

# NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

**MARCH/APRIL 2024**



## THE EASTER SEASON

*As we celebrate a person's whole life at a memorial service – not just the moment of death – so Easter should celebrate the Lord's life on earth, not just His crucifixion and resurrection. As with Christmas, Easter should be celebrated as a season of light and promise, not one day tinged with sadness – a sunrise not a sunset.  
(Page 90)*



# New Church

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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

**E**ditorials (page 73) include:

- *The Joy of the Easter Season*: Easter, like Christmas, should be celebrated as a whole season, not focusing exclusively on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus but with appreciation and gratitude for His whole life on earth. This is the real joy of Easter – from the “good tidings” of His birth, through His life and teaching, culminating in His resurrection and glorification. This fulfilled His mission in coming on earth, and His triumph is forever ours as well. That is the joy we celebrate.
- *Preference Falsification*: The same kind of public and cultural pressure that influences many of the major issues today also was at play in the Easter story, especially as the masses who had hailed Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem turned viciously against Him at His crucifixion,

In an Easter sermon the Rev. Barry Halterman uses the story when “Jesus wept” to show us the human side of God. For Him to come on earth and let us see and know Him as a human, visible God “is literally an image that changed the world and changed the history of religion. Ultimately, it is here to change us.” That should make us eternally grateful – every Easter, every day. (Page 83)

The Rev. John Odhner wants us to celebrate “the Easter season” – not just Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter morning. When a loved one dies we focus not on that person’s death but celebrate the entirety of his or her whole life. So it should be with the Lord: appreciating why He came on earth, what He accomplished, and His enduring legacy for our lives. (Page 90)

In a children’s talk, the Rev. Grant Odhner explains why the fruitless attempt to seal the Lord’s body in a tomb after His crucifixion is one of the most important stories in the Word. “It teaches us that the Lord, Jesus, is more than just a man. He is our God.” And, “Just when things seemed the

darkest, He came. With great power He changed the way things had been in the church. He pushed back the evil. He broke the seal of falsity and opened the Word. Then the people could see that He was still alive and could see the way to heaven.” (Page 92)

In a sermon, *Wandering in the Wilderness*, the Rev. Stephen Cole explains that the Children of Israel were not “wandering” so much as finding their way to the Lord. That is true for our lives as well, with the Lord leading us on our journey – ultimately to heaven. It is a humbling, hopeful and liberating experience. ”The Word,” he says, “is filled with lessons learned in desert places,” which give meaning to our “wandering” and a Promised Land if we but follow in His way. (Page 95)

Writing From the Bishop’s Office, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth talks about the efforts of General Church Outreach in *Helping People Find the Church*. Every day people all over the world are asking questions about religion and spiritual life, which are answered through the General Church website and social media, with follow-up when possible. Specially produced short videos are also helping to build small groups, with the hope that these will develop into new societies of the church. (Page 101).

In the Introduction to her massive biography – *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Making of a Modern Visionary* – the late Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan explains her mission and summarizes each of the 10 chapters, spanning Swedenborg’s whole life and mission as a revelator. This book is still in production and we will offer a review when it is completed. (Page 104)

Throughout this issue are three Easter poems by the Rev. Coleman S. Glenn: *Palm Sunday*, *Ecce Homo*, and *The Road to Emmaus*.

Church News (page 130) includes:

- Pastoral moves
- An encouraging update on the financial outlook for Bryn Athyn College
- A weekend retreat in Australia, with the theme, *What’s the Use?*
- An invitation for Glencairn Award nominations
- Academy Summer Camps
- This summer’s Jacob’s Creek Family Retreat, with the theme: *Charity – The First of the Church*

# Editorials

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

## THE JOY OF THE EASTER SEASON

The joy of Christmas is with us through December – special services, concerts, tableaux, parties and festivities, anticipation and participation – culminating in Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Easter gets a week of our attention – Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter. There is joy on Easter when “He is risen,” but it is generally a more subdued celebration. It need not be.

Easter fulfills the Lord’s purpose in coming on earth. It is a joy in the making from His birth, when the angel proclaimed: “Behold, I bring you good tidings, which shall be to all people.” Those good tidings are ever with us.

This issue includes three articles which speak to the depth and the joy of Easter:

- The Rev. John Odhner writes about “the Easter season” – why it should be more of a “season,” just like Christmas.
- The Rev. Barry Halterman tells in a sermon, *Jesus Wept*, how the Lord’s life and death on earth revealed His human dimension – and helps us to know Him as a visible human God.
- In *Trying to Entomb the Lord*, the Rev. Grant Odhner explains in a children’s talk how the Lord’s crucifixion was His ultimate triumph over those who would destroy Him – and why it is one of the most important stories in the Word.

John Odhner makes an interesting point: “When we celebrate the resurrection of a loved one who has died, we celebrate the person’s whole life,

from birth to death, with the hope and expectation of a renewed joyful life in heaven. It would be sad and useless to spend a memorial service talking only about death and the last hours of life.”

So – in the important focus on the drama of the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, His betrayal and execution, His rising from the sealed tomb and the salvation of the human race for which He lived, was tempted, and died – let us remember and celebrate His life on earth and its full meaning.

As John also says: “I hope we can make our Easter celebrations more of a ‘season’ like Christmas, yet with more focus on the Lord’s life and resurrection – rather than His death – and on the new birth and growth that comes from Him.”

Barry Halterman explains that the Lord came on earth to be seen, known and loved as a human God – a God we could relate to in our lives. It is this image, “that changed the world. The Lord as a Divine Human Being changed the history of religion. It changed this planet through the rise and spread of Christianity. Ultimately, it is here to change us.” Throughout His life on earth the Lord modeled what it means to be truly human – to be born in His image.

The importance of His coming on earth – and of His life among us – is what gives such rich meaning to the Easter story. What is important, lasting and meaningful in our own death is our legacy – what continues on from us – in this world and the next. So it is with the Lord – His life and His enduring legacy.

Grant Odhner reminds us that those who executed Jesus sealed His body in a tomb – a symbolic statement of their victory. But even in death He confounded them, rising from the tomb with His natural body to be glorified in heaven, and giving us all the ultimate triumph.

The reason why this is one of the most important stories in the Word is because it “teaches us that the Lord, Jesus, who came on earth and touched us with His great love and wisdom, is more than just a man. He is our God.”

We know all about the Lord’s birth and some of his childhood, such as when he astonished the elders in the temple with his wisdom. But we don’t know much about His growing up life until the last three of His 33 years. That is when He taught the disciples, the people – and all of us – from the Sermon on the Mount to all the miracles and parables of His teaching, and His final persecution. He attracted a devoted following. He also attracted enemies, whose power and dominion were threatened by His unique leadership.

It all culminates in the Easter story. When He came near to Jerusalem in that fateful final week, He wept over it – just as He had wept for Lazarus. These tears manifested His humanity – His love and His grief for a people who did not comprehend His love and wisdom, even as He taught them and loved

them. They wanted a king but did not understand that His kingdom was not of this world. They did not understand that He had come on earth to save them.

A disappointed Jesus said to them: “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” (*Luke 19:42*) That sad warning still resonates today.

As Jesus was being tried He was accused of “stirring up the people.” Indeed He was. He was desperate to rouse them from their spiritual lethargy – which is what He does for us in our regeneration. Some of the people wanted to follow Him. Others wanted to destroy Him. It is the same really with us: follow Him freely or turn our backs on Him.

Even though He knew that the end was at hand, He spoke about new life. This is the life of springtime, which comes to all of us when we put aside old habits and become “born again,” as Jesus advised Nicodemus. (*John 3:3*)

Those who abused and killed Him were certain they had won – that the threat of Him leading them had been eliminated. But His crucifixion was actually the culmination of His purpose in coming on earth – His (and our) crowning victory.

His willingness to undergo the ultimate temptation – putting in doubt the salvation of the human race – is what the transforming event of Easter is all about. Doubt and despair give way to joy and hope.

Grant Odhner says in his children’s talk: “This story also teaches us that there really is a life after this one. Our eyes can be opened like the disciples to see it. There is so much more to life than we can see with our earthly eyes.

“Finally, it teaches that the Lord has all the power, He cannot be hurt by evil people. Nor can they stop Him from helping good people.”

And so, he concludes, “we should rejoice today.” The Lord “has made His truth shine brightly for us in His Word! And we know that no one can stop the Lord from bringing us there – if only we let Him.”

The angel told the shepherds at the birth of the Lord: “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.” That joy is made manifest at Easter.

The Rev. W. Cairns Henderson spoke of this in an editorial, *The Joy of Easter*, in the March 1959 issue of *New Church Life*:

For the Lord Himself, His resurrection on the first Easter morning was the fullness of joy. And although we may scarcely begin to understand the nature and depth of His joy, we can learn from the teaching what the true joy of Easter is: joy that because the Lord glorified His human race was withheld from total destruction, and the salvation of all who will accept Him in love and in faith has been made sure.

And as we celebrate another Easter season, that joy will be inmosty



within the happiness of all who are receiving from the Lord a spiritual love toward the neighbor. Easter means many things to different people; but for us it can bring a measure of the true joy, enhanced by the glorious truth that the Divine Human now stands forth to view in the Lord's second coming.

(BMH)

## PREFERENCE FALSIFICATION

*And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas" – who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. (Luke 23:18,19)*

It is ironic that this same crowd had only a few verses before been accusing Jesus of the same thing as Barabbas – rebellion against Caesar:

*Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." (Luke 23:1,2)*

Crowds are notoriously fickle. But the heart of this incident is accusation – accusing Jesus of wrongdoing and demanding punishment. In the Gospel of John, the crowd even threatens Pilate with accusations, saying:

*If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar. (John 19:12)*

Accusation is a fearsome tool in the hands of people who wish to impose their own will on others, just as it is a necessary tool in the hands of people seeking true justice. No one likes to be accused of wrongdoing. The fear of being accused is a significant factor in some of the changes that happen in public opinion over time.

People are often surprised at how public opinion can change, and especially how things and views that were once acceptable become unacceptable and vice versa. It is also interesting that sometimes these changes can happen almost overnight.

One interesting aspect of this is something called "*preference falsification*" – a phenomenon closely related to the fear of accusation:

*Preference falsification, according to the Duke University economist Timur Kuran, is the act of misrepresenting one's wants under perceived social pressures. . . . A common effect of preference*

*falsification is the preservation of widely disliked structures. Another is the conferment of an aura of stability on structures vulnerable to sudden collapse. When the support of a policy, tradition, or regime is largely contrived, a minor event may activate a bandwagon that generates massive yet unanticipated change.<sup>1</sup>*

Reading this we may think about people's affected support for a tyrannical political regime out of fear of being accused of disloyalty, or giving in to the pressure from a crowd of friends to accept misbehaviors, or cruel actions, out of fear of their disapproval. More often the fear itself is not overt, but barely noticeable, being nothing more than an inclination to believe what others believe and do what others do.

The example that Kuran, the economist quoted above, gives is about what is known as DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion). DEI is a set of organizational frameworks which seek to promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people, particularly groups who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or disability. While this would seem to be an effort that everyone ought to support, Kuran asserts that it has a dark side related to preference falsification:

*Preference falsification has been central to the trajectory of DEI. People who abhor DEI principles and methods came to favor these publicly through a preference cascade. Every instance of preference falsification induced others to pretend they consider DEI just, efficient, beneficial to marginalized groups, etc. In time, a false consensus effectively displaced the search for truth as the university's core mission, replacing it with DEI.*

*Most professors watched in concealed horror the transfer of enormous powers from themselves to rapidly growing DEI bureaucracies. In countless contexts, they endorsed policies they considered harmful, participated in the defamation of scholars they admired, and sheepishly submitted to DEI training – all to be left alone, to avoid being called racist, to advance their careers. But the resulting equilibrium was self-undermining. In emboldening DEI officials, it increased privately felt anger and resentment. The stage was set for a preference cascade in reverse.<sup>2</sup>*

According to this, the event that activated a bandwagon against DEI was the conflict in the Middle East that led to opposing views as to whether antisemitism or Islamophobia was the more accurate accusation.

Whatever our view of this example might be, the point is that the phenomenon rests on popularly held views of right and wrong, and the fear of

accusation that resisting those views may lead to.

A similar example is often repeated in the Heavenly Doctrine with regard to the distinction between kindness as it is popularly understood and true kindness or true charity:

When we come to see the difference between the popular concept of kindness and true charity we can “*find ourselves accused by evil spirits, all of whom are purely earthly. One of their main charges is that we lie about what is good. They will say, for instance, ‘You used to think and say that we should do good to our neighbor, and you proved it with your deeds. But now by ‘neighbor’ you mean only people with goodness and truth, not people with evil and falsity who can’t be reformed. You don’t want to help the evil any more. If you are going to help them, you want them punished, for their own improvement and in order to head off any harm from your neighbor. ‘That means,’ they charge, ‘that you have thought and spoken falsely; your thoughts are at odds with your words.’*” (Arcana Coelestia 5036.4)

Here the accusation is that the spiritual person lacks charity. In the gospel story the accusation is that the Lord promoted rebellion against Caesar and that His claims were blasphemous. These accusations implicitly claim the moral high ground, effectively silencing anyone who might be inclined to resist.

Satan is called “*the accuser of our brethren*” (Revelation 12:10) because the nature of evil is that it accuses the good of wrongdoing. Its power lies in its ability to confuse the majority about the true nature of right and wrong.

*To accuse means, symbolically, to stand in opposition to a doctrine, to charge that it is false, and to expostulate against it. And because those meant by the dragon do this continually as though before God, the dragon is called the accuser of our brethren which accused them before God, day and night. The devil does this, too, whenever it tempts or subjects to trial, for it draws out various thoughts from a person which it labels as false and condemns. (Apocalypse Revealed 554)*

During the Easter season we are reminded that the majority can often be mistaken about what is true and good. The concept of “*preference falsification*” may help to explain how it is that the expressed thoughts of many people are naturally influenced by current ideas of right and wrong and the terminology that prejudices common beliefs. It also may illustrate how quickly these misunderstandings can be changed by ongoing events. As we read in

*Revelation:*

*Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God. day and night, has been cast down.” (Revelation 12:10)*

(JFS)

<sup>1</sup> Wall Street Journal ‘Merit Is No Longer Evil’ Is DEI vulnerable to sudden collapse? James Freeman, Jan. 5, 2024

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

# Letters to the Editors

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

## ***What is Our Duty?***

To the Editors:

Every human being is given a natural body to live in while they are choosing who or what they will follow on their path to eternity after death. It is universally known that everyone leaves their earthly body behind; no exceptions besides Jesus. That seems to be God's whole plan: get born, choose heaven or hell, pass over into our spiritual dimension, and live forever according as we have chosen. Simple and straightforward. The two great commandments will get us to heaven. Ignoring them will not. Our choice in this world is final and eternal.

The ways of the Creator are so far beyond the understanding of us, the created, that it is clear there is no ratio between the infinite and finite. Beyond our wildest notions the infinite makes the highest concepts of natural man seem less than dust. But could it really be that what is happening now will turn out to have a good outcome?

Well, we know that the Lord God conceives, causes and effectuates His goals with infinite love, wisdom and certainty. We know that He does this without violating the freedom of any created human. And we also know that He achieves His goals through us humans, using "on-the-job training."

God makes us all free to choose what we will think and do every second of our earthly lives. We have all been exposed to the Golden Rule: to love one another and God above all. And there are Ten Commandments (not merely suggestions) to be embedded into our daily living. If we actually did these things, surely it would bring heaven onto earth.

However, the question arises as to how we should behave when others seek to have dominion over us and to hate us, and our views, even to the point

of murdering us. Our instructions from the Word appear to be showing us how to fight against evils that are within ourselves from birth and also those which we imbibe by our own actions. But the Word does not seem to give us a lot of instructions about how we should respond to evils outside of us yet directed against us or against His church. Should the oppressed fight back as in real war? Collectively, what is our responsibility to mankind and to the Lord?

What did the Lord do in His life on earth? The Lord on the cross corresponds to what people have done to the Word of God. He was tortured and seemingly put to death in His body, but He triumphed by rejecting hell in Himself, all by Himself. Hell never once succeeded in its attempts to make Him do something selfish. But it appeared that the hells were successful since they apparently crucified Him to death. Yet even then His truth and love prevailed in heaven, although not so obviously on earth. The apparent death of His Word among men does not seem like a triumph, does it? But it was, for He rose again!

The Lord's life and crucifixion served to inspire a few who initiated a new, true church. So, that was the successful achievement – the Word was reborn among a few on this earth. Those few did not fight. They hid themselves in catacombs and shared their new teachings almost secretly. They suffered horrendously if ever they dared to proclaim the Lord to be God the Savior. (Is “through trauma” how heaven must come to earth?)

The Lord says to turn the other cheek. (*Matthew 5:38*) He says that if one takes our coat, we should offer him our inner garment also. (*Luke 6:29*) He says that love never fights or hates. (*Arcana Coelestia 9313*) But doesn't He also say to “Rise Up!” to fight against evildoers, to defend Jerusalem with the sword? Confusing, isn't it?

I have always admired the courage of the countless heroes of history; men and women who have sacrificed their tender bodies and all their bright prospects for the future simply because they held that the future life of their country was more important than all the pain and terrors they were facing! “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.” (*John 15:13-14*)

Surely the Lord's life on earth should be our best example of how to live and what to do. And it looks to me like physical wars are not indicated by the life of the Lord.

Are we (should we be) ready to literally fight for our “rights,” or should we accept crucifixion for our beliefs? What is our duty to the Lord our God?

Martin Klein  
Huntingdon Valley  
Pennsylvania

***A Companion Book***

To The Editors:

In the November/December issue of *New Church Life*, in an advertisement for the book, *The Lord, God With Us*, I made a statement that it has been nearly 80 years since a book about the doctrine of the Lord has been published by the General Church. I am writing to apologize for inadvertently misleading readers.

In fact, a wonderful book about the Lord's whole life, as described in the internal sense of the *Genesis* story was published in 2002 by Fountain Publishing, not technically the General Church, but definitely affiliated. This book, by the late Rev. Geoffrey Childs, is a truly marvelous summary of New Church teachings about this. In fact, it's a rather dense treatment of the subject, worthy of deep reflection, and although out of print today, it is still readily available as a "print-on-demand" publication through Amazon.com.

Although I had not remembered this treatment of the subject when I compiled my sermons, I am gratified to realize that much of the exposition in our two books is the same. Though the writing style and composition of the material is very different, they make excellent companion volumes.

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish  
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

# Jesus Wept: The Human Side of God

*An Easter Sermon by the Rev. Barry C. Halterman*

*Lessons: John 11:17-44; True Christianity 370:3; 109*

Our text is the simple phrase, “Jesus wept.” (*John 11:35*) It comes from the story of the raising of Lazarus and we will be looking at the image of God given to us through that story.

The core theology of the New Church is: “The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns and His kingdom will last for ages of ages.” (*True Christianity 791*) It is not a complicated view of God: God is a Divine Human Being who came on earth as Jesus Christ. It is the core and the beginning of all our theology.

It is the message we see preached in the beginning of the *Gospel of John*: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (*1:14*) The Word, the All-Powerful, Infinite, Eternal God came down on earth as a Human Being and dwelt among us.

But while He was on earth as Jesus Christ, not even His disciples always grasped this. When Jesus told them: “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him,” His disciple Philip asked Him to “show us the Father.” Jesus said to him: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (*14:7-9*)

God is the I Am, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, born on earth as Jesus Christ to be the Human Manifestation of God, the Immanuel, “God with us.” (*Matthew 1:23*)

How lucky we are to have this image of God as a Divine Human Being. Throughout human history, so many people didn’t have this image of God. Even today, many people don’t have this idea of Jesus as God, and many don’t have any image of God at all. Throughout the history of religion there have been and still are many religious traditions that have focused on the infinite,



impersonal Divine nature of God. They say that God Himself cannot be limited to any human terms and that trying to know God in human terms is not really knowing Him because God is infinite and beyond all human conception.

Of course, there is truth in looking at God as something far beyond what we can grasp because God is Infinite and Unlimited and we are finite and limited. But is a God who is beyond our grasp an inspiring idea of God? Is it an idea of God upon which we can base our lives? Is it a God we can know? Is it a God we can love? Is it even an accurate picture of God?

Many religious traditions throughout the ages have also acknowledged this point. They know that we need some kind of finite image of God to have some way of seeing God.

According to New Church theology, in the earliest times people were taught principles about God by angels from heaven and they saw qualities of God manifested in all the physical things around them.

When people in most ancient times saw mountains, they thought of “elevation” and “height,” and those concepts led to thinking about heaven and heavenly thought which is higher than natural thought. When they saw the sun, they thought not of what the sun of the physical earth did, but the sun of the spiritual world and how God is like a sun. They thought of how its light is like Divine Wisdom that enlightens us all and how its warmth is like Divine Love that enlivens us all. This was true for all things in nature. All of nature was seen as a theater representing the Lord and His Kingdom. (See *Secrets of Heaven* 3483) With this view God was present with them everywhere.

But in time this way of viewing things deteriorated. It seems the people of those ancient times began to lose the connection between the object and what it represented about God. The object became confused with the source and they began to think that the object itself was somehow infused with God. They placed the importance in the image itself, not simply in what it represented. This was the origin of idolatry. The sun and moon, for example, went from being seen as natural objects that represented aspects of God to being worshiped as gods themselves. And since everything in nature represented God in some way, idolatry was combined with polytheism – the worship of many gods. The true idea of God was lost.

Seeing God in nature is important. It’s also understandable that seeing God in this way could lead to humans losing the true image of God. Since people can’t see God as He is in Himself, they start to look in terms of what they see. What we see when we look outside is nature. But then we start to make conclusions about God based on our own observations of nature. In an effort to make God visible to us, the visible form we put on God is nature. But can we grasp all of nature? Is that the way for us really to truly see God?

Many of us, when we are out in nature, feel God’s presence strongly there.

We see many things that inspire us to think about God. This is a wonderful avenue for seeing God since all of nature is a theater representative of the Lord. But is it really the best way of seeing God? Does it give us everything about God?

Nature is impersonal. Can we have a person-to-person relationship with something that is impersonal? A relationship with nature or even with an impersonal God just isn't the same as a relationship with another human being. We human beings need a more concrete image of God. We need a vision of God that we can emulate, imitate, follow. We need a God that we can have a relationship with. We need a God that is human so we can have a human-to-human relationship.

We can't really imitate the Divine because we are not divine. We can't imitate the Infinite because we are not infinite. We can't really follow Life Itself, Wisdom Itself, or Love Itself. We can't be omniscient. We can't be omnipotent. We can't be omnipresent. All of those qualities that religions around the world have always given to God – the Divine Force, the Divine Creator – are hard to connect with. They are not really on our level. We can't even really begin to grasp those aspects of God let alone connect on that level.

In order to connect with God, human beings started to put the forces of nature in more personal terms. It is easy to see, then, how the myths of the great religions started. We turned those forces and those qualities of God into things that we can grasp. We needed to have them be more human. In order to make them human, though, instead of having the Lord present Himself as a Human to us, what we see in human history is us creating human gods in our own image. We give those gods Divine powers. We give them exalted human qualities like wisdom and beauty and love. But we also give them human weaknesses – anger, greed, jealousy. And we have those gods do very ungodlike things.

The good news is we don't actually have to imagine what God would be like as a human being. That is the Good News of the New Testament, the Good News of the Lord's story on earth. We know what God would be like as a human being because He came into the world and showed us what He is like as a human being.

We know from *Genesis* that in the beginning we were created in God's image and likeness. (1:26) God is a Divine Human Being, and we get our humanness from that God. As the human race fell away from loving God and we turned further and further away from God, we turned further and further away from the idea of God as a Divine Human Being from whom we gain our humanity. When the Lord Himself comes to earth as Jesus Christ, He comes in a way that shows us both His Divinity and His Humanity.

We can especially see these aspects of God in the story of the Raising of Lazarus. (*John 11*) We see His Divine nature through His Divine power as He

does things only God can do. We also see, perhaps more than almost anywhere else in the Word, His Human side, His Human connection to people, His one-to-one human love that He has for every single one of us.

Let's look first at some of those images of the Lord's Divine Power in the story. We read that Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went out to meet Him. She said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (*John 11:21*) She shows a belief in the Lord's tremendous power, that the Lord even has the power to give life. But at this point Martha seems to think that, while Jesus could have saved him, now it's too late. So, Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise again." (*11:23*)

Martha said to Him: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (*11:24-27*) We see strong images of the Lord's power here. The Lord is teaching that He does have all power, even the power over death, and that truth is acknowledged by Martha.

We see the message of the Lord's power again when Jesus comes to the tomb: "Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him: 'Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her: 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?'"

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said: "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them: "Loose him and let him go." (*11:38-44*) The Lord has the power to bring people back to life!

The Lord shows His power in so many ways in the New Testament. He shows it when He walks on water. He shows His tremendous power when He heals blind people, when He heals the lame, when He feeds people miraculously. We see it in this story, the seventh of His miracles in the *Gospel of John*. It occurs soon before the Easter story. Here He shows that He has the power to raise someone from the dead – not just at the Last Days at a Last Judgment, as they are thinking, but raise them right now. This is tremendous power, power never before seen in a human being.

We always need to see that Divine nature of God, a God with all power. But the story also shows a human side of God. That image starts right off in the beginning where Jesus is told about Lazarus: “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” (11:3) Love is brought in right at the beginning of that story. But when He gets there, we start to see the Lord’s loving side really come out. After Martha comes to meet Jesus she tells her sister Mary, and when Mary comes to the Lord, she falls at His feet, saying: “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:32) This is a very human story. This is someone coming to the Lord, weeping about her brother being dead.

***God has a personal love for each one of us. This is ground changing. We see here something that had been missing from other pictures of God: His humanity.***

We read further: “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” (11:33) The great Creator of the Universe – the one in charge of life and death, the one in charge of all things down here and is present among us –groans in His spirit, feels the pain and shows the pain in a way we’ve never seen before. God groans over human suffering.

Then He does something extraordinary: “Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’” (11:35-36) The powerful almighty God seen throughout history is actually a God who can come down and be amongst us as a human being. God can love like other human beings. It’s not an abstract, impersonal kind of love either. It’s a very concrete love, a very particular love. It’s a love for a specific person, Lazarus. The Lord loves each person individually, personally. God has a personal love for each one of us. This is ground changing. We see here something that had been missing from other pictures of God: His humanity.

We are taught in the passage read earlier from *True Christianity* 370:

*Jehovah came down and became human so that He could come close to us and we could come close to Him and a partnership could be forged through which we could have salvation and eternal life. When God became human and then a human became God, He became able to draw near us in this adapted form as a human God and as a Divine Human forge a partnership with us.*

The whole point of His showing himself as human is so that we can

actually have a partnership with the Lord. Having God be more distant and above us is comforting in many ways, but this new image that the Lord gives us is one that is personal to us, one that can lead us in a new way, one that can show us human love.

The Lord adapted Himself to our understanding so He could be closer to us and so we could draw nearer to Him. The Lord, in a sense, changes. He adapts Himself to a physical human form so that we human beings can better see Him and love Him. He comes in a form we human beings can emulate and follow.

As we look toward Easter and see the tremendous power the Lord has, we also see the tremendous love that comes with it. We see the Lord at His most human, His most vulnerable. We will see it in the stories of Good Friday. We will see it in the stories of Easter morning as the Lord rises. We also see it prefigured here in the story of the Raising of Lazarus, which happens almost immediately preceding the Easter story. We can see God coming on Earth, changing His way of showing Himself to us for our sake, so that we can connect with Him.

It is literally an image of God that changed the world. The Lord as a Divine Human Being changed the history of religion. It changed this planet through the rise and spread of Christianity. Ultimately, it is here to change us.

So, as we look at the pictures of the Lord given in the Word, we need to see God as Divine. We need to see Him as beyond us human beings. We need God to do the God things that we mere human beings can't do. We need to have someone in charge of the bigger picture, someone we can trust to have the plan and who is executing the plan. We need to know that somebody, somewhere, does have it all under control, that there's nothing that happens outside of God's plan, and that the Lord can always lead us back from wherever we go.

But we also need to see God as Human. We can't just leave God kind of up there managing things from on high. We need to see God as right here among us. We need to see God as feeling every emotion that we've ever had and as being aware of every thought we have. We need to see God as having gone through every experience that we've all gone through, felt the pain of going through trials and struggles, and knowing what that feels like as a human being. We need God to be Human, the Word made Flesh, down here with us. And we need to know the Lord weeps. "Jesus wept." (*John 11:35*)

So, the Lord is truly Divine. He is far above and beyond us maintaining an order and a justice and a mercy on the cosmic and eternal scale that we can't be fully aware of. But the Lord is fully and truly Human too. He knows each and every single one of us and He knows us personally.

May we find peace and comfort in the Divinity of the Lord and may we also be stirred with compassion and love for one another as the Lord modeled

for us as a human being here on earth.  
Amen.



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# The Easter Season

*The Rev. John L. Odhner*

*(Reprinted from the April 6, 2023, Bryn Athyn Post)*

The Easter season is not as prominent in our culture as the Christmas season, which has both upsides and downsides for the church. I welcome the fact that so much energy goes into celebrating the Lord's birth, while feeling sad that the culture seems to be putting more Santa than Christ in Christmas. There is a tendency at Easter as well to focus more on the secular elements of bunnies and eggs than the Lord's resurrection.

I suppose one reason why people have downplayed the Easter story is that the traditional Christian doctrine is gloomy. A big mistake in the Christian world has been to see the Lord's suffering on the cross as the whole of the Lord's redemption, as if Christ saved us by suffering the ultimate punishment from the Father. This puts the whole focus on Jesus' death instead of His life.

While it is pleasant and joyful to spend all of December celebrating the Lord's birth as an innocent baby, who wants to spend a month in spring focusing on death and punishment? When we celebrate the resurrection of a loved one who has died, we celebrate the person's whole life, from birth to death, with the hope and expectation of a renewed, joyful life in heaven. It would be sad and useless to spend a memorial service talking only about death and the last hours of life.

In the Lord's providence Passover was celebrated in the first month of spring because the escape from slavery in Egypt corresponded to the new beginning represented by the spring's fertility and growth. Some people have criticized Easter's bunnies, eggs and flowers as pagan symbols, but the actual origin of those symbols was in the ancient church's knowledge that the fertility and growth of spring corresponds to the fact that all life arises from the Lord.

The same thing was represented by the Lord's resurrection in the morning. The sunrise begins a new day as spring begins a new day, so the Lord is called the Sunrise or Dayspring. (*Luke 1:78*) In fact, our word Easter is from the word

“east,” which (like “orient”) means “sunrise.”

I hope we can make our Easter celebrations more of a “season” like Christmas, yet with more focus on the Lord’s life and resurrection – rather than His death – and on the new birth and growth that comes from Him.



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# Trying to Entomb the Lord

*An Easter Talk by the Rev. Grant H. Odhner*

Editors' note: This children's talk was originally printed in *New Church Home*, and later by the Office of Education in *New Church Vineyard*.

Reading: *Matthew 27:57 - 28:17*

**W**e all admire people who can't be stopped – the soccer player who always manages to get through the defensive line; the person who suffers unbelievable setbacks yet stays cheerful and still manages to help others; the hero in a movie who is forced to jump off a cliff (so we believe he's dead) but manages to escape alive.

Think of the Lord: surrounded by soldiers at night with only a few of His followers around, captured by His enemies for no just reason, tied up, slapped and spit upon, struck with a rod on the head, teased and made fun of, lashed with a whip, then nailed through the hands and feet to a wooden cross, and left hanging there to die a horrible death – all this while there were soldiers around. He seemed to be completely beaten. Not only this: After His body was put in a tomb with a large stone door, they sealed the door and placed a guard of soldiers outside so that no one could get in or out.

Of course, the Lord's followers were utterly shocked and heartbroken. They could hardly believe that it all happened to the Lord. His special disciples (the 11 who were left) were sad and disappointed more than anyone. They really thought the Lord was going to become king. They thought He was unbeatable. On top of this, they were scared. Because they had been seen with the Lord so often, they worried they might be captured and killed too. Indeed, the Lord had said to them: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (*John 15.20*) For these reasons none of the disciples had the courage (at first) to go to the tomb to pay their respects to the Lord. Besides, they were probably just too disappointed.

Meanwhile, the scribes and the Pharisees must have been pleased with themselves. They thought Jesus was dead, out of their way. They had gotten rid of Him. And His body was even sealed away in a tomb and guarded by soldiers. They wouldn't have to worry about Him anymore. This would "shut up" His disciples, wouldn't it?

But what happened next? When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb early Sunday morning? All of a sudden, there was an earthquake. An angel appeared, whose face shone like lightning and whose clothes were dazzling white, like snow. He broke the seals and rolled the stone away. The guards were so terrified they fainted and became like dead men. They had no power against an angel.

But what the angel showed them and told them was even more amazing. The Lord's body was not in the tomb! How had it gotten out!? The angel said: "He is not here; He has risen." He was alive – not only as to His spirit but His body too!

A few minutes later, the two Marys were greeted by the Lord. And He said to them, "Rejoice!" What a wonderful, happy thing. He was alive! His enemies could not kill Him, not even His body.

This story is one of the most important in the Word. It teaches us that the Lord, Jesus, (who came to earth and touched us with His great love and wisdom) is more than just a man. He is our God. Who else could have risen from the dead like He did?

This story also teaches us that there really is a life after this one. Our eyes can be opened like the disciples to see it. There is so much more to life than we can see with our earthly eyes.

Finally, it teaches that the Lord has all power. He cannot be hurt by evil people. Nor can they stop Him from helping good people.

It's this last point that we are speaking about now. The Lord could not be stopped. The Scribes and Pharisees used soldiers and the power of a Roman governor to try to capture and kill the Lord. They shut Him in a rock tomb in the earth and sealed its heavy stone door.

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So also, evil people had used lies and tricks to kill the Lord in other people's minds. They had tried to shut His Word, so that no one would read it nor understand it, nor think it was worth understanding. They had tried to twist its meaning so that people wouldn't really see what it said nor *do* what it said.

They had tried to block the way to heaven, so that they could be in control.

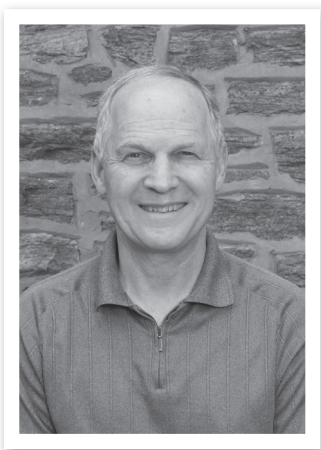
We see all this pictured in our story. The tomb, where the Lord's body was laid, stands for heaven. (This is because when angels think of a tomb, they don't think about dying, but about going to heaven.) The great stone door is the Word, which is the way to heaven. Evil people in the church had sealed up the Word and wouldn't let anyone near, so that no one could "open" it and get to heaven. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2916, *Apocalypse Explained* 400:14, 687:18)

But just when things seemed darkest, the Lord came. And, with great power (like the angels) He changed the way things had been in the church. His coming was like an earthquake! He pushed back the evil (they "became like dead men"). All by Himself He broke the seal of falsity and opened the Word. Then people could see that He was still alive, and they could see the way to heaven. (*Apocalypse Explained* 400:14)

All of this is pictured in what happened on Easter morning. Think of that scene once more: it was still somewhat dark in the early morning as the two Marys came sadly to the tomb. The unfriendly-looking guards, with their swords and spears, were still keeping watch. It was quiet and lonely. All of a sudden, the ground heaved and rumbled and shook. A dazzling angel appeared, and with great strength pushed away the rock and sat on it. The guards were terrified and helpless. Light shone brightly from the angel as he showed the women the opened tomb and told them the good news.

And moments later they saw the Lord Himself – with new eyes! Never to doubt again! He said to them, "Rejoice!"

And so should we rejoice today. For we are lucky to know that the Lord is alive! He is strong! He has made His truth shine brightly for us in His Word! He has opened to us the way to heaven! And we know that no one can stop the Lord from bringing us there – if only we let Him.



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# Wandering in the Wilderness

*A Sermon by the Rev. Stephen D. Cole*

*Lessons: Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Luke 4:1-14; Apocalypse Explained 730:31*

*Thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee these 40 years in the desert, that He might humble thee and test thee to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or not.*  
*(Deuteronomy 8:2)*

Forty years is a long time. And wandering for 40 years may seem like a harsh sentence, and the Israelites served this sentence in the desert, the wilderness. The 40 years and the wilderness both represent, spiritually, the time and the state of spiritual temptation. In the account of the temptations of Jesus, of which we read in our lesson from *Luke*, the setting was also the wilderness and although the 40 comes in terms of days rather than years, the connection between the two stories is obvious. The account in *Luke* even recalls the story in *Deuteronomy*, quoting the words: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every saying of God.” (*Luke 4:4*)

The temptations of Jesus proceed in the fashion one might expect in a story of spiritual testing. The devil proposes a course of action. And Jesus resists, in each case actually answering with a passage from Scripture. But if the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai portrays a time of temptation, it is hard to see how it fits the same pattern. What were they tempted to do, or fail to do? It seems more a period of feeling deserted, aimless, and without direction.

Similarly, another period of 40 days, the flood of Noah – although it again represents a time of spiritual trial – does not appear to fit the pattern of temptation, at least as people often picture it. Noah faced challenging circumstances, but it does not seem to have been a case of wanting to do wrong and then resisting. What challenges may we face that correspond to those of Noah, and how can they be called “temptation”?

Since we are all likely to go through periods of spiritual temptation, it

behooves us to be clear about what that actually is. And we can, perhaps, gain some clarity by looking closely at the narrative of the 40 years in the wilderness, which is one of the more prominent stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. Not only is it the setting for most of the five books of Moses, it is even in the Hebrew name for one of those books. For the book of *Numbers* is called “*B’midhbar*” in the original language, which means “In the Wilderness.”

Furthermore, the *Prophets*, the *Psalms*, and the later histories all hark back to the lessons learned from the time in these desert places. So let us consider what lessons there may be for us – what it might be for us to experience a wilderness state of temptation. But to do this, let us back up and sketch out how the Israelites had gotten to this point.

For several hundred years they had been in Egypt, first as honored guests, but then more recently as slaves. The Lord had liberated them then from bondage with signs and wonders, a series of 11 plagues, and the great culminating miracle by which they were led through the Red Sea, while Pharaoh’s army was destroyed. The Lord then led them to Mt. Sinai where, amidst thunder and lightning, smoke and flame, the Ten Commandments were delivered through Moses.

Soon after this, the Israelites were encamped in the wilderness near the southern boundaries of Canaan. They had left Egypt as a vast multitude with no particular order to it. But by now, at the Lord’s command they had been counted and set in order, both for their encampment around the tabernacle and for their journeying through the wilderness.

Thus they had been prepared by the Lord to take up their inheritance in the Promised Land. The Lord now told them that they should send 12 spies into the land and make ready to conquer it. The spies searched out the land for 40 days. They returned with samples of the lush produce of the land. They brought pomegranates and figs. Carried on a staff between two of them, they brought an immense cluster of grapes. Truly, they reported, it is a land flowing with milk and honey.

But their report did not end there. Despite the wonders of this new land, 10 of the spies felt that they should not try to take it. The people are powerful, they warned, the cities are strongly fortified, and compared with the giants who inhabit the land, they protested, “we are in our own eyes as grasshoppers.”

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb,

*The Word is filled with lessons learned in desert places. So let us consider what lessons there may be for us – what it might be for us to experience a wilderness state of temptation.*

tried to stem the tide of fear and cowardice running through the people, encouraging them that with the Lord's help they could cast out the mighty inhabitants of Canaan. But this was to no avail. The heart of the people failed them; they would not go up against the land.

As pictured in the story, the wrath of God then turned upon this disobedient people. A plague arose that smote the 10 spies. The rest of the people, God warned, from 20 years old and upward, would perish during 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb would be spared.

We may puzzle over how the children of Israel failed to accept the encouragement of the Lord to conquer the land of Canaan. The Exodus and the events at Mount Sinai were no dim memories to the Israelites. They had only recently heard the Lord's commandments from the mountain. Why did their trust in the Lord's guidance and protection falter? Why did they pay no heed to the words of Joshua and Caleb, who had recommended going ahead and taking the land? Hadn't they seen the Lord lead them out of Egypt with a mighty hand? Hadn't they witnessed miracles in the wilderness and the drama on Mount Sinai? How could they doubt the power of the Lord to accomplish all things that He had promised?

We may puzzle over the weakness of the children of Israel, but it may become more understandable when we consider our own weaknesses and vacillations. Even if we know well the stories of the Lord's power in the Word, and despite previous occasions in which we may have witnessed the Lord guiding our lives in ways we never could have imagined, nevertheless we too can fail to trust the Lord to bear us up if we follow His bidding in the face of seemingly impossible odds.

What is the moral of this story? What does it mean to us? Is it just another in a long string of examples of how hard it is to trust in the Lord's power and how dire are the consequences of disobeying His will? To gain perspective, let us consider this question: How free were the children of Israel to go up against the land?

At first this may seem like a strange question. Without doubt the Lord had shown them His mighty hand. Beyond question were the laws He had given for their guidance. The Lord had, as we have seen, ordered them and arranged them so that they could be an effective fighting force. Was not all the weight then on the side of straightaway going up against the land? To see that there is a legitimate question here, let us parallel the story of the Israelites with the spiritual journeys of our own lives.

We spend our childhood in Egypt, so to speak. We abide in the land of knowledge and drink into our minds much of the knowledge there. But we are as yet only slaves. We do not think for ourselves. We serve other people's ideas of what is right and how we should live, This is, of course, a necessary stage,

but one that should be left behind.

When the Lord leads us out of the house of bondage, we have the opportunity to hear His voice for ourselves. We study the Word, we perceive the Lord's commandments in the way that the Israelites heard the voice of God from Sinai. As we reflect on and reason about what we learn from the Word, if we open ourselves to the Lord's guidance, He will begin to order our minds in the form of heaven. Our spirits will become as the encampment of Israel, organized to serve the Lord and to fight off spiritual foes. Even as we begin our adult lives, then, we may have already, in a certain sense, all that we need to enter the promised land of heaven.

We have sufficient knowledge to begin to lead the life that leads to heaven. Why, then, do people still need to undergo a life-long process of spiritual change to get there? Why didn't the Israelites, who had been prepared by the Lord, take the land of Canaan when they were still fresh out of Egypt?

The Israelites did at length conquer the land of Canaan. What was different then? What they had at that point, which they had not had before, was 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In the literal story, it sounds as though the years of wandering were simply a punishment from a vindictive God. But we know, of course, that God does not behave in this fashion. Everything He does or permits to be done is to help us, to further our spiritual growth.

We can shake our heads with regret that the Israelites did not obey the Lord and go up against the land of Canaan right after they first spied it out. We can regret that we ourselves have not followed the Lord right away, as soon as we have seen where He would lead us. But the fact is that we cannot be regenerated without temptation. All conjunction of good and truth takes place through temptation.

The Israelites had all the truth that they needed to go ahead and take the land. They had seen the Lord's power. They knew what He could do. But this is all a matter simply of the intellect. What we know and what we feel can be two different things. We all know that the Lord's way is the only way. But we are not truly convinced of it with every fiber of our being. This takes the joining together of what we know with what we feel – the conjunction of good and truth. And this can only happen through a series of tests and trials.

Even if temptation is often attended with the sense that we, from our own power, have failed, this does not mean that we should not try. It is crucial to cultivate the youthful idealism represented by Joshua and Caleb, which not only will urge us onward at the beginning, but also will survive to lead the successes that will follow when – after “40 years” – all the weaknesses and doubts have died off.

It took 40 years for the Israelites to become prepared for the challenges of Canaan. And it is a literal 40 years – or even more – that it will take most of us

to learn life's lessons to the point that we are really ready to follow the Lord.

But what are these lessons? The question of the real nature of temptations has not really been addressed head on. What do battles and floods and times of desolate wandering have in common? Temptations are characterized in the doctrines as "an assault upon some love." It is easy to see how this is pictured in a war: the good side is wholesome love, the ideal, and the bad side is an enticement or inclination in opposition to that love. But what about a flood?

In this case, our loves and hopes are inundated with cares and concerns; we feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Wandering in a wilderness? Now, although we have our dreams, our goals, our ideals, we nevertheless feel lost about how to pursue or achieve them. In the various scenarios the causes of our anxiety or spiritual grief are different. But what they have in common is the one only solution: trust in the Lord's power.

The 40 years in the wilderness are often spoken of as years of wandering. But, of course, these years were not wasted and they were not truly wandering. Note the words of the text. It does not say: "Remember how you wandered these 40 years." It says, "Remember how God led you." The Lord did not forget the Israelites for 40 years. He provided manna daily for their sustenance. He led them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. He brought them victory over the enemies they faced during this time. They entered the wilderness an untested army. They left it a well-organized battle array. In our years of seeming wandering, we too are led by the Lord at every turn.

Each experience, whether it seems positive or negative, can become an opportunity to practice trusting in the Lord and not in ourselves. We must realize that the feeling of failure is a normal and often necessary part of the process. Does this let us off the hook? Even if the Lord does not hold us responsible in the long run, we will still – here in the world of time and space – have to suffer consequences, pain and hardship, sometimes for failures beyond our strength to avoid.

We must learn to use such occasions to make firm our resolve to try harder in the future, and to receive with gratitude the grace that the Lord grants us in keeping us from the things that we should shun. We can also try to learn

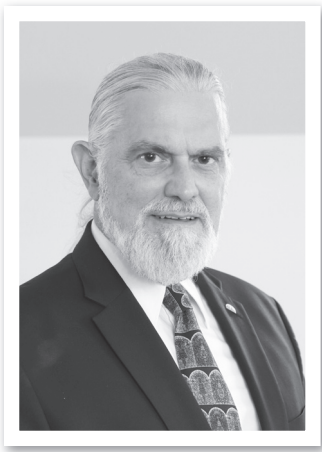
*It took 40 years for the Israelites to become prepared for the challenges of Canaan. And it is a literal 40 years – or even more – that it will take most of us to learn life's lessons to the point that we are really ready to follow the Lord.*



to exercise patience with ourselves and with others.

If we let the wilderness years be times of ever-increasing trust in the Lord and conviction about His power to save us, we too will find that when our time has come full term, we are ready to follow the Lord into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Amen.



*If we let the wilderness years be times of ever-increasing trust in the Lord and conviction about His power to save us, we too will find that when our time has come full term, we are ready to follow the Lord into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey.*

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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

## Helping People Find the Church: Our Efforts in General Church Outreach

*The Rt Rev. David H. Lindrooth*

There is a doctrinal principle in the New Church describing how angels associate with each other in the spiritual world. The concept is that “thought brings presence while affection brings conjunction.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6893, *Conjugal Love* 341, *Divine Providence* 29) The idea is that thoughts and affections instantly bring an angel or spirit into the presence of like-minded spirits and angels who are thinking and feeling the same way.

Interestingly, this concept also captures the main strategy that General Church Outreach uses to help people engage with us through the internet.

Every day, people who have no prior knowledge of Swedenborg or New Church thought turn to the internet asking questions about spiritual life, our relationship with God, heaven, how to separate from destructive habits, and the like. Using our website ([www.newchurch.org](http://www.newchurch.org)), YouTube video, Instagram messages and Facebook, we are able to reach many of these people and help them find New Church answers to their questions. We use these interactions to invite them to deeper engagement and to take steps toward involvement in either online or in-person groups that meet regularly. These new, small

communities will lead toward new General Church congregations in the future.

The General Church produces videos describing New Church theology that are being viewed by millions of people. They find them on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and other online media outlets. They find them when they search for information on topics like Life After Death, Causes of Anxiety, God's Love, Fear, and other subjects.

I can remember a time, years ago, when I worried about the conversations I might have with someone who found that I was a member of the New Church. I anticipated being attacked either because my theology was different than theirs, or because I was a believer in God and might be ridiculed.

Through our current outreach efforts, I have found the reality is very different. Rarely do these attacks occur. And when they do, it is often easy to offer a little clarification about our theological beliefs that provide a context where the inquirer expresses understanding and frequently agreement.

There are certainly times when a person will dismiss our religion outright, but those occurrences are rare in comparison with all the positive responses. The reality is that there are many people who are interested and affirmative toward the theology that the General Church holds dear. There are quite a few people who are seeking our theology out of a desire to find spiritual help in their lives. And of that group, there are people who are looking for engagement in our communities.

People email us with growing frequency, asking how they can engage in a General Church community when they live in a region that is not near a church. Today we are able to offer them online participation in a variety of groups. Our focus is on growing that participation in the coming years.

Last year the number of people engaging with the General Church Outreach effort to sow seeds from the Word and gather people into communities looked something like this:

- \* **29.5 million people** were served content from our online offerings (newchurch.org, our videos, etc.)
- \* **1.2 million people** interacted with that content in some basic way
- \* **33.7 thousand people** shared that they appreciated the content and often subscribed to receive content
- \* **2,679 people** shared their contact information with us, out of a desire to be more engaged
- \* **165 people** started participating in online or in-person groups (sponsored by General Church Outreach).
- \* **212 people** continued to participate for more than a year

We expect these numbers to increase in the coming year because we continue to refine our tactics in reaching people and helping them.

You could help in these efforts in a variety of ways. You might consider undergoing training as a small group leader; these groups are largely lay led. You could contribute toward our marketing efforts. While online marketing is very cost effective, our ability to reach the numbers of people shown above is curtailed by our marketing budget. In fact, we know we could reach many more people simply by increasing our budget. If you are interested in finding a way to support this effort, contact us by email at *Outreach@newchurch.org* and we will get back to you.

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE MAKING OF A MODERN VISIONARY: EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

A Biography

*Dr. Jane K. Williams-Hogan*

*Editors' note: Before her death in 2018, Jane K. Williams-Hogan PhD, had written an extensive biography of Emanuel Swedenborg, now in production.*

*In the January/February issue we presented her Foreword. Below is the Introduction. Once the book is completed – hopefully this year – we will publish a review.*

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was an extraordinary man with extraordinary claims. A multifaceted genius who in his mid-50s claimed he had been gifted with the ability to explore the spiritual realm, walking and talking with spirits and angels while still living here on earth. In 1749 he testified in *Arcana Coelestia* that he had direct on-going experience with the spiritual realm, an ability he retained to the end of his life.

He wrote: “*Vidi, audivi, sensi*” (I have seen, I have heard, I have felt. #68). He did not preach his visions nor found a church based on them. He wrote about these experiences over a 23-year period, although for 19 years he did not claim authorship. In the 18 works he published, he described the wonders of heaven and the desolation of hell, the relationship between spiritual and earthly life, and how after death people ultimately find their way to the place of their greatest happiness.

He not only lived in the period in which “the modern” was born, but was a key figure in its very making due to the fact that his works were avidly read by many of modernity’s most important contributors.

The dawn of the modern age is frequently connected to various 18th century developments such as the rise of science, the philosophical enlightenment,<sup>1</sup> and the industrial revolution. While these events played

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<sup>1</sup> A recent text by Steven Pinker, *The Enlightenment Now* (2018), makes this case both explicitly and intelligently.

significant roles in shaping the modern, new forms of spirituality made equally vital contributions to the modern spirit. Among religious visionaries of that era, Swedenborg stands apart because of the revolutionary nature of his claims and the extraordinary responses to them by key shapers of the modern.

The first important figure to engage with his vision was German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In 1766, Kant published a small book: *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*. English painter-poet William Blake (1757-1827) drew inspiration from Swedenborg's spiritual visions to create his own – from his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, to his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *Jerusalem*.

American short story writer Edgar A. Poe (1809-1849) fashioned his famous tale, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, from a passage in Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) Irish sensational fiction writer, did likewise in *Wylder's Hand*, in which he used a discussion by Swedenborg about the fate of murderers in the afterlife to construct the plot.

The study of Swedenborg's religious works was part of the intellectual development of American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892), American landscape artist George Inness (1825-1894), the developer of European experimental psychology Gustav T. Fechner (1801-1887), and the father of American psychology William James (1842-1910). This list is by no means exhaustive, but illustrates a consistent and serious confrontation of the most creative and revolutionary makers of the modern with the new spirituality found in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The impact of Swedenborg's concept of the spiritual world on the unfolding of the modern in the West has yet to be conclusively explored.<sup>2</sup> While Swedenborg has not been totally ignored as an important player in the 18th and 19th centuries, the fact that his influence was so broad and affected so many different areas of culture, the awareness of his impact has been diluted. Many of the figures that current research clearly show were influenced by Swedenborg were reticent to publicly acknowledge the extent of their indebtedness. This makes it difficult for all but the most dogged researcher to uncover the connections. It is not the purpose of this biography to make all these connections (although such an enterprise would be extremely worthwhile); it is rather to explore the life that generated such a radical representation of the human condition.

This biography hopes to rescue the man, Emanuel Swedenborg, from the shadows of Western history and encourage a re-evaluation of his impact on the past, while creating a space for his life and work to come into the eminence it deserves in the present; and then to be seriously engaged with in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> A group of Swedenborgian scholars has recently published a collection of essays detailing his impact on many aspects of the modern world: *The Word Transformed*.

An interest in Swedenborg is occurring with an increasing number of new religious movements and spiritual practices developing in the modern world. This increase in “esoteric” activity seems to run counter to the “inevitable” triumph of rationalism and materialism which we had expected as secularism strengthened its grip on modernity. Perhaps this process is more limited in scope and more nuanced in its impact than was previously assumed.

To accomplish my goals it is necessary to engage Swedenborg on his own terms. A central tenet of his spiritual message is that each of us becomes/ is what we love. In fact, he began his work, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, with the phrase “love is the life of every person” (#1764:1) This idea has profound significance. It makes clear that the best representation of a person’s life is not the retelling of one’s movements through time and space, from birth to death, as is traditionally done; rather it should be a story organized around the central loves, moments, or projects of a person’s life.

This is very much how the human mind is organized. People store information topically, not historically. As any school child knows, things that delight come easily to mind, and those that do not seem to be hard to locate even when the results matter a great deal, such as on a math or spelling test. Human beings may remember down to the smallest detail the life of people they love – how they move, the tilt of the head and the minute facial changes that occur when they smile – while they often do not remember even the names of people who are only tangential to their life. If people organized the events, people, places and things of their lives in their minds exactly in the sequence in which they occurred, then recalling them would simply be a task of filing through a timeline. But often memories seem hard to find, precisely because they are organized by affections that are not always obvious, even to the person who has them.

Swedenborg makes clear that each of us creates and shapes our character or essential identity within the historical framework of specific times and places. We do not choose our location or circumstance, but we do choose the response. Our inner character is the sum of our responses to the countless situations in which we find ourselves in life.

The challenge of creating a valid biography of Swedenborg is made more complex by the spiritual journey he pursued while engaging in his regular intellectual and economic projects. His quest for spiritual growth drove his worldly activities. When he was called to repentance and service to the Lord, he altered his career path accordingly. No explanation of these changes could be predicted on the basis of the outcomes of his economic success alone. He radically altered the trajectory of his career path to accommodate his spiritual goals. His biography would be inexplicable without an account of his spiritual mission. That mission also was bound up with his quest for personal salvation.

His regeneration and his revelation were inextricably mixed; no account of one is possible without serious attention to the other.

As a result, the chapters of this book do not present the reader with Swedenborg's life in a linear fashion, beginning with his birth in Stockholm in 1688 and ending with his death in London in 1772, with the chapters in between focusing on the significant events of his life as they unfolded. Rather, the chapters of this book are thematic. They focus on the defining environments and events of his life (both material and spiritual) and his responses to them.

## CHAPTER 1 – FIRST STIRRINGS

This opening chapter gives a brief glimpse into the child Emanuel Swedberg (ennobled to Swedenborg in 1719). Today the significance of childhood in the creation of character is well known. Its importance is simply taken for granted. And yet, during the time of Swedenborg's childhood, nothing seemed further from the truth. Almost nothing is recorded about infancy and childhood during the 17th century and, despite the fact that his own life is extremely well documented, very little is known about his childhood. The main events are known: the place and dates of his birth and christening are recorded in Stockholm, as is the fact that the family settled in Uppsala in 1692. The deaths of his mother and brother are recorded in Uppsala in the summer of 1696, and his father's second marriage in 1697.

In addition, facts are known about the house his father completed in 1698, Emanuel's matriculation at the university in 1699, courses he took during his tenure there, and the date of his graduation in 1709. Other biographers have chosen to discuss his childhood within the framework of the skeleton of events outlined above. Here, another tack is taken.

Despite the paucity of material, I would like to introduce Emanuel Swedberg as a four-year- old child, no longer an infant but a young boy still wearing the traditional *kolt* or frock indicating he is not yet a young man. I would like him to come to life for you not as the formidable great man he became, but as a boy in the process of becoming: innocent, eager, precocious, and a bit audacious.

My hope is that in discovering the inner and outer milieus in which Swedenborg grew up, empathy will develop for him, his questions, his projects, and perhaps his solutions. It may also be possible to arrive at greater clarity about his mature concerns, growing out of the world of his childhood and in reaction to it. I have been drawn to recreating one day in his early life because roots and beginning have always fascinated me. I would like to know both the little boy and the world that nurtured him – the structures that gave him his life, his loves and his ways.

Emanuel, the boy who was given a very powerful and perhaps prophetic



biblical name by his father, “God with us,” nonetheless slept, woke, ate, dreamed, played and prayed like other children. And, despite the fact that his parents thought that angels spoke through him, he was a child like his brothers and sisters and the children of other priests and academics in the walled university town of Uppsala. He shared in their common opportunities and was subject to similar regimens and discipline. His expectations and the expectations of others for him were also drawn from this environment.

I would like to weave what little is known about the child Emanuel and his family into the tapestry of what were, in the 17th century, the most important days of the Swedish calendar: *Julafton* (Christmas Eve) and *Juldagen* (Christmas Day). In Christian Uppsala in 1692, they were also the holiest, celebrating as they did the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ, as well as the coming of the New Year.

Such a recreation is possible because the external world of Uppsala and the elaborate traditions structuring these days are well documented. A map exists of Uppsala dated 1702, drawn by Johan Bussar, just prior to the great Uppsala fire on May 17th. On the map it is possible to see Swedenborg’s small wooden boyhood home, as well as the large stone house his father built on the property between 1696 and 1698.

There are also several excellent books written in the early 20th century that detail Swedish customs surrounding Jul. One book by Calender is called *Nordisk Jul (Northern Christmas)*, published in 1928; the second is part of a series by Troels-Lund – *Daily Life in the North during the 15th Century* – published in 1931; and the third in 1936 is by Martin Pin Nillson on *Årets Folkliga Fester (The Year’s Folk Holidays)*. They explore the pagan origins of the folk holidays and their Christian adaptations. The sources are incredibly consistent in describing the traditions that structure both *Julafton* and *Juldagen*. I also consulted with Håkan Liby, Director of Upplandsmuseet, who published a book in 2001 – *Preparations for Holidays in Uppland: From cradle to grave and throughout the year*.

All of this makes it possible to re-create the days of the Swedberg family with some certainty, permitting events to be placed within a highly patterned framework of activities in which to express their individual qualities and characteristics.

There is, however, an important caveat. Despite the wealth of material at my disposal, it would be irresponsible to suggest that what I have written is a precise documentation of what occurred in the Swedberg home on *Julafton* in 1692. This is as true for the ritual framework that structures the day, as it is for the particular conversations and activities reported. Nonetheless, it does represent as accurately as possible what took place. It is an imaginative re-creation faithful to the sources, but it is nonetheless a re-creation. Håkan

Liby encouraged this disclaimer and also assured me that such a re-creation is as close as one can come to entering the lives of the people who lived in 1692. What has come down to us are general outlines, while the specifics are lost in the shadows of time.

Why then write such a chapter in what purports to be a historical biography and not a work of fiction? I believe it adds a crucial dimension to the formation of Emanuel Swedenborg's character not available in any previous biographies. While I wrote about the traditional and rural qualities of Jesper Swedenborg in my dissertation (*The New Church in a Disenchanted World*, University of Pennsylvania, 1985), and in a short biography of Swedenborg in *Swedenborg and His Influence*, I did not fully appreciate the significance of the few lines I penned in 1988: "Throughout his long and prosperous life, Swedenborg never abandoned the perspective and sensitivities of his early rural upbringing with its emphasis on the supernatural, piety, and good works."

It is one thing to suggest that the supernatural influenced or was part of Jesper Swedenborg's world; it is quite another to see that the thin line between the natural world and the spiritual world so evident in his father's world was also a taken-for-granted aspect of the whole of Emanuel's childhood. The nature of that relationship structures the chapter "First Stirrings." One result of attaining a better understanding of the "spiritual" environment of his childhood is a significantly altered appreciation of his "spiritual call." His religious message can be understood, in part, as a re-interpretation and modernization of the reality he took for granted as a little boy in a *kolt*.

## CHAPTER 2 – CIRCLES AND WORLDS: SWEDEN'S SETTING IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY EUROPE

Swedenborg was born in Sweden, a country situated on the Baltic on the very edge of Europe. Europe is by the Mediterranean in the South, the Atlantic to the West, and the Baltic in the North. Somewhere north of Uppsala, Sweden, Christian civilization came to an end in his lifetime. Somewhere not far beyond the woods and dales of Dalarna and the Behm family mines in Axmar lived the Sami, an indigenous aboriginal people. To a certain extent Sweden was an outpost of Christianity. Perhaps that is why the grip of the Lutheran Church there was so strong.

In addition to being born in a Protestant and Lutheran land, Swedenborg was born into a world of privilege based primarily on iron and copper mining. It was a world of raw materials, commerce and trade. He was born in the era when northern Europe began to come into its own as the tides of wealth and power in Europe were slipping out of the sun-drenched hills and valleys of Italy and Spain and shifting to the iron and copper producing centers of trade in the

colder regions of England, Holland and Germany. Powerful nation-states no longer sought to dominate the Mediterranean but rather looked to the Baltic.

The heroic efforts of the pious Lutheran King Gustaf Adolphus laid the foundation for Sweden's era of greatness early in the 17th century. In 1688 Sweden was a power to be reckoned with. Thirty years later in 1718, however, her might lay in ruins, used up by another warrior, King Karl XII. With the death of the king the era of Great Power gave way to the era called by the Swedes, *Frihetstiden*, or the time of freedom.

The world was changing and Sweden was changing with it. Swedenborg, his family, and his circles of intimates and acquaintances actively participated in those changes.

When his older brother Albrecht died in 1696, Emanuel became the oldest son and was destined to assume all the duties entailed. While taking on such a role had little immediate impact, later in his life he was deeply involved in various negotiations involving family mines and family wealth, particularly with his mother's sister Britta Behm. When the family was ennobled in 1719 and changed the family name from Swedberg to Swedenborg, he began to attend the sessions of the House of Nobles now open to him and began his life-long involvement with the political concerns of the kingdom.

The extended family included many priests, although none of the Swedberg children were members of the clergy. Swedenborg's sister Anna was married to Erik Benzelius, who for many years was the librarian in Uppsala. Later he was named Bishop of Linköping and shortly before his death in 1743 he was named Archbishop. Benzelius' father was also an archbishop, as were two of his brothers. Other marriages brought other priests into the family.

One such man, Bishop Filenius, was married to Ulrika, the youngest daughter of Anna and Erik Benzelius. In 1769, when Swedenborg attempted to import the first religious book he had signed – *Amore Conjugiale (Married Love)* – he asked Filenius to use his influence in the House of the Clergy to have the book released from customs. Filenius agreed to do so and sealed the argument with “A brotherly kiss.” But when the time came to support release of the book, Filenius lobbied against it. Swedenborg felt betrayed. Nonetheless, the attempt to use such influence demonstrates the importance of this circle in Sweden and in Swedenborg's life.

During his lifetime, Swedenborg's works attracted interest among the clergy, plus traders and merchants in Sweden, particularly in the West and in Göteborg. These men form another important circle of friends and acquaintances. Some were censured for their use of Swedenborg's teachings and a struggle ensued between the guardians of tradition and those open to seeing Christianity in the new light shed by his books. Supporters of Swedenborg's teachings were accused of heresy and tried before the consistory.

Other important circles that Swedenborg was intimately connected to were the Board of Mines and the royal family. He also participated in areas beyond the somewhat parochial and limited confines of Sweden. He developed contacts within the scientific communities of England, Holland, France and Germany. When abroad he lived among the artisans and interacted with the printers who published his books in Leipzig, Amsterdam and London. For a brief period in 1744 he also had contact with the Moravians in London.

He was both an observer and an inquirer in the spiritual world opened to him after his call. He traveled widely in the spiritual realm, meeting old friends and acquaintances, the famous and the notorious during their earthly lives, and many who died in obscurity only to rise to prominence in heaven, the world of spirits, and hell. He recorded many of these experiences in an unpublished diary between 1747 and 1765, and later in what he called “*Memorable Relations*” (instructive experiences about the spiritual world) inserted into his published works. Associations with some of these spiritual places were a result of his social role and status; others were the result of his achievements in science, philosophy and foreign travel in the natural world.

### CHAPTER 3 – STRANGER IN STRANGE LANDS

This chapter takes up Swedenborg’s 11 journeys in Europe. Often his first destination was Amsterdam, by way of Copenhagen or Hamburg. From Holland he frequently traveled to England and sometimes to France. On one trip to Italy he traveled as far south as Rome. Prior to his “call” he spent time in various German principalities learning about mining and publishing books. In his youth he spent close to a year in Swedish Pomerania on the Baltic. Thus, from his first student trip in 1710 until his death in London 62 years later, he was often on the move, finding himself to be a stranger in foreign lands. His constant travel might even have made him a stranger in his homeland. His last journey from Sweden was in 1770, and his final boat trip from Holland to England occurred in 1771, seven months before his death. He died a foreigner, a Swede, while a resident in London and was buried in the Swedish Church.

When one considers that Immanuel Kant never left Königsberg, the extent of Swedenborg’s foreign travels during the 18th century is quite astounding, particularly because he was 82 when he left on his last foreign journey. However, the extent of his spiritual travels was even greater! He reports that he had daily contact with the spiritual world for 27 years from 1745 to 1772. It is not surprising that he met some of his family, friends and acquaintances in the spiritual world.

This chapter explores Swedenborg the traveler, the stranger, the marginal man who scientifically noted the details of the worlds and realms he lived in.

His keen ability to observe served him well, whether in iron and copper mines, capital cities or small towns, the Board of Mines or the House of Nobles, royal circles or craftsmen's humble work places, and finally in heavenly gardens as well as hellish hovels.

The chapter touches on the background and ingredients of his marginality. It also provides many examples of the acuity of his observations in a wide variety of settings. His very marginality honed his skills and expanded his ability to record his experiences.

#### **CHAPTER 4 – SWEDENBORG ON THE BOARD OF MINES: CIVIL SERVANT AND JUDGE**

At the time of his spiritual call, Emanuel Swedenborg had served on the Board of Mines in Sweden for more than 20 years and served three more before refusing appointment to become president of the board and then resigning. The focus of this chapter, Swedenborg's tenure and career on the Board of Mines, has been described in detail in *The Swedenborg Epic* by Cyriel O. Sigstedt (1952), but there has never been a thorough examination of the scope of his activities with regard to its impact on the Swedish economy, or the meaning of such training and discipline with the duties entailed in his call to serve the Lord. .

For example, how did serving as a judge in mining disputes impact his ability to assess the validity of competing claims to truth? After 20 years of service how did his colleagues and superiors judge his honesty and reliability? Exploring an answer to these and similar questions is the focus of the chapter.

#### **CHAPTER 5 – REASON AND FAITH, FAITH AND REASON: THE GREAT PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS OF SWEDENBORG'S TIME**

Not long after becoming officially established on the Board of Mines, Swedenborg sought to address the most vexing philosophical question of his day: the reconciliation of faith and reason. He approached this issue from the standpoint of a committed Christian philosopher as well as one supremely confident in his ability to succeed. His aim was indeed breathtaking as he sought nothing less than to "explain the soul to the very senses" and thus reestablish faith as the fundamental basis for the further development of reason and the sciences. His audience was the intellectual and philosophical elite of Europe and thus he hoped to heal the chasm that had opened in the heart of European culture. This project would consume the bulk of his creative energy over the next 20 years.

In this chapter I describe the contemporary state of play on this issue and the position of the major philosophers who had been grappling with

it. These men included Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Wolff. Their efforts were profound and important. Swedenborg gained important insights during this process which greatly advanced his own thinking, although it led not precisely where he intended. In the following chapter I provide the results of his incredible effort which lay the indispensable basis for the next stages of his revelatory journey.

## CHAPTER 6 – SWEDENBORG’S RESPONSE

Swedenborg’s effort to craft a response to the naturalist challenge to religious faith was itself expressed in the language of natural philosophy. It was for him, after all, intellectual elites who needed to be reconciled to religion. Over the course of his multi-year quest for a solution he completed four philosophical treatises: *The Principia* (three volumes) in 1734; *The Infinite: The Final Cause of Creation* (one volume) in 1734; *The Economy of the Soul’s Domain* (two volumes) 1739-40; and *The Soul’s Domain* (three volumes) 1743-45.

These brilliant and informative studies established Swedenborg among the leading natural scientists of his time in northern Europe. In the early stage of this work he was extremely confident of his eventual success. In this chapter I detail the substance of that work. He discussed cosmology, planetary motion, the origin of the natural universe, the mineral world, human anatomy and numerous other topics. On the major issues of his day he provided analyses comparable to that of the leading philosophers of his time.

As he proceeded, he became aware that he was not approaching his objective. How he came to this conclusion and what circumstances compelled him is the subject of this chapter. Eventually he realized while the work was important, it was preliminary to his call and not the way to truth. The psychological and spiritual crises which he underwent at this point changed his life completely. They opened up the path to his revelatory call and his spiritual rebirth.

## CHAPTER 7 – DEATH AND REBIRTH

At the height of his career as an empirical scientist and natural philosopher, Swedenborg abandoned his most ambitious project: *Regnum Animale* or the Soul’s Kingdom. After publishing the third volume in London in 1745 he let it die. He had been assailed by disturbing dreams and visions the previous year in which he saw his life pass before him. He caught glimpses of his projects, his ambition, his pride, his lusts, and self-love. Perhaps seeking some control and understanding of these unbidden memories and montages he recorded them in his travel diary and interpreted them. In his sixth entry on August 12, 1743,

Swedenborg noted a meeting he had with his Royal Highness Adolph Fredrich of Hamburg, the newly elected successor to the Swedish throne. Swedenborg was pleased to show him the manuscripts of his *Regnum Animale* which he planned to publish as well as reviews of previously published works.

It is not hard to picture Swedenborg, who was slightly older than the painting of him found in the frontispiece of his 1734 *Principia*, presenting his works to the prince. In it he is wearing flowing robes, a long curly wig and a somewhat haughty self-satisfied expression. One cannot look at this painting and not notice that the subject was very aware of his incredible talents and gifts: he looks peerless. Although there do not appear to be any portraits of Swedenborg painted immediately after his frightening experiences, he did paint a portrait with words of himself in his diary. It conveys a somewhat less confident image during his subsequent ordeal. In entry number 267 from the night of October 12-13, 1744, he wrote,

*“I saw also in a vision that fine bread on a plate was presented to me; which was a sign that the Lord himself will instruct me since I have now come into the condition that I know nothing, and all preconceived judgments are taken away from me; which is where learning commences: namely first to be a child and then be nursed into knowledge, as is the case with me now.” (Swedenborg 1744)*

He continued working on the third volume of *The Soul’s Domain* throughout that winter and into the spring. He pondered the visionary experiences and prayed for additional guidance on his future direction. He received his answer in April of 1745 when the Lord himself visited and called Emanuel to be a revelator of the arcana (secrets) within the sacred scriptures. This was his divine mission.

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visions transformed him and his future. The secular man of science became a seer and visionary. His understanding of this transformation changed his purpose and the direction of his life. They were the most significant events in his life. If this had not happened, despite his obvious genius, he would be little remembered and there would be no controversy surrounding him that required explanation and response more than two centuries later.

The events that occurred in 1744 and 1745 colored Swedenborg's self-understanding, his character, his loves and his fundamental project. Thus, given the nature of this particular biography, understanding how he interpreted his call must be recounted in detail. One must have access to his mind in this process of transformation, or rebirth, in order to be faithful to his life as he experienced it. Very rarely in the history of human thought has a major writer left such a detailed and intimate record of his internal psychological experiences.

Swedenborg never intended these personal and life changing experiences to be made public. But he continued recording his private spiritual experiences for the next 20 years until 1765. They are compiled and published into several volumes called *The Spiritual Diary* or *Spiritual Experiences*. These records provide a rich source of insight into the explicit revelations of his published works.

## CHAPTER 8 – SWEDENBORG'S GARDEN

The period between Swedenborg's call (April 1745) and the beginning of his revelatory writing (December 1748) is easy for some to ignore. It comes between the terrifying visions of his *Journal of Dreams* and the writing of the *Arcana Coelestia*, the introduction to the foundational doctrines of the New Christianity. Yet this period, the second and final stage of his preparation, is essential to study in order to understand his mission.

Swedenborg was not simply the spokesman for the new truths; he had to truly understand them himself. He needed to undergo a difficult period of training and preparation by the Lord. It is clear from his early written efforts immediately after his divine call that he lacked both the correct idea of his new mission and the theological truths to undertake it. He was still under the influence of the doctrine of the established Lutheran religion in which he was raised. Those doctrines would be very difficult to overcome, especially since he was raised by a devout family whom he loved and respected. This process would take an additional three and a half years of intellectual and emotional struggle.

On the strictly theological level there were two essential doctrinal errors he faced and corrected in himself and later in his theological writings. They



are the established Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Doctrine of Faith Alone, also known as the Doctrine of Salvation through the vicarious atonement of Christ's crucifixion. These tenets were not only central to Lutheranism but for all reformed Protestant religions as well.

These two inter-twined doctrines depicted an all-powerful God sternly refusing to forgive humanity's sin. Only the intervention of His Son's sacrifice on the cross softened Him. Thus, Almighty God the Father permitted some humans to be saved only for Christ's sake. Humans themselves were completely passive and undeserving of this generous gift. On the more personal but interrelated level, we see Swedenborg pursuing his own spiritual regeneration. The two processes energize one another and propel him to the completion of his mission.

The aim of this chapter – Swedenborg's Garden – is to relate this training process as he experienced it. It also describes his active participation as he developed. In the course of this unfolding discussion the vital role of the image/vision of "the garden" becomes a potent unifying theme in Swedenborg's description of the Lord's plan for the salvation of the human race.

## CHAPTER 9 – EYEWITNESS TO THE APOCALYPSE

With the conclusion of the transformational experiences from 1744 to 1748, Swedenborg at last possessed the conviction and the spiritual insight to undertake his mission. So begins his identification with the assumption of the role of "servant of the Lord." This concept privately inspired him and guided his conduct for the rest of his life.

He said the publication of the eight-volume *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-1756) opened the seven seals described in the last book of the Lord's Word – *Revelation* or the *Apocalypse*. This permitted the Lord to carry out a Last Judgment in the spiritual world which altered the structure of the heavens and ended the legitimacy of the existing Christian churches. This occurred in the year 1757. Swedenborg published an account of this extraordinary event in 1758.

It was not long after the publication of that work, as well as several others, including *Heaven and Hell*, that Swedenborg experienced clairvoyancy while dining at the home of William Castell in the company of many guests in Göteborg. He saw a devastating fire burning in Stockholm some 300 miles away and reported what he saw to the assembled guests. They were astonished. The next day he was asked by the governor to give an account of exactly what he had seen. Soon thereafter news arrived in Göteborg about the Stockholm fire and it had taken place exactly as Swedenborg reported. News of this "wonder" spread throughout Europe. And now the anonymity Swedenborg had enjoyed

for 10 years regarding his authorship of these “strange religious books” was no longer possible. Now notoriety required that he take a new approach to his role as “servant of the Lord.”

From 1749 to 1759 Swedenborg had assumed the task of biblical exegesis revealing the internal or spiritual meaning of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, as well as that of an anthropologist reporting on the way of life and important events in the spiritual world. After 1759 when his public clairvoyant experience occurred, he shifted to writing doctrinal studies. This phase ends with the publication of an exegetical work on the Apocalypse in 1766.

With the publication of *Marriage Love* (1768), a work that focuses on moral life, he acknowledges his authorship, and on a back page lists the books he has previously published and those he intended to write in the future. He signs this book: “Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swede.” During this last phase of his natural life – he died in 1772 – not only does Swedenborg publicly acknowledge his authorship, he also took a new approach to the meaning of Christianity.

He provided some biographical information sought by a few individuals who had responded to the “Divine” message in his works. By this time, philosopher Immanuel Kant and Friedrich C. Oettinger, a prominent German theologian, had begun to stir up controversy concerning Swedenborg’s whole enterprise, so it is possible that the individuals who wanted the biographical information were preparing for additional controversies in the future.

Despite the subtly shifting nature of Swedenborg’s writing, it is important to point out that at no time did he assume that his role required him to found a new church or religion. He stated very clearly in *True Christianity* that his role as “servant of the Lord” only entailed the writing and publishing of books.

The controversies created by Kant, Oettinger and others grew as the 1760s progressed. Representatives of the Swedish Lutheran Church took mounting notice of the “heresies” contained in Swedenborg’s religious writings. This period of increasing conflict engaged his attention as he defended his doctrines as well as the people who believed in them.

*Despite the subtly shifting nature of Swedenborg’s writing, it is important to point out that at no time did he assume that his role required him to found a new church or religion. He stated very clearly in True Christianity that his role as “servant of the Lord” only entailed the writing and publishing of books.*

The heresy trials of his clerical followers were very painful to him. This chapter provides an account of these proceedings and their outcome.

In 1771 at the end of his career and almost at the end of his natural life, he publicly acknowledged his role. He signed *True Christianity*, “Emanuel Swedenborg, Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This chapter examines Swedenborg’s changing understanding of this servant role: how he assumed it, grew into it, and how he altered his writing output in response to events both in the spiritual world and on earth.

As the sad public events were unfolding in Sweden and on the continent, Emanuel was in the final stages of completing the manuscript for this last work, *True Christianity*. This text marks the culmination of his revelatory mission. When it was completed, on June 19, 1770, Swedenborg wrote that the Lord called together His disciples in the spiritual world and proclaimed the founding of the New Christian Church. At this point (1770), Emanuel left Sweden for England to see to the publication of the manuscript. He would never return to his homeland.

#### CHAPTER 10 – CONCLUSION

The last chapter of the biography describes the final years of Swedenborg’s life after the completion of *True Christianity*. It also presents a summary of his major doctrinal contributions and a brief statement of their impact. Finally, it discusses the state of western religion in this time of dominant naturalism and secularization. What form does prophecy now take to deliver a spiritual message of hope and transcendence? His response proposes a novel reformulation of the fundamental religious calling fitted to the modern context of rationality and human freedom.

# Life Lines

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

## JOHN AND SYLVIA PARKER: MODELING THE NEW CHURCH FAMILY

Edward John Parker and his wife, Lois Edith Motum, had three children in Toronto during the 1930s: John, Sylvia and Richard. Richard passed away four years ago at the age of 82. In the past few months both John and Sylvia have joined him, Sylvia in December and John in January. Like Richard, they were both devoted church members and they had a considerable impact on the life of the church.

Sylvia is remembered especially for her lifelong commitment to New Church education. She attended the Olivet Day School in Toronto growing up, and later attended the Academy college, earning her degree in 1957. She returned to Olivet, teaching there for the next 21 years. In 1978 she was called to open a new school in Rochester, Michigan, where she worked until 1984, earning her Masters in Education from Oakland University.

In 1984, Sylvia returned to the Bryn Athyn College Education Department, overseeing practicums and teaching courses to new recruits. The college is extremely grateful for her excellent teaching and her work in the development of the Education program. In a 2006 letter to *New Church Life*, she wrote:

*To reach a student you always need to be willing to try teaching and explaining by using another approach. Being “willing” is the key. But looking deeper . . . my personal belief (is) that the essence of a New Church teacher must be a living faith. This is developed by a faithful reading and application of the Lord’s Word in daily*



John and Sylvia Parker

*life, so that he/she may teach at any level from the right side of the boat, that is, from love – a combined love of the Lord’s Word, of teaching, of students wherever they are, and of the subject under discussion. For teachers, parents, or indeed any adult, it will forever be true, that “one sows and another reaps.” May the Lord always be the ultimate Reaper.*

John spent the majority of his working career as an Automobile Underwriting Manager in Toronto. He attended Bryn Athyn College and was a lifelong member of the General Church and the Olivet Church Society. He was a founding member of the General Church in Canada and served on its Board, the Academy Corporation, as well as several terms on the Olivet Society Board and Pastor’s Council, including 10 years as Assistant Treasurer, and was a lifelong loyal member of the Forward Sons. He was very involved in the 1957/58 move from the Parkdale Church site to Burnhamthorpe Road and served as Secretary of the Building Committee during this time of transition.

In his last 10 working years, he especially enjoyed running the new Swedenborg Book Store, specializing in religious reading material, where he found many opportunities to share his active interest in Christianity and cultivation of the growth of important spiritual and moral concepts. The bookstore was purposely located on a busy Toronto street. It was a forward-thinking experiment in the Toronto Society to locate the bookstore in a prominent city location where it would catch the attention of passing traffic. John loved this idea and was proud of the work. His experiences there broadened his perspective on other faiths and backgrounds and he truly loved engaging visitors in faith conversations. He was a modest and charitable man, who fervently believed in, and lived, a life of use and service to his neighbor.

His son Wayne recalls his Dad coming home from work on Friday with his paycheck. He would go to his dresser and line up the dollar bills in piles marked groceries, insurance, mortgage, etc. Each pile would go into an envelope. The very first envelope was the Olivet Church contribution envelope, to go into the plate on Sunday morning. Wayne notes:

*When I asked him why, the answer was simply that, “This belongs to the Lord and tithes are not the change left on your dresser on Sunday morning. They are to come off the top of the deck because they reflect our priorities and the Church is first in our hearts.” As an adult, this powerful lesson became more and more important with every passing year.*

John is married to Erska Alden, and their children are sons Karl, who passed away last year, and Wayne, and daughters Gwenda, Sharon, Holly, Lisa and Nancy, along with numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. Their

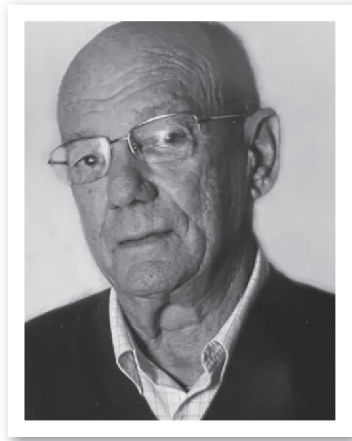
Aunt Syl loved them very much, along with the children and grandchildren of Richard and Gillian Parker: Sheila, Janet, Keith, Phil and Erik.

The church is grateful for the Parker family, their love for the Lord's kingdom, and their many contributions to the life and well-being of the church.

(JFS)

**ROBERT B. SMITH:  
GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT**

Every society has special men and women at the bedrock. They are the ones always answering the call when something needs to be done, volunteering their time and expertise, leading out of love for the church, and seeking no reward or recognition. Such a man was Bob Smith, who passed away suddenly on January 16 at age 87 in Glenview, Illinois.



Bob Smith

Bob was born and raised in Bryn Athyn, the church and Academy Schools. He married Naomi Gladish 65 years ago, and together they never stopped loving and serving the church. He was a pillar of both the Glenview New Church, where they made their home and raised their family, and the Boynton Beach New Church in Florida, where they spent many winters. Behind a confident, welcoming smile, he was “a rock that shall never be moved.”

Bob was especially known and respected for his leadership of the popular Eldergarten – which became the Boynton Beach Retreat. It was a team effort – “the two Bobs,” Bob Smith and Bob Brickman, with their wives Naomi and Gail – who made it happen all those years and kept people coming back for more. It took a lot of work and organization – with several other volunteers – and was one of the more successful church programs ever undertaken. Bob was the ultimate director, in his trademark sweater vest, getting everyone where they needed to be, and enjoying every planned and unplanned minute.

Bob was always looking for ways to help spread the good news and grow the church, including taking an active interest in the emerging church in Africa.

Typical of his commitment to the growth and stability of the church was a letter to *New Church Life* (September/October 2023, page 357): Women in

the Church. He was always restless with a comfortable status quo and was particularly concerned that too many young people and women were feeling left out of church organization, involvement and ownership.

He was not one to stir things up; he just wanted to get people thinking about ways to make the church healthier and more welcoming. With his typical gentle, sincere approach he laid out the issues as he saw them, hoping that this would lead to productive, charitable discussion and debate. He saw no easy remedies or solutions but was confident that we could work together to produce a healthier church.

Bob was a respected leader because he lived his faith – within the church, in his career, and with his wife and family: children Jennifer Allen, Matthew, Rachel Asplundh, and Owen, 13 grandchildren, five great grandchildren, and brothers Glenn and Colin. (Brother Carey had predeceased him.)

He was the epitome of the “good and faithful servant,” and we gratefully rejoice with him and his family as he “enters into the joy of the Lord.”

(BMH)

#### THE CELEBRATION OF EASTER IN THE GENERAL CHURCH

From before the Academy was founded in 1876, and through the time that the movement separated from Convention in 1890, there was an ongoing search for customs and rituals appropriate and faithful to the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine. In the pages of *New Church Life* there are interesting descriptions of how they celebrated Easter.

For example, the following quote describes a robe worn at the time and both a confirmation of 11 young people and the Holy Supper as part of the Easter service.

*PHILADELPHIA 1881 - The chief day of the month was Easter Sunday. The floral decorations at the church were beautiful, and the brilliant sun shone through the stained glass over the altar and fell in a blush of glory on the pages of the open Word. The pastor wore for the first time a robe – silk, of Hyacinthian blue, over a snowy under-robe of linen, which was clasped by a belt of golden lace and a buckle of gold. As he performed the various priestly functions our minds were, more than ever before, removed from him as an individual and directed to his sacred office, and the sphere of worship coming down into ultimates and resting there in fullness was deep and strengthening.*

*The church was filled by a congregation of 144. After the reading of the lessons, 11 young people were confirmed in the Doctrines of New Church. Then followed a short sermon on the text from*

*Matthew 18:28, full of instruction and encouragement. After this the sacrament of the Holy Supper was administered, and the persons joined in the holy rite. From beginning to end the sphere of devotion was powerful, affecting all and reminding one of the glorious forms of worship in which the New Church on earth will bring the love of the LORD into ultimates, in the bright but far-distant future. (New Church Life, 1881)*

This next quote talks about the effort to create appropriate ritual and suitable music, maybe especially the development of harmony in congregational singing.

*RETROSPECT OF THE YEAR 1894: THE USES OF WORSHIP have made a remarkable progress during the year in the direction of external order, power, and beauty. The externals of worship of the Church of the Academy are gradually assuming new and much more beautiful form than have ever been in use in the New Church. New and impressive rites have been prepared for the festivals of the Incarnation (Christmas), the Glorification (Easter), and the Institution of the Church (June 19th).*

*The new music for the Psalms, which is being composed by Mr. C. J. Whittington, of London, and published by the Academy Book Room, is a blessing from the LORD which cannot be sufficiently appreciated. The practice in singing this heaven-born music, and the spiritual teachings that have been given on the subject, have increased the general interest in the cultivation of the Science and Art of Harmony, illustrated in part by the renewed impetus in the formation of Church Orchestras in Societies connected with the Academy and the General Church. (New Church Life, 1894)*

In 1905 there was a discussion of festival services in the General Church, and especially the addition of a celebration of June 19th in addition to that of Christmas and Easter.

*GENERAL CHURCH CLERGY MEETINGS 1905 - Mr. Gladish, who introduced the subject, said that in the Jewish Church there were three festivals, the Paschal Supper, the Feast of First Fruits, and the Feast of Ingathering. In the Christian Church there were likewise three, Christmas, Easter and Ascension. He did not think that the New Church needs to celebrate Ascension Day as it was instituted as a festival in accommodation to the state of the disciples. But the Nineteenth of June comes near Ascension Day, and is a day having*



*particular reference to the establishment of the New Church. It is the birthday of the New Church. It would therefore be proper that the three feasts of the New Church should be Christmas, Easter and the Nineteenth of June. The Holy Supper should be administered on that day or on the nearest Sunday. It does not seem sufficient to celebrate it merely in a social way, though it would be useful to have a feast of charity in the evening.*

*In the discussion which followed it was pointed out that what Mr. Gladish advocated is being done in several of our Societies. Also, that besides having the Holy Supper on these three festivals, it is generally held a fourth time at the opening of the new season in the fall. Mr. Odhner said that there is a festival which the Church could usefully celebrate in the fall, namely, the First of September, on which day, in the year 1748, Swedenborg brought the manuscript of the first volume of the Arcana Coelestia to a close, and then witnessed "a general glorification throughout the spiritual world on account of the Advent of the Lord." (Spiritual Diary 3029)*

*Bishop Pendleton said that in order that the festival of the Nineteenth might be complete, there should be two days for it, the Nineteenth and the Twentieth. In fact, there should be three days if possible. Every festival to be complete should occupy three days. It cannot really be completed in less time. It should revive the spirit of the Church, or, what is the same, it should be a revival. Into a festival of the Church three elements should enter: worship, instruction and social life. (New Church Life 1905)*

These examples illustrate the continuing thoughts and discussions about worship and festivals in the early days of the General Church. Discussions like these have gone on right up to the present day, with church practices continually being modified as ideas change about what is appropriate and pleasing and what fits best with the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine.

(JFS)

## WE ARE NEVER ALONE

We are blessed with the church, blessed with the Lord's revelation, blessed to really know the Lord and His Word, blessed with certainty in a flailing world. We are blessed as well with glimpses of the universal but often invisible New Church growing and nurtured all around us. These are signs – sometimes

grand, sometimes subtle – that the Lord is known and loved and received in many ways. And all of it is heartening.

I came across one example in an insightful book by William Kent Krueger, *Ordinary Grace*, set in rural Minnesota in 1961. It is a novel about uncommon wisdom among common folk, and the enduring grace of God.

The narrator is Frank Drum, telling the story 40 years later of his coming of age as a 13-year-old – in a summer of death and secrets, faith and wisdom. He and his younger brother discover the body of a vagrant under a railroad trestle. No one knows who he is or how he died – only that his was a lonely life, left with no one in it. But Frank's father, Nathan, a country pastor, decides that the man deserves a proper burial.

Nathan Drum is Atticus Finch in a clerical collar – a quietly heroic man of solid conviction and purpose, hearthstone wisdom and trust in God. He led this service before a handful of neighbors – strangers to this man – reading from the *23rd Psalm* and *Romans*, then ending with: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Then he closed his Bible and said from his heart:

We believe too often that on the roads we walk we walk alone. Which is never true. Even this man who is unknown to us was known to God and God was his constant companion. God never promised us an easy life. He never promised that we wouldn't suffer, that we wouldn't feel despair and loneliness and confusion and desperation. What He did promise was that in our suffering we would never be alone. And though we may sometimes make ourselves blind and deaf to His presence He is beside us and around us and within us always. We are never separated from His love. And He promised us something else, the most important promise of all. That there would be surcease. That there would be an end to our pain and our suffering and our loneliness, that we would be with Him and know Him, and this would be heaven. This man, who in life may have felt utterly alone, feels alone no more. This man, whose life may have been endless days and nights of endless waiting, is waiting no more. He is where God always knew he would be, in a place prepared. And for this we rejoice.

This is the extraordinary grace – that no matter how forgotten and abandoned we may feel, we are never alone. What more can we add but “Amen.” And “Thank you.”

(BMH)

## THE TAPESTRY OF OUR LIVES

In a touching Epilogue to *Ordinary Grace* Kreuger tells of reuniting with his brother and his aging father (his mother has died) in New Bremen, Minnesota, these 40 years later – to reflect, to laugh, to remember, and to place flowers on the graves of friends and loved ones. It is both a bonding and haunting ritual. He writes:

It seems to me that when you look back at a life, yours or another's, what you see is a path that weaves into and out of deep shadow. So much is lost. What we use to construct the past is what has remained in the open, a hodgepodge of fleeting glimpses. Our histories, like my father's current body, are structures built of toothpicks. So what I recall of that last summer in New Bremen is a construct both of what stands in the light and what I imagine in the dark where I cannot see.

We look back on our lives with a sense of wonder – all the things we remember, and so much more we have forgotten. With a mix of curiosity and trepidation, we know we are writing our Book of Life every day of our lives, that we may relive parts of it in the spiritual world, and that every detail is known to the Lord. That may seem intimidating but is not meant to be.

We recognize that path “that weaves into and out of deep shadow . . . the hodgepodge of fleeting glimpses.” What does it all mean? And where does it lead? These questions have long haunted writers, readers, thinkers and dreamers.

Consider renowned American writer Thornton Wilder, who pondered the role of providence in our lives in two books written 40 years apart.

He began in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, written in 1928, telling the story of five people falling to their death in 1714 when a rope bridge collapsed. Why these five, he wondered, and not those who had just crossed or were waiting to cross? How do we make sense of it all? Is it just bad luck? Or God's will? Is there a divine plan to each and every life, or is it all just random acts and consequences?

Brother Juniper, who witnesses the accident, tries to reconcile the tragedy with the nature of God. He ponders: “Either we live by accident and die by accident, or we live by a plan and die by a plan.”

After 40 years of ruminating on this mystery, Wilder wrote another book, *The Eighth Day*, about a good and decent man whose life is ruined by bad luck. He offers the image of a tapestry depicting each of our unique lives. On one side is a tangle of threads and knots – the hodgepodge our lives often look like to us. On the other side is what all this work produces – a work of art – with every twist and knot contributing to a grand design.

This is what Krueger seeks, what Wilder sought, what we all ponder amid the tangled webs of our lives. The beautiful tapestry that makes sense of it all is what God sees.

(BMH)

## THOSE WHO ‘DON’T NEED GOD’

Many people considered learned in this world, but who know nothing of the Lord and turn their backs on Him, are said to be among the “stupid” in the spiritual world. Those who look to themselves rather than follow the Lord are lost. Their pride and their ego say they don’t need God in their lives, but they delude themselves.

Among the prideful is Dr. Anthony Fauci, the controversial czar of the covid pandemic in the United States. Whatever you think of his science or his politics, he is a learned man. But in a recent interview he claimed that he doesn’t need church, or prayer, God or religion in his life anymore.

Yes, he was baptized, confirmed and married in the church, and his children were baptized too. But, in a burst of hubris typical of all too many these days, he says: “I think my own personal ethics on life are enough to keep me going on the right path.”

There are all too many who agree with him. They may even consider themselves spiritual but just don’t need church or God in their lives. They are doing just fine on their own, thank you. So far.

What they don’t realize – or won’t admit – is that their lives are a gift from the Lord: every day. Whether they know it or not they could not live a moment without Him. They may feel confident that they can figure things out, overcome challenges, and be relatively content just relying on themselves – until they aren’t.

We know we all must endure temptations – attacks on what we love – to be regenerated for heaven. “While a person is being regenerated and becoming spiritual, he is involved in constant conflict.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 59) Although we may feel alone, the Lord is always with us – and fighting for us. Those who “don’t need God” fight alone.

Consider the ultimate prescription:

*The Lord desires a state of humility in a person for that person’s sake, because the Lord can flow in with heavenly good when that state exists in a person. (Arcana Coelestia 5957)*

No one is regenerated without temptation – without the Lord’s redemption. For Dr. Fauci and all of those who feel safe in their isolation – confident that they don’t need God and prayer and church and religion in their lives – they

would find themselves a lot healthier and happier with a dose of spiritual reality and “booster shot” of humility.

(BMH)

## THOSE WHO DO NEED GOD AND ARE SEARCHING

As distressing as it is to see so many people professing that they don't need God in their lives, and as discouraging as it is to see so much of today's media virulently anti-religious, there is hope.

One thing about media – whether newspapers, magazines, television or social platforms – they generally know what their audiences want and cater to that hunger. So, it is encouraging to see recent issues of *Time*, *Life* and *National Geographic* inviting readers with bold headlines to inquire into the “mysteries of faith” – especially the life after death.

A recent *Time Magazine* cover offers the provocative headline: *Heaven and the Afterlife – What Awaits Us?* This is the universal question, pondered through the ages. That so many still are ignorant of the Lord's revelation through Swedenborg in *Heaven and Hell* is both discouraging and challenging. We who have the answers people seek must always be looking for ways to get this revelation to them.

Time also teases these headlines: *Stories from the Beyond; The Science of Continuing Consciousness; and The Quest to Live Forever*. One chapter is headed: *How Rethinking Heaven Could Improve the World*. None of this can compete with Swedenborg's full title: *Things Seen and Heard in Heaven and Hell*. Yes, he actually has been there, talked with spirits and angels, and answers our most persistent questions.

*Life Magazine* focuses on *Miracles – The Presence of God in Our Lives*, a promising perspective. Included in the issue is *The Aura of Saints, Visions and Saviors*, and *Modern Miracles*. *National Geographic* offers a scholarly account of *The Story of Jesus*.

These treatments are more serious than the whimsical but no less searching book by Ken Jennings of *Jeopardy!* fame: *101 Places to See After You Die – A Travel Guide to the Afterlife*. (See a write-up of that book in Life Lines, New Church Life, November/December 2023, page 475.) As did the editors of *Time*, Jennings looked at the teachings of major religions throughout history, but only he included a brief and well-researched chapter about Swedenborg. But he did not reference the New Church, either, or where to get more information about Swedenborg and the church devoted to this revelation.

People are searching. They need more light.

(BMH)

**P.S.**

The November/December issue included a Life Line by the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons on the connection between Carl Lucas Norden, the maker of World War II Norden Bombsights, and the New Church. Adding another connection: My grandfather, George Synnestvedt, ran a building company out of Bryn Athyn for years, and during World War II the resources were redirected toward supporting war efforts. In order to ensure some continued work for his employees he was able to recommit his efforts toward building shipping crates for Norden Bombsights.

Teryn Synnestvedt Romaine  
Blairsville, Georgia

# Church News

*Compiled by Bruce Henderson*

## PASTORAL CHANGES

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

The following pastoral moves, pending approvals, will take place July 1, 2024:

The **Rev. Justin Schorran** has been nominated to serve as Pastor of the Boynton Beach New Church. The congregation responded enthusiastically to this nomination on February 4.

Justin's pending move from the Carmel New Church and School, in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, where he has been serving as Assistant to the Pastor for the past three years, will leave a vacancy there. We will be working with the congregation to consider creative ways of providing additional support.

The **Rev. Coleman Glenn** will join the Bryn Athyn Church pastoral staff as an Assistant to the Pastor. Coleman has expressed a desire to return to pastoral work. He will be leaving his teaching and Chaplain position at Bryn Athyn College – a role that he has loved.

The **Rev. Calvin Heinrichs** has been appointed to serve the Kansas City Circle in Missouri as its first resident pastor. We are excited to work with them as they increase their worship and outreach activities, aiming to eventually become a vibrant new General Church congregation. Calvin will be moving from Kempton where he has been serving this year.

The **Rev. Derrick Lumsden** will return to active pastoral work as Associate Pastor in the Kempton New Church and School. Welcome back Derrick.

The **Rev. Todd Beiswenger** will serve as the next pastor of the Olivet Church and School in Toronto. Todd will assume that pastorate in January of

2025, delayed due to their child's end-of-school schedule.

The **Rev. Jong Ui Lee** has been nominated to serve as pastor of the Morningstar Chapel in Atlanta, Georgia.

Our congratulations and support go to Justin and Denali Schorran, Coleman and Anne Grace Glenn, Calvin and Liza Heinrichs, and Derrick and Eden Lumsden, Todd and Jenn Beiswenger, Jong Ui Lee and Elaine Kim. We rejoice at these next steps in their service within the Lord's Church.

## **BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE**

*The Rev. Eric H. Carswell, President*

Due both to decisions by the Academy Board of Trustees and two major contributions, plus a number of others, Bryn Athyn College now has a significantly smaller deficit reduction target for the fiscal year that begins this July 1.

This is being achieved at the same time that we will have the smallest withdrawal from our endowment for that fiscal year that we have had in more than 10 years. Future help with replenishing Bryn Athyn College's endowment is also a possibility.

All of these things allow the College to continue collegiate New Church education in the near term and provide strong reassurance for the long-term future.

## **WHAT'S THE USE?**

*(From the Newsletter for Australia)*

*The Rev. Todd Beiswenger*

A planned January weekend retreat at the Roseville New Church was cancelled but then was resurrected in a shorter format for the weekend of January 20-21. The original theme was to be "What's the Use?" and it remained a resonant focus, especially in an era where traditional expressions of faith seem to be waning in our rapidly changing culture. As our church communities experience these shifts, many of us might find ourselves grappling with the profound question: What's the Use?

Yet, this question, poignant as it may seem, isn't just limited to our collective faith journey. It's also deeply personal. Each one of us, at different moments in our lives, might question the purpose or significance of our thoughts, intentions or actions. What value do they bring? What impact do they have? Frankly, some of us may even question our own use in this world.

For this reason the Roseville New Church decided to hold the retreat for



those who wish to engage on the subject. It was very successful.

This was the framework: In a world constantly evolving and redefining its values, how does an institution as venerable as the church retain its significance. How can it remain a beacon of hope, guidance and solace in today's landscape? We embark on this journey of discovery, seeking answers and perhaps finding even more questions, as we explore the enduring relevance of the church in our contemporary world.

There were three speakers: The Revs. **Todd Beiswenger, Ros Taylor and Howard Thompson.**

Ros led off with: *Why Worry? We Were Told This Would Happen.* She showed some of the discouraging numbers about church attendance and membership around the world, followed with teachings that basically say: "I told you this was going to happen."

Her main point was that the true New Church isn't about worshipping in buildings but a rethink about how people approach spirituality. She cited examples of ministries that are helping and teaching people but are outside of traditional church structures. This was a good reminder that the Lord has it all under control.

Howard followed with a session on *Uses of the Church*, noting that despite declining numbers the traditional church still has a useful role to play in the modern world, including individual, community and larger perspectives. He separated attendees into small groups to discuss specific questions.

What I heard is that is that organized religion is in a tough place right now – not only with fewer people interested but greater competition for those who are. We really need to examine what uses we can offer and provide, because without a focus on use how can we expect people to participate?

Todd offered a presentation on *New Church Perspectives on Organ Transplants* and offered several examples, such as people who have experienced profound changes after a heart transplant. Science can't explain this, but the Writings offer some ideas. When we look at teachings about the Grand Man, we learn that there are communities of spirits that interact with each of our organs. Could it be that when we transplant an organ, we are actually transplanting more than we realize?

Howard finished with a short presentation: *The Gospel of Ted Lasso.* In a popular television series that ran for three seasons, Lasso is a fictional American football coach hired to coach soccer for a Premier League team in the United Kingdom. He knows little about soccer but is such a wonderful human being that even the most ardent skeptics come to love and respect him. Ultimately, Howard suggested, he serves as a great role model for how we should implement New Church teachings in our lives that stand out because they rise above the ordinary.

## **GLENCAIRN AWARDS**

The Glencairn Award Committee is accepting applications for the Glencairn Award. The deadline for submission of applications for the 2024 award is March 29, 2024.

The award is given to a teacher or a member of a New Church community for outstanding achievements and/or contributions in these fields: religion, science, education, the arts, literature, or community service.

As provided in the gift that funds the award, such achievements are the sole criteria for the award. It may not be given as compensation for service or as a supplement to salary or based on the financial needs of the recipient.

If you know of someone who may be worthy of consideration, please submit a nomination application on the form you can request (by email or letter) from the Academy's Secretary-General Counsel, Phillip R. Zuber. (Phone: 267-502-2417 Email: [Phillip.zuber@anc-gc.org](mailto:Phillip.zuber@anc-gc.org))

All nominations and any other information provided about the nominee will be kept in strict confidence by the committee.

## **ACADEMY SUMMER CAMPS**

### **ANC Summer Camp**

The camp will run July 7-12 under the direction of **Jena Frey** and **Sarah Cooper Waelchli**.

The camp fee is \$659, with an early discount of \$75 for payment in full by April 1 and a sibling discount of \$50 for each child.

For information contact: [summercamp@ancss.org](mailto:summercamp@ancss.org)

### **Performing Arts Camp**

This camp runs June 17-27, offering an exciting theatrical experience for sixth, seventh and eighth-graders, and culminating in a performance of *Finding Nemo, Jr.*

The fee is \$525 which includes a keepsake script, digital download of the dress rehearsal video and a camp T-shirt.

For information email [sarah.waelchli@ancss.org](mailto:sarah.waelchli@ancss.org).

### **Tools4Life**

The camp will not be offered this year as staffing, programming and financial considerations are being reviewed for the future of the camp.

## JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT

*Charity: The First of the Church*

Rev. Matthew L. Genzlinger, Family Retreat Pastor

This year's Jacob's Creek Family Retreat will run July 25-28 at the Laurel Retreat Center in western Pennsylvania.

Every year we have a theme that helps us focus on specific teachings from the Lord's Word and how we can actively make them a part of our lives. This year's theme is: *Charity: The First of the Church*.

The Lord clearly teaches that, "Charity is the first of the church." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1091) When there is no charity, there is no church. (See *Doctrine of Faith* 69) When asked which commandment is the first of all, the Lord famously said: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God from thy whole heart . . . and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" (*Mark* 12:29-31)

In many ways this is a simple teaching. Yet we struggle at times as to what is the most charitable thing to do. There are various aspects to the Doctrine of Charity that must be understood if we want to practice charity well and truly make charity the first of our church.

This year at Jacob's Creek Family Retreat we will focus on teachings that help us better understand what genuine charity is and how we can better practice it in our day-to-day lives. Some of the topics to be explored:

- Charity and truth: which comes first?
- Charity itself vs. Benefactions of Charity
- The first of charity being to shun evils as sins
- Discriminate charity and charitably dealing with evil
- Practicing charity toward an individual vs. society vs. one's country vs. the entire human race
- Is it charitable to go on vacation and play video games?  
(Spoiler alert: The answer may be "yes!")

This year's pastoral staff will include myself, the **Rev. Coleman Glenn**, and others to be announced soon. This year's Retreat Directors are **Jamie and Julie Uber**. (Note that **Bradley and Andrea Cranch** are taking a year off to focus on their three sons' weddings!) With the help of many other dedicated volunteers as well, this promises to be another great year. We urge you to register early because we are capping attendance at 150. If you know of friends who would enjoy Jacob's Creek, please invite them. We look forward to welcoming one and all.

For information email: [jacobscreekfamilyretreat@gmail.com](mailto:jacobscreekfamilyretreat@gmail.com)

Website for more information: [www.jacobscreekfamilyrtreat.org](http://www.jacobscreekfamilyrtreat.org)

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## ORDINATION, Second Degree

*And I will give you pastors according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:15)*

### **Heinrichs, Calvin Bradley**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, January 21, 2024, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

## BAPTISMS

*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. (Psalm 127:3)*

### **Aganmwonyi, Eseosa Elizabeth**

At London, United Kingdom, December 17, 2023 (born August 12, 2023), daughter of Joseph Aganmwonyi and Hilda Odiase, Rev. Grant H. Odhner officiating.

### **Agnes, David Lawel Esses**

At Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, January 7, 2024 (born February 5, 2023), son of Sylvain and Berengere Agnes, Rev. Patrick Loba officiating.

### **Cole, Aubrey Sparrow**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 28, 2024 (born November 17, 2023), daughter of Ben and Joy Brown Cole, Rev. Stephen D. Cole officiating.

### **Derouchie, Tage Thomas**

At Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, January 21, 2024 (born April 12, 2023), son of Adam Derouchie and Lauren Schnarr, Rev. Mark B. Allais officiating.

### **Djah, Amenan Aimee Marie**

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, December 2, 2023, Rev. Bab Moise officiating.

### **Gouws, Finn Victor**

At Cape Town, Western Province, South Africa, January 3, 2024 (born May 8, 2023), son of Ernst and Lara Browne Gouws, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

**King, Elswyth**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, October 28, 2023 (born October 10, 2023), son of Kendal and Linnea Heinrichs King, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

**McCurdy, Kacey Anderson**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 7, 2024 (born July 10, 2023), son of Blake and Kaitlyn Brock McCurdy, Rev. George D. McCurdy officiating.

**McCurdy, Lennon Ann**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 7, 2024 (born May 31, 2021), daughter of Blake and Kaitlyn Brock McCurdy, Rev. George D. McCurdy officiating.

**Yapo, Achi Evariste L.**

At Phoenix, Arizona, December 17, 2023, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

**CONFIRMATION**

*How can a young woman cleanse her way? By taking heed according to Your Word. With my whole heart I have sought You; O, let me not wander from your commandments. (Psalm 31:1,3)*

**Deibert, Jade Xin Min**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, February 5, 2024. Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

**IN MEMORIAM**

*In order that a person may live to eternity, it is necessary that what is mortal, or the material body, should be taken away from him (or her) by death. When this is done, that which is immortal is uncovered, and the person becomes a spirit still in the human form. (Divine Providence 324)*

**Fiske, Marian**

December 23, 2023, of Glenview, Illinois. 95.

**Fornander, Maj**

November 28, 2023, of Jönköping, Sweden. 88

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**Grubb, David Jr.**

October 23, 2023, of Cardiff,  
California. 83

**Hiller, Elisabeth Schieser**

June 6, 2023, of Munich, Germany. 54

**Leon-Goyes, Elsa Victoria**

June 8, 2023, of Mundelein, Illinois. 82

**Parker, Cecil John**

January 21, 2024, of Guelph,  
Ontario, Canada. 91

**Smith, Robert Alan**

January 16, 2024, of Glenview,  
Illinois. 87

**Visco, Dorothy Matilda**

December 11, 2023, of Warminster,  
Pennsylvania. 101

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When Time Stands Still ~ Sermon  
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Tibetan Buddhism and the New Church ~ Address  
Hinduism and the Ancient Church ~ Address  
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**[www.newchurchaudio.org](http://www.newchurchaudio.org)**

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