

# NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024**



## New Church Education: Where Do We Go From Here?

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*New Church education – symbolized in the Academy seal – is at a critical juncture between dream and destiny. See a paper by the Rev. Jeremy Simons, *The Dream of New Church Education* (page 343), and an editorial, *The Future of New Church Education*. (Page 312)*



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Matthew 6

## **NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180) PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY BY THE GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM**

Bruce Henderson, Editor | [bruce.henderson@newchurch.org](mailto:bruce.henderson@newchurch.org)

Jeremy Simons, Spiritual Editor | [jeremyfsimons@gmail.com](mailto:jeremyfsimons@gmail.com)

Tess Taylor, Layout Designer

**subscription: \$30 to any address. \$15 for new subscriptions**

To order: 267-502-4990 or [susan.wright@anc-gc.org](mailto:susan.wright@anc-gc.org) Postmaster: Send address changes to:

New Church Life, PO Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 or e-mail: [datacenter@anc-gc.org](mailto:datacenter@anc-gc.org)

# New Church Life

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

310 In This Issue

312 Editorials: *The Future of New Church Education*

*The Heavenly Love of Political Office*

319 Letters to the Editors

323 Beasts of the Sea and Land: Seeing Ourselves in a Museum

*A Sermon by the Rev. Scott I. Frazier*

329 The Lord's Coming as the Son of Man and as the Holy Spirit

*The Rev. Grant H. Odhner*

338 The Two Great Prophets and Our Journey to Heaven

*A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.*

343 The Dream of New Church Education

*A Paper for the Council of the Clergy: The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

367 From the Bishop's Office: The Problem of Forgiveness

*The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth*

370 Making Appropriate Judgments – *The Rev. Erik J. Buss*

373 Woke Like a Patriarch: Are You Woke? I Hope So

*The Rev. Howard A. Thompson*

377 Life Lines

388 Church News

400 Announcements

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# In This Issue

Editorials (page 312) include:

- *The Future of New Church Education*: New Church education has a strong, proud history as a primary use of the General Church, but most of its schools are struggling for survival, for a variety of reasons. What do we need to do to secure the dream for the future?
- *The Heavenly Love of Political Office*: With an upcoming presidential election in November, Americans' views of politics and candidates are often negative. But the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the love of ruling others can be one of the highest heavenly loves – a model for all of us.

The Rev. Scott Frazier takes us on a fanciful museum tour where we see ourselves in *Beasts of the Sea and Land*. There are warnings here for the church, the clergy, and the laity. “The entire book of *Revelation*,” he says, “is a story of church history – how churches rise and fall and how the Christian Church has come to a close. It is also about our personal journey and struggle to become a church in microcosm, to approach the Lord in His Word and come into conjunction with Him.” (Page 323)

The Rev. Grant Odhner leads us through an in-depth understanding of “The Lord’s Coming as the Son of Man and as the Holy Spirit.” This is important, he says, that we may know the Lord’s living presence with us as the Spirit of truth and that His Second Coming “may become a full and healing reality in our own lives.” (Page 329)

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr. offers a sermon on “The Two Great Prophets” – Elijah and Elisha – and “Our Journey to Heaven.” Their story is “the miracle of our journey to heaven, which is represented, first in Elijah’s miraculous transition into heaven, and in the friendship and works of these two prophets.” (Page 338)

Illuminating the editorial cited above – *The Future of New Church Education* – is a paper delivered by the Rev. Jeremy Simons for Council of the Clergy meetings in Bryn Athyn just prior to the General Assembly: *The Dream of New Church Education*. It traces the history of our commitment to an educational system, with two provocative and essential questions: Have the mission and purpose of New Church education changed? And are New Church schools still a viable means of passing the church on to the next generation? (Page 343)

Writing From the Bishop's Office, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth acknowledges that forgiveness does not come easily but that we are strongly encouraged by the Lord to develop habits of forgiveness – which are also good for our regeneration and spiritual life. (Page 367)

The Rev. Erik Buss writes about “*Making Appropriate Judgments.*” Bottom line, “The Lord makes it clear that He wants us to avoid taking any pleasure in seeing what is wrong with others. And He wants us to search for the good in others.” (Page 370)

The Rev. Howard Thompson asks: “Are You Woke?” He hopes so – but not in the current pejorative sense of the word. Against the backdrop of the awakening of Jacob, he counsels: “The next time you hear the work ‘woke,’ think: ‘I hope I’m woke – woke like a Patriarch.’ It just may help you to put culture wars in their proper context and focus on what the Lord is calling you to acknowledge.” (Page 373)

Church News (388 ) includes:

- A plan for the future of the church in the United Kingdom
- News from the annual meeting of the General Church Corporation, including this year's recipients of the Glencairn Award
- A preview for the new academic year in Bryn Athyn College
- The search for a new president for the College
- A preview for the new year in the Academy Secondary Schools
- A new initiative for recruiting New Church ministers and teachers
- Publication of *A New Testament for Young Children*
- News from Glencairn Museum

# Editorials

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

## THE FUTURE OF NEW CHURCH EDUCATION

One well-attended workshop at the General Assembly in June was a presentation by Greg Henderson, longtime teacher and principal of the Bryn Athyn Church School, now co-director of General Church Education. His enticing topic: *Readings, the Writings and Arithmetic – A 200-Year History of New Church Schools*.

During the international clergy meetings preceding the Assembly the Rev. Jeremy Simons – who headed both the Kempton and Bryn Athyn schools as pastor in each society – presented a similarly well-documented and thoughtful paper: *The Dream of New Church Education*. A subheading asked the questions:

- Have the mission and purpose of New Church education changed?
- Are New Church schools still a viable means of passing the church on to the next generation?

(See page 343 for a slightly condensed version of this paper.)

These were important presentations on the history of New Church education – because history is our best guide for navigating a challenging future. There was great appreciation for these candid reviews of New Church education and for the critical questions they posed for our times. They reminded us that many Swedenborgian schools were launched in England and America with great hopes for growing and spreading the church – and why most failed. And we need to appreciate those that have succeeded – and why: the General Church elementary schools, and the Secondary Schools, College and Theological School that grew out of the Academy Movement. But lingering in the wake of all this history is the insistent question: what is the future of New Church education?

The dream emerged after a lunch table discussion in Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania, on January 14, 1874, where John Pitcairn, William Henry Benade, Frank Ballou and Walter Childs were worried that the New Church (Convention) was becoming “more liberal and ecumenically minded.” They began formalizing plans to reform the church, agreeing on two guiding principles: the authority of the Writings and the vastated condition of the Christian Church.

Soon after came the Academy Movement, the split with Convention, and the creation of the General Church. Convention believed the church “had no right to invade the strictly lay use of education.” The Academy founders viewed New Church education as an essential use of the church – indeed, its “growth engine.”

*The Principles of the Academy*, enunciated in 1899 by the Rt. Rev. W.F. Pendleton, still guide our commitment to New Church education. Principle 12 is unequivocal and enduring: “The true field of evangelization is with the children of New Church parents.” There was no intent then of opening the schools to non-New Church families – indeed active opposition.

The model worked for a long time – not with significant growth of the schools but with stability. Church members were committed to the schools, families were larger then, and there was a steady stream of students from societies throughout the church to the Academy Secondary Schools and College.

Now almost all of our schools are struggling. The General Church schools still are prized for their inspiring education of our children in the light of the Word. All but the schools in Bryn Athyn and Kempton, however, are coping with declining numbers and financial pressures and have opened their doors to non-church families. Some have gotten creative with survival skills, such as Pittsburgh developing an expertise in teaching students with dyslexia and Oak Arbor partnering with Montessori.

The Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College have been dealing with severe financial pressures, brought on by overly ambitious growth initiatives, forcing painful cuts in staff and programs. Enrollments have declined from church societies but increased slightly from non-traditional sources. The Theological School is facing a huge gap in projected needs as retirements loom, and a serious recruiting program is underway for ministers and teachers.

The dream still conveys commitment and responsibility to foundational New Church principles, but the destiny of the schools – at every level – is at a critical juncture. The challenge is to keep faith with the dream and the commitment, and to stabilize the schools at all levels without compromising on the distinctiveness and integrity of New Church education.

Times change. Mission does not. The challenge is to find the balance between what works and what doesn’t, what is foundational and what is

possible, what should change and what must never change, and what best serves the destiny of the church as “the crown of all churches that have ever existed on the earth.”

At the 50th anniversary of the Academy in 1924, the Rt. Rev. N.D. Pendleton stated unequivocally:

*We have been guarded from any grave disappointment by our Academy training which forbids grandiose expectations. Besides, we believe that the thing we are engaged in building can best grow slowly, can only grow slowly, and under Providential guiding rather by our forcing. So we are content, not to rest from our labors, but wait on Providence with the steady conviction that an adequate and protective basis of reception, a fit containant, without which spiritual influx cannot be held, and natural growth will be in vain.*

But there has always been a zeal to share and grow the church in a needy world, and expanding the influence of New Church education invited a commitment to rapid expansion, growth and financial investment that has not materialized as forecast and left the schools scrambling to survive. This was all well-intentioned and enthusiastically supported, but hard lessons have been learned and survival strategies are being tested.

Much of this is detailed in Rev. Simons’ paper – what happened and why, and the questions that need to be asked. He offered this paper as encouragement for discussion and solutions, and we invite that respectful discussion within the pages of *New Church Life*.

So, where do we go from here? What has always been held to be “special” about the Academy and College specifically – and recognized as such by visitors – suddenly is viewed as not quite so special anymore. Why not? What can we do – and must we do – to regain the “specialness” of New Church education? Where can we bend? Where must we persevere?

As his paper states, it is increasingly challenging to maintain a New Church culture in a changing, technology driven world. We struggle with change in our church, our schools, our communities and our lives, but we all should start with a clear sense of the values and constants in our lives and a clear faith that we will not compromise. Indeed, that is a lot of what the “searchers” are looking for: institutions that know what they stand for and will not water it down.

Much of the overly optimistic planning for growth was fueled by respected consultants who recognized the uniqueness of what New Church education has to offer and saw the Academy as “a gem just waiting to be discovered” and “poised to take off and grow.” Indeed, many students new to the Secondary Schools and College have been thrilled with what they have found; some have even joined the church. But reality has never measured up to expectations.



One encouraging development is a serious, comprehensive study undertaken this summer by a special Academy Board committee examining the best governance structure for the institution going forward. Options range from the old and much-revered model of an Academy President and day-to-day leader based in Pitcairn Hall between both campuses to variations in board structures.

This is a hard-working committee, evaluating input from a wide range of people with experience and expertise. It is a healthy and encouraging undertaking, especially because it is open to so many informed points of view. Distilling all of the input for a recommended structure is a challenge – and a welcome opportunity. We cannot just speculate about the root causes for why we are at this challenging point of survival. We need to study carefully, be honest and open, understand what is happening and why, and come up with wise and workable solutions.

Any structure, of course, will only be as good as the people charged with making it work – especially the ultimate leader. That depends on finding the right person, with the right educational credentials and leadership abilities, plus a team that will inspire support – financial and emotional.

As Mr. Simons notes, ministers are usually expected to provide such leadership – often unfairly because not all have the inherent qualities or proper training. We need to develop better training – not only for ministers but for anyone called to academic leadership. Too many good people stepping up when called have been frustrated by demands they did not feel trained to handle.

Good, clear communication is also vital to leadership but often gives way to protective instincts that may be well-intentioned but often invite distrust and forfeits goodwill. Communication – especially with constituents and supporters – must be as transparent as possible. That is not always easy, especially in trying situations, but as many a private company has learned the hard way, not being open and honest is counterproductive, whereas openness and transparency build trust and support.

Another vexing challenge is keeping our young people connected to the church and Academy – hopefully so that they will send their own children. The warning rings true: the church and its commitment to education are only as strong as the next generation. A consultant once told one of our principals: “You do everything right – but you don’t close the deal!” We let them walk away. We used to be able to count on graduates joining the church and filling the pipeline. Not anymore. Finding ways to keep them connected has to be part of the solution.

We must preserve and grow New Church education because it is essential to the church and the world. Its mission is unique. For all our schools may be struggling today, they still nurture both natural and spiritual conscience –

and both are desperately needed in a world morally adrift in a values vacuum where few teachers dare talk about morality and ethics, right and wrong. The world is desperate for this leadership.

New Church education still is served – as it has been for almost 150 years – by good, caring, talented and dedicated people who devote their lives to educating our children in the light of the Word – and for the hope of the world. We cannot let them down. For all who keep faith with the mission of New Church education, we hope in them and are blessed by them.

As Rev. Simons concludes his study: “The General Church [and New Church education] is a microscopic part of the worldwide plan that is in the hands of the Lord alone.” In Him we trust but must also ask: what can and must we do to help?

(BMH)

## THE HEAVENLY LOVE OF POLITICAL OFFICE

When Americans vote on November 5 something we might be thinking about are the motivations of the politicians we are voting for. This is hard to judge in others, or even in ourselves.

According to polls, the most important factor in deciding who to vote for is similarity of views on political issues. But our assessment of a candidate's intentions and motivations are also high on the list. We want to be able to trust the people we vote for.

Americans currently have fairly negative views on the motives of those seeking elected office. According to a poll taken by the Pew Research Center in 2023 almost two-thirds of Americans believe that all or most politicians are motivated by the desire to make money, or to get fame and attention for themselves. Fewer than 20% believe that they run for office in order to address issues that they care about, or to serve the public.

This is a sad commentary considering the importance of what politicians do. Still, it is not hard to believe that politics is a profession that is especially hard on a person's spiritual character. In fact, the Writings comment on this question:

*Of those who while in the world were employed in trade and commerce and became rich through these pursuits there are many in heaven. But there are not so many of those who were in public office and became rich through those employments. The reason is that these latter by the gains and honors that resulted from their dispensing justice and equity, and also by the lucrative*

*and honorable positions bestowed on them, were led into loving themselves and the world, and thereby separating their thoughts and affections from heaven and turning them to themselves. (Heaven and Hell 360)*

This is easy to believe considering that most people see the desire for power as something less than heavenly. But where would we be without good leaders?

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the love of ruling others can be one of the highest of heavenly loves. In a story in *Conjugal Love* 261-266 Swedenborg is told:

The universal characteristics of [both heaven and] hell are three, but the universal characteristics of hell are diametrically opposite to the universal characteristics of heaven. The universal characteristics of hell are the following three loves: a love of governing stemming from a love of self; a love of possessing the goods of others stemming from a love of the world; and licentious love.

*The universal characteristics of heaven opposite to these are the following three loves: a love of governing stemming from a love of being useful; a love of possessing the goods of the world stemming from a love of performing useful services by means of them; and truly conjugal love.*

Swedenborg then met people who were in those loves and saw how they affected the world that they lived in. Whereas these loves in hell created an environment of anger, suffering and poverty, their counterparts in heaven led to the opposite. Two rulers in heaven said that *“they experienced continual joys from an eternal happiness which they had in them from the Lord; and that everything in their society was splendid and magnificent – splendid on account of its gold and precious stones, and magnificent on account of its palaces and paradise-like parks.”*

*“The reason for this,” they said, “is that our love of governing does not arise from a love of self, but from a love of accomplishing useful ends; and because a love of accomplishing useful ends comes from the Lord, therefore all good and useful things in heaven are splendid and radiant.*

So, they continued, saying:

*The positions we hold are positions we admittedly sought, but for no other purpose than to be able to perform useful services more fully and to extend them more widely. We are also surrounded with honor, and we accept it, yet not for our own sake, but for the good of the society. For our comrades and friends among the common people there scarcely know otherwise than that the honors of our positions are lodged in us, and consequently that the services we*

*render come from ourselves. We, however, feel differently. We feel that the honors of our positions are outside us, and are like garments with which we are clothed, while the services we render come from a love of them within us from the Lord. This love, moreover, gains its bliss from its communication through useful service with others. (Conjugial Love 266)*

While it may be challenging to find leaders like this, it is not an impossible goal. In one example the Writings praise the English, who are said to have “a profound intellectual light.” This is due to their freedom of thought and speech, and it is activated in them in response to the leadership of famous and powerful people. “*For this reason they are assigned governors in the spiritual world and are given preachers of great reputation and skill.*” (True Christianity 807) They then willingly follow them because they trust them and see the wisdom of their leadership. The implication is that the same thing happens in this world as well, and this characteristic may have similarities throughout the English-speaking world.

After listening to those leaders in heaven, Swedenborg asked: “*How can anyone know whether he performs useful services from a love of self or whether he does so from a love of accomplishing useful ends?*”

They replied:

*A person cannot distinguish the one and the other kinds of service, but the Lord sees the difference. Everyone who believes in the Lord and refrains from evils as sins performs useful services from the Lord. But everyone who does not believe in the Lord and does not refrain from evils as sins performs the services he does from himself and for the sake of himself. That is the difference between services performed by devils and services performed by angels. (Conjugial Love 266)*

This simple distinction may not seem to be much help in knowing who to vote for or who to choose as our leaders in other areas of life. But it is good to know that this is the real distinction, and it is something to look for, not only in political candidates but in ourselves.

(JFS)

# Letters to the Editors

**Letters to the Editors may be sent to:  
Editors of New Church Life  
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009**

## *The Power and Comfort in Prayer*

To The Editors:

I enjoyed the Life Line about the prayer (*Our Father/My Prayer*, January/February, 2024) because it resonates with my own feelings.

Almost always I say the prayer alone, whether it's Sunday when I have church, or on weekdays when I've turned off the light and am ready for sleep. One advantage to saying it alone is that you can set your own pace and ponder your feelings about what you are saying.

The first two words, "Our Father," seem to me to be following the first of the Ten Commandments, and those two words are quickly followed by "hallowed be Thy name," which fulfills the commandment about not taking His name in vain.

When I say, "Thy kingdom come," I feel I'm saying it for the whole world but "Thy will be done " is said only for what is inside of me.

"Give us this day our daily bread" reminds me just where good comes from. And the parts about debts or trespasses remind me that we should do things for others as we would like things to be done for us.

"Lead us not into temptation" brings in the knowledge of where my proprium can lead me and Who can help me stop.

And then we can remind ourselves of the Lord's power, relax into His hands, and go to sleep.

Joseph F. David  
Indianapolis  
Indiana

## *What's in a Thought?*

To The Editors:

Love is a commodity. We can give it away and we can receive it from another, just like gold. We have an endless supply of it to start with since it is given to us from the Lord, because, in fact, it is — *our life!* (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 875.2). The more we give of it to someone, the more he/she can give some back to us and pass it on to others. As we pass it on, the richer we all will get and life will become, “upon earth as it is in heaven.” We can use it to do good and useful things to help build the church and community, and we can use it to help everyone to be happy.

The secret reason behind *everything* is: God's Divine Love! And by means of God's infinite Divine Wisdom, the Lord God continually creates people and maintains all of creation – all of it so that there may be people for Him to love and make happy in heaven forever! (See *Divine Providence* §323) How well it all works depends on us.

Affections are offshoots of love. The Lord, being love itself, gives us of His love as life in us – love as the core of our souls. Imagine rays from this glowing center as being our affections – our urges for doing everything that our loves desire. Now here is the wonder: our affections are contagious. As we pursue the “rays” of our affections we attract those spirits from the spiritual world who have similar affections to ours.

Good spirits or evil, the spirits with whom we associate all share our affections, and thoughts are forms of those affections, just as speech is a form of sound. The more spirits we attract by pursuing our affections the more our affections are shared and the more our thoughts favor these influences—good or bad depending on our daily choices.

To verify this, I include this quote from *Apocalypse Revealed* 875, parts 2 and 3. Reading it takes about five minutes, but it could add eternity to one's wisdom.

*The angel from the heaven of wisdom asked what love is, and the other replied that love originating from the Lord as a sun constitutes the vital warmth of angels and men so as to be their life; that offshoots of that love are called affections; and that these produce perceptions and thus thoughts.*

*It follows from this, he said, that wisdom in its origin is love, consequently that thought in its origin is an affection of that love, and one can see from its derivations examined in turn that thought is nothing else than a form of affection. This is not known, because*

*thoughts are seen, whereas affections are matters of warmth, and people reflect on their thoughts, therefore, but not on their affections.*

*The case is the same as with sound and speech. That thought is nothing else than a form of affection can be illustrated by speech, as being nothing else than a form of sound. The case is the same, too, because the sound or tone corresponds to affection, and speech to thought. Consequently, it is affection that utters sounds, and thought that speaks.*

*This can also be clearly seen when the proposition is put; take away sound from speech. Is there any speech left? Similarly, take away affection from thought. Is there any thought left?*

*It is now apparent, therefore, that love is everything in wisdom, consequently that the essence of the heavens is love, which expresses itself as wisdom. Or what is the same, that the heavens exist from Divine love, and take manifest form from Divine love by means of Divine wisdom. Accordingly, the two are, as we said before, inseparable.'*

*I had with me at the time a newly arrived spirit, who on hearing this asked whether the case is the same with charity and faith, inasmuch as charity has to do with affection and faith with thought.*

*The angel replied, "It is altogether the same. Faith is nothing else than a form of charity, just as speech is a form of sound. Faith is also formed from charity, as speech is formed from the utterance of sound. In heaven we also know the way it is formed, but we don't have time to explain it here."*

*The angel added: "By faith I mean spiritual faith, which has its spirit and life solely from charity; for charity is spiritual, and it causes faith to be spiritual, too. Consequently, faith divorced from charity is a merely natural faith, and such a faith is a lifeless one. It also combines itself with a merely natural affection, which is nothing else than a lust."*

*The angels spoke about this spiritually, and spiritual speech embraces thousands of things that natural speech is incapable of expressing. And what is surprising, they cannot even fall within the scope of the ideas of natural thought.*

*Please remember what has been said here, and when you go from natural light into spiritual light, which happens after death, inquire then what faith and charity are, and you will clearly see that faith is charity in form, and thus that charity is everything in faith, consequently that it is the soul, life and essence of faith, altogether as affection is of thought, and as sound is of speech. Moreover, if you wish, you will see that the formation of faith from charity is like the formation of speech from sound, because the two correspond.”*

You can read the whole book or any part of *Apocalypse Revealed* online at [www.newchristianbiblestudy.com](http://www.newchristianbiblestudy.com).

Martin E. Klein  
Huntingdon Valley  
Pennsylvania



# Beasts of the Sea and Land: Seeing Ourselves in a Museum

*A Sermon by the Rev. Scott I. Frazier*

Readings: *Revelation 13:1-18; Apocalypse Revealed 576*

*One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow,  
but its mortal wound had been healed.  
(Revelation 13:3)*

Our relationship to the Lord through His Word defines who we are. It not only defines who we are as individuals, but also as a community and a church. The book of *Revelation*, with all its amazing and perplexing visions of beauty and danger and confusion, has shown us how – and how not – to build communities around the Word and the doctrine we draw from it. The Heavenly Doctrines reveal to us these instructions and warnings.

The entire book of *Revelation* is a story of church history – an account of how churches rise and fall and specifically how the Christian Church has come to a close, told prophetically by John of Patmos. On another internal level, *Revelation* is about our own personal journey and struggle to become a church in microcosm, to approach the Lord in His Word and come into conjunction with Him.

Today we turn to chapter 13 and the relevant material in *Apocalypse Revealed*. This story, describing a Beast of the Sea and a Beast of the Land and their efforts to conquer the world, is a warning for us about twisting the Word and celebrating

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into conjunction  
with Him.*

our own power. It is also a warning about how the clergy and the laity interact and work together; the Beast of the Sea is an image of the laity, and the Beast of the Land is an image of the clergy.

We will consider these images today like visitors walking past displays in a museum. Imagine the thick display glass, the small placards in front of the glass. We walk past three displays, three windows and each has a warning. The first reads: “Live a Disjointed Life.” The second reads: “Stay in Our Evils.” The third reads: “Hurt People.”

These are three terrible ideas, and they lurk within each of us. These are personal warnings, but they also serve as a warning to the church as a whole. Blessedly, there is a universal law described in the Heavenly Doctrines explaining that insofar as we shun evil loves, the Lord replaces those with good loves. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5828, *True Christian Religion* 437) We can use these three warnings to find joy in our church with each other and join the Lord in His Holy Kingdom. Thus, we have three scenes, three warnings to each of us, and three warnings to the church.

Our first scene is the well-known great red dragon with the heading: “Live a Disjointed Life.” Inside the display we see a beast with seven heads, seven crowns, and 10 horns – a description that speaks to its terrible power. By the end of chapter 12 this dragon has been thrown out of heaven by Michael, and then failed to destroy the Woman Clothed with the Sun with her child as the earth swallowed the dragon’s flood. Now the dragon seems to summon two new beasts, one of the sea and one of the land, to resume the fight against the forces of good.

Very often in the Heavenly Doctrines the dragon is described as the idea of faith alone, the notion that salvation comes from belief and enthusiasm apart from behavior and repentance. (*Arcana Coelestia* 369, *Brief Exposition* 54, *True Christian Religion* 343) More specifically, from *Apocalypse Revealed* 537, we get a collection of related ideas representing the greatest threat to our participation in the Lord’s church:

- 1) God is three persons
- 2) The Lord Jesus Christ has two natures
- 3) Faith is and should be separate from charity
- 4) and faith alone saves a person

This is a complicated and dreadful collection of ideas, more than we can untangle here today, but it is all about attacking and subverting the “functional” authority of the Word while preserving its “official” value. By insisting on the first two ideas: that God has multiple persons and the Lord has two natures; Christianity in history separated and destroyed the idea that Jesus Christ is

Jehovah, the Creator of the universe and the Savior of mankind. By insisting on the second two ideas – that faith and charity have no connection and that Christianity is nothing more than a passive trust in the Lord – Christianity has reduced the Word to a meaningless document of castigation and mystery.

The Heavenly Doctrines are not here describing our neighbors across the street or their sincere efforts to embody the love of Christ. They are describing the stance of institutional Christianity of the 18th century, an official stance that remains largely unchanged today. Insofar as a church cannot see Jesus “officially” as Jehovah and cannot see the Word “officially” as the path of repentance and conjunction with the Lord, it is not a church according to the Heavenly Doctrines.

But what about us as individuals? How do criticisms of official statements of European churches hundreds of years ago relate to our spiritual struggles now? Draconic ideas are always with us and within our minds. Every time we resist obeying the Word, it is the dragon. Part of us wants to lead a disjointed life. Part of us wants to learn but not obey the truth.

We want to be spiritually proud of our learning and perspective and wisdom while keeping those ideas from changing what we do with our bodies and to our neighbors. We want a disjointed life where talking the talk does not interfere with walking the walk. The truth is, happiness and peace come only through putting good and truth together, and that means removing evil from our operating, behavioral lives. (*Heaven and Hell* 289)

More specifically, in chapters 12 and 13, this first scene is about our personal inclination to revere the Word but not listen to it. This brings us to our second museum scene: “Stay in Our Evils.” Past the glass we can imagine a beast also with seven heads. It looks mostly like leopard, though it has the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. It looks like a leopard to symbolize confusing falsity and truth, much as the light and dark spots on a leopard confuse prey. It stands on feet like a bear because the literal sense of the Word is its foundation, and bears symbolize the literal sense, here twisted from ignorance and confusion.

This monstrous creature has the mouth of a lion because of how powerful it is. The lion is all the reasoning supporting falsity drawn from a twisted idea of the Word, a power that can seem unstoppable, like a lion. (*Daniel* 7:4-6) The descriptions of this beast’s conquests and power show how insatiable this idea of staying in our evil can be, taking over our whole lives if we let it.

It should remind us of the dragon because it is a version of the dragon. It also has seven heads, but one head has been wounded to death. As we watch the scene, the head is healed. This recovery symbolizes the fact that “faith alone” as a doctrine is nowhere taught in the Word, but this error can be “healed” if we simply believe nobody can obey the truths of the Word. Once we decide nobody can measure up, that none of the commands in the Word are realistic

or clear, the church can instead focus on enthusiasm and blind faith, and then the doctrine of faith alone is alive and well.

This does not describe our honest struggles to understand the Word or our debates about how to live its commandments. No, this beast is the belief that we can value the Word without having to follow it. Like a useless but expensive gem locked in a box, the Beast of the Sea does not see the Word as the enemy but as the source of the beast's power and esteem.

Everyone sees authority in something. Nobody is master of themselves, and we each must choose whether to follow God or Mammon. (*Matthew 6:24*) We all strive to see authority in God's Word, and we all are tempted to see authority in Mammon – our own appetites and senses. The danger of the Beast of the Sea is the promise of having it both ways: combining the disjointed faith alone perspective of the dragon to our loyalty to the Word.

How wonderful would it be if we could revere the Word without having to obey its truths? How peaceful would life be if we could rest secure in our love for the truth and our confidence that it could not possibly describe our lives? This is the Beast of the Sea. It is a corruption of the Word in its literal sense; it is the conviction that since nobody is certain what the Word says, it must say nothing of consequence. This is what it means to be a leopard with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, with seven heads healed and healthy.

Let's not forget about what it says about the church as well. The Beast of the Sea is an image of the laity, specifically the desire of the laity to be told by the priesthood that the church members are special, they are God's chosen, and they do not need to change. There is an implicit bargain being offered here to the priesthood: the laity will value the Word – and give authority to those who preach from it – so long as the priesthood does not pester the laity with anything that upsets their exercise of hellish freedom. As long as the priests in the pulpit and classroom say nothing offensive or contrary to our human prudence and the mores of the day, the laity will be happy to attend church and consider the priesthood wise and respected.

The Beast of the Land is the reply of the clergy. We now walk past the third and final scene: "Hurt People." The beast within is perhaps more disturbing than terrifying. It is not described much beyond having two horns like a lamb and speaking like the dragon. The lamb's horns show us that this beast's power comes from the Word and the idea of God, but the voice of the dragon shows us that this beast also preaches a disjointed life, a life of pride unbothered by humility, repentance, or change. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 595) It uses the traditional powers of a prophet to demand everyone worship an idol of the Beast of the Sea, and it desires to mark everyone with the sign of the beast, 666, and thus eradicate dissent and sincere pursuit of the Word.

Just as evil wants to value the Word without listening to or following it,

evil also loves to punish those who differ or disagree. More specifically, the draconic idea of a disjointed life here means we demand people value our point of view and even obey it – but because it is our point of view, not because it is from the Word.

This hatred of others will always flow from the previous idea that the Word doesn't specifically govern us. If we conclude the Word doesn't demand that we obey it, then we will demand others obey us in its stead. Every time we think we personally are beyond reproach, are not guilty of our confirmed evils, those evils will immediately prompt us to persecute those around us who "obviously" disagree with our ideas enjoying the Divine seal of approval.

If the Lord cannot disagree with our choices in life, how dare anyone else disagree? How dare anyone, anywhere, claim we should change if the Word allows us to wallow in our evils? Evil is insatiable, and absent our specific and daily obedience to the truths of the Word, our evils wish to overcome everyone and everything around us. (*Heaven and Hell* 559, *True Christian Religion* 405)

The Beast of the Land thus serves the Beast of the Sea, demanding all parts of our life worship our desire to stay in our evils. In our church, this would be clergy carefully avoiding any claims that the Lord is saddened by our evil decisions but castigating with virtual fire from heaven those who do see the command to change and repent.

This is not an image of heated doctrinal debate. No, this museum display shows damnation, the permission to hate others because we are sure they are not the neighbor, not worth listening to, and deserve nothing but sharp and perpetual persecution until they obey us. Any doctrinal stance can be taken by the Beast of the Land so long as it demands no meaningful change in ourselves and gives us an excuse to hate those around us.

Our third museum display concludes with the mark of the beast, also the mark of the man, symbolizing a united hellish person of both affection (the beast) and intelligence (the man). It is a mark on both forehead and hand to symbolize our conviction in both will and intellect, thought and deed, that the truths of the Word cannot lead our daily lives. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 605) The number six refers to every truth united to good corrupted by faith alone, and its repetition shows us how totally the church within us can be overwhelmed by this terrible idea.

So, what are we to make of these three museum displays? They are more than a description of spiritual events from hundreds of years ago. They are warnings from the Lord's mercy and love, a path to avoid every day personally and in our church.

When we read this description of the dragon, we know that the Lord instead wants us to draw doctrine for life, Monday afternoon as much as Sunday morning, not lock it away as a mystery. (*True Christian Religion* 185)

When we read of the Beast of the Sea, the Lord instead wants us to submit to the rules of the Word we see regardless of our personal preference or cultural message. When we read of the Beast of the Land, the Lord instead is asking us to revisit His Word daily in humility, and to rejoice when others read and struggle with us.

The result will be a New Jerusalem: a church like a city with the Lord's radiant presence, a laity which values the Tree of Life for its healing leaves, and a priesthood atop its high walls with open gates beckoning all who desire to learn the truths to enter into the mysteries of faith.

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*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it. (Psalm 95:11)*

Amen.



The **Rev. Scott I. Frazier** is Head of the Religion Major and Sacred Languages and an instructor in Latin, Hebrew and Religion at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church. He has been named as the next Dean of the College's Theological School. He and his wife, Nicole (Hill), live in Bryn Athyn with their family. Contact: [Scott.Frazier@brynathyn.edu](mailto:Scott.Frazier@brynathyn.edu)

# The Lord's Coming as the Son of Man and as the Holy Spirit

*The Rev. Grant H. Odhner*

## **The Second Coming and the Lord's teaching when in the world**

When the Lord was in the world, He spoke frequently about coming again. It was not just a promise that He left them with at the very end; it was a part of His teaching all along. What He was working for would not be fulfilled right away; it would not be completely finished when He left the world. True, He said to the Father: "I have finished the work which you have given Me to do." (*John 17.4*) He also said things like: "I have overcome the world." (*John 16.33*)

But He also spoke of the coming of His kingdom as a future event that would fulfill the purposes of His first coming. He Himself would usher in this kingdom when He came again. That is when the judgment would take place and when rewards would be given to those who were faithful. (*Matthew 25.31-32*) The Lord kept this second coming before the disciples, for example, when He challenged them:

*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

He added:

*For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*  
(*Matthew 16.24-27*)

Again, He said:

*Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8.38)*

On another occasion, after encouraging His followers to “pray always and not lose heart,” He adds:

*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Luke 8.7-8)*

He kept His coming again before them.

### **The effect of this teaching**

What must have been the effect of this teaching about His future coming? ...

Well, it must have been confusing in some respects. Why did the Lord need to go away? Couldn't He just stay there with them? Continue to heal and to teach? Couldn't He simply become king now and establish His wonderful kingdom and fulfill all the beautiful promises?

There was also confusion about the timing of this advent. Many of His statements seem definite. When He sent out the disciples to preach the gospel (early in His ministry), He said:

*Truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10.23)*

On other occasions He said:

*Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Ibid. 16.28)*

*Truly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. (Ibid. 24.34)*

But in the same breath He warns:

*Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. . . . Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. . . . Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Ibid. 24.36, 42, 44)*

He likens His coming to that of a thief – secretive and unexpected. (Matthew 24.43; Luke 12.39; Revelation 3.3; 16.15)



Now in one passage the Lord seems to spiritualize His coming. The Pharisees ask when “the kingdom of God would come,” and He replies:

*The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17.21)*

Yet He clearly does not mean that His coming will be invisible; He immediately says to the disciples:

*The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. (Ibid. 17.22)*

He goes on to speak of false prophets arising and claiming to be the Christ, and warns:

*Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. (Ibid. 17.23-25)*

The Lord's coming would be surprising, but it would not be invisible: it would involve the Son of Man appearing.

So, the overall impression that the Lord gives in the New Testament is that He would come again in person, and that this would take place soon after His leaving. Indeed, in the revelation given to John, after the Lord's resurrection, He says repeatedly: “Behold, I am coming quickly” (2.5, 3.11, 22.7, 12, 20).

### **The “Son of Man” in the clouds of heaven**

And how would He come? The Lord was pretty clear on this point. In response to a direct question from some of the disciples about what would be the signs of the end of the age and of His coming the Lord said:

*They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24.30; Mark 13.27; Luke 21.27)*

The Lord also said to the high priest at His trial:

*After this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. (Matthew 26.64; Mark 14.62)*

And in the *Book of Revelation* John says:

*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him. (Revelation 1.7)*

The message about the Second Coming sounds pretty clear. And it would have remained so if the Lord had only come quickly while that generation still lived, and come in the clouds of heaven.

### **The coming of the Holy Spirit**

But then there is the *Gospel of John*. In it we do find the Lord promising to come again, as in the other Gospels. For example, His last words to Peter after the resurrection are: “If I will that he (the disciple John) remain till I come, what is that to you?” (John 21.22) And He says to the fearful and sad disciples on the eve of His capture:

*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling-places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14.1-3)*

Yet on this same evening (as recorded by John) we find the Lord promising not to come in person, but to send His Holy Spirit, which will abide with them forever. This Spirit would be a Spirit of truth. It would counsel them, bring His words to their minds, “reprove” the world, teach them, guide them into all truth, show them things to come.

It is clear in the context here that this Holy Spirit will be the Lord Himself. He says:

*I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. (John 14.16-19)*

A few verses later He says:

*You have heard Me say to you, “I am going away and coming to you.” If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, “I am going to the Father.” (14.28)*

And later in the evening He says:

*A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father. (16.16)*

The disciples are puzzled by this statement:

*“What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” (16.17)*

The Lord responds (rather indirectly) by telling them that they will have sorrow, like a woman in labor, before her child is born. But, He says:

*I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (16.22)*

He then tells them He would no longer speak to them in figurative language, but would speak plainly about the Father. (16.25)

The Lord's coming to the disciples – in *John 14-16* – is His own coming, but a coming in Spirit. It is His dwelling in the minds of believers. Still, we may wonder: Is this coming of the Lord something that He accomplished with the disciples immediately after the resurrection? His first act then is to breathe on them and say: “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” And clearly their sorrow is turned to joy and He instructs them. Or is the promise of the Holy Spirit more about His ongoing relationship with them after He fully left the world? Or is He speaking symbolically about His second coming?

New Church people often make the connection between the coming of the “Spirit of truth” and the second coming. The statements sound so suggestive of what the Heavenly Doctrine does for us. Clearly, the Lord had “many things to say to [His disciples]” which they could not yet “bear.” The Heavenly Doctrine tells us plainly of the Father. It reveals Him more fully. It seems to hold the potential to “lead us into all truth.”

Interestingly, the Writings do not directly relate what is said of the coming of the Spirit of truth in *John 14-16* to the second coming. But I think there is a connection.

## Two Comings

As we have seen *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, all speak quite concretely about the Lord's second coming. They give us the picture of the Son of Man's coming in the clouds of heaven. By contrast *John's* Gospel speaks more about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I believe these represent two aspects to the Lord's Second Advent: it is an outer event, as portrayed in *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*; and an inner event, as portrayed in *John*. There are these two aspects to every coming of the Lord.

His first coming involved an outer event. He accomplished certain things in the natural world. He presented Himself in a material body, He glorified that body together with the entire human mind He'd taken on; and He provided for us a written record of His words and His presence here. This event is not merely subjective: we know it from without, through the pages of the New Testament.

But the Lord's first coming is also an inner event. It is not a reality for us merely because it is known from without, or because it happened as an outside event. His advent becomes a reality for us when we are touched by its spiritual significance. What the Lord did then becomes effective in our lives. The "letter" (which reveals His advent to us) must become "spirit and life." And it becomes "spirit and life" when we allow the Lord to "come" from within. Inner and outer Coming meet, and the Divine advent is full. (Compare the teachings on "immediate" and "mediate" influx – e.g. *Arcana Coelestia* 7056, 8701, 8707.)

"The Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven" describes the outer aspect to the Lord's Second Coming. And the Coming mentioned in *John* – of the Holy Spirit – describes the inner aspect to His Second Coming. Let us look at this.

### **The Coming of the "Son of Man" – a coming in outer forms of truth**

Most of you are familiar with the idea that "the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory" refers to the Lord being seen again in His Word through the revealing of its spiritual sense. The "clouds" are the literal, worldly meaning of the Old and New Testaments, which is often obscure. The "glory" is the spiritual meaning, shining through the letter. "Power" is the good of love in the Word that brings real change and healing to us when we live it. The "Son of Man" is the Divine truth, both natural and spiritual.<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament the Lord uses the name "Son of Man" to refer to the outer aspect of Himself, the part of Him that interfaces with the world. The Human that He took on was both the "Son of God" and the "Son of Man."<sup>2</sup> "Son of God" is used to refer to the Lord's Divine origin: God. "Son of Man" is used to refer to the fact that He took on a clothing from the world in order to deal with people, to fight hell and conquer, to teach us in accommodation to our states, to restore us. This "clothing" for His Human became Divine as to its inner order and essence but remained finite for men and angels to see.

And so when we look at the New Testament we find that the Lord uses "Son of Man" whenever He is referring to conflicts with evil by means of the truth, or judgment by means of truth (e.g. "The Son of Man must be delivered up to be crucified." "The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.") He also uses the "Son of Man"

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<sup>1</sup> The "Son of Man" in this context is sometimes said to be the internal sense (*Arcana Coelestia* 2813.2), but is most often said to be the Divine truth/Word, and the "glory" said to be the spiritual sense.

<sup>2</sup> *Arcana Coelestia* 2159.2

<sup>3</sup> *Apocalypse Explained* 1061

where matters of saving or regenerating by means of the truth are concerned (e.g. "The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which is lost." "The Son of Man has power to forgive sins.") (See *Doctrine of the Lord* 22)

And so, when the Lord speaks of His coming He uses the name "Son of Man." The reference is to the coming of truth to the mind, to new forms (finite conceptual forms). The "Son of Man" is both spiritual truth and natural truth. The Heavenly Doctrine took form in heaven as well as in the world. It is not just a coming of the spiritual sense, but of a "natural sense from the spiritual sense."<sup>3</sup> In fact, it involved an actual physical coming onto paper and print. (Swedenborg was once commanded to write on a copy of one of His works (*Brief Exposition*): "This book is the Advent of the Lord.")

It is through the Writings that the Lord directly proclaims Himself. We can approach Him there anew, respond to Him freely, react to Him as an object outside of ourselves – much as people could react to His person when He was in the world. There must be this outer component to the Lord's coming. It provides a fixed basis for His touching us and for our free response.

### **The Holy Spirit and the Lord's coming**

However, the books of the Writings on the shelf are no more His Second Coming for us (personally), than was Jesus' physical body. "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing." "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (*John* 4.24) In other words, we can "see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven" and yet not be moved by the "power and great glory." We can see and yet not really see.

Recall that the Lord told the chief priest, "you will see the Son of Man . . . coming in the clouds of heaven." And in Revelation it is said: "*Every eye shall see Him, and they who pierced Him.*" Good and bad alike can see the forms of the spiritual sense as they have descended into the world. But not all truly see the Lord in them.

By contrast, the Holy Spirit, promised in John, would be seen only by disciples. "The world" could not receive Him because it neither saw Him nor knew Him. "*But you know Him,*" the Lord had told His disciples, "for He dwells with you and shall be in you." (16.17) There must be an inner coming to meet the outer coming. In order to really see the spiritual sense we must receive the "Spirit of truth."

### **A word against the Son of Man vs. speaking against the Holy Spirit**

Something that supports this idea of a dual coming is the incident in which the Lord says:

*Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12.32)*

Why might a sin against the Son of Man be forgiven? It is because we may easily be led to misinterpret the outer teachings of the Word or even reject them, and yet not be setting ourselves against the genuine truth within them. But a sin against the Holy Spirit involves an interior rejection – a rejection of that truth after we have come to see it from the heart and live it – so that we are rejecting its true *spirit*, its holiness and divinity. (*Lord 50; Arcana Coelestia 9818.27*)

In this passage the “Son of Man” is the literal sense, and the “Holy Spirit” is the internal sense. (*Apocalypse Explained 778.3-4*) But the contrast suggests to me that the same applies to the Writings. As to outer form they are the “Son of Man” appearing in the clouds of the Word for all to see. But as to inner form they are the “Holy Spirit” seen only by those who receive them in heart.

### **Receive the Holy Spirit!**

We noted that the Writings themselves do not make a direct connection between the Second Coming and the teachings of John on the sending of the Holy Spirit. I believe this is the case lest we think of the Holy Spirit as a set of books or teachings! The Holy Spirit is the *living Divine presence*, which *brings to life* the truth with us.

The ideas of the New Church – however beautiful and enlightening they may seem to us – do not bring light by themselves. They only bring light to those who *live them* from a love for the Lord and for their fellow human beings. The Lord makes His home with those who love Him and keep His commandments; this presence is the only source of true light with us.

So, if we see the “Father” plainly in the pages of the New Word, it is because we have let the Lord touch our hearts. If we understand the Lord more fully and deeply from the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine, it is only in the measure that we have His Spirit in us. If we are experiencing a gradual opening of our mind, a “leading to all truth,” through the new revelation, it is because we are letting His love abide with us.

The Lord has indeed come again. He has come as the “Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” He has come in new concepts of truth for all the world to see, which have great power to move and mold the mind for heaven, truths which can light up our spiritual lives with incredible glory.

Let us pray, then – *we* who have been so blessed with the wonderful truths

of the Lord's Second Coming – let us pray that we may not remain in mere truths, in outer ideas alone. Let us ask for the Lord's *living* presence, the Spirit of truth, that His Second Coming may become a full and healing reality in our own lives, in the lives of our loved ones, in our church, and in our world. This is the eternal Second Coming that the Lord holds out to us.

He who testifies to these things says: *"Surely I am coming quickly."*

May we respond: *"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"* (Revelation 22.20)



**The Rev. Grant Odhner** is pastor of Michael Church in London, England, where he lives with his wife, Sarah (Bruell). Contact: [grant.odhner@brynathyn.edu](mailto:grant.odhner@brynathyn.edu) or [pastor.grant.odhner@gmail.com](mailto:pastor.grant.odhner@gmail.com)

# The Two Great Prophets and Our Journey to Heaven

*A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.*

*And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” So he saw him no more. (2 Kings 2:12)*

Two great prophets were together in a communion rare among friends – their last conversation on earth, and both of them knew it. They shared a parting that has no counterpart in human history. Elijah went up to heaven in a chariot of fire and no trace of his body was ever found upon earth, though 50 of the sons of the prophets searched for three days.

Single-handedly Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, wiped the worship of Baal from Israel and restored the worship of Jehovah. But that was not all that needed to be done. He needed a prophet to follow him and consolidate his work.

Their story is a tale of our journey toward the Lord, and their miracles tell of wonders He works in our minds and hearts. The secret of representation in the internal sense is in their names. For Elijah means “He whose God is Jehovah,” and Elisha, like Joshua and in fact Jesus, means “God is the Savior.” They represent two parts of our journey toward true worship and of obedience to the Lord, one following the other.

The stories about both of them are telling. Elijah, the greatest prophet, the one who would later appear with Jesus at the transfiguration, called Elisha to be his servant. When it was time for him to die, he went from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan, and they journeyed in Gilead beyond Jordan. Each time Elijah told Elisha to leave him, and each time Elisha said: “As Jehovah lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.”

So, Elijah asked him what he could do for him, and Elisha said: “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” That didn’t mean that he would have twice Elijah’s prophetic power. The “double portion” was a legacy of the oldest son of a house. Elisha was asking, “Please make me your son and heir.”

Elijah’s story is about our earlier attempts to follow the Lord. It is a tale of our conscious efforts to shun evils and do what is right. His miracles tell of



how the Lord helps us to resist actual evil – to stop worshipping and following the things that the Ten Commandments forbid. He represents the Lord's Word and how it gives us the strength to do this: to repent and begin a heavenly life.

But as our life goes on, there comes a time when we stop working – just from conviction, from self-compulsion, from the truths of the Word. A different prophet, representing a different power from the Lord's Word, replaces him, and the manner of the changeover is a miracle that we don't fully see in ourselves, yet it is a significant progress toward heaven.

The story starts with a journey and each step represents part of Elijah's contribution. We go from the spiritual Gilgal, which speaks of our longing for ideals, our hopes and dreams for our spiritual life, to Bethel, the knowledge of truth from the Word which shows us how to reach those dreams. We go down to Jericho, representing lower moral principles, practical truths about how to behave. Then we have to cross the Jordan barrier: false ideas and worldly values which stop us putting our beliefs into practice. The Word banishes these, as Elijah parted the waters. Finally, we walk in Gilead, the land beyond Jordan, the world of external practice, of daily obedience to the truth.

And at each step there is Elijah, the promise of saving truth.

So, what is the miracle of Elijah's disappearance from this earth? It represents that the Elijah truths, the ones we use to force ourselves to obey the Lord, and to shun our evils, disappear from our conscious minds on the journey to heaven. When we practice repentance and the life of charity, truths that we have been using to do this disappear. They are lifted up out of our consciousness into our interior beings, and we stop thinking of them. We just do them.

Consider a person who is learning to play the piano. At first she has to practice all the tools of playing – the right fingering, the scales, the arpeggios, and so on, and she learns to play music from rote. It works. She doesn't play very well, but she's doing the right thing. After long practice, however, playing becomes automatic, and then she stops thinking about how to put her fingers in the right place, or even where the keys are. She doesn't think of it any longer. It becomes so automatic that she would have difficulty going back to the conscious practice that she worked so hard at.

When that happens, she begins to become not a piano player but a musician. She can interpret the music, put her heart into it, even begin to invent new music. She still has much to learn, but it is a totally different kind of learning. Now the playing is instrumental. The music is what matters,

In our spiritual lives, this is what happens to our Elijah truths. They are raised up by the Lord into our deeper minds and become at first habitual, then spontaneous – a matter of life, not self-compulsion. The Elijah truths ascend up into heaven surrounded by the fire of the Lord's gift of love to us. "And he

saw him no more.”

This is how the Word the Lord’s Second Advent expresses it: *“When truth becomes a matter of life then – through the person’s habitual reliance on it – that truth permeates his whole being. . . . And when it permeates him in this way it flows so to speak spontaneously into action – without his thinking about any fact he has learned regarding that truth.”*

The teaching adds: *“The situation with all truth is that at its earliest stage it is merely something known, but as it develops with a person it becomes a matter of life.”*

And they give us a most practical similarity: *“It is like it is with young children when they learn to walk, to talk, to think, and to use their intelligence and make sensible judgments. Once these activities – through habitual engagement in them – have become unpremeditated and so spontaneous, they disappear from among the facts they possess about how to do those things, because they are now instinctive.”* (Arcana Coelestia 3203)

Elijah disappeared from this earth and was never seen again. So truth that we work hard to obey and use is lifted up into our spiritual minds, and vanishes from our conscious thought. But it is even then more useful, for it is a part of our lives.

The Lord’s sun of heaven warms our truths and lifts them up, and we begin to love them almost unconsciously. For example, we all need to work hard against anger and hatred. We practice and practice every time someone annoys us. Over the years we no longer have to tell ourselves the truth about self-control in these situations; it becomes our automatic reaction.

This is what one of the things the Lord meant when He said: *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people unto Myself.”* (John 2:32) And similarly: *“No one has ascended up to heaven, but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:13-15)

So what happens when this miracle takes place in our minds? This is the story of Elisha and his miracles. We begin to experience something of salvation. God is now our Savior – Elisha.

We can see a hint of the difference between these two states in the stories of the two prophets. Elijah was the dramatic, powerful instigator of the deliverance of Israel from Baal – its return to Jehovah. So he is remembered as the great prophet. He was a lonely man, perhaps even living outdoors. He did that by the brook Cherith at the beginning, and we only hear of him being in a house during the drought when he lived with the widow and her son. He was wild and hairy and wore rough clothes. His words were often harsh and very decided. His hand was alone against the forces of evil. “I have been very

zealous for Jehovah of hosts . . . and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.”

We even learn how he despaired and asked Jehovah to take away his life, and how Jehovah reproved him and said he was not alone; that there were 7,000 children of Israel who had never worshipped anyone but Jehovah. And He told Elijah that the work would go on, to anoint two kings to carry it on, and to anoint Elisha as his heir. The kings and queens were his enemies.

Elisha lived very differently. The kings were friendly or grateful to him. He dwelt in a house. We never hear that he doubted his power. Where Elijah’s miracles often brought punishment on the rulers (such as when Naboth was killed so that Ahab could take his

vineyard) or manifested Jehovah’s power (as when he called fire down to burn his offering), Elisha often did favors for people and helped Israel defeat its enemies.

When the king of Syria sent an army to arrest him, he wasn’t worried, for he said: “*Those that be with me are more than they that be with them,*” for indeed there were horses and chariots of fire all around him. And he led that army, blinded, into the capital city – which actually represented a conversion to the true faith. And when he was to die, the king came to him and said the same words he said to Elijah: “*My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof.*” (2 Kings 13:14) He was more accepted and respected, but not as much feared.

When we pass from consciously fighting evil and doing what is right to a deeper state, when salvation is being made real in us, we are more at peace, we are able to do things we could not do before, we feel less anxiety and doubt. Elisha lived a quiet life, much unlike Elijah.

The point is that the Lord leads us through states which are very different, and He alone knows when to introduce us to them. We pass from conscious obedience to a state of relative warmth and peace. It is not always so – we have to fight hard again at times – but as salvation is born in us, we come to do the Lord’s will more easily and often without reflecting on the self-compulsion that we used to need. The love that He is sowing in us makes it easier and makes us

*Elijah was the dramatic, powerful instigator of the deliverance of Israel from Baal. He was a lonely man, wild and hairy, and wearing rough clothes. Elisha was very different. Kings were friendly to him. He dwelt in a house. He lived a quiet life, unlike Elijah.*

calmer and warmer, even loving, in our dedication to Him and His Word and in our relations with others.

This is the miracle of our journey to heaven, which is represented first in Elijah's miraculous transition into heaven, and in the friendship and works of these two prophets. The Word of the New Church has so many teachings about the difference between acting from self-compulsion, which is very good, and acting from a life principle, which is even better. And knowing that the second state is coming is so comforting to us in the tough times when we are working so hard, and perhaps not feeling that we are making progress – as Elijah did when he asked Jehovah to let him die.

There is going to come a time when the battle is easier and calmer, and our feelings more settled and warm toward others. We still have to work hard to follow Him, but He has been drawing us to Himself in heaven, and we will feel something of His lifting us up.

Amen.



The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr. is Bishop Emeritus of the General Church. He and his wife, Lisa (Sandstrom), live in Longmont, Colorado. Contact: [peterbusssr@gmail.com](mailto:peterbusssr@gmail.com)

*This is the miracle of our journey to heaven, which is represented first in Elijah's miraculous transition into heaven, and in the friendship and works of these two prophets.*

# The Dream of New Church Education

*Have the mission and purpose of New Church education changed? Are New Church schools still a viable means of passing the church on to the next generation?*

(Editors' note: This is a slightly condensed version of a presentation at the Council of the Clergy meetings in Bryn Athyn prior to the Assembly.)

*The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons*

What was the dream of New Church Education? What were the hopes and expectations of those who founded the Academy and articulated the need for New Church schools?

For many people religious education is seen as a logical extension of any church, and religion is seen as a common and normal aspect of children's schooling. If we think of it that way it makes sense that our founders would have started schools.

Another way to see the historical development of New Church schooling, however, is as a survival strategy. The Academicians saw the church's position as perilous, like the woman in *Revelation 12* pursued by the dragon. Without some way of passing on a love and commitment for the church to the next generation the church would not survive in the Christian world. The rhetoric of those times among the members of the Academy movement reflected that attitude and the educational structure – and the schools that they created – put that rhetoric into practice.

For a long time, General Church schools have been relatively successful, and both the schools and the church grew steadily if not dramatically. The generosity of the church members, and the willingness of the organizational leadership to devote moral support and financial resources to the project paid off. But in recent decades the situation has changed, many of the schools have struggled, and the case could be made that their mission and purpose have changed as well.

## **Have the Mission and Purpose of New Church Education Changed?**

The topic of this paper is the changes in the dream of New Church education that have taken place over the years. Whereas the rhetoric of the Academicians emphasized the threats to the New Church, more recent discussion has focused on the opportunities in front of us that ought to be taken advantage of. Whereas the early church saw itself in a position of weakness, we have more recently seen ourselves as in a position of strength, and some would say that hubris has led us to take risks that have led to problems. On the other hand, some would also say that we really are in a stronger position than ever before, that our prospects are good, and that the issues we face are the perhaps inevitable result of larger societal changes.

This paper asks how we see these issues today. Are we still on board with the original goals and purposes of New Church education? Do we see New Church education as a survival strategy? Do we see it as a growth strategy? There have also always been people who see it as an impediment to the growth of the church. Would the church be better off without these expensive full-time schools that take up enormous amounts of time and resources, and involve the clergy in work that it is not well equipped to carry out effectively?

*This paper asks how we see these issues today. Are we still on board with the original goals and purposes of New Church education? Do we see New Church education as a survival strategy? Do we see it as a growth strategy?*

**New Church schools have been, and still are, the jewels in the life of the General Church.**

I see New Church schools as being among the jewels in the life of the church. I believe they are competently managed and offer a spectacular education to our young people. At the same time, I am aware of some of the challenges they face, and I want to encourage the discussion of those challenges and their solutions among those who love these schools and their mission.

### **Changes in the church in my lifetime**

Since I graduated from the Academy in 1971 there have been changes in the church that have surprised me, and others that have not been so surprising.

Here are three that have surprised me:

1. **The growth of the church in West Africa.** This is something that I began paying attention to and wishing for when I was in college in the 1970s. It is the reason for my choice of a college major and why I joined the Peace Corps and went to Togo. I had confidence that the church would grow in Africa, but I am surprised and delighted at how quickly it has grown.
2. **The success of *offTheLeftEye* and the New Christian Bible Study.** I had never expected that any efforts like these would be as popular as they are. I feel tremendous gratitude for the talent and brilliance of the individuals who have made these things happen and hope that they have a long-lasting effect. Similar efforts from the General Church have also been successful and may prove to have a real impact on the organized church.
3. **The decline of New Church schools.** I did not expect this. The system seemed so solid until recently. Now all of our church schools are struggling except perhaps those in Bryn Athyn and Kempton. Few church members from outside of Bryn Athyn send their children to the Academy. The student bodies of the Academy and College are increasingly made up of students from families new to the church. Fewer and fewer of the students or graduates seem to attend church services or participate in the church organization after graduation.

Other significant developments have not been so surprising. As predicted in the Heavenly Doctrine the results of our evangelization efforts have been disappointing, and our culture war struggles with issues around gender and sexuality are in line with these predictions as well. The decline in participation in almost all of our congregations follows similar declines in other churches in Europe and North America. The liberalization of our traditions and policies in an effort to accommodate to a changing world is natural and unsurprising. The developments in New Church education are part of these trends as well, and the purpose of this paper is to ask questions about how to accommodate to them. These developments have surprised me because I had always believed that our system was stable and that the principles that it rested on were well understood within our leadership, faculties and boards.

1. **Understanding the pessimism of our founders is important to understanding the original impetus for New Church education**

It is hard to come to grips with the founders' concepts of New Church education without understanding the fundamental pessimism of their views. It is not that there was any pessimism about the ultimate future of the New Church, or any doubt about its teachings. The pessimism was about the likelihood of the New Church surviving in the Christian world unless strong, even radical, measures were put in place to preserve and protect it.

They rejected the optimism of the larger church, that is, the Convention, that the New Church would grow and even have a major impact on Christianity as a whole. Instead, they believed that the cultures of North America and Europe would grow increasingly hostile to the New Church, eventually persecuting and eradicating it unless steps were taken to combat its influence.

They believed that children born within the church would have little chance of accepting and adopting New Church teachings if they grew up fully immersed in the culture of the old church. While there would always be a few believers no matter what the church as a whole did, the adoption of New Church education, among other strategies, would enable the organized church to be large enough and strong enough to effectively contribute to its future spread in parts of the world more receptive to its teachings, as the Writings predict. They accepted as a given that the future of the New Church lay outside of the Christian world.

**New Church education was seen as necessary because the people of the Christian world were seen as resistant to New Church teachings.**

The doctrine on this topic is fairly straightforward. The teachings state that the New Church will find few adherents within the culture of the former church, but many more in some other part of the world outside of that culture. The reasons given are that the culture of the former church is antagonistic to the new teachings. This is because these teachings contradict their assumptions, because they run counter to their lifestyle, and even because the peoples of the former church are disposed by their hereditary makeup to be resistant to the truth:

*The reverse of faith is ingrained within them not only on account of the assumptions (or principles) they have adopted since early childhood and subsequently confirmed, but also on account of their heredity. (Arcana Coelestia 788)*

By contrast the peoples of other parts of the world typically do not have ideas that so strongly close their minds to the new teachings, and they also typically lead more charitable lives and believe in God, according to the Heavenly Doctrine. (Arcana Coelestia 4747.2; 9256.7)



These qualities naturally vary throughout the world, just as they do within the traditional Christian world. Just as the Writings praise the English and predict that they will embrace the Heavenly Doctrines more than others in the Christian world, they similarly praise the peoples of Africa and predict the growth of the New Church there. Both of these predictions seem to be confirmed by what has happened since the Doctrines were given. What limited success the New Church has had has been mostly in the English-speaking world, and more recently in Africa.

The history of the church up to this point has also confirmed the larger point that it would find little success in the culture of the former church, that is, in Europe, North America, Australia, and other places colonized by Europeans.

An important point here is that the theories of New Church education are specifically about the state of the New Church within the culture of the former Christian Church. They do not apply to other parts of the world. Although religious schools are no doubt excellent tools for teaching the New Church anywhere in the world, the argument for their necessity for the survival of the church is directed specifically at the culture of fallen Christianity.

Schools are expensive, complicated institutions that involve the clergy in many tasks to which they are not always well suited. Therefore, they are most worthwhile in places where the church cannot easily be passed on by any other means. In places like Africa other forms of evangelization, such as distributing books, are likely to be more fruitful and effective.

Despite its small numbers the New Church has continued to exist in Europe, North America and elsewhere. The books of the Writings have continually been published and distributed, and there has been a steady and devoted interest in them among a few. In addition, internet offerings such as the amazing videos of *offTheLeftEye* and the remarkable website *New Christian Bible Study*, have had so much success, especially in the past decade or so, that they hold out the promise of contradicting our founders' pessimistic attitude. While their thrilling accomplishments do not seem to be having much of an effect on the fortunes of the organized church at this point, this could easily change.

More importantly, the Heavenly Doctrines place little importance on organizational affiliations, so whether or not these internet tools lead people to join organizations they are still immensely valuable. At the same time, it is still true that organizations are needed. Organizations, such as churches, schools and publishing houses, are needed to maintain the means for people to find, study and live by New Church teachings. These then perpetuate the continuing increase of those people who genuinely know, love and live by them, who are known to the Lord alone.

As the Doctrines tell us, the assumptions of the average person, their

adopted and accepted lifestyles, and our shared hereditary makeup militate against it. This means that without organized means to reinforce, support, educate and inspire people to live according to the teachings most people will adopt the thinking and habits of the majority culture – placing both the continued existence of the organizations and of continuing interest in the teachings at risk.

One of the central ideas in New Church education is that it looks to provide conditions within the Christian world that are more like that of the gentile world, making it more likely that the students will adopt the beliefs and lifestyle of the New Church. Accordingly, New Church education both teaches the Word to students and attempts to lead them to live by it. These were the explicit goals of New Church education in the minds of the founders of the Academy movement. The same is often the case with those interested in home-schooling.

It should be clear, therefore, that a prerequisite to the idea of New Church education is the understanding that the former church is at an end and will not be reformed:

*It is worthy of note that the cause of New Church education gained no headway until the precursors and founders of the Academy movement made it clear that the state of the world was such that we could expect no reform from within the Christian Church. This involved a new and more discriminating concept of charity. So long as it was thought to be a part of charity to suppose that the old churches could be reformed by a secret influx from the new heaven, or by an unconscious permeation of New Church truths, or by an evolution apart from the Writings, so long there was no strong incentive for attempting to establish a distinctive New Church intensively consecrated to the development of its own religious perceptions, its own institutions, its own philosophy, and its own mode of life. (Rev. Hugo Lj. Odhner, Our Responsibility to the Future, New Church Life 1950)*

**The movement for New Church education was therefore founded on two principles:**

Carl Theophilus Odhner wrote in 1901:

*The idea of New Church education was the offspring of two most important parent principles of New Church faith:*

***The first of these principles*** *was the practical acknowledgments of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Second Coming: that He is present with His Church in and by the Revelation of Divine Truth which*

*has been given in the Theological Writings of His Servant Emanuel Swedenborg...*

*And the second of the two fundamental principles was the recognition of the complete Distinctiveness of the New Church. . . . This involved the recognition of the utterly devastated condition of the Old Church as to any true spirit of Christianity. (Carl Theophilus Odhner, The Academy of the New Church: An Historical Sketch)*

**The point of New Church education was to pass on the first of Odhner's two principles to the next generation, overcoming the influence of what is described in his second principle.**

The “*first principle*” is about a belief in the Heavenly Doctrine as the authoritative Word of God. The “*second principle*” is that the state of Christian culture is a negative influence that works to prevent this “*first principle*” from gaining acceptance. Without an appreciation of this situation the church will struggle to pass the church on to the next generation.

*The interests of the earliest members of the Church were in general occupied with the absorbing desire to make the Heavenly Doctrines known to the world at large, and in this field of work they performed a great and necessary use. But, alas, in the meantime many, if not most of them, failed to present these heavenly treasures to their own children. It was generally supposed that the Doctrines of the New Church were not adapted to the comprehension of the young, or that parents had not the right to influence their children in the choice of a religion.*

*The results of this neglect, or mistaken policy, began to become evident some 30 years after the first establishment of the Church, when, in the early periodicals, there were heard voices of alarm at the deplorable fact that most of the children of the New Church parents were returning to the denominations of the Old Church, or had grown up without any active interest in the things of religion.*

*(Carl Theophilus Odhner, The Academy of the New Church: An Historical Sketch 1904)*

Odhner goes on to point out that this situation and the remedy of establishing schools were recognized from the very beginning of the church, by Hindmarsh and a few others. But such practical issues, and perhaps especially the lack of finances, prevented schooling from becoming an effective solution.

**The founders' views were that without effective New Church education few of the children born within the church would become committed to the Heavenly Doctrines.**

This view is stated most directly in W.F. Pendleton's *Principles of the Academy* in 1899:

*The neglect in the organized New Church of the children born within its borders has the result that comparatively few of such children have remained in the Church after reaching adult life.*

*Nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that it is of the LORD'S Providence that children born of New Church parents should enter into the Church in adult life; and it is reasonable to hope that this will take place, if the Church co-operates with the LORD according to the revealed laws of order.*

*This most desirable result can therefore be accomplished, provided that the LORD be acknowledged in His Second Coming; that the distinctiveness of the New Church and the death of the old, be seen; that there be marriage in the Church, and the laws of order in marriage be observed; that the sphere of the Church be in the home; that there be New Church day-schools, and thus that the children be kept in the sphere of the Church, in the home, in the school, and in their social life, until they reach adult age.*

*The Academy, therefore, decided to occupy this new field of Evangelization, one which had been largely neglected; believing that from this source mainly the future members of the Church will be provided; that it is the most fruitful field of the New Church for its increase in the Christian world; that by it will be provided in the future not only multiplication in numbers, but growth in quality, such as can come in no other way."*

W.F. Pendleton here advocates for New Church education and describes its important features:

1. *"That the LORD be acknowledged in His Second Coming"* – That is, that the Writings are the Word of the Lord.
2. *"That the distinctiveness of the New Church and the death of the old, be seen."* – That is, that the vastated state of our culture be recognized and protected against.
3. *"That there be marriage in the Church, and the laws of order in marriage*

*be observed.*” – This is about ensuring that both partners in a marriage accept the New Church and live by its teachings. The “laws of order” mentioned here probably refer especially to rejecting birth control.

4. *“That the sphere of the Church be in the home”* – The idea here is that the church and school would reinforce each other, the school being an extension of what is believed and taught in the home.
5. *“That there be New Church day-schools.”* – That is, this cannot be accomplished only with Sunday School.
6. *“Thus that the children be kept in the sphere of the Church, in the home, in the school, and in their social life, until they reach adult age.”* This is all about the moral environment of the world in which a child is raised, with multiple influences being consistent with each other and with what the Heavenly Doctrine teaches.

**From the start it was clear that the Academy view of New Church education was opposed to its use as a vehicle for evangelizing those outside of the church.**

Religious schools are a common feature of churches worldwide and have often been seen as means of evangelization. This was also true at first in the New Church. In the view of the founders of the Academy, however, this attempted use of New Church education would cause it to fail. C. Th. Odhner put it this way:

*New Church day schools were established by a few societies, the movement finally culminating in the foundation of the Urbana University, in Ohio, in 1851. For some years these schools worked with considerable success, but before long most of them were invaded by the proselytizing spirit. In the hope of making converts, and in some cases for financial reasons, their doors were opened to children of Old Church parents. As the next step, the instruction in the Doctrines of the New Church was made a matter of choice instead of remaining an essential sine qua non. The schools thus lost their distinctive character and became New Church for the most part in name only. Many went out of existence before long; a few developed into purely secular institutions. (Carl Theophilus Odhner, *The Academy of the New Church: An Historical Sketch* 1904)*

The point here is not only that the effort would be unsuccessful, but that it would cause the school itself to fail, or to lose its religious identity. This was the theme of the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith’s paper in 2000: *The Secularization of Religious Colleges and Universities*.

**Since the founding of the Academy schools there has been continual**

## **development in the field of New Church education.**

From the very beginning of the Academy Movement in the 19th century, the discussion of New Church education has included the idea of methods of instruction based on the Writings. That is, it has included the thought that the New Church would develop a new kind of pedagogy unlike the methods advocated by secular educators.

While other aspects of New Church schooling were perhaps more emphasized at first, over time significant effort has been put into developing the practice of New Church education in New Church schools. In doing this some have been left with the impression that the new pedagogy that has been and continues to be developed is very important, that the education that resulted would benefit any child who was exposed to them, and even that these things are the core of what is called “New Church education.”

The argument of this paper, however, is that the core of New Church education is really the environment of love, charity and faith in New Church teachings that exists in the school, based on the shared beliefs and behaviors of parents, teachers and the students themselves – regardless of pedagogical methods. This is the environment that will foster the love of the Word and the life that it teaches, a genuine worship of the Lord, that will perpetuate the New Church.

The beloved and respected church leaders who talked about educational methods, such as Bishops Benade and de Charms, also made faith and life central to this work. They did not make the methods more important than other aspects of the original concept. Over the years, however, there has come to be more of an emphasis on the importance of these methods, and less of an emphasis on other aspects of New Church schooling. This has been especially true as such things as exclusivity and rigid moral standards have been criticized by society.

I am not sure there has always been an adequate appreciation of the idea that everything in New Church education is based on a shared belief in New Church teachings, and that if teachers, parents and students don’t accept and act on those teachings the system breaks down.

## **Bishop George de Charms spoke of “indirect use of Revelation” in education.**

Bishop de Charms makes an interesting distinction between teaching the Word itself and teaching using methods taken from the Word:

*The indirect use of Revelation is the real means by which education becomes distinctive, rather than by the direct use of Revelation. This latter has its place, its important use, but by itself it will not make*

*New Church education. Never! The indirect use of Revelation is the real basis of distinct teaching. By the indirect use of it we mean, not teaching the Writings, but teaching from the Writings. We mean teaching from the philosophy of life and the philosophy of subject matter that we, ourselves, have derived from the Writings and which has been built up in the Church by study of the Writings. We mean that the teacher, having come to see and be inspired by the vision now given of the relation between the external things she is teaching and the internal things of spiritual life, will teach in such a way that gradually that vision may open up to the child as his mind becomes prepared, so that it will come to the child as his own discovery.” (Philosophy of New Church Education, Rt. Rev. George de Charms, p. 158)*

That is, it is not just that students in a New Church school will be taught the Word itself, but that the teachers will teach in a way that is guided by the Word. Few would disagree with this idea, but what it means in practice is not completely clear.

Here is how this is stated in General Church Education’s document: *What is New Church Education? A Model in a Human Form* by Kay R. Alden, May 2010

*New Church education seeks to develop the affections, understanding, and skills associated with being truly human.*

*To achieve this goal, New Church education operates in two primary ways which are different from other schools. We can think of these two vital activities as the two legs on which New Church education stands.*

***The first leg is rather obvious: New Church educators systematically teach ABOUT New Church concepts.*** This leg illustrates the many ways that New Church teachers directly teach truths from the three-fold Word. It represents the instruction associated with worship services, religion classes, and the way New Church concepts are integrated into the content of secular courses such as English, history, art, physical education and science. Distinctive New Church curriculum provides the framework for this leg, which is easy to see and recognize as being distinctively New Church.

***The second leg is perhaps less obvious: New Church educators also teach FROM New Church concepts.*** The extensive teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine about the human mind, stages of development,



*regeneration and accommodation help educators make decisions about how, when and why material is taught. Concepts from the Heavenly Doctrine also guide New Church teachers' choices about discipline, social interactions, community relationships and service. This "leg" inspires teachers at all levels to protect innocence and develop a conscience. It emphasizes the importance of working with parents in the younger grades and balancing freedom with rational abilities as they mature. . . .*

*Although this second leg, teaching from New Church concepts, may be less obvious to an outside observer, it may be even more vital to distinctiveness than the first. Certainly, our model needs both legs – ABOUT and FROM the Lord's Word – if it is to have a truly human form.*

This follows from Bishop de Charms' description above. *"The indirect use of Revelation is the real basis of distinct teaching."* These things are very familiar to New Church educators in the General Church. We emphasize accommodation, leading by the affections, attention to children's stages of development, learning by doing, stimulating the "as-of-self" and other features that are common in our schools. These ideas have been developed over many years at the college and in the schools. These ideas have been exceedingly helpful and important.

**Other aspects of New Church education, as envisioned by the founders, are more difficult to control.**

Principles like these about what happens in the classroom are essential. But the primary emphasis of the Academicians was education *"within the sphere of the church"* where the school was an extension of the New Church home, and where parents, teachers and students shared a belief in the Heavenly Doctrine. It did not dwell on any particular model; the emphasis was the environment of the child's upbringing. Bishop de Charms emphasized this as well:

*We define education as the rational control and direction of a child's environment to the end that the child's mind may be disposed to the reception of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom from the Lord. And this definition applies especially to parents in the home, to the church as a community of homes all seeking to create a similar effective environment for childhood, and to professional educators as well. (Rt. Rev. George de Charms, December 20, 1962, New Church Audio Class #28)*



So, de Charms' emphasis was not just about distinct teaching methods, but the students' whole environment. The issue is that much of this is outside of a school's control. Neither the school nor the church can control what happens inside the home or in society, nor should they. These depend on the voluntary beliefs and actions of the individuals who make up the community of parents. Outside of setting requirements for employees and admission the school can do nothing other than rely on the leadership of those who control the institution.

Other critical aspects of formal education are such things as financial support and having a student body and faculty large enough to provide an adequate educational experience. At the elementary level the number of students can be quite small without causing concern, but in high school and college most parents hope for larger numbers.

The twin concerns of finances and adequate numbers of students have been the reason for the failure of almost all of the schools founded by New Church congregations over the years.

### **There are conflicts inherent in religious schools.**

In his paper in 2000, Brian Keith pointed out that schools, especially at the college level, have their own inbuilt priorities and agenda, and that these do not always easily co-exist with the priorities of a religious body. Whereas churches look for doctrinal integrity, moral behavior and a sphere of reverence for the Lord and the Word, educational institutions prioritize academic excellence, the credibility of the institution, freedom of speech and diversity, and the ability to attract high quality students and faculty.

When it comes to faculty, the need for excellent teachers often outweighs the desire to have teachers who are church members. Furthermore, colleges require accreditation to maintain credibility, and accrediting bodies typically discourage schools from being controlled by churches. Both schools and churches naturally pursue strategies to enable their survival and success, and these strategies often diverge. Administrators and boards are therefore often put in difficult positions between these conflicting priorities. This is especially true when finances are at stake.

### **These conflicts have caused certain aspects of traditional New Church education to be seen as unworkable.**

The educational views of the Academicians, as shown above in the writings of C. Th. Odhner and W.F. Pendleton, emphasized the school as an extension of the New Church home, the environment of reverence for and obedience to

the Word, and the support for the New Church on the part of teachers, parents and students. They were also enthusiastic about the “new pedagogy” based on New Church teachings.

Over time, however, the “new pedagogy” became a much easier pill to swallow than the Academicians’ rigid ideas about maintaining the sphere of the church in the schools. Restricting both the faculty and student body to baptized members, carefully monitoring social life, disciplining or expelling students for moral transgressions, requiring church attendance and having other similar expectations were standards that were hard to maintain. Insistence on them could be seen as threatening the legitimacy, attractiveness and even survival of the school.

In practice, as anyone might guess, the things necessary to maintain the sphere of the church have always been to some extent up for debate. Are baptism and membership necessary or is simply having an interest in the church sufficient? To what extent are the private actions of the individual student and home anyone’s business but their own? If a church and school are supposed to be all about the practice of charity, how do we justify the exclusions, restrictions and penalties that go along with maintaining the school’s standards?

In the end it has always been a delicate balancing act. The testimony of well over 100 years of New Church schooling has shown that sometimes it has worked well and sometimes it has not. Sometimes the student body, faculty and school families have combined in an environment that is loving and enthusiastic about the church. Many church members have looked back on their schooling in the church with gratitude, saying that almost all of their friends and classmates have been part of the church ever since.

Other times it has not worked out as well, with few students maintaining any long-term interest in the Heavenly Doctrines. Whether brought up in the church or not, the personalities and behaviors of individual students can be problematic. But when home and school are aligned the chances of success are much greater.

The point here is just that it is difficult to maintain a New Church environment in New Church schools. Because of this many have come to see other aspects of education as being more important, or at least more practical to administer. Many have come to believe that almost any student from almost any family who attends New Church schools, learns the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine, attends chapel services, hears New Church philosophy in their coursework, and engages in traditional New Church social life is likely to develop an interest in the Heavenly Doctrine and join the church.

This is perhaps why many have advocated for a long time that exposing new students from outside the church to New Church education will result in

the growth of the church. This contradicts key aspects of our founders' beliefs, as well as the experience of other New Church schools, not to mention the experience of the school systems of other churches. No one expects students who attend Quaker schools to become Quakers, and almost none do. This is the almost universal experience of religious schools who admit students from outside their denomination.

Still, many New Church schools have followed suit, dismissing the pessimism of our founders.

### **Our experiment in using New Church education to grow the church.**

In the year 2000, the Rev. Dan Goodenough put it this way:

*There is fairly widespread agreement that the Academy, particularly the college, should seek to grow by improving our appeal to spiritual seekers from outside. But it is crucial to the Academy's integrity and spiritual direction that decisions about this be motivated by a genuine spiritual wish to build the Lord's kingdom, rather than by worldly (yet not bad) reasons for growth. (Governance to put Light on a Lampstand, New Church Life, 2000)*

A few years later the Academy board approved a new strategic plan for 2006-2011:

*The plan has been carefully thought through to project what is best for the Academy to improve its offerings and to grow. There were six essential guidelines:*

- *Building a strong relationship with the General Church*
- *Contributing to distinctive New Church education*
- *Prudent, viable growth*
- *Prudent financial management*
- *A governance structure capable of responding to needs*
- *Excellence in all that we do*

*The committee determined early on that for long-range planning to be effective, it must have collaboration and support from the General Church, the Bryn Athyn Society and other organizations. As the General Church develops and implements its own strategic plan, the Academy will work with societies around the world to promote New Church education and the establishment of the Church.*

*Traditionally we have relied on the children of General Church parents to attend the Academy, and for that we are grateful. The*

*Academy has for decades been successful in planting truths in their minds for the benefit of the Church and of society. But propagation also means to spread the Word. We in the Academy have the responsibility of teaching truths to all potential students who would benefit from their experience at the Academy and who would bring benefit to the Academy, to the Church and to the world.*

*We are not growing for the sake of growth or for the sake of revenue from tuition dollars. We are growing because we see this as fulfilling our commitment to the Charter's first purpose. The Academy will not be changing its admissions policies, its curriculum or its mission. We want more students from within and outside the Church "who have a genuine desire to learn about the Lord in His Threefold Word, to learn all subjects in the light of that Word, and to abide by the tenets of a spiritually moral life."*

*The emphasis in our planning is on sound financial modeling. We will do only what we can afford to do, and will ask donors to support only what is feasible, responsible and necessary for prudent growth.*

*Bryn Athyn College is planning for enrollments up to 1,500, with incremental targets along the way.*

*The optimal scenario for the Secondary Schools limits the size to 400-500, with 150-200 boarding. Ideally, as the Church grows, other societies will be able to support K-12 schools.*

*Short-term (10-year) goals are 18 in the Theological School, 250 in the College, and 300 in the Secondary Schools.*

*The teams that recently re-accredited both the Secondary Schools and the College/Theological School each came to see that the Academy is a gem just waiting to be discovered, and that our faculties, students and facilities are real treasures.*

*BMWV, a consulting firm that helped the College with its recruiting strategy, said there surely are thousands of students within a 50-mile radius who want what the Academy has to offer. They just don't know it's here.*

*Sasaki Associates quickly came to see the Academy as poised to take off and grow. They love the integrity of our teachings and values,*

*the setting that enhances our spiritual mission, and the Doctrine of Use as a calling to students interested in service and spirituality. (Academy of the New Church Strategic Plan, New Church Life 2006)*

This plan clearly sprang from a love of the church, a desire to help it grow and prosper, and a willingness to work hard to make this happen. The plan was adopted, new buildings have been built and many new students now attend both the college and high school. The clear goal of the plan was to grow the church. Donors supported the plan, happy to contribute after years of frustration with the church's failure to grow, years of promises and unsuccessful efforts.

There are statements in this plan from 2006 that the passage of time may give us perspective:

1. *The Academy will not be changing its admissions policies, its curriculum or its mission. We want more students from within and outside the Church who have a genuine desire to learn about the Lord in His Threefold Word, to learn all subjects in the light of that Word, and to abide by the tenets of a spiritually moral life.*

- Has the Academy changed its admissions policies, its curriculum or its mission? What do we do to recruit students who have the "genuine desire" listed here? Are we requiring students to "abide by the tenets of a spiritually moral life"?

2. *The emphasis in our planning is on sound financial modeling. We will do only what we can afford to do.*

- In retrospect it seems that despite our best efforts this has been difficult to carry out.

3. The numbers used in planning now seem optimistic:

*Bryn Athyn College is planning for enrollments up to 1,500, with incremental targets along the way.*

*The optimal scenario for the Secondary Schools limits the size to 400-500, with 150-200 boarding. Ideally, as the Church grows, other societies will be able to support K-12 schools.*

*Short-term (10-year) goals are 18 in the Theological School, 250 in the College, and 300 in the Secondary Schools."*

- The clear expectation here is that increased enrollments will lead to church growth in terms of membership.

4. The last parts of the report quoted above note how the companies assisting us in planning, and our accrediting agency, praised us as a gem just waiting to be found. They spoke of the large numbers of students nearby who want what we have to offer. In practice this potential, which I am sure that we see as well, has been hard to realize.

### What have been the results of this experiment?

It is now almost 20 years since this experiment began. Is it too soon to judge the results? Here are some church membership statistics as recorded in *New Church Life*:

Year	Total membership	New members
1979	3,627	101
1985	3,879	111
1990	4261	155
1995	4554	103
2000	4584	157
2005	4979	139
2010	5296	84
2015	5411	49
2020	5409	37
2021	5384	48
2023	5360	64

Membership statistics don't come close to telling the whole story. Maybe they don't tell us much at all about the experiment. But they do show us that few if any of the new students have become formal members as yet. They also show us that, contrary to expectations, the number of new members has declined dramatically in the years since the new policies and programs were put into effect and the new buildings were built. They don't tell us *why* that happened, and there may be no connection at all between the two. But they do tell us that there has not been any increase, much less the increase that was expected.

Another interesting fact about these years, since about 2014, is that this has been the period in which the *offTheLeftEye* videos have made their astounding rise in popularity. Some have expected that the people who write enthusiastically about how Swedenborg has changed their life would look around for others who feel this way – and come into contact with the organized church. This has not seemed to happen except with a very few.

The membership numbers are quoted all the way back to 1979 to show

that there has been a fairly consistent pattern of new memberships each year, with small but consistent increases in total General Church membership. The church has grown at a consistent rate of 10% to 15% every 10 years since the 1920s. Between 2010 and 2020, however, the rate declined to 2%, and since 2018 the numbers have declined every year.

We can only speculate about the causes of this decline. It may be because this is what is happening to all Christian churches in this part of the world. People no longer tend to join organizations. It may be due to sentiments inflamed by current sex and gender related issues. It may be due to policies and practices within the General Church. It may be due to the changes in New Church education that we are describing here. It may have nothing to do with any of these.

**Finances have played a major role in New Church education.**

The Academy and General Church system of education owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to their generous donors over the years, especially to John Pitcairn and his descendants, but to others as well who are well known to all of us. Without John Pitcairn's support none of it would probably have happened. Almost all of the experiments in New Church education failed for lack of financing, and ours would have failed as well if not for him. It is only because of this support that the Academicians could even dream of restricting the student body to families dedicated to the church.

Everyone in the church has been well aware of this support, even if the families involved have typically been as modest and anonymous about their support as possible. But I believe that few realize how unusual and generous the support has been. I had always been aware, for example, that the Academy had a large endowment. But it was not until I attended meetings of the *Association of Delaware Valley Independent Schools*, when they discussed endowments, that I realized how large it was compared to other schools.

At the time, around 2006, it was not just the largest endowment of any school in the Philadelphia area, it was one of the largest of any high school in the country. On a per-student basis it was the largest in the country. This meant that its financial security was guaranteed, and that the Academy was not dependent on either tuition or its donors. This didn't mean that it didn't need tuition or donors, since educational needs are virtually limitless, but it did mean that its continued existence was never in question.

The purpose of having a large endowment was not so that the school could do whatever it wished, or ignore the advice of its supporters, parents, faculty or community. The purpose was to allow the school to maintain its integrity as a New Church institution, something that had to be sacrificed at

every other New Church school in the past.

Schools such as Urbana in Ohio were never able to realize their founders' purposes largely because of a lack of funding. A large endowment also made it possible for anyone interested in a New Church education to afford the tuition regardless of economic circumstances. So, the Academy has historically offered an education that rivaled the most prestigious and expensive private schools in the country at a price that anyone could afford.

Before the existence of the well-funded General Church and Academy, New Church education has been almost impossible to make viable. Unfortunately, the financial crisis of 2007-2008 had a significant impact on the funding of the Academy's 2006 strategic plan. The timing could not have been worse. We had committed large portions of the now crisis-reduced endowment to the plan, and the ability of donors to support the plan was also affected.

When all was said and done the funds available to the administration to operate the high school and college with their new buildings were greatly diminished. The new plan included a much greater reliance on tuition, so the importance of expanding enrollments was also increased. We have been working hard ever since to catch up and gain control of our financial situation.

### **Is New Church education about church membership?**

As it became clear that these changes in our schools would do little to grow the church, people began to point out that the purpose of New Church education is not about church membership but about the spiritual free development of the human mind.

Bishop de Charms is quoted on this topic:

*It has been supposed that in the New Church we have a New Church education for the primary purpose of increasing the membership of our Church. That has been supposed to be the Catholic reason for having Catholic schools also. It is not the end and purpose of our education to increase the membership of our Church. The end or purpose of our education is to develop a mode of training that will be in cooperation with the Divine Providence, that will open the gates of influx to the operation of the Lord with children so that He may lead them, and it will not take away their freedom of spiritual life by determining their life for them ahead of time. Therefore, true New Church education has the greatest possible regard for the spiritual free development of children in the next generation. (The Philosophy of New Church Education, p. 31)*

There is no doubt that Bishop de Charms is right about this. New Church



education is not about indoctrination, brainwashing or propaganda. There is no effort to compel students to believe in the New Church or join the organization. It is about freedom based on clear explanations of the truth.

It should be noted, however, that de Charms was writing at a time when the views that W. F. Pendleton wrote about in the “*Principles of the Academy*” were widely held, when ideas of “*distinctiveness*” were at their peak, when virtually all graduates of the Academy became members of the church, and when other New Church bodies criticized New Church education as a form of brainwashing. He was defending it as being based in freedom of thought.

The founders of the church and its original thinkers such as Richard de Charms, Bishop Benade, and others saw New Church education as crucial to the continued existence of the church within the culture of the fallen church. Bishop de Charms agreed with them. In simple terms the objective has always been about the survival of the New Church in the Christian world by passing on its beliefs and lifestyle to the next generation, as it has been commonly put in statements such as these:

*New Church education exists for the purpose of evangelizing the children of New Church parents. For the ends of New Church education are the ends of the church itself – the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom in the individual human mind, that the Lord may reign or govern. (Some reflections upon Government in New Church Education, the Rt. Rev. Louis B. King, New Church Life 1981)*

### **Church organizations are important.**

As noted before, the Heavenly Doctrines place little importance on organizational affiliations. Our goal is not the success of the organization but a much larger mission. Whether or not such things as New Church schools, internet tools and videos, and other things lead people to join organizations, they are still immensely valuable.

At the same time, it is still true that organizations are needed. Organizations, such as churches, schools and publishing houses, are needed to maintain the means for people to find, study and live by New Church teachings, and therefore to perpetuate the growing number of people who genuinely know, love and live by them, who are known to the Lord alone.

### **New Church education has demonstrably contributed to the membership of the church.**

While teachers and administrators in the schools rightly point out that church membership is not their job, data about New Church education indicates that

attendance in the church schools is a significant factor in membership.

1. In the United States 2,167 of 3,366, or 64%, of General Church members are Academy or Bryn Athyn College alumni.
2. In the United States another 1,077, or 32%, were baptized as adults.
3. In the United States out of 2,546 who were baptized as children but did not attend New Church schools only a small number (209) have become members.
4. In the United States almost 50% of the living alumni of Academy and Bryn Athyn College are General Church members, 2,167 out of 4,688. Many more are involved but have not signed the rolls.

These figures are from 2012 and are for the United States only, since other factors come into play in other parts of the world, and New Church schools are only available in a few places.

These figures tell us that about two-thirds of the U.S. membership is composed of alumni, and that almost all of the rest are newcomers, many of whom are married to people who are alumni. In one way or another graduates of the Academy and Bryn Athyn College are responsible for a very large percentage of the U.S. membership. By contrast, few of those who were baptized in childhood, but who did not attend the Academy or College, have become members.

Statistics clearly show, however, that the relative success of New Church education as a source of members has been declining over the years. A much higher percentage of graduates joined the church 60 years ago than in the past 30 years. So, the fact that recent graduates have not been joining the church may not be as great a break with the past as some might think. Despite this, church membership has continued to grow right up until the past few years. Now, however, it appears that church membership will decline every year going forward unless something changes.

Regardless of their challenges, I still see New Church schools as being among the jewels in the life of the church. I believe they are competently managed and offer a spectacular education to our young people. The faculties and student bodies are wonderful people. The challenge is that it is difficult in the current circumstances to foster an environment that makes it likely that they will know, love and practice the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine throughout their lives.

There are many factors involved in this, but an important one is how difficult it has become to raise children “within the sphere of the church” as W.F. Pendleton described it. In places where this is still possible, however, the results have been good with respect to church attendance and membership.

The Kempton Society, for example, has grown consistently since it began in the late 1970s and this has been true in a few other places as well.

**So here is the problem.**

The General Church is currently in a dilemma:

1. Our traditional model for sustaining our membership, relying on New Church schools, no longer seems to be working.
2. Our efforts at evangelization do not seem to be working any better than they have in the past.
3. It seems inevitable that our membership will decline.  
Of course, any of these could improve at any time.

**What are some possible solutions?**

Only the Lord knows what will happen in the future, and our own speculations about what might help or hurt the cause are likely to be misguided. But here are some possible ways that things might change:

1. There might be successful efforts to moderate the environment within and around our New Church schools to one more conducive to the life-long acceptance of the Heavenly Doctrine – an environment supported in the home, in the social lives of students, in faculties, and in the student bodies themselves.
2. There might be more successful efforts at evangelization throughout the church, and the realization of the promise that the success of things such as offTheLeftEye and the New Christian Bible Study seem to offer.
3. The continued growth of the New Church in congregations overseas, in such places as Africa and Asia, may have a corresponding effect that revitalizes the General Church throughout the world.
4. The predicted decline in the membership of the General Church, as well as declines in attendance, may not actually continue, and the slow but steady progress that has characterized the last century will continue in the next.

There are plenty of other possibilities. Perhaps an overriding question is whether it might have been different if our policies and practices were different. If our schools were to insist on practices common in the old Academy, would there be enough students to have successful schools? (*Practices such as baptism before admission, requiring church membership for parents and faculty, expected*

*church attendance, student social life within the church, and strictly moral sexual behavior.)*

I expect that opinions would differ on this, and about whether the views of our founders have stood the test of time. True solutions, however, are seldom all-or-nothing choices and I am grateful to our administrators and leaders who work to navigate our institutional progress in the face of these challenges. The General Church is, of course, a microscopic part of the worldwide plan that is in the hands of the Lord alone.

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**The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons** is retired but still serves as Spiritual Editor of *New Church Life*. He served as pastor in Kempton and Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, where he oversaw their schools. He and his wife, Allyn (Edmonds), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: [jeremyfsimons@gmail.com](mailto:jeremyfsimons@gmail.com)



FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

## The Problem of Forgiveness

*The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth*

One day, I believe, the New Church and its membership will become known for their practice of forgiveness. The Lord urges us to develop the habit of forgiveness in the strongest of terms. When the disciple Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered him: "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (*Matthew 18:21,22*)

In the Lord's Prayer we recite the words, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (*Matthew 6:12*) This followed by the supplication: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," taken from the words of *Matthew 6:14*, which directly follow the Lord's Prayer.

We can also reflect on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount where He says: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." (*Matthew 5:43,44*)

It can be very difficult to love our enemies and forgive those who have hurt us. This can be complicated by the righteous necessity of preventing someone who has harmed us from harming us again.

Various words used in the Old and New Testaments refer to "letting go," "lifting up," or "releasing," without expecting anything in return. These

concepts can be particularly helpful if we see forgiveness as a form of self-care. If we are constantly holding on to resentment or animosity related to past hurts, it can feel like we are locked in a dark place. This also applies to states of shame we feel when we are unable to forgive ourselves.

In addition to bad thoughts we create for ourselves, our lack of willingness to forgive can lead to us harming others in ways that are unnecessary, thus increasing a cycle of violence and pain. We are taught that the “law of retaliation” only exists in hell.

I remember meeting an elderly woman, Eva Kor, who spoke years ago at an event put on by NewChurch Live. She spoke powerfully of her efforts to forgive the Nazi guards and staff who held and tortured her while she was incarcerated in Auschwitz as a child during the Second World War.

She was criticized by some for her efforts to meet with and forgive the old guards at the death camp. But she had clarity: while she could not change the lives of those who perpetrated such evil in the camp, she could let go of the hold those events and memories had on her. She knew that unless she released the past, she would continue to suffer.

Amazingly, we are taught in the Heavenly Doctrines: “*The Lord forgives all people their sins. He does not accuse or impute!*” (Divine Providence 280) But the passage continues by saying that this forgiveness does not stop one’s evil behaviors. Only the practice of repentance does that. Faith, confession, the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper, do not serve to abolish our sins. Rather, the Lord removes our sins through our efforts to turn to Him in the practice of repentance. (True Christianity 409) Further, we are taught that the Lord alone accomplishes this through the act of repentance for the forces of hell are too overwhelmingly powerful for us to stand against alone. This is the “letting go” that the Lord wishes for us.

There are several passages in the Heavenly Doctrines that name “signs of forgiveness.” These are worth paying attention to as signs of progress toward spiritual health. The first passage says that being held back from evil, and instead, being kept focused on doing good, are two powerful signs of forgiveness. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 170)

A passage in *Arcana Coelestia* 9449 also has a more comprehensive list

*The Old and New Testaments refer to “letting go,” “lifting up,” or “releasing,” without expecting anything in return. These concepts can be helpful if we see forgiveness as a form of self-care.*

shedding light on the benefits of forgiveness. These include: experiencing delight in worshipping the Lord (for the Lord's sake); delight felt in serving the neighbor (for the neighbor's sake); enjoyment of doing good (for goodness sake); and in believing truth for truth's sake. Also experienced is an aversion to taking credit for acts of charity. A final attribute that comes through the practice of forgiveness is the ability to keep away from evils.

This is a good list to reflect on. Developing a healthy pattern of forgiveness puts us in harmony with the Lord and His angels who view all from the perspective of good. When one thinks of the organization of a church that is a strong proponent of true forgiveness (that does regard healthy boundary setting), one can see it as an organization that can talk openly about evils that are taught in the Word, and can, at the same time, welcome people who are coming from difficult backgrounds, but who are following the Lord's path of repentance.

Developing a strong habit of forgiveness seems to run counter to many of the trends expressed in various levels of our culture today – and that perhaps is a good motivator to remember to differentiate from our culture by practicing forgiveness.

*Contact: David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org*

# Making Appropriate Judgments

*The Rev. Erik J. Buss*

*(Reprinted from the Newsletter for the United Kingdom)*

**W**e know that we need to make judgments about the actions of other people. Yet the very act of saying that is uncomfortable and I've heard New Church people question how to find the balance. That's because we also know that we have to be respectful of others and their concerns. How do we do this? How do we avoid unfairly judging others and the pain that causes, while standing for what we believe?

In the Word, the Lord supports a non-judgmental attitude:

*"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye' and look, a plank is your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

*(Matthew 7:1-5)*

The spirit of fault-finding is seen as the plank in our eye that we need to get rid of before we can see clearly what might be wrong with someone else's behavior. And the idea that the spirit of judgment we use on others will be turned back to us, should make us hesitant to judge.

The Lord makes it clear that He wants us to avoid taking any pleasure in

*The Lord makes it clear that He wants us to avoid taking any pleasure in seeing what is wrong with others. And He wants us to search for the good in others.*



seeing what is wrong with others. And He wants us to search for the good in others, even when we see them doing things we don't approve of. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1079) For many of us, it is a lifetime's work to remove that judgmental spirit and to look at others with eyes of love.

Yet we also know that we have to make judgments. The Lord speaks directly about this in *Married Love*, where He explains the "judge not that you be not judged" statement:

*"This cannot in the least mean judging of someone's moral and civil life in the world, but judging of someone's spiritual and heavenly life. Who does not see that if people were not allowed to judge of the moral life of those dwelling with them in the world, society would collapse?" (Married Love 523)*

This is part of a significant body of teachings about the need to judge the actions of others. And strikingly, this teaching adds that we can judge their moral behavior! It is okay to say someone is wrong for breaking the Ten Commandments and in fact, if we don't take those stands, society will fall. It's also striking that judging someone's moral life involves looking at the person's intention as well as at behaviors. But, the passage continues:

*"To judge what the inner mind or soul is like within, thus what a person's spiritual state is and so his fate after death – of this one is not permitted to judge, because it is known to the Lord alone. Nor does the Lord reveal it until after death. . . . A general judgment is allowed, such as the following, 'If you are in your inward qualities as you appear in your outward ones, you will be saved or condemned.' But a specific judgment – as for example to say, 'You are of this or that character in your inward qualities, therefore you will be saved or condemned' – is not allowed."*

With this qualification, the Lord brings us back to intentions. We can and should deplore behavior that is harmful to others and that is against the Lord's commandments. But we withhold inappropriate judgment of a person when we don't call them evil for their actions; we hope that they didn't know any better; we hope their better self wishes that they had made a wiser decision, or we look to other aspects of their character that suggest they might have many good qualities.

It's hard to hold the middle line. It's easier to say, "Don't judge anyone for anything," or to say, "I call good good and evil evil and that's all there is to it." But the Lord asks us to find the balance.

Notice when good and evil are done, but do so with eyes of compassion, looking for the good in those same people. Most of all, we must search our

own spirits to make sure we are not taking any delight in the judgments we may make.

*“Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:6)*



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

# Woke Like a Patriarch

Are you Woke? I Hope So.

*The Rev. Howard A. Thompson*

If you are engaged in the political battles that constantly rage or if, like me, you are a student of the dynamics of the political battlefield, you are most likely familiar with the term “woke.” If you are not familiar with it I can guarantee that you are far more spiritually healthy than I am.

Originally rooted in African-American Vernacular English, the term has come to describe a heightened awareness of social injustices, particularly related to race, gender and class. In the broader cultural context, being “woke” means being aware of, and actively attentive to, important facts and issues, especially related to social justice and inequality.

Over time, “woke” has become a broader umbrella term encompassing awareness and acknowledgement of a variety of social and political issues beyond just race, such as LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, environmental issues, and more.

However, like many terms tied to socio-political movements, “woke” has also been subject to co-option, commercialization, and sometimes, derision. Critics argue that it has been overused or misused, often referred to as “performative wokeness,” where individuals or corporations publicly express progressive views primarily for self-promotion or profit rather than genuine advocacy. Conversely, some conservatives use “woke” pejoratively to criticize what they see as excessive political correctness or perceived left-leaning cultural shifts.

In short, while “woke” originally described a genuine awareness and commitment to social justice issues, its meaning has expanded and become more nuanced, reflecting both genuine advocacy and, in some cases, skepticism or cynicism about the sincerity of that advocacy. As conversations around these topics have intensified, “woke” has found itself at the center, illustrative of the larger cultural wars being played out in the public sphere.

Personally, I’m tired of hearing the term. Whether it’s from my politically engaged friends complaining about “wokeness” and the damage it is doing to society or from the political talking heads on my newsfeed. My way of dealing

with the conflict I see around me is to reflect on what is really important and how have symbols and words been coopted to steer people away from their true import and distract people from what we should be focusing on.

And so, several weeks ago, I heard the term “woke” (pejoratively) one too many times. That got me to thinking. Is being “woke” really a bad thing? I mean, were there any “woke” people in the Bible? What a great question. Let’s find out.

According to the dictionary I consulted, “woke” is the past tense of “wake” which means “to emerge from sleep.” Search the Bible for examples of people who “emerged from sleep” and you will find numerous examples, not the least of which was Jacob: Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said: “*Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not even aware of it!*” (Genesis 28:16)

Of this specific passage Emanuel Swedenborg says in *Secrets of Heaven* 3715:

*Jacob woke from his sleep symbolizes enlightenment. This can be seen from the symbolism of sleep, which means a dim state, compared to consciousness, which is a bright state. So, in a spiritual sense, waking from sleep means being enlightened.*

Wow! I want to be enlightened, don’t you? So, why has “woke” become such a cultural lightning rod? It has only become so for those who enjoy engaging in the culture wars. I get it; culture wars are fun, they give us a great rush when we engage in them, a culture war high. That high comes from the sweet taste of righteousness, correction. It comes from the sweet taste of self-righteousness. And if you are feeling self-righteous you are about as far away from emerging from sleep as you are far away from the Lord. To be clear, I’m not condemning the “left” or the “right,” I’m cautioning all those who engage in the culture wars and believe that effort can add one moment to their life.

*“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*

*“Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!*

*“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.” (Matthew 6:21-24)*

So, where is your treasure? Where are the desires of your heart? Are they focused on the Lord or are they focused on the world?

In the *Gospel of John*, during His prayer for His disciples before His

crucifixion, Jesus said:

*I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. (John 17:14-16)*

The Apostle Paul wrote about living in the world but not conforming to its patterns. In Romans 12.2, he advises:

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

On their surface the words “not of this world” might suggest separation from the cares of the world, separation from other people, isolation, a simple life, even vows of poverty. In the symbolic language of the Bible, however, “not of this world” simply means not embracing the evil and falsity the world offers. “Not of this world” means looking within yourself and seeing where evil and falsity have taken root. Seeing where evil and falsity have taken root within ourselves requires some serious spiritual work -- the work of repentance.

This is not done casually, not done in the few minutes before going into church and certainly not done if we continue the same behavior again, again and again. When we focus all of our efforts on the problems of the world, we risk avoiding the deeper issues.

From Abraham to Lazarus many major figures in the Word are said to have slept and or awakened from sleep. Swedenborg explains that sleep often symbolizes a state of spiritual obscurity or unconsciousness. Waking from sleep, therefore, can symbolize spiritual awakening or enlightenment, a transition from ignorance or unawareness to understanding and awareness of spiritual truths.

Let's return to the story of Jacob, my personal favorite “awakening” in the Word. Jacob was ambitious, cunning and opportunistic, securing his brother's birthright and deceiving his father for a

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.  
(Romans 12.2)*

blessing. After Jacob awoke (*Genesis 28:16*), a transformed Jacob recognized God's presence, becoming more spiritually aware, eventually striving with God, earning the name Israel, and maturing into a patriarch of the Twelve Tribes.

Jacob's waking up: "As [Jacob] approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him" (*Genesis 33:3*) represents a realization or acknowledgment of spiritual truth. Our own "waking" can mark an acknowledgment of spiritual truth as well.

The next time you hear the term "woke," I invite you to think to yourself: "I hope I'm woke – woke like a Patriarch." It just may help you to put culture wars in their proper context and focus on what the Lord is calling you to acknowledge:

*"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" (Genesis 28:16).*



**The Rev. Howard A. Thompson** is pastor of the Society for the New Church in Australasia in Sydney, Australia, where he lives with his wife, Debra. He was previously pastor of the Colchester, England, society and also served in the Bryn Athyn Society.

Contact: [revhathompson@gmail.com](mailto:revhathompson@gmail.com)

# Life Lines

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

THANKS, WE NEEDED THAT



(Photo: The Assembly team: Back row, left to right: Rev. Derek Elphick, Nicole Bau-Madsen, Marijke Bau-Madsen. Front row: Kelly Treacy, Nina Dewees, Emily Hasen, Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., Lana Tang-Holmes)

The 36th General Assembly is receding in our rear-view mirror, but we still are warmed by the afterglow of its heavenly sphere. It was just what the church needed – a joyful coming together amid times of strife and concern. And it was just what all of us needed as the church community – a euphoric feeling of climbing that mountain together and coming down with a renewed sense of being one and together with the Lord's Church. It was a win/win.

The Assembly concluded just as the July/August issue of *New Church*

*Life* was going to press, so this is our belated opportunity to reflect on its abiding success. This was the first General Assembly since 2011. (A scheduled Assembly in 2020 was a victim of the covid pandemic.) The hunger for church community was quickly apparent as estimates of 500-700 attendees quickly grew to almost 1,000, including 180 children and teenagers, hailing from 13 countries and 28 states. They came to experience the Lord operating through His Church within us – a presence that enveloped all of us.

Crowds flocked with happy anticipation to two plenary sessions, 57 workshops, worship, evening vespers and holy supper, children and teen programs, campus fun fests, an evening social at Glencairn Museum, just time to relax and be together. It all flowed perfectly, thanks to more than 200 volunteers and especially the “angels in pink” – the Assembly team in pink shirts who organized every detail and were always on hand with smiles and answers.

The team was led by Emily Hasen, with Lana Tang-Holmes (also Youth and Teen Director), Nicole and Marijke Bau-Madsen, Nina Dewees and Kelly Treacy. They were always on their feet, always available, always ready to help. LynnEllen King, who has a way of calmly and masterfully feeding masses, led a kitchen staff that served meals to almost 1,000 people three times a day. Testifying to their success was a crowd of people lining up after church on Sunday to buy leftovers.

One plenary session after worship each morning set the tone. The first, led by the Rev. Malcolm Smith, assistant pastor in Bryn Athyn, focused on the journey up the mountain, ascending to the Lord “to learn of His ways.” Offering powerful personal testimonies were Rafe Williams, Bryn Athyn; Penny Rhodes, Kempton; Pennsylvania, and Leah Rose, Bryn Athyn.

The second plenary was led by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., Executive Bishop of the General Church, on coming back down the mountain. This is where we “walk in His ways,” putting all that we have learned into lives of loving and serving the Lord and our neighbor. The theme – “I Can Live a Heavenly Life” – was supported with 100 examples from the Writings of how to do this – every day. Enriching the lesson with touching testimonials were Kerry Foord, Westville, South Africa; Landon Elder, Richmond, Indiana; the Rev. Howard Thompson, Roseville, New South Wales, Australia, and Dawn and Wayne Wadsworth, Marietta, Georgia.

YouTube videos of the plenaries were quickly made available soon after the Assembly, to be followed by videos of many of the workshops. One frustration with the workshops was choosing one among several inviting possibilities. The videos let us catch some we missed.

All of this came within a heavenly sphere of being led by the Lord – up the mountain and down again, showing us how to reflect all that love and truth in our lives. There was a sphere of church community – at once aspirational



and immediate. It was seen and felt throughout – in smiles between friends, strangers making a connection, in small acts of charity, sharing ideas, and sensing an elevation and perspective that can make us all more loving and useful in the world.

It all came to a perfect culmination in Sunday morning's community service, with 711 families and adults packed into the Cathedral. The theme was from the Lord's Prayer: "*As it is in heaven*," and the sphere was captivating. One of the questions offered for personal reflection or discussion was: "What are your take-aways from this Assembly? What one thing would you like to do to bring heaven a little closer to earth?"

This was not a challenging question in the wake of an Assembly that gave us all a taste of heaven: looking for the good in everyone, not making personal judgments, serving others without sense of reward or recognition, being kind, being there for each other, being a blessing.

The church – each of us and all of us – got a sense of that mountaintop perspective of building our lives and the church within us and our communities "*as it is in heaven*."

Thank you. We all needed that.

(BMH)

## WE ARE ALL TEACHERS

One of the most popular workshops in the Assembly was a presentation by Curtis Childs, provocatively titled: *The Ones That Got Away*. Curtis is admired throughout the church and the world for his creative and inspiring YouTube videos for the Swedenborg Foundation's *offTheLeftEye* and his engaging way of explaining the Heavenly Doctrines.

He makes a bold claim that by the year 2040 Swedenborg will be known throughout the world – and exudes confidence that this is not an impossible dream. But as we were caught up in his vision and creativity – in the context and the calling of The Great Commission at the end of Matthew to go forth and "teach all nations" – it was easy to feel that, well, this is all wonderful and inspiring but I can't do that!

No, we can't all do that and bless Curtis that he can. But we all share the feeling of wanting to do something – great or small – to share the gift of the church in a needy world. Recall the advice of Helen Keller, a revered New Church woman with unique insight. This deaf and blind woman with her own special vision, said: "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." Doing "small tasks" with kindness and caring is what makes them noble.

Helen Keller also laid out a challenge for the New Church at a national conference in Washington, DC, in 1928, that resonates now more than ever:

*It seems to me the New Church has a great mission in the world. The people are in need of just the message that Swedenborg gave for mankind. Instead of merely listening to that message we should go out and teach it. I want to see the New Church put on its beautiful garments and shake itself from the dust of aloofness.*

It is not enough just to go up the mountain and come down inspired – without sharing the message. So how do we do that beyond the magic of YouTube videos, in our own humble ways? How do we shake that “dust of aloofness” and “go out and teach it”?

The late David McCullough, a masterful historian who brought the past alive for us in many great biographies, gave a wonderful talk in Glencairn 20 years ago. His passion for history was electric. But he said we teach our history all wrong – that it is not just names and dates and wars but stories. We need to tell the stories to bring history alive.

That’s where we come in. McCullough never taught regularly in a classroom, but he tutored millions in the stories of history. And he said something both simple and profound: “What you love you cannot help but teach.” We all know that feeling. We cannot help but share what we love. And so we are all teachers.

We may not feel like teachers. We are not trained to stand in front of classrooms and engage students. But whether we are making videos, writing books, sharing perspectives or just setting an example by the way we live our lives, we are teaching lessons – often without even realizing it.

And as the Lord helps us, He also actually needs us to help Him in this work.

*God loves every one of us, but cannot directly benefit us. He can benefit us only indirectly through each other. For this reason, he inspires us with His love, just as He inspires parents with love for their children. (True Christian Religion 457)*

That is what the Lord was doing in this Assembly – inspiring us with His love so that we cannot help but answer Him with: “Here I am Lord. Send me.” And then, “go out and teach.” What greater calling?

(BMH)

## SWEDENBORG IN WASHINGTON

The Life Line above mentions Helen Keller speaking at a national conference in Washington, DC, in 1928 about the New Church’s mission in the world. This is not the only time Swedenborg has been acknowledged in the nation’s

capital, including the White House.

In 1793 Baltimore became home to the first Swedenborgian church in America – just as George Washington was beginning his second term as the nation's first president. At his inauguration church members sent him a gift of *True Christian Religion*. Washington responded with a gracious letter, in precise handwriting, which said in part:

*We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and imperfection that every person may hereby worship according to the dictates of his own heart.*

*In this enlightened age and in this land of equal liberty it is our boast that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the laws and deprive him of the right of attaining the highest office that is known in the United States.*

*Your prayers for my present and future felicity are received with gratitude, and I firmly wish, gentlemen, that you may in your social and individual capacities taste these blessings which a gracious God bestows upon the Righteous.*

When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, the Baltimore congregation again sent a copy of *True Christian Religion*. Jefferson was known to be a reader of Swedenborg and had several copies of the Writings in his library. In 1802 he led 100 members of Congress to Baltimore to hear the Rev. John Hargrove talk about Swedenborg. Then in 1804 Jefferson invited Rev. Hargrove to preach in the Capitol before both Houses of Congress. This is the only known time that a New Church minister has been invited to address Congress.

Suzy Laidlaw, who has recently moved with her husband from Bryn Athyn to Colorado, posted on Facebook this statement from: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, The White House, January 5, 1938:

*The career of Emanuel Swedenborg emphasizes in a striking way the triumph of the spiritual over the material, and the vitality and inspiration of his message finds eloquent witness in the hearts of his disciples today.*

*In a world in which the voice of conscience too often seems still and small there is a need of that spiritual leadership of which Swedenborg was a particular example.*

*I hope as a result of the forthcoming commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth, by the Committee of the General Convention of The New Jerusalem Church, that the world may be turned away from material pursuits to a contemplation of the quiet strength which lies in things of the spirit.*

(BMH)

## NOVA ECCLESIA

Allen Mackley is a web developer in Utah who set up a website in 2021 called “Nova Ecclesia” ([novaecclesia.com](http://novaecclesia.com)). A former Mormon and a spiritual seeker, he found the Heavenly Doctrine online through *offTheLeftEye* and New Christian Bible Study, among other sources, and became convinced of its authenticity. Steve David, who leads the New Christian Bible Study, was especially helpful in explaining things.

One thing that he noticed in the Writings was the central importance of having the spiritual church within us. The church is an internal connection with the Lord, not just membership in an organization. This led him to reflect on the thought that while the internal church is what is most important, organized churches in this world are also needed.

Many people today are skeptical of church organizations, so it occurred to him that an effort to help people feel confident in the Heavenly Doctrine would be useful. Nova Ecclesia is a website aimed at this purpose, subtitled: *Ideas about Life, Literature and Christianity*. It has articles with titles such as: *Examining Ideas Most Christians Misunderstand*; *Review of The Lessons of History*; *Why Swedenborg Isn't Like Other Mystics*; and *The Heavenly Role of Men and Women in Marriage, Church and Society*. The articles are well written and insightful.

Mackley was impressed with Bishop Peter Buss Jr.'s article about marriage in the January/February 2022 issue of *New Church Life*. It showed a willingness to stand up for what the Heavenly Doctrine teaches about a controversial issue. He was at the Assembly in June and enjoyed it very much, meeting a lot of people, and many of us were happy to meet him as well.

(JFS)

## THE GRACE OF GOD

In the wake of the assassination attempt on former U.S. President Donald Trump in July, there was much talk of “divine intervention,” “the hand of God”

and “a miracle” when he turned at just the right moment and was only nicked in the ear by a bullet aimed at his head. One spectator was killed by a bullet while protecting his family; two others were injured but recovered. From what we are taught in the Writings it is worth reflecting on what Divine Providence is – and what it is not.

In the *Bryn Athyn Post* the following week the Rev. John Odhner noted:

*The assassin took aim from 400 feet away. Even the slightest deviation – a puff of breeze, the victim turning his head, or a nervous tremble in the hand holding the gun – could make a difference between life and death, and might even change the course of a nation or the world.*

*Ahab, king of Israel, tried to avoid being a target in battle by disguising himself as a common soldier, yet “a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor,” another example of the smallest deviation making a difference between life and death. The Lord governs the smallest details of our lives.*

As we strive to understand our teachings about providence and permission, here are some pertinent passages from *Arcana Coelestia*:

*Every smallest moment of a person’s life entails a chain of events into eternity. Indeed, every one is like a new beginning to those that follow. (3854)*

*There is no such thing as chance; apparent accident or fortune is Providence in the ultimate of order. (6493)*

*The Divine Providence is in the least of all things, according to the Lord’s words, that not even a hair falls from the head without the will of God. (6494)*

*The Divine Providence does not work from a regard for what is fleeting and transitory, and which ends with the life of a person in the world; rather it regards that which remains to eternity, thus which has no end. (10775)*

*Everything that happens, which is called accidental and is ascribed to chance or fortune, is of Providence. But the Divine Providence operates invisibly and incomprehensibly in order that people may be in freedom to ascribe an event to Providence or to chance. (5508.2)*

So, we may safely assume that the Lord's providence is in every act and experience – indeed to the least particulars – but we cannot presume to understand all of the infinite applications of the Lord's love, order and protection. It is perhaps best to consider Divine Providence within the context of Divine Love and Wisdom.

We share the faith that the Lord is in control of all of His creation, even if we cannot comprehend how it works. He does not intervene and manipulate our lives – stopping a car from hitting a child, sparing a young mother from cancer – because He will not infringe on our freedom. But He is loving and leading us constantly to a good end – to heaven – if we but follow.

Everyone wonders in the wake of tragedy: why does God let it happen? But only love flows from Him. All evil comes from hell. We live between both influences, free to choose. He permits what He does not will for the sake of our freedom, but never stops loving and leading us.

So, we are left to ponder why one man was spared but a popular fireman, husband and father was struck down by one of those bullets. (That man lived in nearby Freeport, home of the New Church society there, where several members knew him and his family. They are haunted by the questions too.)

Surely the Lord could have struck Hitler dead before he wreaked evil upon the world. He could have stopped the terrorists on 9/11. He could do a lot of things to change and affect our lives – but taking away our freedom, even if it leaves us victim to tragedy and evil, would deprive us of our humanity. And the Lord looks always beyond the trials of this world to His spiritual kingdom, where His love prevails.

It is good that people are contemplating “the will of God,” “His plan for our lives” and His presence with us, even if we do not always understand. It is good to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to live through Him, so that there may be less evil in the world. Even if we cannot understand all that the Lord sees and knows, it is comforting to believe that He governs even the smallest details in our lives, that the workings of His Providence are invisible, and thus incomprehensible, but that His presence is constant and true – leaving us with questions, but also a sense of wonder and awe, trust and gratitude.

(BMH)

## WAITING ON THE LORD

The Assembly was all about movement: shifting from venue to venue, climbing the mountain, “walking in His ways,” living our journey. But sometimes we need to be still, to listen, to pray, to wait.

Elijah learned that lesson when he was fleeing the wrath of Jezebel,

considered himself a failure, and asked the Lord to end his life. He was hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb when the Lord asked him what he was doing there and told him to go outside. There he looked for the Lord in the wind, an earthquake, and fire, but found Him only in “a still, small voice.”

We are also asked to pause in the midst of trials and listen for that calming, reassuring voice, to see with a new “mountaintop” perspective, and then go forward with hope. That is what “climbing the mountain” is all about: pausing to see, to understand, and be guided forward. At times we all need to be still, to listen, to wait on the Lord.

*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:13)*

The Christmas story always fills us with hope but talks as well about waiting and trusting.

Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, all are confronted with change – and wait, with a sense of patience and trust. What they were being told was beyond all imagining – but not beyond hope and confidence in the Lord.

When Mary is told by the angel that she has “found favor with God” and would be the mother of the Lord, she did not shrink from her calling and protest: “Can’t you find someone else? I’m not ready.” No, she said with all humility: “*Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to Your word.*” (Luke 1:38)

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem “to present Him to the Lord,” the “just and devout” Simeon was not overwhelmed. He had been “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” with the promise that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. In that transforming moment he said: “*Now let Thy servant depart in peace, according to Your Word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation.*”

We live with such promise unto the end of our lives – with doubts, with hope, with waiting. In waiting on the Lord there is patience, hope, trust and humility.

*The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore, I will hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:24-26)*

(BMH)

## JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT

The Jacob's Creek Family Retreat is held each summer at the Laurelville Retreat Center in the Laurel Highlands east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, not far from Laurel Hill State Park.

The Laurelville Retreat Center is beautiful but modest. The accommodations, dining hall and meeting hall are all comfortable, spacious and air-conditioned. The pool is large and new, with water slides and areas for young children. The center is surrounded by woods and hills. There is a field at the top of the hill called Sunset Hill, where the opening worship is held, weather permitting. It has a gorgeous view of the valley and the Laurel Highlands.

The program includes adult lectures and discussions as well as a fully planned children's program. The emphasis is on doctrinal instruction and reflection. Children are grouped by ages, from infancy through high school. Their program runs at the same time as the adult program. The children have a religious lesson first, followed by a recreational activity.

There is family worship twice a day – morning and evening. There is also an opportunity for adults to take Holy Supper. There is ample unscheduled time in the afternoons to allow for family time including swimming, sports, games, hiking, spontaneous group discussions, etc.

There are evening programs for everyone, such as a campfire, talent show, and more. Parents of young children can put them to bed, then come out into the common area and enjoy socializing with other adults. One of the retreat's best features is the teen program, with the teens actively engaged from start to finish.

There were about 95 people this year, evenly split between adults and children. I was most impressed with the enthusiasm for the church and for the Heavenly Doctrines shown by all ages. The three-day program focused on "Charity: The First of the Church."

- **The Rev. Mike Gladish** spoke about "Faith and Charity: Brothers in the Word."
- **The Rev. Matthew Genzlinger's** program was on "The Universal Kinds of Charity."
- **The Rev. Malcolm Smith** spoke about "The Past, Present and Future of Charity."
- **The Rev. Jeremy Simons'** lecture was on "Discriminate Charity and New Church Education."

**Bishop David Lindrooth** was also with us for a question-and-answer session. The discussions were lively and harmonious.



Under the lay leadership of **Jamie and Julie Uber**, with **Penn and Leesa Cooper** helping this year, the retreat is thriving. **Allyn** and I are looking forward to returning again in the future. Next year's retreat is July 24-27. The projected theme is Faith.

(JFS)

## SAVING WAYFARERS CHAPEL

The chapel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright Jr., was built 75 years ago and was named a National Landmark last year. It is owned and operated by the Convention Church, which proudly shares its Swedenborgian heritage with all who come to experience its natural beauty and spiritual serenity. But a tragedy of nature is threatening this landmark of paradise.



(Photo: Wayfarers Chapel)

The chapel was designed to showcase the harmony between God's creation and the inner world of mind and spirit. There is hardly a more magnificent setting than this bluff on a peninsula overlooking the Pacific surf. But an inexorable landslide – called the Portuguese Bend – is rapidly threatening the building and surrounding homes. The chapel closed its doors in the spring and began frantic work to take it apart, piece by painstaking piece, preserving as many of its unique materials as possible, with plans to rebuild somewhere nearby – and safe.

The Rev. Dan Burchett, Executive Director, assures: "Wayfarers is committed to preserving our iconic chapel exactly as it has always been. We are taking immediate action to carefully disassemble the chapel's historic materials as a necessary step in the preservation of the chapel for generations to come."

Anyone who would like to contribute to this heroic effort can do so through the chapel's website: [www.wayfarerschapel.org](http://www.wayfarerschapel.org).

(BMH)

# Church News

*Compiled by Bruce Henderson*

## **A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

*The Rev. Erik J. Buss*

Working with the Bishop's Office, the church in the United Kingdom has become aware that in the near future we will be served by one minister rather than the traditional two. This means we need to recalibrate how we see the many roles the church plays in the UK and come up with a plan that is both possible for one man to do and also gives the best chance for success.

I have been working with a committee for the last six months to come up with a plan, which has been accepted by the General Church Council (the body that oversees the church in the UK). I am grateful for the willing and practical spirit everyone has brought to a situation that nobody would like to face. What follows is a summary of that plan.

We will have one pastor in the country, likely resident in the Michael Church manse, but possibly further away if that makes sense. The congregation in Colchester is selling its church and will close down operations as an independent congregation. It will become part of the broader UK church and engage in Michael Church services online.

The pastor will lead a church service roughly three times a month at Michael Church, providing a home base for newcomers to visit, and a church home for the whole country. These services will be broadcast to the whole country, via Facebook and Zoom. Michael Church will become the home church for the whole country, which will mean reconstituting its board and pastor's council to make sure it is meeting the needs of all.

The other Sunday of the month (roughly) the pastor would be serving elsewhere: British Academy Summer School (one weekend missed), All Ages Weekends (two), Young People's Weekends (two), clergy meetings (one), and personal holiday (four), plus possible miscellaneous events that may arise. Some of those services could be streamed to the UK church, particularly the services taking place at Purley. Others would not.

The pastor would visit larger centers like the Oxford and Colchester

groups three or four times a year, either on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. Smaller groups he would hopefully visit occasionally, though it may be much harder to manage in the new reality.

Additionally, the pastor would offer a variety of classes similar to what Grant Odhner and I are already doing, including a class accessible to newcomers.

We will continue offering All Age Weekends, British Academy Summer School, Young People's weekends and such. But the pastor will not be able to take on duties outside of the UK, which Grant and I have been doing.

To make this job doable, we will need to hire an administrator, possibly full time, but perhaps a part-time position, to free up the pastor for leadership and ministerial duties. We will have funds to do this. It is also possible we could hire two different people for different roles, such as someone with marketing expertise and someone who knows the church in the UK.

We would also need some ministerial support from outside the country. Our hope would be to buy some of a pastor's time, perhaps 20% of a salary. This would enable someone to come for our big weekend events, and also lead a class or two via Zoom. We might also get some European ministers to preach at Michael Church in the pastor's absence to keep a strong presence.

At present, we would maintain the General Church Council, British Academy and Michael Church boards. Perhaps at some future date it would make sense to merge the GCC and the Michael Church board but that is an item for the future.

Although we are cutting back on what we do, it is essential that we keep working on such critical areas as outreach efforts, reaching out to young adults and strategic initiatives. These are what will make for a hopeful future and we will have to be firm in creating a space in which these things happen, even with one pastor.

This is a big job for one minister, and we may well have to downscale our hopes when faced with the reality of the situation.

I would like to say that I have been so proud of the church members in the UK, who have faced a challenging situation with grace. That mature willingness to move forward constructively will, I believe, offer the best possible chance for the Lord to be present and work His miracles in our beautiful church community here.

## **GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION**

At the annual meeting of the General Church Corporation on June 26 in Bryn Athyn – at the conclusion of international clergy meetings and on the eve of the General Assembly – seven incumbents and four new members were

reelected to the General Church Board of Directors.

The incumbents are:

- **John Berridge** – Deal, Kent, United Kingdom
- **Barbara Horigan** – Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- **Rene H. Johnson** – Russell, Pennsylvania
- **Brynn Carswell Smith** – Boston, Massachusetts
- **James Uber** – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- **Wayne Wadsworth** – Marietta, Georgia
- **Tanya Woker** – Westville, South Africa

The four newly elected to three-year terms are

- **Erin G. Busby** – Austin, Texas
- **Stephen Elphick** – London, England
- **Kelly Niall** – Caryndale, Ontario, Canada
- **Shawn Synnestvedt** – Sunset Beach, North Carolina

Board members thanked for serving maximum three terms were:

- **Wade Buick** – Kempton, Pennsylvania
- **Stephanie Klippenstein** – Maysville, Missouri
- **Ned Uber** – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

### **Glencairn Award**

In the second year since the Glencairn Award was reinstituted, these 11 recipients were named and honored at the Corporation Meeting – with the commendations read by the **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.**

**Eva Björström:** Eva is the leader in creating a Swedenborg Library in Stockholm, Sweden. For the past 15 years she has devoted countless hours to this library – a full day each week, and other random times weekly, all unpaid. Her work in preserving and creating a Swedenborg Library is the main reason for her award. She is also a stalwart volunteer and supporter of the Stockholm Society.

**Peter Boericke:** There is no group, building or part of Bryn Athyn that Peter has not been a part of. He has relentlessly volunteered since age 13 at the Bryn Athyn Swim Club, the Fire Company, Cairnwood Village, the Cathedral, General Church Board, Borough Council, Bryn Athyn College and more. He has also volunteered and worked in other communities, including the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the Red Cross, and visiting nurse

programs, all with no expectation of reward.

**Rev. Andrew Heilman:** Andy steadfastly follows the doctrines when teaching science, incorporating the doctrines into his science lessons. He educates and mentors theologs in Brazil. He is an avid leader of the Kempton Project – pursuing “a translation of the Letter of the Word] faithful to the original text in the light of the Heavenly Doctrine,” with the development of accompanying research materials and tools.

**Brian Henderson:** Brian is a passionate teacher who has inspired a love for the New Church and history in many of his students. In recent years he has made the Glencairn Museum come alive for all ages, school groups, homeschoolers and surrounding communities. He has worked with and listened to his staff to make Glencairn more than just a museum, rather a place where people come together to celebrate many cultures, and to appreciate art and history. If you get the chance to interact with Brian you will instantly be drawn in by the breadth of his knowledge.

**William and Sharon Kunkle:** Bill made virtual learning possible during the Covid pandemic at the Washington New Church School by fixing and updating old laptops for students to use. He also manages cameras, sound and IT for the school. He is a constant and everyday steady volunteer presence, ensuring that everything works and benefits school and church uses, no matter how long or what it takes. Sharon can be found at the Washington New Church and School every day; whether it's cleaning or substitute teaching, she's doing it with a smile. She serves on committees to prep for each school year and takes minutes at staff meetings. For many years, she has done every volunteer task and risen to every need, including New Church Day, July Fourth, Tableaux, Theta Alpha, President of Acton Park, choir leader, substitute teacher, banquets, etc.

**Ronald Nelson:** Ron is a faithful servant of the New Church and its schools for well over 60 years. A few of his many military accomplishments are worthy of note: Special Projects Officer for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Reserve Affairs at the Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington, DC, in charge of all Marine Reserve helicopters east of the Mississippi, and early in his career was selected to be the helicopter pilot for President Dwight Eisenhower. While in the Reserves Ron was teaching at the Academy. He taught for 33 years, serving also as a housemaster in Stuart Hall, and coached football and wrestling. He led the ANC team to win the National Prep School Tournament Championship at Lehigh University! His list of wrestling accomplishments for himself and ANC are too many to mention, but the fact that he has been

inducted into the Pennsylvania and National Wrestling Halls of Fame give a glimpse into all that he has done. What was most respected about Ron were the values and the conduct he taught in the classroom and on the sports fields. He expected respect from his students and did this by role-modeling, giving them respect, and pushing them to achieve higher goals because he believed in them. After retirement he continued to serve ANC with fund-raising efforts, serving on the board, volunteer coaching, and you will find him in his 90's still volunteering.

**Lori Odhner:** You find yourself bumping into her because she is all over Bryn Athyn supporting a variety of uses. Many people think of her when they focus on music because of the variety of programs she has been a part of and songs she has written. She has helped her husband write books on marriage, and her "Marriage Moats, -- sent out in emails and on Facebook -- have helped and inspired countless people on their personal journeys. In terms of supporting marriage, in addition to Marriage Moats, she mentors many couples, and initiates in-person visits with multiple couples per week to check-in and support them. She also reaches out to families of children with special needs.

**Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose:** Jonathan has served for decades as series editor and translator of the Swedenborg Foundation's New Century Edition of Swedenborg's works, prioritizing "new readers" of the Heavenly Doctrines. He helped to get original church documents preserved. He has had a positive impact on many people through sermons, religious celebrations and as a teacher. He is involved with, and is known by many, for his invaluable part of "offTheLeftEye" YouTube videos. For years he led a deeply inspiring and enriching "Spirit and Life Bible Study," beautifully connecting seemingly disparate parts of the Bible through the doctrines of the New Church.

**Rev. Dr. Ray and Star Silverman:** This couple found the New Church through the book *Conjugal Love* and came seeking for more truths. They wrote "*Rise Above It*," then wrote "*Rise Above It, A Spiritual Development for College Students*." It is hard to meet a New Church person who does not know what *Rise Above It* is because it is an accessible and useable curriculum for following the Ten Commandments. Aside from writing and leading classes on *Rise Above It*, spreading the New Church in many communities -- including prisons -- being a beloved teacher in the college, fierce and compassionate advocates of marriage, they are about to complete a significant book: "*A Seamless Garment: The Four Gospels as Divinely Arranged Narrative*."

**BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE PREVIEW***The Rev. Eric Carswell, President*

Bryn Athyn College of the New Church is looking forward to another strong academic year. Despite major budget cuts to reduce our deficit spending (reduced by \$2.4 million from last year) we have nearly all the programs and activities continuing that are important to educate and serve our students. We were grateful beneficiaries of some unexpected major contributions from donors that will support both the FY 25 and 26 budgets as we continue to achieve a long-term sustainable program.

We have had some reductions in our staffing, one retirement from the faculty, **Laura Nash**, and two professors taking voluntary cuts in the number of courses they are teaching. **The Rev. Coleman Glenn**, our chaplain, has been appointed to serve the Bryn Athyn Church as an assistant to the pastor and his role as chaplain will be filled by the **Rev. Matthew Genzlinger**. Our three most popular majors are business, biology and psychology.

This past fall, we recognized that, like many of our peer institutions, we could not get adequate numbers of students/athletes for a women's field hockey program, but otherwise we expect to continue our Division III sports and ACHA ice hockey programs.

Several years ago, **Forrest and Peggy Dristy** established a Dristy/Farrell endowment in memory of their daughter **Janet Farrell** to support teaching of religion at Bryn Athyn College. This year, in consultation with Dr. Dristy, Bryn Athyn College established a Dristy/Farrell Chair of Religion, with some of the payout from the endowment covering a portion of a professor's salary. We announced last June that the first honoree of this Chair is Religion is the **Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman**. Dr. Dristy also clarified that he was most interested in supporting students new to the New Church studying New Church ideas.

We selected seven students who received very high grades in the required Religion 101 course and offered each of them a \$1,000 scholarship contingent on submitting a 400–600-word essay describing a positive outcome from their engagement with the content of Religion 101. We have already received some of these essays.

One student in submitting the essay wrote: "After completing [Religion 101], I decided to enroll in Religion 115 [Introduction to New Church Doctrine on Life After Death], which ultimately confirmed my desire to join the New Church faith."

As reported in the news, the Federal Financial Aid, FAFSA, had a very troubled roll-out of a new form this year. A president in one of the schools within our athletic conference called it the Covid of 2024, in terms of its negative effect on student enrollment. Comparatively, Bryn Athyn College

appears to have done a good job recruiting and admitting students. We are not likely to achieve the desired number of 270 students for this year but may fall only 5% short of that goal.

I am starting the second of my two-year interim tenure as president. A strong committee is working to search for the next College President with the expectation that the new President will be named no later than this December.

## **COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH**

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

Bryn Athyn College is seeking applicants for the position of President. The President is the chief executive officer of the school, reporting directly to the Board of Trustees, and has responsibility for and oversight of all campus administration, faculty and students. In addition to leading the institution in the development of a financially sustainable vision, the President of Bryn Athyn College is responsible for:

- Leading the school toward the achievement of its mission
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan
- Leading the institution's fund-raising efforts
- Establishing and managing the College's annual operating budget
- Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, Academy Corporation, Chancellor, administrators, Faculty Council, students and the Alumni Association

Currently reporting to the President are the Dean of the Theological School, the Dean of Academics, the Dean of Faculty, the Dean of Student Life, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Admissions, and the Director of Institutional Advancement.

Bryn Athyn College offers undergraduate majors in Biology, Business, Early Childhood and Special Education, English and Communications, Human Society, Interdisciplinary, Mathematics, Psychology and Religion. The institution also offers a Master of Divinity and the Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

As stated in the institution's by-laws, the successful candidate will be a member of the General Church of the New Jerusalem. Thus, the College seeks a candidate who loves both the New Church and liberal arts education. Professional experience in academia and a graduate degree are preferred, but the position is open to candidates with other backgrounds.

Applicants should submit a letter of interest and a curriculum vitae by October 1, 2024. The successful candidate is expected to assume her/his



responsibilities by July of 2025.

Nominations, application materials, and inquiries should be addressed to:

Bryn Athyn College Presidential Search Committee  
Chancellor Peter Buss Jr.  
P.O. Box 743  
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009  
*Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org*

## ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS PREVIEW

*James M. Adams - Managing Director*

*Erica O. Stine - Girls School Principal*

*Jeremy T. Irwin - Boys School Principal*

We are happy to formally welcome **Jim Adams** back as Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools and **Erica Stine** as the new Girls School Principal. As principals, Erica and Jeremy report to Jim as Managing Director, who in turn reports to the Board of Trustees. We are always willing to have a conversation with anyone about questions or concerns.

### Enrollment projections for the 2024-2025 school year:

Girls School		Boys School	
Seniors	19	Seniors	28
Juniors	28	Juniors	44
Sophomores	21	Sophomores	23
Freshmen	15	Freshmen	17
Dorm	8	Dorm	19
Day	75	Day	93
TOTAL	83	TOTAL	112

### Changes for the coming year

We want to address recent budget-based changes. Since 2008, we have been working to reduce our institutional deficit to establish a sustainable balanced budget. This has involved both reductions in expenses and efforts to increase revenue. Difficult but necessary reductions have been made in the areas of

faculty, staff, administration, programs and shared support services, while at the same time we have sought to raise funds to support endowment, targeted projects and the schools' annual fund target each year.

We rely primarily on three sources of income: tuition, donations and income from endowment. Tuition has historically been discounted to meet the financial needs of our families. Our net tuition and fees represent roughly 20% of the actual costs and do not adequately support our programs. Therefore, we rely heavily on the generosity of our ANC extended family, the foundations that support us, and endowment earnings based on defined payout policies. It is critical that we do not draw money from our endowment to cover deficits as doing so reduces future payout and perpetuates financial challenges.

We must continue working toward a balanced budget to protect the endowment principal, and to ensure fiscal responsibility. Heading into 2024-25, we needed to reduce a significant percentage of our operating expenses. A task force of ANC Corporation Members and Trustees was formed to work with the school administration to identify areas for reduction. Many factors were examined, including but not limited to, operational efficiencies, enrollment trends, state education mandates, graduation requirements and overhead costs. Many of the adjustments (e.g. reductions in Human Resources, Admissions, Advancement and Facilities) will not result in any changes in the experience for our students or families.

In order to support our goal of fiscal responsibility, there have been changes to some course offerings for the 2024-2025 school year. These changes include reduced or consolidated courses in Art, English, Math, PE and World Language. Some sports will see a reduction in coaching staff. Senior Project will not be offered. The Instrumental Ensemble will be moving to a club this year. We are actively looking to endow the instrumental program and have it return as a class the following year.

As previously announced, we have closed the school store, although ANC merchandise can be purchased through our online store. (See [www.ancss.org](http://www.ancss.org), "Quicklinks"). We have also consolidated to a single school secretary, with Keene Blair serving both the Girls School and the Boys School. Her office will be in the space previously occupied by the School Store – at the Benade Hall entrance – so she is centrally located.

We must reach a balanced operating budget to ensure sustainability for both our current and future families. To achieve this, we are exploring multiple avenues to eliminate the remaining deficit, including new revenue opportunities.

## Changes in Admissions

We wish **Jennifer Allen** well in her retirement and thank her for all she did for our school over many years. We are happy to announce that **Sacha Wade** has accepted the position of Director of Enrollment. Sacha has worked in admissions for the past two years and is well-versed working within our system.

## RECRUITING MINISTERS AND TEACHERS

The General Church has launched a search for a Ministry and Education Recruiter “to oversee all aspects of growing the talent pool of ministers and teachers throughout General Church congregations.”

Applications for this position were due on August 15. The successful candidate will report to **Karen Stoeller**, Director of Human Resources, with direction from the Dean of the Theological School and the Coordinator of New Church Schools. The goal is to expand existing channels for recruiting and to create new pipelines for identifying and fostering relationships with potential ministers and teachers, and to promote careers in New Church education and the ministry within the General Church.

Among the specific responsibilities for the position are:

- Designing and implementing an overall recruiting strategy for developing a pipeline of talent for current and future teaching and clergy positions
- Sourcing and recruiting candidates into the education program as students, as well as qualified individuals in fulfilling employment needs
- Helping to establish a culture of promoting teaching and ministry careers within the church

## A NEW TESTAMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

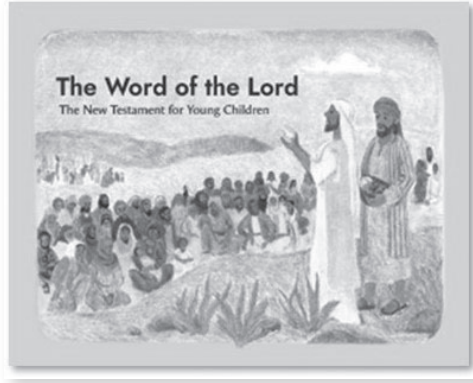
*Rachel Glenn*

Just published is an illustrated *New Testament Bible*, simplified for young children by **Carol Buss** with beautiful soft pictures by **Dianna Synnestvedt**.

This is a companion to the *Old Testament for Young Children* which was published in 2019.

It is designed to introduce children to the wonder and power of the Lord's Word. Each story is one page – just right for bedtime reading or family worship. Brief notes on the meaning of the stories are given at the back of the book for parents.

The book available at [newchurchbooks.com](http://newchurchbooks.com) for \$23.95.



### **GLENCAIRN MUSEUM**

The Museum remained active while the building itself was closed for more than a year for extensive improvements and has returned to its usual busy schedule.

The popular Children's Summer Camp was welcomed back after a four-year hiatus – due the closure and covid. It was all new and redesigned for one week in July for two age groups: 8-10 and 11-13. The camp is designed to spark creativity, build new connections and invite children to experience art and culture in a new way through artmaking, outdoor adventures, baking and time traveling through history.

As part of a continuing series of exhibitions, *Cardboard Chronicles: The Biblical Art of Rudolph Bostic*, is open through November 1.

Bostic is a longtime member of the Second African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, known for a distinctive technique of enamel and housepaint on cardboard. His 23 paintings explore a range of biblical themes and stories, from Adam through scenes from the life of the Lord on earth.



**We are pleased to report that our Sermon of the Week Podcast surpassed 11,000 certified downloads. You can subscribe or listen on multiple platforms including Apple Podcast, YouTube, Spotify, and more.**

### **Sermon of the Week Podcast**

Labor Day is a federal holiday in the United States that is celebrated on the first Monday in September. It is a day to recognize the contributions of American workers. This can also be a time for all to reflect on the importance of living a life of use. To help with that is a selection of worship service talks regarding use.

#### **Listen online or download:**

#### **What's the Point of Me? ~ Children's Talk and Adult Sermon**

We're supposed to be useful and bringing heaven to earth but what does that mean about what a person does on a Monday morning? What if a person is uninspired about doing their job? How can the Lord help each of us to answer the question, "What's the point of me?"

#### **A Fruitful Life ~ Family Talk**

The Lord asks us in the Gospel of John 15:4 to be a branch that brings forth fruit. A fruitful life is a useful life. With the Lord's guidance, our desire to help can "branch out" in many useful ways as we become more and more capable of serving.

#### **Joy from Heavenly Treasures ~ Children's Talk and Adult Sermon**

We will explore where true joy comes from, and how through a life of service we can build up a never-ending supply of happiness.

**[www.newchurchaudio.org](http://www.newchurchaudio.org)**

*Recordings are added to the website thanks to  
volunteers and donations.*

PO Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009  
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Email: [newchurchaudio@newchurch.org](mailto:newchurchaudio@newchurch.org)

# Announcements

## BAPTISMS

*Baptism was instituted for a sign that a person is of the Church, and for a memorial that he or she is to be regenerated; for the washing of baptism is a spiritual washing, which is regeneration. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 202)*

### **Buss, Eleanor Naomi**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June 25, 2024, (born May 21, 2024), daughter of Derek and Freya Kistner Buss, Rev. Erik J. Buss officiating.

### **Buthelezi, Samkelisiwe Patience**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, May 5, 2024, Rev. Jerome B. Dube officiating.

### **Donkor, Alicia Anima**

At Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana, July 1, 2023, (born April 16, 2023), daughter of Joris Donkor and Ophelia Odoom, Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating. Delayed report.

### **Donkor, Joana Kyerewa**

At Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana, November 1, 2018, (born February 14, 2005), daughter of Joris Donkor and Ophelia Odoom, Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating. Delayed report.

### **Donkor, Vera Niaamenna**

At Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana, November 1, 2018, (born August 9, 2018), daughter of Joris Donkor and Ophelia Odoom, Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating. Delayed report.

### **Goge, Banele Yikhokonke**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, May 5, 2024, (born November 30, 2020), son of Philani Goge and Samkelisiwe Buthelezi, Rev. Jerome B. Dube officiating.

### **Mensah, Nana Adwoa Buabemaa**

At Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana, September 24, 2023, Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating. Delayed report.

### **Odoom, Ophelia Nana Ama**

At Tema, Greater Accra, Ghana, November 1, 2018, Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating. Delayed report.

### **Saltzer, Sasha Charity**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, June 23, 2024, (born May 20, 2024), daughter of Matthew and Daelen Jungé Saltzer, Rev. Lawson M. Smith officiating.

## CONFIRMATIONS

*I will meditate on Your precepts and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word. Give me understanding and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:15,16)*

**Buick, Bethany Karen**

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, July 11, 2024, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

**Buthelezi, Samkelisiwe Patience**

At Clermont, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, May 5, 2024, Rev. Jerome B. Dube officiating.

## MARRIAGES

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

**Acton-Pushkina, Kesniel Carswell  
Acton and Tatiana Pushkina**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, July 13, 2024, Rev. Elmo K. Acton officiating. (Blessing)

**Hartman-Klippenstein, Alex  
Eugene Hartman and Hannah  
Danielle Klippenstein**

At Bethany, Missouri, July 4, 2024, Rev. Brett D. Buick officiating.

**Rhodes-Closterman, Nandin  
Oliver Rhodes and Ava Kathryn  
Closterman**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June 15, 2024, Rev. Christopher A. Barber officiating.

**Spitaletto-Reinprecht, Christopher  
John Spitaletto and Megan Kim  
Reinprecht**

At Hammonton, New Jersey, June 22, 2024, Rev. Nathan D. Gladish officiating.

**Taylor-Brown, Joshua Porter  
Taylor and Tess Hannah Brown**  
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, July 7, 2024, Rev. Scott I. Frazier officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

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

**Buss, Neil Martin**

July 20, 2024, of Bryn Athyn,  
Pennsylvania. 81

**Kirsten, June Kelly Barnes**

June 1, 2024, of Padstow Heights,  
New South Wales, Australia. 97





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