* 514e; *De Conj* 9. ) We further find that those who have lived in adulteries:

*Their final lot is that from the extreme impotence to which they are at length reduced they become emptied of all the fire and light of life, and dwell alone in deserts as images of the slothfulness and weariness of their own life. (Apocalypse Explained 1003:3)*

Women adulteresses have a similar outcome. We are told they live where “all things are filthy; they dwell in caves, and on account of their ugliness and deformity they fear to be seen, nor can they any longer allure any adulterer because they are deformed and have a foul smell.” (*De Conj* 9; see also *Conjugal Love* 433)

What is more, at least for the men, it appears they may lose their sexual organs. The final lot of those in the lust of variety is described:

*Their garments are tattered, and they wear their breeches drawn up over the belly around the chest because they do not have any loins. The ankles of their feet commence instead from the area just below the belly. The reason is that the loins in human beings correspond to conjugal love, and this is missing in them. (Conjugal Love 510:3 emphasis added; see also 505:4)*

Obviously, it is the loins where the sexual organs are, which are missing.

Another example of a sexless existence is seen in those who lived in polygamy and would not reject it. They are found in hell “and there they destroyed their genital organs, so that they lived without them.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 5197; see also 1979 where it is said of those who engaged in sexual relations without interest in marriage or children, and made them to be holy: “their lascivious members are burned up as if by fire, which was exceedingly painful, to be sure.”)

### **Is Everyone in Hell like This?**

It is possible that the teachings about the sexless and isolated life of evil spirits may apply more to those whose evils were in this area – lusts of adultery, variety, rape, etc. – and that men who did not abuse sexual things may live in hell with a woman. Certainly, the teachings regarding the sexlessness in hell seem to be directly connected to those in evil loves regarding sexual matters. And we are taught that “it is a law in the other life that no one must become worse than he had been in this world.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6559)

Could it be that a devil whose predominate love was money might not be like this? That since they did not abuse sexual relationships, that they would not be allowed to enter into them in hell, and thus be spared a sexless existence? Heaven and Hell 586, which notes there are brothels in hell, may hint at this with the conditioning phrase “in some of the hells,” perhaps suggesting the brothels are not in all of them.

However, all of hell is essentially opposed to conjugal love.

*Adultery is hell itself, thus it is the Devil himself and Satan. It has been shown by many things as also by experience, that all in hell are adulterers, that they rage like furies when they perceive conjugal love; which is a sign that they are from hell; that they desire to violate chaste marriages, and many other things; then that they are in the marriage of evil and falsity. (Last Judgment Posthumous 346; see also De Conj 54)*

This is a wide-ranging statement and would seem to apply to everyone in hell, regardless of whether they had engaged, or wanted to engage, in sexual perversions while on earth.

There is further evidence. In *True Christian Religion* 281, quoted above, where a hellish spirit is told that he could select a harlot, but only one, did not appear to be in any previous sexual disorder – just a general love of evil and falsity. However, there is a connection between all evil and adultery and other sexual disorders, whether engaged in while on earth or not. And that while

devils cannot become worse or enter into new evils, perhaps a manifestation of their evil naturally emerges in sexual issues, even if it had not been evident in this world.

There are also the polygamists who refuse to give up the practice, even with Divine efforts to lead them away from it, who “in the course of time become so feeble and impotent that they are disgusted with marriage, for lasciviousness brings this with itself.” (*De Conj* 47. ) The passage does not suggest that these polygamists were in any other sexual disorder, although it might be inherent in having multiple wives.

Finally, there is the teaching of the profaners who become like skeletons and have little life left them (*Arcana Coelestia* 6348:2) – that they “barely appear as people, but as burnt bones in which there is but little life.” (*Ibid.* 10287:2) “Moreover, because they are no longer human, they are not called he or she, but it.” (*Divine Providence* 226; *Apocalypse Explained* 1050e; *Spiritual Experiences* 5950) Thus sexuality does not appear to exist with those who profane the Word either, a hallmark of all evil and falsity.

While the absence of evidence is never conclusive, I could find no statement nor memorable relation that indicates any of those in hell live as married partners. Yes, together for a time, but not eternal. The one exception may be Charles XII.

It is also possible that the descriptions of men being sexless, even without genital organs, is the appearance that the angels see, yet to those in hell they appear to themselves as male or female. It is generally the case that devils and satans appear “normal” to themselves and only appear deformed when viewed by the angels, hence their desire to avoid the angels. The passage in *Conjugal Love* describing men without loins begins with: “Among themselves they do indeed appear as men, but as seen by others who are allowed to look in there, they appear like apes, with a fierce face instead of a mild, and a horrible countenance instead of pleasing.” (*Conjugal Love* 505:4)

However, while they may appear to themselves as men with sexual organs, the emphasis upon their impotence and general revulsion toward women would render it somewhat of a moot point. These deep hellish characteristics are not merely an appearance but their reality. And, after centuries of punishments when they do evil, they would retreat into a somewhat passive shell – doing some vile uses and living an outwardly orderly existence, for the most part . Would they continue to fantasize about their sexual lusts? It would seem that is eventually leached out of them.

In addition, all evil is self-centered. It excludes others, except when it wants to use them in some way. Hell could thus be described as the absolute isolation from all positive human affection, love and relationships. Thus, how could any devil or satan maintain any lasting marital relationship? Rather,

would not a devil use the marital relationship to express their hellish desires, thus destroying the relationship?

One could speculate that those whose predominate hellish loves were in lesser or other evils might be able to have some, at least temporary, relationships. But this is pure speculation. The clear teachings suggest to me this is not possible, especially given that the love of dominion, which seems to be present in most evil, is one of the most destructive forces in marriages.

### Final Thought

One would think that such teachings would serve as a sufficient deterrent to frighten anyone away from sexual disorders. But Swedenborg's experience in speaking with adulterers in the other world is not encouraging:

*I told adulterers, that, in heaven, there is perpetual potency; and they said, if they had known this in the world, they would never have committed whoredom, so that they might come into heaven. But I said, that, in heaven, it is permitted to love only the married partner, in hell to commit whoredom at pleasure; [and I asked] whether, in this case, they would wish to be in hell, or in heaven; but I was unable to extort a reply from them. (Spiritual Experiences 6110:6; see also 6106)*

But one can always hope these teachings about the fate of those engaged in sexual deviancy and abuse will encourage at least some to refrain from these hellish desires and seek a genuine conjugal partner.

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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

## Smoke

*The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth*

**M**uch of North America has been cloaked in clouds of dense smokey haze this past summer. At my home in Bryn Athyn, the smoke generated by wildfires thousands of miles away caused an eerie gloom that dims the sun, mutes the colors of the landscape to a hazy grey, and oddly makes it difficult to judge distances. For me, it generates a mild claustrophobic experience feeling, as though the world is collapsing and closing in on itself. But of course, that is only an illusion.

The experience is an effective reminder of what happens when one's perspective is formed from what the Heavenly Doctrines call "sensory impressions", or purely from information that comes from our worldly experiences gathered through our physical senses. That kind of judgment makes our world view small, dim and cloudy.

*Arcana Coelestia 5084* teaches us that thinking based on purely external worldly experience is "the source of all illusions that reign in a person" and is the main reason people reject religion and spirituality in our world today. This is particularly true when a person is living a life that looks toward worldly, materialistic and purely physical pleasure as its goals.

The reality is that one cannot see or understand spiritual realities simply by observing physical evidence. Or to put it another way, one cannot be religious using data gathered from experiencing the natural world. To see and

understand heavenly realities, one has to have information that comes from heaven. To see and understand who the Lord is, one has to have information that comes from the Lord.

The point is that one needs to elevate one's perspective above the sensory information that comes to us from the physical world and look down from that perspective. This is put concisely in a passage from Isaiah where the prophet writes: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (*Isaiah 55:8.9*)

Consider this quote from *Arcana Coelestia* 5089:

*Unless a person's thought can be raised above sensory impressions so that these [sensory impressions] are beheld as existing so to speak beneath him, he cannot possibly discern any interior aspect of the Word, let alone things of heaven such as are totally removed from those of the world, since the senses take hold of them and stifle them. This explains why people who rely on their senses and have focused their attention on known facts rarely understand anything about the things of heaven; for they have immersed their thoughts in the kinds of things that belong to the world, that is, in terms and in definitions formed from these, and so in what the senses perceive, from which they can no longer be raised up and so preserved in a way of looking at things that is higher than the senses..*

In July, I was high up in the mountains of Wyoming when a storm passed through and swept away this smokey gloom that had been obscuring our view of the magnificent landscapes of the mountains. What struck me most was the view of the sky that night. One could see millions of stars spread across the sky in our galaxy. The contrast between the haze of the previous night was stunning.

This contrast reminds me of what the Lord is inviting us to do with His Word. He asks us to rise above the gloom of our own personal interpretations, woven out of our personal sensory impressions and worldly preferences. Through teachings in His timeless Word, we are given fantastic, clear views of the heavens, the spiritual world and all its enduring realities. Then, from that perspective (from above), we are invited to view our physical world. That heavenly perspective brings into focus the magnificence of the Lord's natural creation. That opens our eyes to a new appreciation of the Lord's natural creation.

The goal is to view the world with all its delights, which offers us a

platform for human spiritual life. We do not need to eradicate our enjoyment of the natural world. Rather we are taught to subordinate it, to experience it in conformity with the deeper spiritual realities of heaven which come from the Lord Himself. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5247)

This perspective – looking at our natural experiences and enjoyments and filtering them through the higher platform of heaven – allows us a clarity of vision that is not possible from simple sensory experience alone. It is the effort of elevating our perspective by means of the Word that clears the smoke away and gives us that magnificent view of the Lord's creation that He alone allows us to enjoy.

Contact: [David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org](mailto:David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org)

*It is the effort of elevating our perspective by means of the Word that clears the smoke away and gives us that magnificent view of the Lord's creation that He alone allows us to enjoy.*

# Choosing to Make Bryn Athyn College The Best that it Can Be

*The Rev. Eric H. Carswell, President*

(From an address given to students, faculty, coaches,  
staff and guests May 5, 2023).

Back in January I was happily retired and enjoying that life when I was asked if I would consider serving as president of Bryn Athyn College for an interim two-year period. I agreed and am happy to be serving at this College, which is so important for the cause of the New Church in this world, as well as for the General Church.

I think the collegiate New Church education at Bryn Athyn College is deeply important. I have worked in schools from elementary, high school, college and graduate school. Each level has important contributions to make to the development of a child or young person. Collegiate New Church education has a huge capability of fulfilling the invitation Swedenborg recognized in a memorable experience where he saw the Latin phrase “*Nunc Licet*” which means that now we are allowed to use our intellect to explore the mysteries of faith. (*True Christian Religion* 508) You students now have minds that are far more prepared to recognize significant ideas and how they connect with others.

While classroom experiences and individual study are a key part of college, a great college experience contains so many elements. I wonder what you will remember in five, 20 or 40 years?

## **Bryn Athyn College mission:**

*Bryn Athyn College of the New Church serves as an intellectual center for all who desire to engage in higher education enriched, guided and structured by*

*the study of the Old Testament, New Testament and theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This education challenges students to develop spiritual purpose, to think broadly and critically from a variety of perspectives, and to build intellectual and practical skills. The ultimate purpose is to enhance students' civil, moral and spiritual lives, and to contribute to human spiritual welfare.*

The first phrase of this mission – *Bryn Athyn College of the New Church serves as an intellectual center for all who desire to engage in higher education enriched, guided, and structured by the study of the Old Testament, New Testament, and theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* – describes the foundation of all that Bryn Athyn College works to teach.

I think you may recognize that all useful knowledge must be put in order. Yes, you can have an encyclopedia article with many facts. But facts without a framework do not really tell you anything. Knowledge must have an organization, a principle behind it that connects them into a coherent whole. Facts are useful only to the extent they help support a true, useful and good idea or concepts.

Some people see the world around them as a chaotic competition for survival, where the strong dominate and the weak wither. For such a person life can be focused on gaining power and money, staying ahead of others and being in control. This is not the framework Bryn Athyn College seeks to build. The Old Testament teaches: *“The heavens declare the glory of God.” (Psalm 19:1)* Think of all the things from the natural world that Jesus used to illustrate His parables. The teachings for the New Church state:

*The whole visible universe is nothing else than a theater that is representative of the Lord's kingdom. And this in turn is a theater representative of the Lord Himself. (Arcana Coelestia 3483:2)*

An education at Bryn Athyn College strives for an organization of information in all subjects that presents the world and all that is in it as the creation of a perfectly loving and wise God – that there is a purpose behind it and because of this there is good reason for each of us to be active as we lead our lives.

The Lord is less concerned about what is happening in our lives right now than where it is going to lead us. And because human beings must be free there are things that God absolutely does

*The Lord is less concerned about what is happening in our lives right now than where it is going to lead us.*

not want to happen, but that He cannot prevent. Nevertheless, He is going to work within everything that happens to bring out as much good as He can. This is one reflection of how education at Bryn Athyn College is structured by Divine revelation.

The second phrase of Bryn Athyn College's mission statement states: "*This education challenges students to develop spiritual purpose.*" Spiritual purpose means having an inner locus of control. You see what is happening around you and consciously make choices in response to these things – how to react, how to move forward in your life.

In contrast, a person who has an outer locus of control and thus little spiritual purpose tends to think: "Stuff happens to me, and I don't know why." Such a person is primarily reactive to his environment, like a pool ball rolling forward until it runs into another ball or wall and its direction changes, until its energy runs out. That is not a spiritual purpose. It is being impacted by the environment one lives in.

Being primarily reactive does not lead to a very happy life. Living with a spiritual purpose is like someone who thinks: "What am I going to do today? How is what I choose going to make a difference in this world for good?" That can mean small things like smiling at a friend, helping another person, or recognizing that the education you are getting now is an important preparation for having a mind that employers seek. It helps a person have a broad and deep body of knowledge and understanding. It helps them make better decisions. Developing a spiritual purpose means consciously choosing to live from a set of principles and values that you recognize produces a useful life.

The third phrase in our mission statement is: "to think broadly and critically from a variety of perspectives, and to build intellectual and practical skills." The most important things employers are going to look for are not just the facts a student can learn in four years of college, because 10 years from now aspects of that knowledge may not be applicable.

When I took Biology at Bryn Athyn College Dr. Grant Doering said that when he was working on his PhD, he did not learn things he was teaching now in an introductory college biology class. Part of what you are doing is building a foundation of knowledge but also learning how to learn. Not only that, but employers are looking for people who can think critically and so can recognize things that are not what they should be, because they are paying attention. They care. They want what they are trying to accomplish to work better.

Part of what we are trying to build at Bryn Athyn College are those critical thinking skills as well as the practical skills of how you can glean information out of a setting that will help you be more useful. All these things will serve you throughout your whole life.

The fourth phrase of the mission statement states: "*The ultimate purpose*

*is to enhance students' civil, moral and spiritual lives.*" This means we want students to be good citizens in this world, to live a civil life and contribute to the welfare of this country. We want them to have a moral life – to recognize that the values they choose really make a difference in the lives of the people with whom they interact, that they are committed to being the kind of person each of us would like to have as a friend.

Ultimately, we want them to recognize that there is a spiritual level to their life that supports the two lower levels. Having a spiritual life means being committed to a set of values and deep principles of life that are so central that it does not matter if anyone is watching, or if there is no issue of legal consequences, that person is still going to live by those values and principles.

The mission statement concludes: *"and to contribute to human spiritual welfare."* This refers to how our efforts can make a big difference in the world. In the teachings for the New Church there is this fundamental statement: *"Charity itself is acting justly and faithfully in our position and our work and with the people with whom we interact."* (*True Christian Religion* 422) This means that part of what the Lord wants is for us to make a difference in this world for good. It means that our choices will make this a better world, and not just better materially, but that in our lives we will model what inspires others in their lives.

As a very small college Bryn Athyn has strengths and weaknesses. Its small size means it has a focused number of majors and minors. At some campuses with 90,000 students there can be hundreds of majors to choose from. Such choices can be overwhelming. At many of these colleges classes are taught by inspiring teachers and students are prepared and attentive.

When I attended Bryn Athyn College 50 years ago most students did two years and then transferred. The only majors were Education, Religion and Philosophy. Now there are many more degree programs and minors to choose from.

In my last two years of undergraduate education at Penn State main campus, I did have some smaller classes, but also huge auditorium classes, some of which were good and others regrettable. You did not have a relationship with the teacher. If you needed help you probably met with a graduate school student.

At Bryn Athyn College the professors know the names of each of their students. And unlike the pressure to publish research papers on many campuses, they focus on teaching as their primary role. One of the regrettable courses I took at Penn State was a Theory of Learning class whose professor was working on a new edition of a book. Can you imagine an hour-and-a-quarter of the teacher reading chapters to us for his lectures?

The life of a college has many elements. I hope many friendships are being

*Above all I hope  
we help foster  
a fundamental  
optimism that comes  
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elements of our lives.*

formed –getting to know each other from all sorts of backgrounds, profoundly enriching the experience of college. Life in the dormitories can mean so much, with activities, such as community service projects, helping students work together to accomplish something good.

There are incredible experiences related to our athletic teams. Being part of a team can benefit you for the rest of your life. You bring your strengths and skills, and learn to work with others, with their own abilities, to contribute to the team. It can help a person learn how to focus when things are going poorly and how to show true sportsmanship when things are going well.

There is so much that can be fun in the life of a college. We are trying to provide a rich variety of experiences: academic, friendships, making a difference for good, being a student athlete, and so on. All of this is a foundation for being a useful human being.

Above all I hope we help foster a fundamental optimism that comes from believing that there is a loving and wise God working within the tiniest elements of our lives. This is reflected in this teaching for the New Church:

*People are in error who believe that the Lord has not foreseen and does not see the smallest individual thing with each person, or that within the smallest individual thing He does not foresee and lead, when in fact the Lord's foresight and providence are present within the tiniest details of all the smallest individual things with us, and in details so tiny that it is impossible to comprehend in any manner of thought one in many millions of them. For every smallest fraction of a moment of our lives entails a chain of consequences extending into eternity. Indeed every one is like a new beginning to those that follow, and so every single moment of the life both of our understanding and our will is a new beginning.*

(*Arcana Coelestia* 3854:3)

This means that the Lord knew certain events that happened to you when you were three years old are significant in your life now. Things that happened when you were in fourth grade will be significant when you are 60. Things that are happening now will influence you to eternity in the life after death.



It is hard to imagine how the Lord does this in each of our lives. The answer is that He is infinite. He can pay attention to each of our lives, knowing the tiniest things that are going on within our minds and environment. And as He watches over us it is always with a loving smile. Even when we are doing regrettable things, He can know why we are doing them and work with us to recognize there is a better way to respond.

In all that we do at Bryn Athyn College, we try to prepare students for a useful life – to get you ready for a job that will be incredibly fulfilling. We are trying to form your mind so that you will be a useful person in many parts of life. We hope you get a lot of joy from many things you do.

These are some of the many reasons why I chose to come and help Bryn Athyn College to be the best it can be.

**Note:** Bryn Athyn College expects to have an enrollment of 265 students for the 2023-24 academic year, offering 20 majors, some of which are interdisciplinary.

Here is a sampling of testimonials offered by Bryn Athyn College students:

*I am so thankful to be in Bryn Athyn because I feel like I have finally found my place and myself in life. I have adopted the New Church beliefs and live by them now.*

*I know that God is caring for me, otherwise I wouldn't be at Bryn Athyn right now. Even though I am not sure what I want to do in life, I know that coming to Bryn Athyn was the first step toward deciding, and I greatly feel that by letting God guide me, I will accomplish great things here.*

*Just being here in Bryn Athyn has changed me for the better. I can tell because for one, I am a lot happier here than I have ever been in my life. This is such a positive place. My views have been changed on heaven and hell. This has started a new journey for me on learning about myself and becoming who I want to be.*

*I'm still dumbfounded that there is a church that thinks the way I do. It's funny, because a lot of this seems like common sense. I really feel like I've*

*In all that we do at Bryn Athyn College, we try to prepare students for a useful life – to get you ready for a job that will be incredibly fulfilling.*

*always been part of the New Church but didn't know it existed until now.*

*I found all of the New Church ideals very inspirational, and I feel practically converted already. It is so comforting to know there is a church that believes what I have thought for so long, and I wish many more people knew about it. I always knew that as long as I did my best and stood strong, God would watch out for me.*

**The Rev. Eric H. Carswell** came out of retirement – most recently as pastor of Bryn Athyn Church – to serve as President of Bryn Athyn College. He and his wife, Donna (Zeitz), live in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: [Eric.Carswell@brynathyn.edu](mailto:Eric.Carswell@brynathyn.edu)



# The Most Important New Church Belief

*The Rev. Erik J. Buss*

(Reprinted with permission from the General Church Newsletter for the  
United Kingdom)

If someone asked you what was the most important belief in the New Church, what would you say? Would you focus on the practical nature of the Lord's teaching, namely that everyone goes to heaven based on how they live? Would you focus on the explanations of the inner meaning of the Word, on the clear teachings about life after death or about marriage?

These are all powerful teachings, but when the Lord focuses on one teaching that is most important, it is about Him and who He is. The "first of all the commandments" is that the Lord is one and that we are supposed to love Him. (Mark 12:29; Deuteronomy 6:4) And in the Heavenly Doctrines we are told that the reason the New Church is the crown of all the churches that have existed up until now is that we can worship the Lord as the one visible God:

*From the beginning there have been, generally speaking, four churches on this earth; one before the flood, one after the flood, a third the Israelite, and the fourth named Christian. Since all churches depend upon the knowledge and acknowledgment of one God, with whom a member of the church can be joined, and since all four churches lacked that truth, it follows that a church will take the place of those four, which will know and acknowledge one God. . . This new church is the crown of all the churches which have up to now existed upon earth, because it will worship one visible God, in whom is the invisible God, as the soul is in the body. In this way and no other is God's conjunction with humankind possible, because people are natural and so think in a natural fashion. Joining must take place in their thinking and so in the affection of their love, and this happens when a person thinks of God as a person. Joining with an invisible God is like joining the sight of the eye with the expanse of the universe, the bounds of which are not to be seen. Or it is like looking out in the middle of an ocean, when the gaze falls on air and sea and is frustrated. But joining with a visible God is like seeing a person in the air or the sea opening his arms and inviting*

| *you into his embrace. (True Christian Religion 786, 787)*

This is such a striking statement, in part because it says that the people of the Most Ancient Church, the most spiritual beings that have existed in this world, also worshipped an invisible God. And that the New Church is the crown of all churches because we can worship a God we can see in our mind's eye when we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and do what He said.

The importance of knowing our God is strengthened by the teaching that “the faith of the new heaven and the new church is in universal terms as follows:

*The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, came into the world to subdue the hells and to glorify His Human. Without this no mortal could have been saved, and those are saved who believe in Him. (True Christian Religion 2)*

The broadest description of what the New Church is about is all about who the Lord is, because it is in coming to know Him, turn to Him, and serve Him that we open ourselves up to the blessing He seeks to offer us.

I'm guessing that you, like me, spend much of your spiritual focus working on being a kinder, more loving person to those around you, and that you do this by shunning evil and doing what is good. This is so important because we love the Lord by loving those around us. But it is good to remember that at root spiritual living is about coming to know and love our Lord.

This is why He asks us, in addition to serving others, to spend time learning about Him and communicating with Him through attending church, taking Holy Supper, prayer, reading the Word, and reflecting on what He says. And it is why He gives us so much teaching about Himself, such as the work Divine Providence, where He explains His priorities in His governance of us.

Perhaps all of us could usefully spend a bit more time reflecting on who the Lord is, what He has done for us, and then giving Him thanks directly for His powerful presence in our lives.

**The Rev. Erik J. Buss** is National Pastor for the United Kingdom and Pastor for Colchester New Church in England, where he lives with his wife, Ann (Gladish). Contact: erikjbuss@gmail.com



## GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION CONFERENCE

# Reconnect and Rejuvenate

*Rebekah Russell and Greg Henderson*

More than 80 New Church educators gathered on the Academy Secondary Schools campus for a two-day education conference June 15-16 in Bryn Athyn, hosted by General Church Education. This was the first education meeting of this scale since 2010 and included attendees from all six United States General Church schools, as well as guests from the Secondary Schools, Bryn Athyn College and Glencairn Museum.

The conference was held on the campus of the Academy of the New Church, which generously offered its classrooms, girls dorm and dining hall for the event. With Girls School Principal Kira Schadeegg at the helm, they took care of the technology, food, security and accommodations (for some out-of-town teachers) for the event.

It was natural after so many years for one of the goals of the conference to be reconnection. It was satisfying to see old friends and colleagues reconnect and new relationships form with teachers who have joined the ranks since 2010. In addition to the professional development offered in the sessions, the conference provided an opportunity for mutual support, sharing of resources and ideas, and friendship.

Each morning began with worship led by the Rt. Rev. Brad Heinrichs, followed by a plenary session.

Greg Henderson gave Thursday's talk – *Houses of Learning* – about the many New Church schools that have existed since 1785, and the people who brought them to life through their hard work and dedication. With interesting anecdotes recorded in history, plus many photos from the archives, the hope was that current teachers would leave with a fuller sense of the New Church education movement and their place in it.

The Rr. Rev. Ray Silverman led Friday's session – *Spiritual Development for Educators* – based on his (and his wife Star's) study of the Ten Commandments and his Bryn Athyn College Course with the same title, and its application to the work of educators in the classroom. This session was filled with heartwarming

journal entries from teachers challenging themselves to develop spiritually while in the classroom.

After each plenary, teachers attended two workshops of their choice. With 22 workshops offered, there was a wide variety of topics to choose from. They ranged from building a foundation of belief and trust in the Lord, to teaching history from a New Church perspective, circle time, and music and art in the classroom.

Other workshops covered subjects such as effective communication, executive functioning, and multi-sensory math. Participant comments affirmed that the quality of the workshops was top-notch, and the opportunities to work together discussing the use of teaching in New Church schools energized the teachers as they wrapped up their school years and began preparations for the fall.

A group session allowed participants to hear about each of the 11 General Church Schools in North America and Africa, as well as their Academy Secondary Schools hosts. These reports by administrators included photos and a short update on aspects of each school. Each day, there was time set aside for grade level meetings, which allowed the teachers to meet with colleagues teaching the same grades to share ideas and information.

Finally, in addition to the breaks and lunch periods which allowed for relaxed conversation, there were two social events: a welcoming gathering on back campus Wednesday evening and a dinner on Thursday, complete with a game show and prizes. Delightful food and drinks paired with a positive and dedicated group of attendees made for two enjoyable evenings.

Since the conference's conclusion, groups of teachers have initiated conversations online, sharing resources and asking each other questions. These are the kind of lasting connections and initiatives conferences like this can generate. GCED is grateful to all who contributed to making this conference a success.

(See photos on page 406.)

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## REGIONAL MINISTERS MEETINGS IN STOCKHOLM



Goran Appelgren and Cara Dibb



Erik Buss and Sarah Odhner with the group at Swedenborg's summer house in Skansen



Erik Buss and David Lindrooth looking at a first edition of New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine



Andy Dibb and Grant Odhner looking at old manuscripts in Skansen



Erik and Ann Buss with a bust of Swedenborg



The wives in a garden (clockwise from left): Aven Lindrooth, Ann Buss, Josephine Appelgren, Cara Dibb, Cathy Heinrichs, Sarah Odhner



Erik and Ann Buss, Josephine Appelgren, Aven and David Lindrooth at the gates of the King's summer palace

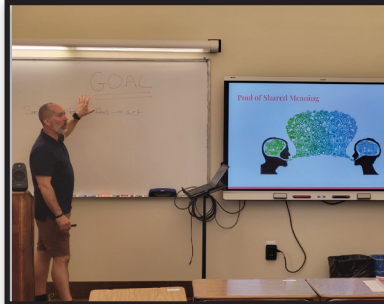
## GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION CONFERENCE



A proud group of New Church teachers in front of Benade Hall



Welcome smiles at the opening event



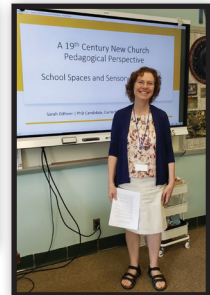
Presentations at left and below



Dinner table conversations



A grade level group meeting outside de Charms Hall





# Church News

*Compiled by Bruce Henderson*

## REGIONAL CLERGY MEETINGS

### *Adventus Domini in Sweden*

*Ann Buss*

**(Reprinted with permission from the General Church Newsletter for the United Kingdom.)**

Our United Kingdom pastors and their wives traveled to Stockholm, that city of islands and blue waters, for clergy meetings in the first week of June. We were joined by **Bishop David Lindrooth and Aven Lindrooth, Bishop Brad Heinrichs and Cathy Heinrichs** from America, as well as the **Rev. Dr. Andy Dibb**, the head of the Bryn Athyn College Theological School, and **Cara Dibb**. From Norway we had the **Rev. Thomas Floyd**.

The meetings were hosted by the Swedenborg Church of Stockholm, with the **Rev. Göran and Josephine Appelgren** doing all the arranging of meetings, tours, sight-seeing and meals. We are so grateful to them both. It was the best set of meetings I've ever attended.

The natural beauty of the place is in part responsible for that sentiment. Everywhere I looked I saw clean water sparkling in the sun. (Never mind that they got their first flowers only in May.) We used public transit a lot and it was easy, clean and on time.

I also enjoyed the small size of the group because of the chance this afforded for personal connections with those who are closely involved in the church in this region. We were able to give each other focused support because our interests overlapped so tightly. The clergy spent most days in meetings, investigating Swedenborgian thought in both theoretical and practical ways.

The ministers' other halves came to the church for morning worship, then went to see cultural sights and spend time connecting with each other. We all met as a group for dinner each evening. We plan that next time the wives will sit in for one of the sessions when we discuss promoting the church in Europe.

In addition to the beauties and the chances to connect, the real kernel of my enjoyment at these meetings was how close we all stand to revelation. Everywhere we went it was with the thought that Swedenborg himself had been walking and working here or there, perhaps communicating with spirits as he walked the cobbles I walked in Gamlastan, the old town, or perhaps while

taking a boat to go to Drottningholm, the King's summer palace. We did not go there to talk to the King, it's true, but maybe Swedenborg once strolled on gravel paths and observed the formal gardens.

In this vein, the highlight for many of us was his Summer House, preserved intact in Skansen. We were allowed inside and gazed around the serene little space where so much mighty work happened while his pen scratched quietly across the page. Did he look up and gaze out at his garden shimmering in the sunshine through the uneven panes of glass we looked through?

Our tour guide also took us into the Tottie residence, a mansion furnished in period artifacts, where Swedenborg was undoubtedly a guest. It was easy to imagine him, stepping into the study where books and records were laid out on the desk to speak to the host, or joining a small crowd in the dining room where authentic glass and silver gleamed on the table.

Another day we were taken to a room in the Swedish Academy of Science to look at the carefully preserved drafts and fair copies of his theological works. The archivist brought out some volumes by prior arrangement with Göran. We all marveled at the immensity of this labor done with quill and ink, at the places with words or paragraphs crossed out, at the way an ending for one work was never written. This process of the miraculous intersecting with the everyday – of a revealing that happened through a human hand – seemed more immediate and real.

At 7 Tegnérhlunden Street the New Church carries forward the work started with Swedenborg. Their library is full of his works, and the chancel is prolific with Swedenborgian symbolism. On the wall of the library is a facsimile of something he wrote into the back of his work *Brief Exposition*. Reading this message in his own hand I was struck with quiet amazement. It says: "*Hic Liber est Adventus Domini Scriptum ex mandato*," which translates, "This book is the coming of the Lord written by command."

Aven Lindrooth summed up our week well with these words: "[in all we did] there was a sphere of awareness that this was the spot where the Lord revealed Himself in the Second Coming through Swedenborg. I deeply felt that this was hallowed ground."

(See photos on page 405.)

### **Bryn Athyn Meetings (June 28-30, 2023)**

*The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.*

Thirty-three priests of the General Church gathered for regional clergy meetings in Bryn Athyn this past June. Among them were members of the Bryn Athyn pastoral staff, Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College professors, some pastors from Boynton Beach (Florida), Ivyland, Mitchellville

(Maryland), and Kempton (Pennsylvania), a few valued retired clergy, and our three currently serving bishops. We were capably and comfortably hosted by Bryn Athyn Church.

Eleven clergy wives participated in a set of activities running parallel to the meetings, extending into opening and closing worship, and the sacrament of the Holy Supper.

Papers and discussion topics included:

- *Wise Shifts in Perspective* – **Bishop Peter Buss**
- *Passing on the Faith to the Next Generation* – **Bishop Brad Heinrichs**
- *Joseph's Dreams: Joining Faith to a Charitable Life*  
– **Bishop David Lindrooth**
- *Separating People from the Church* (or reserving such practice to extreme situations) – the **Rev. Michael Gladish**
- *Principles of Doctrine for a New Church Priesthood*  
– the **Rev. Brett Buick**
- *Why Apocalypse Explained* – the **Rev. Stephen Cole**
- *Reading the Word in Worship* – the **Rev. Kurt Nemitz**
- *Sex in the Spiritual World* – the **Rt. Rev. Brian Keith**
- *Growing the Church in People's Hearts* – the **Rev. Pearse Frazier**

Meetings in smaller sessions such as this allow for more people to present and engage in discussion, as well as for deeper input into the Bishop's Office on church-related matters. I am grateful for the professional and useful way in which these meetings took place.

Remaining regional meetings:

- West Africa (August)
- Western United States (September 12-14)
- Great Lakes/Canada (September 19-21)

## GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Highlights from the June 23 Meeting*

### President's Report

*Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.*

Current work with the Bishop's Council involves reviewing Episcopal messages, including the Bishop's Newsletter, news from the Academy, budgeting plans and promoting the General Church Assembly 2024. Steps in the near future will focus on finding shared ground in the church, following through on organizational goals, and looking for the Lord's help in shifting our perspectives.

The Assembly will be held in Bryn Athyn June 27-30, 2024. All General Church members, families and friends are invited to attend. Planning is underway for a wide variety of programs, activities and worship.

Outgoing Board members thanked for their years of service to the Board and committees included: **Kay Alden, Gustav Fornander, Mary Jane Jungé, Ian Carswell, Jake Brown, Steve Ball and Alex Coulibaly.**

## **Vice Presidents' Report**

**The Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth** reported on changes in the clergy performance review process. The shifts are significant and full adoption of the new system may take time.

**The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs** noted that the General Church is revisiting the need for centralized distribution of New Church literature and resources. **Teryn Glunz** has been hired in a part-time role managing book orders and inventory.

## **Executive Director**

*David Frazier*

Estimated financial results for the end of FY 23: Revenue \$6.2 million; Expenses \$6.1 million; Operating Surplus approximately \$100,000.

A Membership Data Task Force is being formed. The team has identified needs and decided to recruit an expert to assist.

## **General Church Education**

*Charlotte Gyllenhaal*

**Greg Henderson** gave a brief overview of the successful GCED Council Conference in June. (See page xxx for a full report.)

**Rebekah Russell** provided an update on the Intake Program for New Church Education and described next steps, which include interviews with school staff to help identify educator needs, development of a recruiting process to attract talent, continued development of New Church eLearning videos, ongoing training, a compensation study, and more.

**Rachel Glenn** reported that GCED is excited about launching the refresh of the New Church Vineyard website. Important changes focus on content and making the site easier to navigate through an improved search function.

## **Outreach**

*Charles Ebert and the Rev. Pearse Frazier*

The Board was reminded that the overarching goal of Outreach is to use advertising dollars ultimately to result in new church members. The aim is to connect with people who seek a new approach to Christianity, especially hoping to find those who may be interested in starting small congregations.

In the coming months, Outreach's aim is to increase the ratio of contact information obtained through user interaction with our ads.

There are plans to work with interested societies to test outreach practices in the context of specific congregations.

## **Theological School Committee**

*Rev. Dr. Andrew M. T. Dibb*

The new strategic initiative aimed at recruiting and developing priests was discussed. The current focus is on matching talent to institutional needs and identifying ideal backgrounds to factor into the priest recruitment process.

A flowchart illustrated what a candidate could expect in a career as a General Church minister, and the estimated training and experience involved at each stage.

## **Global Healthy Congregations Report**

*John Berridge and the Rev. Jeff Smith*

John thanked Jeff for his contributions to congregational projects as he leaves this use to join the Bryn Athyn Church pastoral staff. Bishop David Lindrooth is seeking a part-time Manager of Projects to replace him.

Jeff reviewed progress on projects in West Africa, such as building development and land registration.

Bishop Lindrooth said the final year of the five-year pilot studies in West Africa would focus on coordinating with the congregations to understand their ability to transition to regional or national management.

## **Advancement**

*Mark Wyncoll*

**Marijke Bau-Madsen** continues to support strategic vision-casting and is monitoring engagement results of messaging from the Bishop's Office.

Mark reports healthy contributions over the past year. Advancement expects to end higher than usual on planned and restricted gifts, but below its

goals on unrestricted annual fund giving and total gifts.

**Freya Williams'** work on engagement coordination focuses on stewardship of new and potential members. Upcoming efforts will prioritize updating data for groups with high joining potential.

Advancement is seeking to fill the role of New Church Career Network Coordinator.

## GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

At the Annual Meeting of the General Church Corporation in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, on June 24, 2023, seven new nominees were elected to three-year terms on the Board of Directors:

**Wendy Baker** – *Summerville, South Carolina*

**Annette Baltz** – *Rydal, Pennsylvania*

**Greg Clay** – *Rochester, Michigan*

**Robert Heinrichs** – *Boynton Beach, Florida*

**Keith Hyatt** – *Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania*

**Andrew Martz** – *Rochester, Michigan*

**Erik Odhner** – *Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania*

Three current members were re-elected to three-year terms:

**Charles Ebert** – *Lafayette, Colorado*

**Ethan King** – *Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania*

**Catherine McQueen** – *Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania*

Two Board members did not seek re-election after serving two terms:

**Stephen Ball** – *Mitchellville, Maryland*

**Alex Coulibaly** – *Monrovia, Liberia*

Resigning from the Board was **Mary Jane Jungé**, *Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania*

## A NEW NEW CHURCH VINEYARD

*Rachel Glenn*

*Coordinator, Religious Educational Programs*

*General Church Education*

One of the projects we have just completed is a refresh of our New Church

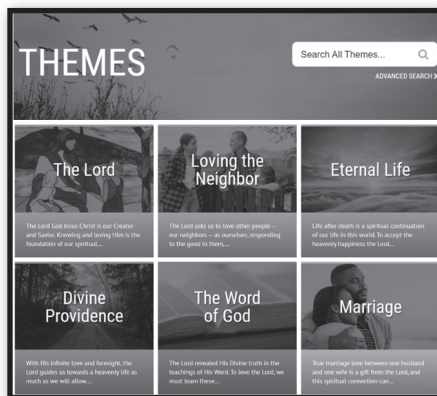
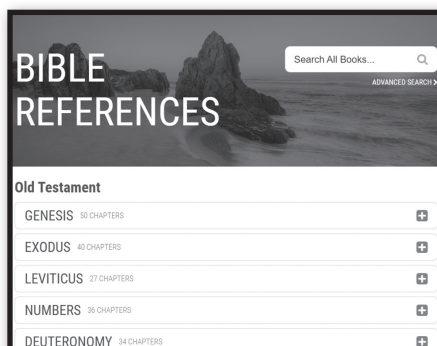
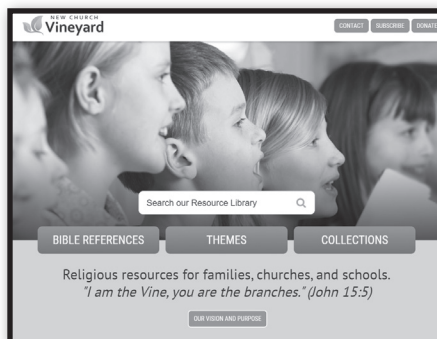
Vineyard website, [www.newchurchvineyard.org](http://www.newchurchvineyard.org). Thanks to all the GCED (General Church Education) staff who worked on improving the site, especially Greg Henderson, Gretchen Keith and Sarah Odhner.

This site is a library of resources for New Church education with videos, worship talks, sermons, lesson plans, songs, activities, teacher background, stories, projects, coloring pictures and more. It was already serving homes, schools and Sunday schools, but its usefulness has increased in both design and content.

New Church Vineyard now offers a more visual, streamlined search experience, with three main ways to search for resources. The first is by Bible References where users can select books and chapters to find resources on specific parts of the Word such as an illustrated story about Noah, a Sunday school project on Jesus feeding the 5,000, or a spiritual task based on the Fourth Commandment.

The second search method is by Spiritual Themes which are eight doctrinal topics, such as the Lord, the Word and Worship which are used in the General Church religion curriculum, along with religious holidays. Here users can browse for resources such as an article about how to talk about eternal life with children and teens, a sermon on Divine Providence, or a video telling the story of Jesus' birth.

The third way to look for resources is through Collections. This is where our new content can be easily found, including the Youth Journey Programs, which are comprehensive Sunday school series for ages 3-14 (and sometimes 18) developed in the past decade. Topics include Creation, Joseph, Elijah and



Five Parables of Heaven. Also new are the Jacob’s Ladder Religion Lessons which are based on General Church Schools’ religion curriculum and designed for Sunday schools and families. Most of these materials have been added to the Vineyard over the past two years, and in total the Vineyard library now has more than 6,000 resources.

Among the Collections you can also find our FaithBuilder series for teens, multi-age lessons for family groups, the treasured Dole Bible Study Notes and more. So, if you are planning for Sunday school, looking for family resources for your family, preparing for classroom worship, or searching for insight on particular stories from the Word, try out our updated New Church Vineyard website.



You can also sign up for our highlight emails which come out once or twice a month with resources for all ages centered on a particular spiritual theme. I believe this site refresh is a big step forward in the mission of helping children and adults learn about the Lord, His Word and the purpose of life.

## ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS

**Kira R. Schadegg**, *Girls School Principal*  
**Jeremy T. Irwin**, *Boys School Principal*

Enrollment projections for the 2023-2024 school year:

### Girls School

Seniors	27
Juniors	18
Sophomores	25
Freshmen	20
Dorm	14
Day	76
Total	90

### Boys School

Seniors	34
Juniors	27
Sophomores	37
Freshmen	18
Dorm	22
Day	94
Total	116



### **New Programs:**

The main room of Glenn Hall will be utilized as a student union for all students. This will be a place for students to hang out, study, relax or socialize before school in the mornings and after school in the afternoons and early evenings.

### **Staffing Changes:**

On December 31, 2022, **Jim Adams** retired as the Managing Director after 12 years in that position. Jim is continuing to work for the Academy in his other roles (with reduced hours) as Director of Facilities and for ANC Secondary Schools as Director of Advancement.

The Boys School said “Happy retirement!” to **Cory Boyce**. He will be missed for his knowledge, wisdom, love and care for students, as well as his mentorship of his colleagues.

**Baird Kistner** is leaving to begin a new chapter with his new bride and family. He will be missed in both the English and Performing Arts Departments. He will be missed also for his dedication, hard work and willingness to step up and help in every way.

The Boys School is happy to welcome **Derek Cronlund**, teaching freshmen and junior boys English, among other assigned duties.

The Girls School said goodbye to **Meryl Simons** and **Laura Clymer**. Laura stepped into the role of Spanish teacher this past year when we had three sections of Spanish 2. While Laura has decided that the education of high school girls is not in her future, we are incredibly grateful to her for giving it a try and most especially for helping us out in a bind.

Meryl has been the head housemother in Glenn Hall since 2012. She worked consistently to make the dorm a homey place for the girls. Meryl has been a tireless cheerleader and advocate for the residents under her care. She is to be commended for her love and care of the Glenn Hall girls these past 11 years.

We have five new staff members this year in the Girls School: three new assistant housemothers in Glenn Hall: **Holly Adams, Lianne Adams, and Yaicha King**. There will be two new RAs in Glenn Hall.

**Brandon Asplundh** is stepping down from his role as Boys School Athletic Director and will be pivoting to a part-time role, primarily in student support. **Jackie Pennink** will become the Athletic Director for both schools. **Holly Adams** will be the Assistant Athletic Director under Jackie.

**Keith Gruber** will be the housing coordinator for both Glenn Hall and Stuart Hall. **Emily Klippenstein** will be the lead housemother in Glenn Hall.

**Mary Williams** will be the director of the fall play.

**Nicole Smith** and **Hilary Bryntesson** will be co-coaches of the girls tennis team this fall.

**Sarah Cooper Waelchli** will be the head field hockey coach and **Caitlin Irwin** will be her assistant.

**Libby Allen** joins the volleyball coaches as an assistant coach this fall.

### **Boarding Update:**

Boarding has been a part of the range of ANC options for a long time. Over the years, the boarding program has changed and improved as new times call for new approaches. Recently, we went through a challenging and important review of what we can offer and how we can do it well. One of the many plans we considered was a “pod” system. We have moved away from that idea and have landed on an approach that to most people will look very much like it has in recent years. The dorms will be staffed with capable and caring house parents and resident assistants. Wonderful students will occupy the dorm rooms. There are three key areas that have been adjusted to accommodate financial realities and ensure a continued excellent experience.

1. The charges we pass on to the families will be much closer to the actual costs incurred by the boarding program. There will be less institutional subsidization.
2. The way we handle food will be less expensive and more limited. Specifically, we will no longer offer institutional breakfasts and students may purchase a lunch plan and/or a dinner plan. Both dorms have kitchen facilities so students can manage their own breakfasts (or other meals).
3. The way we handle medical services will be less expensive and more limited. Specifically, during the day dorm students will have full access to the school nurse. But after hours, medical concerns will be handled directly by the dorm staff in close consultation with parents.

We are grateful for the hard work of many people who helped determine the best path forward to continue offering a meaningful boarding experience at ANC. In particular, we would like to thank the dorm staff for their insight and commitment.

### **CHARTER DAY 2023**

This year’s Academy Charter Day celebration will run from Thursday, October 12 through Sunday, October 15, with the Annual Scholarship Fund Golf

Tournament the following Monday, October 23.

Six classes will be celebrating reunions: 1963, 1973, 1983, 1993, 2003 and 2013.

**The Rev. Christopher A. Barber** will give the Charter Day Address in Bryn Athyn Cathedral on Friday morning.

**Kristin Huff**, Vice Principal of Bryn Athyn Church School, will give a presentation at the Theta Alpha luncheon on Friday.

A new event this year will be an update from the leaders of Bryn Athyn College and the Academy Secondary Schools on Friday at 2 p.m. in the Mitchell Performing Arts Center.

Repeating this year – in addition to a full slate of athletic events – will be:

- A Reunion Art Exhibit in the Fine Arts Center
- A Songs at Sunset event outside the Cathedral – weather permitting – including Academy songs and the ANCSS Instrumental Ensemble
- Drinks and Dessert in the Historic District Saturday evening at Cairnwood Estate and in The Grove

## **JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT**

*The Rev. Jeremy Simons*

At the end of July I attended the Jacob's Creek Family Retreat near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the first time, although it has been running for decades. Having regularly gone to the Laurel Family Camps held nearby at Laurel Hill State Park since 1971, I was interested to see it. The Jacob's Creek Family Retreat is at the Laurelville Retreat Center, just 20 miles west of Laurel Hill State Park on Route 30 in Mount Pleasant.

The Laurelville Retreat Center is beautiful but modest. The accommodations, dining hall and meeting hall are all comfortable, spacious and air-conditioned. The pool is large and new, with water slides and areas for young children. The center is surrounded by woods and hills.

There is a field at the top of the hill called Sunset Hill where the opening worship is held, weather permitting. It has a gorgeous view of the valley and the Laurel Highlands.

The program includes adult lectures and discussions as well as a fully planned children's program. The emphasis is on doctrinal instruction and reflection.

Children are grouped by age from infancy through high school. Their program runs at the same time as the adult program. The children have a religious lesson first followed by a recreational activity. There is family worship twice a day – morning and evening. There is also an opportunity for adults to take Holy Supper.

There is ample unscheduled time in the afternoons to allow for family time, including swimming, sports, games, hiking, spontaneous group discussions, etc. There are evening programs for everyone – such as a campfire, talent show, and more. Parents of young children can put them to bed, and then come out into the common area and enjoy socializing with other adults.

There were about 120 people this year, evenly split between adults and children. I was most impressed with the enthusiasm for the church and for the Heavenly Doctrines shown by all ages. The three-day program this year focused on the seven days of creation. **The Rev. Matthew Genzlinger**, the pastor, spoke about days 1-3, followed by the **Rev. Pearse Frazier** discussing days 4-7, and I recapitulated all seven days.

**The Rev. Calvin Heinrichs** also gave an afternoon elective about forming friendships. The discussions were lively and harmonious.

Under the lay leadership of **Jamie and Julie Uber** and **Brad and Andrea Cranch**, along with the pastoral leadership of Matthew Genzlinger, the retreat is thriving. Allyn and I are looking forward to returning in the future. The dates for next year's retreat are July 25-28, 2024.

## A CHANGE IN KENYA

*The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth  
Assistant Bishop of the General Church*

The Bishops, together with the General Church administration, have made the difficult decision to suspend financial support of current operations in Kenya. This decision was made after concluding that the General Church's prolonged efforts to establish systems that ensure transparency and accountability with our representatives in Kenya have been unsuccessful.

The decision is complicated and will take some time to implement. One important aspect of this process is to complete our desire to help the children living at the General Church Sacred Care Orphanage in Kenya who have been served by "HCIC" (Helping Children in Crisis). While there will be changes in how they are served, we fully intend to find proper ways to support the remaining children in completing their education. While we will use existing HCIC funding to support the Kenyan orphans, we will no longer accept contributions toward Kenyan uses. HCIC will continue to look for opportunities to help children in the other areas where this work is performed.

The steps we are taking in Kenya will not affect General Church operations elsewhere. It remains our priority to foster integrity and secure working relationships with all our employees and congregations.

If you have questions, please direct them to me via our Communications Director at [marijke.bau-madsen@newchurch.org](mailto:marijke.bau-madsen@newchurch.org).

# Life Lines

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

## **BRAVE NEW WORLD? A BITE OF THE APPLE**

Thomas Edison launched our technological age – but never imagined where it would take us. He pioneered more than 1,000 inventions, from the lightbulb to the phonograph and motion picture cameras. Through his genius and perseverance, he changed our world. Would he recognize it today?

Throughout history little changed in whole lifetimes. Then came the 20th century. My parents were born just after the first primitive flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903 and lived to see men walk on the moon. Now grandchildren of that generation take space for granted and are tethered to cell phones.

The roots go back to 1844 when Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph message from Baltimore to Washington with incredulous wonder: “What hath God wrought?” Now we all wonder what we have wrought, and whether we are going too far.

Albert Einstein warned in the early days of the technological revolution that now engulfs us: “The concern of man and his destiny must always be the chief interest of all technical effort. Never forget it among your diagrams and equations.”

As we tinker with genes and cloning, produce babies from test tubes, and replace workers with robots, the insistent question becomes not what can we do but what should we do – or not do? We are dazzled but wary of the next giant leap: Artificial Intelligence. And as we ponder its impact on our lives, we must think about our spiritual journey as well.

AI is obviously smarter than all of us – on the simple plane of knowledge. It is not wiser and never will be. It can produce sophisticated essays – even quoting Swedenborg – compose touching poems and advance medical technology. It may even be able to write passable New Church sermons. But it cannot think spiritually. It can produce impressive material in seconds, citing history and quoting philosophers. But it cannot create, it cannot love, it cannot

save.

The ubiquitous symbol of the technology age is the icon of Apple computers – not just a shiny, red apple but with a bite taken out. This may have been chosen just because it looked more interesting, or perhaps to convey a subliminal message, but the warning is there. AI has taken a bite of forbidden fruit.

AI has been called “god-like” by its creators. We all know the morality tale of the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve prohibited from eating of the tree of knowledge lest they “surely die.” But they are seduced by the serpent – our basest nature – who assures them that they would not die because when they ate of the tree, “for God knows that in the day you eat thereof, you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” That is the danger of eating the forbidden fruit: that we feel we no longer need the Lord and His truth for our spiritual development.

The Lord shows us through His Word what is good and what is true. Without that clear vision people live in spiritual darkness, where good and evil are subjective terms, defined by their own whims and standards – and they will “surely die.”

Artificial Intelligence may bring blessings and curses. Just be careful about what it is and what it isn't, what it promises and what it means. And be careful what you bite into.

(BMH)

### **SEEK YE FIRST . . .**

Just as Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent to taste of the forbidden fruit – and corrupt themselves – it can be all too easy for us to be enticed by “the next great thing” to make us “smarter than the gods” – from personal computers to smart phones and now AI.

But as Jesus advised the multitude – and thereafter all of us: take no thought for the things of this world, “but seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” (*Matthew 6:33*)

We need always to be guided by the moral truths and values that come from the Lord through His Word. And we need leaders – in government, in our churches, our schools, our media, wherever they have influence and responsibility – to model and uphold the standards.

It all flows from the Ten Commandments – or should – but there is so much moral confusion these days that absolute truth has given way to moral relativism. Simple standards of right and wrong, good and evil, have been abandoned for personal feelings and social whims.

John Adams was able to say with clear conviction in 1787 that the newly drafted Constitution for the United States of America was “made only for a moral and religious people.” He and his fellow Founders knew that the whole experiment of a government of “We the People” rested on belief in God. It still does. Too many have forgotten.

Many leaders and citizens still rally to the calling and we are forever grateful for their voices and their passion. Among them was former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who left a legacy with the no-nonsense style that defined her: “The truths of the Judeo-Christian tradition are infinitely precious, not only, as I believe, because they are true, but also because they provide the moral impulse which alone can lead to peace – in the true meaning of the word – for which we all long. There is little hope for democracy if the hearts of men and women in democratic societies cannot be touched by a call to something greater than themselves.”

That “call” went out first in the Sermon on the Mount and has echoed ever since: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.” Then everything else falls into place.

(BMH)

## ANGELS AMONG US

My wife and I are of an age where the pace of life takes on the rhythm of doctors’ offices, lab tests and even the sterile urgency of operating rooms. Much of life for those of us sharing complaints about ailments – dubbed “organ recitals” – is attended with anxiety and hope, plus the loving support of family and friends. But centered in the progression of symptoms and treatment are affirmation and trust.

The Lord is leading in our lives, even in lonely darkness that tries the soul. His words ever whisper of comfort and hope. And then there are the angels.

Bustling hospitals, grimly purposeful operating theaters and tense waiting rooms are attended by them. Doctors, nurses and staff bear badges of competence and professionalism. But beyond all the sterile implements of treatment and healing, they offer smiles, kindness, caring.

In a world torn by ugliness spewing from the hells, this is the goodness we seek to balm the world and restore our hearts. We need to look for the good people all around us. They do not clamor for attention. They are just there to help, to serve, to reflect the Lord’s love. This is His mercy, brimming in His angels,

When we or loved ones are afflicted with pain and illness, we all may wonder: why me? Why our family? Why is this life so often challenging and troublesome? Why is there pain on the path to heaven? But we all learn from

each other. And we are blessed – if only with smiles and good cheer that overcome stark hospital rooms and the fearsome instruments that root out evil and deliver healing and hope, with eventual trust and acceptance, and with everlasting gratitude for the angels among us.

*“As in heaven, so upon the earth.”*

(BMH)

## ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

New Church people generally doubt popular reports of UFOs and suggestions that beings from other planets will someday visit earth. The reason is that although the Writings are clear that people do exist on other planets, they also suggest that, unlike people on this planet, they are uninterested in technology.

*Spirits of that planet do not want to be in the company of spirits from our planet because they are different in temperament and custom. They say that spirits from our planet are crafty, and quick and clever at evil schemes, but do not know much about what is good or give it much thought.*

*Spirits from Jupiter are much wiser than spirits from our planet. They describe us as talking a lot and thinking very little and therefore having almost no inner perception or ability even to tell what is good. This leads them to conclude that the people of our planet are external by nature. Other Planets (Earths in the Universe) 61*

*In the universal human, spirits from our planet play the role of the outer senses – meaning bodily sensations – and in the other life the outer senses are represented by serpents. Other Planets (Earths in the Universe) 148*

People from our planet are apparently the most external of all planets – although considering how many planets there are it isn't clear whether this is meant literally. Still, the clear impression given is that people from other planets are not likely to be technologically oriented.

One curious exception to this is in a description of the people identified as being from Mars:

*They said that on their planet they eat fruit from trees, and especially a kind of round fruit that grows out of their soil; they also eat vegetables. They wear clothes that they make from the fibers*



*of the bark of particular trees that can be woven and also glued together with a kind of adhesive that they have. They told me that they know how to make flammable liquids so that they have light in the evening and at night. Other Planets (Earths in the Universe) 93*

This indicates that these people knew how to make glue, as have people on Earth for millennia, although we have not generally had adhesives that would be of use in making clothes.

The more interesting statement here is that “*they know how to make flammable liquids so that they have light in the evening and at night.*” This would be something like petroleum products, which were not used in 18th century Europe. Although petroleum had been known in China and the Middle East for over a thousand years, it was not used in lighting until the mid-1800s. Oil lamps were in use but they used vegetable oil or tallow, as they had for thousands of years, and produced a poor light. Swedenborg would mostly have used candles, which he mentions frequently in the Writings. Whale oil began to be used in lamps in the 1780s, and represented a leap forward in interior lighting, but this was after Swedenborg’s time.

It appears from this that Martian technology was ahead of Swedenborg’s time with respect to the use of lamps and lighting. Maybe this could be read as suggesting that their technology might still be ahead of ours. But the more general teaching is that people on other planets have little interest in these external things and are more focused on spiritual matters. And, of course, when it comes to what is actually the case with other planets, whether in our solar system or elsewhere, there are too many uncertainties to do anything more than speculate.

(JFS)

## OUR NEW CHURCH HEROES

We all have favorite teachers, remembered with smiles and gratitude. They are men and women who impacted our lives far beyond classrooms and athletic fields. As another year of New Church education enlivens our General Church and Academy schools and Bryn Athyn College, teachers step up to the rote and unpredictable, before trusting eyes. It is a journey spelled out in lesson plans but with unpredictable twists – where the most rewarding teaching often happens. And that’s when teachers and students bond – when learning happens.

One of my favorite books about education is *My Losing Season* by Pat Conroy, which re-lives his basketball career at The Citadel, a tough military

college. But it's really the story of a young man learning about himself – and the teachers and coaches who helped him to find value and truth in his life.

It is ultimately about those moments of discovery that flash between a teacher and a student – and forever leave a mark on both.

The book is Conroy's tribute to a high school English teacher who transformed his life by opening his mind beyond a world narrowed to sports by opening up his mind. "The great teachers," he writes, "fill you up with hope and shower you with a thousand reasons to embrace all aspects of life."

We have all known teachers like this, steeped in passion, who left indelible marks and helped to shape our lives – often without being aware of their influence. Such moments have little to do with physics or football, but everything to do with life – especially from a New Church perspective.

In a sense we are all teachers. We teach our children. We teach each other, just by the way we live our lives. We teach what we love – because that's what love does. Teaching is a profession. It is also a way of life.

But those who devote their lives to teaching – especially New Church education – are doing the Lord's work. He has told us that whoever teaches His ways will be called great in the kingdom of heaven – and we have all known such angels. Their passion transforms their lives, filling us up with hope and showering us with thousands of reasons to embrace life – and what we can do to make our lives meaningful by teaching and serving others. These New Church teachers are our heroes.

(BMH)

## LOVE IS THE LIFE OF MAN

Time is too slow for those who wait,  
Too swift for those who fear,  
Too long for those who grieve,  
Too short for those who rejoice,  
But for those who love, time is eternity.  
– Henry Van Dyke

All you need is love. (The Beatles)

Love is the essential reality of every individual life. It is therefore the source of the life of angels and the life of people there. (*Heaven and Hell* 14)

Love pervades the whole of heaven, for in the heavens no other life is found except the life that belongs to love. (*Arcana Coelestia* 32)

(BMH)

# Announcements

## BAPTISMS

*Baptism was instituted for a sign that a person is of the Church, and for a memorial that he or she is to be regenerated; for the washing of baptism is a spiritual washing, which is regeneration.*

*(New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 202)*

### **Arcadia, Ebo Neo**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June 25, 2023, Rev. John L. Odhner officiating.

### **Bhatt, Celine**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, August 6, 2023, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

### **Brown, Olivia Noëlle**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, July 2, 2023 (born December 7, 2019), daughter of Rhett and Michelle Biermann Brown, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

### **Buick, Ingrid Elaine**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, July 2, 2023 (born April 22, 2023), daughter of Bennett and Alison Cole Buick, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

### **Chamane, Thandokuhle Precious**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, April 9, 2023 (born May 18, 2019), daughter of Siyabonga Mkhombe and Celesto Chamane, Rev. Bheki J. Dube officiating.

### **Cooper, Diana Gwendolyn**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, July 16, 2023 (born May 28, 2023), daughter of Jordan and Becky Smith Cooper, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

### **de Charms, Morgan Blair**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, August 13, 2023 (born June 28, 2015) daughter of Brent and Jennifer Diehl de Charms, Rev. Derek P. Elphick officiating.

### **Gilbert, Brayden Alexander**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June 18, 2023 (born March 5, 2023), son of Marcus and Sarah Clymer Gilbert, Rev. Barry C. Halterman officiating.

### **Gyllenhaal, Noah Lee**

At Glenview, Illinois, July 23, 2023 (born June 8, 2022), son of Randy and Leigh Lesniak Gyllenhaal, Rev. Mark D. Pendleton officiating.

**Jett, Penelope**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
June 4, 2023 (born April 20, 2021),  
daughter of Edward and Krissy  
Andrews Jett, Rev. Elmo K. Acton  
officiating.

**Koko, Reuben Enam**

At Accra, Greater Accra, Ghana,  
June 4, 2023 (born September 21,  
2011), son of Ben Kofi Amewuga  
Koko and Elizabeth Agbenyo, Rev.  
George Dziekpor officiating.

**Mavundla, Lwazi Alwande**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal,  
South Africa, April 9, 2023 (born  
September 20, 2015), son of Zakhele  
Loyiso Stemela and Immaculate  
Charmane Mavundla, Rev. Bheki J.  
Dube officiating.

**Mchuna, Qiniso Spheisinle**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal, South  
Africa, April 9, 2023 (born January  
15, 2010), daughter of Nhlannla  
Prince Mchunu and Immaculate  
Charmane Mavundla, Rev. Bheki J.  
Dube officiating.

**Mkhize Nonjabulo,**

**Khanyisa Mangunezi**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal,  
South Africa, September 1, 2022  
(born July 24 2019), daughter of  
Jabulani Michael and Mbukiso  
Ignatia Mkhize, Rev. Bheki J. Dube  
officiating. Delayed report.

**Moloisana,**

**Keamogetswe Ongsiametse**

At Buccleuch, Sandton, Gauteng,  
South Africa, April 1, 2023 (born  
October 13, 2022), son of Ntando  
Zulu and Tebogo Boitumelo  
Moloisana, Rev. Mandla Sitole  
officiating.

**Narh, Elizabeth Korker**

At Tema, Ghana, November 1,  
2018 (born September 4, 2018),  
daughter of Richard Narh and  
Helena Inkoom, Rev. Ekow Eshun  
officiating. Delayed report.

**Narh, Emanuella Dede**

At Tema, Ghana, November 1,  
2015 (born September 3, 2015),  
daughter of Richard Narh and  
Helena Inkoom, Rev. Ekow Eshun  
officiating. Delayed report.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

**BETROTHAL**

*It is proper on earth for a priest to perform betrothals and to hear, receive, confirm and consecrate the consent. The consent is the essential element in marriage, and the rest of the things that follow are its formalities.*

*(Conjugial Love 21:4)*

**Draper-Nel, Chase David Draper  
and Hannah Claire Nel**

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South  
Africa, June 10, 2023, Rev. Joel C.  
Glenn officiating.

**MARRIAGES**

*The delights of conjugial love surpass the delights of all other loves, and conjugial love also gives delight to these other loves according as it is present and at the same time united to them. (Conjugial Love 68)*

**Asplundh-Kuhl, Duncan Reed  
Asplundh and Hanna Grace Kuhl**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
July 29, 2023, Rt. Rev. David H.  
Lindrooth officiating.

**Cho-Chung, Francisco Cho and  
Rebecca Jennifer Chung**

At Toronto, Ontario, Canada,  
May 27, 2023, Rev. Jong-Ui Lee  
officiating.

**Boyesen-Smith, Eyvind Carl  
Boyesen and Megan Renee Smith**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June  
17, 2023, Rev. Derek P. Elphick  
officiating.

**Draper-Nel, Chase David Draper  
and Hannah Claire Nel**

At Umhlali, KwaZulu-Natal, South  
Africa, June 24, 2023, Rev. Joel C.  
Glenn officiating.

**Brock-Roth, Zachary Charles  
Brock and Marin Kane Roth**

At Lafayette, Colorado, May 13,  
2023, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

**Fee-Friesen, James Francis Fee and  
Kera Friesen**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, July  
15, 2023, Rev. Solomon J. Keal  
officiating.

**Gardner-Roscoe, Robert Stephen  
Gardner and Renee Elizabeth  
Roscoe**  
At Asheville, North Carolina, June  
26, 2023, Rev. Alan M. Cowley  
officiating.

**Herder-McDonald, Duncan  
Theodore Herder and Lindsay  
McDonald**  
At Lumberville, Pennsylvania,  
June 3, 2023, Rev. Elmo K. Acton  
officiating.

**Makkawy-Chapman, Alexander  
Ali Makkawy and Natalie  
Christina Chapman**  
At Glenview, Illinois, July 1, 2023,  
Rev. Elmo K. Acton officiating.

**Odhner-Bichon, Asher Heath  
Odhner and Clara Gabriella  
Bichon**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, July  
8, 2023, Rev. Calvin A. Odhner  
officiating.

**Odhner-Fraser, Seth Benjamin  
Odhner and Meghan Carswell  
Fraser**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
July 8, 2023, Rev. Eric H. Carswell  
officiating.

**Roth-Chandler, Kellan Sandström  
Roth and Tianna June Chandler**  
At Mead, Colorado, July 15, 2023,  
Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

**Smirnov-Heinrichs, Nikita  
Smirnov and Sierra Genai  
Heinrichs**  
At Estes Park, Colorado, September  
17, 2022, Rev. Willard H.D.  
Heinrichs officiating.  
Delayed report.

**Synnestvedt-Kurucz, Blake  
Synnestvedt and Barbara Ann  
Kurucz**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,  
July 1, 2023, Rev. Charles E. Blair  
officiating.

**Wilkinson-Elphick, Matthew  
Wilkinson and Natalie Elphick**  
At Kroonstad, Limpopo, South  
Africa, April 1, 2023, Rev. Joel C.  
Glenn officiating.

**Zhang-Brock, Zepeng (Eric) Zhang  
and Allaina Grace Brock**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June  
3, 2023, Rev. Barry C. Halterman  
officiating.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

IN MEMORIAM

*And behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:12-14)*

**Bostock, Willard Glenn**

June 25, 2023 of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 61.

**Robbins, Anthony James**

May 2, 2023, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 80.

**Carter, Christopher Manson**

June 9, 2023, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 71.

**Sandström, Alfred Daniel**

July 24, 2023, of Line Lexington, Pennsylvania. 83.

**Gladish, Claudia Cranch**

June 22, 2023, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 75.

**Smith, Philip Stanley Graham**

August 10, 2023, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 90.

**Hendricks, Robin Jesse**

August 5, 2023, of Emmaus, Pennsylvania. 38.

**Synnestvedt, Marilyn Ruth**

**Richard**  
August 2, 2023, of Muskogee, Oklahoma. 93.

**Mansfield, Lisa Michelle**

June 30, 2023, of Westville, South Africa. 22.



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