

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MAY/JUNE 2025



The Threat to the New Church And Our Responsibility

This scene from the 19th of June pageant in Bryn Athyn last year depicts the dragon attacking the Woman Clothed with the Sun and her newborn baby – representing the New Church. A series of sermons, articles and an editorial in this issue speak to the meaning of New Church Day – for the church and in our own lives.



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Matthew 6

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New Church Life

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

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New Church Life is available online back to 2006 at <https://new-church.org/connect/subscriptions/new.church.life>. All issues can be researched back to 1881 at www.heavenlydoctrines.org.

In This Issue

Editorials (page 196) include:

- *The Church Reborn*: Of all the images we associate with New Church Day the most important may be the one we see in the mirror. The church is only as strong as its members and our commitment to it. There are many ways we can be a positive influence for the church in the world, perhaps without even being aware of it. We have been called and need to be ready to answer: *Here I am, Lord. Send me.*
- *Fits and Starts*: For all the earnest efforts to grow the church over the years, experience shows that the church will grow only “by fits and starts,” with periods of promise and periods of struggle. That does not mean we should stop trying – and “it is important for those who love the New Church to nurture the organized church in this world as well as to spread the church.”

We generally publish two sermons in each bimonthly issue in *New Church Life*. For this New Church Day issue we publish four – each shedding its own light on the meaning of the celebration. The first is “*Hold Fast to What You Have*” by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., about “holding fast” to all the blessings in our life: the Word to guide us, the church to unite us, the truths that lead us, and the Lord’s love always encouraging the best in us. (Page 209)

In “*I Saw Heaven Opened*,” the Rev. Derek P. Elphick says: “Anyone familiar with the Heavenly Doctrines knows that heaven has been ‘opened up’ by virtue of what its pages teach, but what makes this awakening significant is the access we have been given to a new key, which has been lost for thousands of years and now has been found.” (Page 215)

The Rev. Brett D. Buick offers a sermon, *That Serpent of Old*, which links the serpent in the Garden of Eden, leading Adam and Eve astray, with the serpent in the book of *Revelation* seeking to undermine the New Church. Both

warn against the dangers of faith alone. Our job – as a church and individuals – is to join Michael’s army and fight the dragon by working to understand rationally the teachings of the New Church,” and as the Lord leads us, “the deluge from the dragon will fall to nothing.” (Page 221)

In a sermon preached in Bryn Athyn Cathedral in September 1994, but never published, the late Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh lays out *The Responsibility of the New Church*. This is a responsibility we all share. “The New Church has been chosen as the specific church to carry the torch of specific light for the whole world. It has unique and special responsibilities. As members of this church, you have been called as disciples of the Lord with a sacred trust.” (Page 226)

Adding his own reflections From the Bishop’s Office, the Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs expresses *Gratitude for the New Church* -- along with happy memories of family celebrations of New Church Day. He quotes from his book – *As For Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord* – to illustrate how our own traditions add meaning to the day. (Page 233)

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish offers an article, *On Being Born Again*, explaining what it really means to be “born again.” “The phrase, born again,” he writes, “actually means ‘born from above.’ It is intended to convey the idea that we are created to live to eternity, but just as we are born naturally into this physical world, so we must be born again spiritually in order to live in the spiritual world.” (Page 236)

In *Twice Hacked – Cybercrime and Spiritual Attacks* the Rev. Howard A. Thompson explains that just as our technology can be hacked by cybercriminals, Swedenborg describes how we can be “spiritually hacked” also by those preying on our weaknesses, sowing discord, and seeking to rob us of peace and freedom. (Page 244)

In *Not as the World Gives* the Rev. Grant H. Odhner says we may not always understand how the Lord is bringing peace in the midst of turmoil in our lives, but His is not a quick fix – it is everlasting. (Page 247)

Church News (page 265) includes:

- A report from March meetings of the General Church Board of Directors
- The June meeting of the General Church Corporation, including election of Board members
- February meetings on the Academy Board of Trustees, including significant changes at Bryn Athyn College and the Academy Secondary Schools
- A report from the Bryn Athyn College Theological School
- A Sunshine Retreat at Boynton Beach New Church
- News on church summer camps and Gathering Leaves

Coming in the next issue

On March 24, Bryn Athyn College President **Sean Connelly** sent out a letter, widely distributed, on the financial sustainability of the College. After “a comprehensive review of our financial situation,” he announced several major decisions for the survival of the College as a distinctively New Church institution. This included eliminating all NCAA Division III athletic programs, outsourcing all IT operations, and streamlining student and institutional support. “This is a turning point,” he said, “not an ending.” The July/August issue of New Church Life will include a new vision for the survival of the College.

Editorials

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

THE CHURCH REBORN

Many images come to mind with New Church Day:

- The Holy City New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven – our enduring promise and inspiration
- The sacred comfort of our own churches, where our faith comes to life
- Indelible symbols from 19th of June pageants: the Woman Clothed with the Sun, the menacing red dragon, the four horsemen, Michael and his angels

But one of the most important images is one we may not think of: the one in the mirror.

We need that vision of the Holy City to sustain and inspire us.

We need the structure of the General Church of the New Jerusalem – for priestly leadership, doctrinal instruction and the supporting services of this New Church.

And we need our beloved churches, where we gather to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

But mostly, we need the people. The church is nothing without them. It is with the people that the church comes alive – in our hearts and our communities. And that is not something that happens only on Sunday mornings in the pews. The church only truly exists when we make it part of our lives by reading and reflecting on the Word and the Writings, then living our faith.

Life constitutes the church, not doctrine, except in the measure that it becomes applicable to life. (Arcana Coelestia 8152)

Everyone who leads a good life, in charity and faith, is a church. (Arcana Coelestia 6637)

| *The kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21)*

This is a humbling blessing we can all aspire to – that the church is in us and always with us. It begins with baptism and progresses through our lives as we learn the truths of the Word and embrace them by living and modeling them. But this blessing also implies responsibility. What can and must we do to advance the cause of that Holy City descending into this needy world?

Our world has always been in turmoil. That is why the Lord came on earth 2,000 years ago: to subdue the hells, reorder the heavens, and enable us to worship a visible, knowable God.

The natural and spiritual worlds cresting again in turmoil brought on the Last Judgment in 1757. We still are tormented with the fallout as we seek to establish and spread that Holy City – the hope and antidote to all the evil in the world – ever since the birth of the New Church in heaven on June 19, 1770.

Because of that promise, we are not hopeless. And we are not helpless. There is much we can and need to do. It begins on Sundays as we go to our churches to be instructed and inspired. But the hope of the church is rooted in what we do when we go out to live what we have learned – and learned to love – by modeling the church within. The Lord and His Church exist within us only as we internalize it and then manifest it in daily living. And that sets a powerful example for others, even if we are not aware.

In his sermon on *The Responsibility of the New Church* in this issue (see page 226), the late Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh talks about our dual responsibilities: those of the church itself, and especially those we are charged with in living our faith.

He noted that we often say we want to serve people outside the church and find many ways to do this, but it's a challenge. One thing we all can do – quietly and alone – is simply read the Word and the Writings for a few minutes each day. This is a small but meaningful way to enrich our own lives and actually begin to change the world.

Some may find the Word and the Writings challenging to read and understand, but just making the effort connects us with the Lord, heaven and angels – and amazingly helps us to be positive influences in the lives of others. It helps to read the Word as though looking in a mirror and seeing ourselves. So much of it may seem ancient and unrelatable to our lives but it is filled with stories and images we love. All of it is about the Lord. And all of it is about our own lives.

Abraham Lincoln said: “I am busily engaged in the study of the Bible. I believe it is God’s Word because it finds me where I am.” Would that we all could be as profound and grateful, and also find in that mirror the pathway to heaven – and the pathway for a lost world.

So, yes, we have a responsibility – but it is not daunting. The Rev. Asplundh wrote:

What you do as a New Church person to bring your life into conjunction with the heavens has an effect on people you do not know and may never meet. From the touchstone of conjunction in your mind and heart is an avenue for influx from the heavens to countless others. You, with your efforts, are creating a link between heaven and earth. **And if we in the New Church do not serve this function, there is no one else who can.**

That is as challenging as it is inspiring. We all can have a kind of “ministry” – if we choose to embrace it. The Lord constantly leads us with His love and His providence. We may not always see and appreciate all of our opportunities to “be the church” and to spread the church, but they are boundless. Consider:

The Church of the Lord is not here or there, but everywhere. It is within those places where the church is, as well as outside of the church, wherever people’s lives are formed according to the principles of charity. So it is that the Church of the Lord is spread throughout the whole earth and yet it is one: for when life makes the church, and not doctrine separate from life, then the church is one; but when doctrine makes the church, then there are many. (Arcana Coelestia 8152)

The Lord came first to establish the Christian Church on earth – as a visible, knowable God. But He taught in the parables of the literal sense of the Word, and told His disciples – and all of us:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. (John 16:12-13)

And so He came again, beginning with sending His disciples throughout the spiritual world on the 19th of June, 1770, to “*preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be from ages to ages.*” (*True Christian Religion* 791)

The New Church was born and began descending from heaven to earth on that day – our gift and our responsibility.

The Lord did not come just one day into the world on what we celebrate as Christmas. Every day since then He is continually born with us. And every day he builds on that initial coming: His life and teaching in the world, His crucifixion and resurrection to give us eternal life in heaven; His judgment of the Christian Church, and His coming again as that Spirit of Truth to enlighten and lead us through the revealed spiritual sense of His Word. Every day He is born anew with us and in us. It is constant and progressive throughout our lives.

And so it is with each of us. We tend to associate “church” with the General Church organization and our own societies but know that the “universal church” actually grows and matures within each of us – and in people all over the world – and leads us throughout our lives “from ages and ages.”

Birthdays and anniversaries – like the 19th of June – are milestone events. We look back at where and how far we have come and look ahead to where we want to be, and what it will take to get us there. This is true for us as individuals, and it is true for the church. It is a time for honest reflection, humility and gratitude.

Every day is a new beginning, an opportunity to “*choose this day whom you will serve*” – the false gods that tempt us, or to be like Joshua: “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” (Joshua 24:15) We serve the Lord by being His Church – not just on Sunday but every day.

The Lord told His disciples to “*go and preach to all nations that the kingdom of God is at hand.*” (Matthew 10:7) We also are His disciples who need to hear and heed the calling.

We are commanded to love the Lord – to “feed His sheep” – by loving and serving our neighbors. And we are told that before we can enter heaven we must become as little children and be “born again.” That means shunning evil, regenerating, and innocently following the Lord in all aspects of our lives. And as we are “born again,” the church is reborn within us. That is our charge. And that is the hope of the church.

It is right and good to celebrate the 19th of June in our churches. That is where we come together, where we are taught, where we pray, where we are led. But the connection is not broken when we step outside into our normal lives. That is when the church really lives – in us and through us.

The Lord said to His followers – while He walked among us, and as He forever lives with us: “*You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go out and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*” (John 15:15)

And He challenges each of us in His Sermon on the Mount:

You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14,16)

We all are called, and we all have a role. As the Rev. Asplundh concludes his sermon on *The Responsibility of the New Church* – with a charge to our own responsibilities as champions of the church:

The Lord’s voice is calling, asking: “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” Are we ready to answer in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “*Here I am, Lord. Send me.*” (BMH)

FITS AND STARTS

The reason why the interior contents of the Word are being disclosed at the present time is that the Church today has been so much vastated, that is, is so devoid of faith and love, that although people know and understand they still do not acknowledge, let alone believe – with the exception of a few who lead a good life and are called the elect. Among these few who are now able to be taught the New Church is to be established. But where those few are the Lord alone knows. Few of these will be inside the Church. In the past it has been the gentiles among whom new Churches have been established. (Arcana Coelestia 3898)

The Heavenly Doctrine does give us hints, and maybe more than hints, about the future of the world and of the New Church. You might think that people who believe in these teachings would have little anxiety about the seemingly constant precarious state of our planet and our country. But maybe there is a rule that true solutions appear to be few and feeble until the time is right.

We rely on teachings like these:

The New Church, which is meant by “the woman clothed with the sun,” is at first amongst a few, that in the meantime provision may be made for it among more; until it grows to fullness.

There are several reasons why this New Church that is called the Holy Jerusalem will first begin with a few, afterwards to be with more, and finally to reach fullness. . . . These also were the reasons why the Christian Church, after the Lord had left the world, increased so slowly in Europe, and did not attain to its fullness until an age had elapsed. (Apocalypse Explained 732)

The reasons listed in this passage are insightful and true, but our topic here is a more general observation about how churches spread. The assertion in this passage is simply that the church will grow, and that it will grow in a recognizable way just as Christianity has.

We have come to think of evangelization as the source of church growth in the most successful American churches and have judged the New Church as wanting because of its lack of success. This is a misconception.

Looking at two of the most successful American religious movements, it is clear that their growth is mostly attributable to their fertility and retention rates.

The Mormon Church, for example has an annual rate of increase that has varied between 1.4% and 1.7% in recent years. But their birth and retention rates are falling, as they are in other American denominations.

As of 2021, American church members have an average of 2.8 children per household by ages 35-45, as opposed to a U.S. national average

of 2.06. (Wikipedia, Demographics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 2025)

Between 1980 and 2014, the LDS Church's retention rate fell from nearly 90 percent to 64 percent. As more millennial Mormons leave the religion, more LDS families find themselves facing and overcoming faith divides. (Crossing Borders: For LDS Families, Millennials Leaving Religion Causes Faith Divide, Utah Public Radio, By Katherine Taylor, March 20, 2018)

The annual growth rate of the General Church between 1910 and 2010 was 1.4%. Not too much less than the Mormons.

The Amish growth rate is even more impressive. 100% of the growth in the Amish population is due to their fertility and retention rates, since converts are rare. Yet their population doubles every 20 years, something like 3.5% annually.

Amish have 'sizable' nuclear families (five or more children on average) and a retention rate (Amish children who join the church as young adults) of 85% or more.' ("Amish are growing rapidly in number and staying put" by Jack Brubaker, The Scribbler, Nov. 6, 2023)

We usually attribute the Mormons' remarkable growth rate to their aggressive and successful evangelization efforts. But it is actually mostly due to their impressive fertility and retention rates, although statistics on this are hard to find. In addition, "about 50 percent of LDS converts in the U.S. stopped attending church within a year of baptism, while outside the U.S. the rate was about 70 percent." (Wikipedia, Demographics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 2025)

According to the Pew Research Center the growth of virtually all religions depends on their fertility rate and not evangelization.

Conversion will have little impact on the size of religious groups. Pew projects that religious people will increase by 2050 due to increasing fertility rates in religious countries and decreasing fertility rates in less religious countries. ¹

It is projected that birth rate – rather than conversion – will prove the main factor in the growth of any given religion. While according to other various scholars and sources Pentecostalism – a Protestant Christian movement – is the fastest growing religion in the world, this growth is primarily due to religious conversion and denomination switching among Christians. ²

The General Church has often compared its evangelization efforts and rate of success with Christian mega-churches like North Point, Saddleback,

Willow Creek and Calvary Chapel. These churches often claim to be truly converting the “unchurched” and not simply “denomination switching” as this article states. But in a place like North America, where Christianity is so historically dominant, this claim is doubtful. They are not mostly converting Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu populations. Instead, they are mostly attracting people of Christian backgrounds through charismatic leadership, community programs and effective organizational work.

In other parts of the world the situation is somewhat different. In Africa, for example, Christianity has spread rapidly over the past century as people have converted from animism to Christianity:

The rise in African Christianity in the last 100 years is one of the most under-appreciated success stories in global religious history. In 1900, there were less than 10 million Christians on the continent, many of whom were non-native missionaries. A century later in the year 2000, there were 350 million. By 2025, that number is expected to nearly double, to somewhere between 630 and 700 million believers.

This growth was not simply due to natural population increase but to conversions, going from 6% of Africans in 1900 to about two-thirds of the population today. Nevertheless, much of it is due to the high birth rate that prevails in Africa as well as to the high percentage of children who accept the religion of their parents.

It is also true that at the beginning of any church movement virtually all of its growth will be due to conversion, as was the case with the New Church in America in the 19th century. The Transcendentalist movement and the enormous growth of interest in Spiritualism in the United States after the Civil War resulted in many famous intellectuals, leaders and artists espousing the works of Swedenborg.

This general interest led to increased membership in the New Church. The General Convention of the New Jerusalem reached a peak of 187 societies by 1890, and a peak total membership of 6582 by 1920.⁴ The General Church, which split from Convention in 1890, had only 1,420 members in 1920, but whereas Convention’s membership has declined since then to fewer than 1,000, the General Church has grown consistently. The difference has been birth rate and retention rate.

¹ Pew Research Center “The Future of World Religions” (PDF). Archived from the original (PDF) on 29 April 2015.

² “Key Findings From the Global Religious Futures Project”. Pew Research Center. 21 December 2022.

³ The rapid growth of Christianity in Africa, by Michael M. Canaris, December 13, 2018 in Columns, Growing in Faith, The Catholic Star Herald

⁴ The New Church in the New World, by Marguerite Beck Block, page 356

The point here is not that evangelization is unimportant. It is both a part of the Lord's command to us and a practical necessity. People do join the church, and the more the better. Instead, the point is that it is a mistake to expect evangelization to be the source of growth in 20th and 21st-century North America and Europe. It is especially mistaken to expect evangelization to be a more important source of growth for our imperfect church organization than its rate of natural increase through birth and retention. While the spread of the truths of the Lord's Second Coming is happening in myriad ways now more than ever, this spread can only happen by means of human organizations that have the membership, assets, and the knowledge and skills to perform this work.

It appears that the church will grow by fits and starts, with periods of promise and periods of struggle. Overall, the New Church meant by the Woman Clothed with the Sun in *Revelation* will grow slowly at first. The true spiritual reasons are those given in *Apocalypse Explained* 732 quoted above. They amount to a need for there to be more people who genuinely love and practice spiritual values, more people who are not held back by mistaken doctrines, and a need for the church to grow in the spiritual world. As these needs are met over time, however, it is important for those who love the New Church to nurture the organized church in this world as well as to spread the Word.

(JFS)

Letters to the Editors

Letters to the Editors may be sent to:
Editors of *New Church Life*
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Divine Clay

*"I go away, and come back to you," **
A thread unraveled, then made new –
Not skyward flight, but gasp at dawn,
A hidden truth, by Love outdrawn.

The Father's voice, a greater chord,
Reshaped the clay, the flesh adored.
From Mary's frame, a seed took root,
Then swelled to bear us Godly fruit.

The prince of shadows stalked the earth,
Yet found no crack to claim His worth.
For Love had rinsed the dust of night—
Transfigured frailty into Light.

He shed the cloak of transient years,
The mother's weave of blood and tears,
To don a robe no loom could spin –
Soul fused with Body, One within.

"Arise," He whispers, "walk this road,
Where burdens lift with blessings sowed.
Forswear the world and unlace
The finite self for boundless grace."



*"Pietà" by Charles Umlauf (1945
Bronze) Photo by Alan Pendleton
©2024 (Austin, TX)*

Now, follow and feel the loom's refrain –
Each act of kindness, Love's terrain.
For in His steps, both near and far,
We too are clay kissed by the Star.

**The Gospel of John 14:28*

At the heart of Christian mystery revealed in the Lord's Second Coming lies the paradox of unity: a Savior both fully human and fully Divine, a bridge between earth and eternity. Drawing from the *Gospel of John* and Swedenborg's *Doctrine of the Lord*, this poem – Divine Clay – traces the incarnate journey of Christ as He transcends mortal frailty to embody Divine wholeness. Here, the Lord's words – “*I go away, and come back to you*” – are not a farewell but an invitation to witness the alchemy of Love reshaping flesh into Light.

My poem envisions Christ's humanity as malleable clay, first molded by Mary's earthly lineage – the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star, and then transfigured by the Father's Divine essence. Through metaphor and rhythm, it mirrors Swedenborg's teaching: the Lord did not ascend to a distant heaven but “changed state,” shedding the finite to fuse soul and body into one radiant being. The tempter's shadow in the wilderness, the fragility of tears, the loom of human existence – all become threads in a grand needlework of redemption.

Yet this is not only Christ's story. The final stanzas turn to us, the readers, still clay beneath the Potter's hand. To “forswear the world” is to echo His surrender, to let every act of kindness become a stitch in Love's vast fabric. For if the Divine once wore mortal dust, then we, too, might glimpse eternity in our own fragile forms -- “kissed by the Star” that guided the Wise Men and Him home.

In sum, my poem is a call to walk the road where grace unravels limitation, and unity is not a doctrine but a lived breath.

Alan Pendleton
Arlington, Virginia

*Which Came First,
the Chicken or the Egg?*

To The Editors:

Some of the most beautiful lines of poetry I have ever read appear in the English translation by Edward Fitzgerald of the Persian poem, “*The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*,” For example:

Awake! For Morning in the Bowl of Night

Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight.“

Now, as is well known, Persia, eons ago, was a world leader in the sciences, and it would seem that old Omar was a learned fellow, for he was searching for answers relating to life and death. I doubt, though, whether he would have been able to ascertain whether the chicken or the egg came first, for he says :

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
came out by the same Door as in I went . . .*

*Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many Knots unravell'd by the Road;
But not the Knot of Human Death and Fate.*

*There was a Door to which I found no Key:
There was a Veil past which I could not see:
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
There seem'd – and then no more of Thee and Me.*

(The Rubáiyát of Omar Kayyám, rendered into English Verse by Edward Fitzgerald)

That is not surprising, for the Lord Himself tells us in *Arcana Coelestia*, 3404.2:

It is known that the Divine is infinite as to being, and eternal as to manifestation, and that the finite is not capable of comprehending the infinite, nor indeed the eternal, for the eternal is the infinite as to manifestation . . . For example: man cannot possibly have any idea of the eternal except from time; and this being the case, he cannot possibly comprehend what is from eternity, thus what the Divine was before time, or before the world was created. And so long as there is in his thought, anything of an idea from time, if he thinks on the subject, he must necessarily fall into errors from which he cannot be extricated.

With that we must be content and accept what the Lord tells us. What happened before the “Big Bang” – or even if there was one – or how God came to exist, is beyond our ken. Similarly in regard to life on earth and how man came to exist. Did life on earth just begin simultaneously across all species? Did man evolve separately from other life forms, or from the apes? Or

did life begin as a single cell which evolved into fish and then into birds, to animals, and thence to man?

None of this matters. We can never know. Importantly, the Lord, as quoted above, has given us the answer. We are finite and unable to comprehend the infinite. The Lord has also told us that He created the universe and all that is in it. How He did it is beyond us. Where is our faith if we question such matters? Trying to reason from our limited perspective is pointless. We can never know and such questioning is immaterial other than for man's vanity of trying to prove the impossible.

Barrie Ridgway
Canberra
Australia

Trust and Confidence

To The Editors:

I begin this epistle with the letter "I" representing a spiritually healthy egoism and not, I hope, representing a self-worshipping egotism as I quote proudly: *"Redemption itself was a subjugation of the hells, a restoration of order in the heavens and by means of these a preparation for a new spiritual church."* (True Christian Religion 114:1)

Perhaps I am a genuine member of this new spiritual church or maybe not, yet. But it disturbs me greatly to think that many people of my generation and younger generations around me, appear not to be especially interested in the New Church as described, by the Lord, in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Have you noticed this also?

But because the Lord does humble the haughty and elevates the souls of the humble, perhaps I should not worry. (I recall the saying that there are not any atheists in fox holes, meaning that in times of great personal stress people often look to a higher power to rescue them.)

Indeed, I should not worry about the states of those within our ecclesial ranks but replace my feelings with trust in the Lord. And now, I think I hear the voice of a former teacher as I read the conclusion of one of his written sentences: ". . . but because we have from the Lord the ability to serve as instruments for the slow upbuilding of His kingdom, and that we may do our part with deep assurance as to the outcome." (*Selected Editorials* by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, page 50.)

Yes, I believe in the successful and sure establishment on earth of His New Church. I believe that many of my neighbors in Bryn Athyn and here in Pine Run Park have the same heartfelt conviction of its reality among and within humanity.

And through the lens of my senior years I perceive the glow of the new truths in their written and spoken words.

Richard Linquist
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

Stumbling on the Path

To The Editors:

The following statement appeared in a recent issue of *New Church Life*: “I will defer to Swedenborgian doctrine when Swedenborgian doctrine is clear.”

If we do not defer to the Lord’s spiritual teachings through Swedenborg unless we, ourselves, can clearly understand them, have we not tripped over a stumbling block?

Need we “taste” and “touch” in order to “see” that the Way is Good and True? Surely, the path to Truth is a process and rarely a clear one; narrow withal, but grateful.

Martin E. Klein
Huntingdon Valley
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“Hold Fast to What You Have”

A New Church Day Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

*Lessons: Revelation 3:7-13; Deuteronomy 11:22-28;
Apocalypse Revealed 185, 145*

***Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast to what you have,
that no one may take your crown. (Revelation 3:11)***

Letters of encouragement and instruction. The early chapters of the book of *Revelation* contain letters from the Lord to seven churches in “Asia.” (*Revelation 1:11*) These are messages of encouragement and instruction to early Christians and stand as an introduction to the visionary and prophetic themes of the book of *Revelation*, which many of us turn to and hear about in this month of New Church Day.

In an effort to personalize these messages, or see them as applying to our lives, I draw your attention to two contexts. One is a yearly development review or performance evaluation at work. While not always something we look forward to, often these have the same formula as these letters: overall encouragement and gratitude for the things going well, articulation of challenge areas, and goal setting together with incentives for improvement.

If that context is too formal and business-like, perhaps we could think of it as a letter written from a beloved older relative at a milestone birthday, where the person gets real with us: here are the things I love about you – your strengths – and here are some things you need to think about if you want the happiness that the Lord wants for you.

The message to the Church in Philadelphia is the focus for today, an area in Asia Minor believed to be within modern day Turkey. According to the Heavenly Doctrines, this message is addressed to those “*who are governed by truths springing from goodness derived from the Lord.*” (*Apocalypse Revealed 172*) That’s a good group to be a part of. I take this to mean people who are trying to pay attention to what the Lord says, who want to live a good life with His help. Maybe that’s us sometimes and maybe it’s not. But the message is that all of us have a “Philadelphia” desire within us, put in there by the Lord. When activated, we use the Word as a guide for living because that’s what the Lord

wants us to do. One goal for today is to get in touch with that part of us more often, and to strengthen it, which is the point of this letter.

An Open Door. After identifying the Lord as the one speaking to us – the One in the midst of the seven golden lampstands who calls Himself holy and true – He provides an amazingly beautiful invitation. This is the encouragement part. “*See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.*” (Revelation 3:8) We read that “to those who are governed by truths springing from goodness derived from the Lord (Philadelphia) *heaven is opened.* (Emphasis added, *Apocalypse Revealed* 176) This passage goes on to describe people being led along pathways or through entrances to their home in heaven. It mentions some powerful Scriptures:

- “*I am the way, the truth and the life.*” (John 14:6)
- “*I am the door of the sheep . . . If anyone enters by Me he will be saved.*”

(John 10:7,9)

Then there are echoes of messages to come in the book of Revelation: “*Behold I stand at the door and knock,*” (Revelation 3:20), which means His presence and how He presses to be received. (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 217) And the 12 open gates of the Holy City New Jerusalem welcome us into the church and into a heavenly way of life.

How many of us resonate with the way this particular invitation is framed? “*See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.*” The Lord as Savior offers to lead us to everything good and eternal and blessed. He encourages us by reminding us that we’ve responded in the past: “*You have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*” (Revelation 3:8) We’re on the path. We’re people who have some of that Philadelphia quality in us. We’ve seen some of the value in actively living a spiritual life.

Trials and hardship. That’s the encouraging part. Now comes a dose of realism – the instruction. We are going to need perseverance in “*the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*” (Revelation 3:10)

What is this hour of trial? One passage identifies it as “an internal spiritual battle, called temptation” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 185). Other letters identify similar trials in the form of persecution, or headwinds for those striving to live a spiritual life.

Whether they’re external forces or internal, the challenge for us is to stay strong in temptation. It may be a temptation to hide our light of faith, to go along to get along, instead of staying true to religious principle when we need to. Or it could be one of the many personal failings we have, when our unregenerate characteristics manifest in destructive ways: anger, selfishness, justification to treat others in ways we would not want to be treated, worldly pursuits for no higher useful purpose, an unwillingness to give people any

benefit of the doubt but a temptation to write them off, resorting to lies about ourselves or others in the fear of discovery of our failings. We know these weaknesses. We are aware of times when it feels like our “little strength” that the Lord identifies is not enough.

But notice the Lord’s encouragement even here. “*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you.*” (Revelation 3:10) The Lord is offering to help us “fight against evils and reject falsities.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 185) He will give us the strength and endurance to be the kind of people we aspire to be – firm in the face of adversity, able to change from destructive patterns, willing to walk with the Lord into the next phase of our regeneration.

Here we could call to mind a teaching about temptations – that they are absolutely necessary steps on the path to heaven:

In a word, to the extent people cast the devil behind them, to the same extent they are adopted by the Lord and taught, led, withheld from evils by Him and kept in goods. This is the way, the only way, from hell to heaven. (Apocalypse Revealed 531:6; cf. Apocalypse Explained 798:7)

“Hold Fast.” What comes next is arguably the crux of this whole message to the people of Philadelphia. It is to “*hold fast to what you have.*” (Revelation 3:11) Do you hear the call to tenaciousness, endurance, the perseverance already mentioned, the fortitude that the Lord can inspire in us? I hear Him asking us to keep going: believe the things you know to be true, do the things you know to be good; stand on the principles you know are honorable and important.

The Heavenly Doctrines summarize all that as follows: we are to “retain the few things that [we] know from the Word about charity and its resulting faith, and live according to them.”

(*Apocalypse Revealed* 145) We are also asked to remain “steadfast in love and faith.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 217)

What are some examples? The Ten Commandments are a good place to focus – just four of them on the second table, as explained in *Doctrine of Life*. Personalizing these commandments we might strengthen our resolve saying: “I will not murder.” I will not hate or seek revenge but will persevere in a desire to come from love in my

He will give us the strength and endurance to be the kind of people we aspire to be – firm in the face of adversity, able to change from destructive patterns, willing to walk with the Lord into the next phase of our regeneration.

dealings with those who have wronged me. (*Doctrine of Life* 67-69) “I will not commit adultery.” I will do my very best not to “behave licentiously . . . engage in obscene acts, speak lasciviously, [or] entertain filthy thoughts” (No.74) “I will not steal.” I will not resort to “guile or subterfuge” which is I acknowledge to be at the heart of any form of theft – taking from others their dignity, their intellectual property, their livelihood. (No.81) Instead, I will hold fast to the opposite principle of loving honesty and dealing honorably. (No. 82,83) “I will not bear false witness,” or profess false things about people I don’t like. Instead, I will hold firm in an effort to look for and love the truth about them. (See 87,88)

The fact is, the Lord is constantly encouraging us to hold fast to these and many other basics of spiritual life. Like the staff in Moses’ hand when Israel fought against Amalek (*Exodus* 17:9), or the sword in Joshua’s hand when he and the Israelites conquered the enemies of the land (*Joshua* 11:10-12); like Jacob who fought with the angel all night and would not let go (*Genesis* 32:26); like David who would not harm Saul even when he sought to kill him, saying, “*I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord’s anointed*” (*1 Samuel* 24:10) – we too can be led by the Lord to hold on tenaciously and with courage to what we know to be true and good, and persevere in the face of adversity with the Lord’s help.

Rewards. Now to the rewards. We recall the structure of these letters: encouragement, calls to action, and rewards for responsiveness.

For the people of Philadelphia, the first reward is a crown. But note that it already belongs to them. “*Hold fast to what you have, that no one may take your crown.*” (*Revelation* 3:11) We are taught that these words mean: “Lest they lose the wisdom from which comes eternal happiness.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 189) There’s a meaningful concept here that cuts deeply into the New Church faith. This passage continues: “Wisdom perishes in people when they stop putting truths into practice, that is, when they stop living in accordance with them.” It gets worse, even: “They also then cease to love wisdom, and accordingly to love the Lord.”

What’s at play here is a use-it-or-lose-it concept. (*See Apocalypse Revealed* 932) Central to our calling as people on the path to heaven is to actually live the life that leads to heaven – to compel ourselves to refrain from what is hurtful to ourselves or others, and to do what is helpful and loving instead. We show that we care about and internalize those truths by striving to use them in the decisions and choices of life. Otherwise, there’s nothing to hold them in our spirits, or eventually even in our memories. They, in effect, become meaningless to us and we lose them.

Contrary to that is the truth that we do make our own – that becomes for us a “rule of life.” (*Arcana Caelestia* 4190, 6637:2) These lived principles are as

visible to others as a crown on our heads, not in a self-aggrandizing way, but in the sense of what rules our lives.

But the rewards do not stop there. We read of, concerning the person of Philadelphia:

I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on Him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, and I will write on Him My new name.” (Revelation 3:12)

First, there is an opportunity: to be a pillar in the temple of the Lord. That means “to sustain the Lord’s church in heaven.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 191) What is before us, amazingly, is a chance to strengthen the Lord’s kingdom. Our steadfast efforts to live as the Lord asks, however feeble at times, sustain heaven. They strengthen the church. What I hear is the call to be a part of a grand cause of the Lord, to be a part of “*the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.*” (*Revelation* 21:2)

“We shall go out no more.” Again, amazingly, it says, “they will remain in that church to eternity.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 192) When we cooperate with the Lord, the message is that He is able to regenerate us or create anew a steadfast and strong part in us that will not waver.

Even more telling are the names: Written on our spirits, or the promise of that writing, is “the name of My God” and “the name of the city of My God” and “My new name.” These are the truths, or these are the heavenly qualities, that are “engraved on our hearts.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 193-194) And this is the path toward acknowledgment and worship of the Lord alone, which is the Lord’s new name that we come to know. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 196)

That’s quite a list! Let’s acknowledge, of course, that it is aspirational. It is the direction of spiritual life that the Lord lays before us. It is the heavenly reward of a full and complete trust in His providence, from a sense of the principles of His Word which truly protect us and bring blessing to our lives.

Yet all of us are invited on the journey toward that end-state, and we are actually on it. The truth is, the trust, peace and blessing that we long for in our souls can be ours to the extent that we welcome the invitation. It continues each day we choose to walk through the open door, firmly and decidedly into the way of living and believing that leads to heaven. May today, or this time, especially as we prepare for a celebration of New Church Day, be a moment of recommitment to that path.

It continues further with our

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“HOLD FAST TO WHAT YOU HAVE”

efforts to “*hold fast to what we have*.” We have so much. We have treasure troves of blessings in our lives – called by the special name of “remains” or “remnant states” in the Word. We have the Word and its teachings in abundance. We have a church, a beautiful communion of saints or people who are striving to do what we are doing – to put the truths we know into practice. We have memories of when those truths have been our friends – when they’ve helped us resolve challenges and find comfort. And we have the Lord Himself, encouraging the very best in us.

Let us, then, persevere, and hold fast to what we have, and take the next steps through that open door with the Lord’s help. “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” (Revelation 3:13)

Amen.



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“I Saw Heaven Opened”

The Rev. Derek P. Elphick

Lessons: Revelation 19:11-16; True Christianity 201 and 207

On June 19 we celebrate the birthday of the New Church. We mark June 19, 1770, as the official date in history when the final volume detailing the Lord’s long-awaited Second Coming was completed, at which point, we are told, the Lord called together the 12 disciples who had followed Him in the world and the next day sent them throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that “*the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall reign forevermore.*” (*True Christianity* 791)

We celebrate and give thanks on this special day for many reasons. We have gratitude for:

- **The General Church of the New Jerusalem.** This church organization is a human organization which tries to keep the bar high by modeling itself as closely as it can to the direct teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines.
- **Friends and Family** the world over, going back many generations, who provide a strong sense of belonging, a strong network of like-minded people who give our church organization a sense of unity and purpose, a sense of community in which we support each other by living and sharing our faith with others.
- **Our Schools**, with organizational focus on children and young minds, again keeping the bar high by modeling our philosophy and educational practices as closely as we can to the direct teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines.
- **Our Source Material**, the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, which reveal the internal sense, the inner meaning of the Bible, and give us a new kind of clarity about the Lord, faith and religion, providence, the afterlife – many things which have been stumbling

blocks for millennia, and a source of skepticism for people the world over. We celebrate the advent of the modern-day printing press – the Internet – which has enabled millions of people around the world to discover the teachings of the New Church online.

- **The Hidden Effects** of this new religious movement. This new revelation is said to “*surpass all miracles*” (*Invitation to the New Church* 39) because it has produced spiritual change in two worlds simultaneously – the natural and the spiritual. As a result of the Second Coming of the Lord, there has been a Last Judgment in the spiritual world and a re-ordering of the heavens, which means there is a trickle-down effect in that all people on earth can experience and enjoy a new kind of spiritual, religious freedom. (See *Last Judgment* 73-74)

So, yes, we have many reasons for celebrating New Church Day and much to be thankful for.

In preparation for our celebrations, I invite you to consider closely the words of our text: “*I saw heaven opened.*” (*Revelation 19:11*)

What does it mean to see “heaven opened”? Is this a metaphorical expression – or is it describing something different? And if it is more than metaphorical, how might this activity work in us – individually and collectively?

First of all, in our celebration of the New Church, we cannot ignore the *means* by which the Heavenly Doctrines were given to the world – namely that of the Lord’s humble servant, Emanuel Swedenborg.

In a rare reference to himself, Swedenborg said in the final volume of the published works of the Writings, that since the Lord cannot manifest Himself in person again and yet foretold that He would come again to build a new church, that he (Swedenborg), was called by the Lord to “accept these teachings intellectually” and then publish them by means of the press. (See *True Christianity* 779)

Today the world enjoys the fruits of this labor, 18 published volumes which comprise the formal, systematic theology of the New Church, sometimes referred to as “the Church of the New Jerusalem.”

But is this really what we are doing – celebrating books? Is this what the New Church is all about – the books?

The books are obviously very important, as are the Old and New Testaments, but something else has happened too.

Heaven has been opened – not theoretically or figuratively, but for real.

Heaven has been opened in such a way that there is now a re-awakening of the human spirit: a re-awakening to everything that touches our physical senses; a re-awakening to the connection – to the thin veil – that exists between

this world and the spiritual world.

Now, we might think that this isn't particularly newsworthy. Anyone familiar with the Heavenly Doctrines knows that heaven has been "opened up" by virtue of what its pages teach, declare and claim, but what makes this awakening significant, and new, and different, is the access we have been given a new tool – a new key – which has been lost for thousands of years and now has been found.

Let us explore a little deeper the significance of this discovery.

In ancient times, people on earth experienced a very close connection to the spiritual world. We read, for example:

When they saw a high mountain, they did not perceive the idea of a mountain but that of height, and from height they perceived heaven and the Lord. When they perceived the morning, they did not perceive the morning itself that starts the day but that which is heavenly and is a likeness of the morning and the dawn in people's minds. For these people, whatever they saw with their eyes was for them heavenly, and so everything was so to speak alive. (Secrets of Heaven 920)

The people of most ancient times intuitively perceived everything around them – the rocks, trees, flowers, meadows, mountains and hills, lakes and oceans, animals and birds, fish and insects – to be "correspondential" in nature, meaning that they knew everything on planet earth, including themselves, gained existence as a result of having a counterpart in the spiritual world. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3422)

The term for this "causal" relationship is correspondence. We read about it in our lesson today:

I have shown in my book, Heaven and Hell (87-105), that every single thing to be found in nature corresponds to something spiritual, and likewise every single part of the human body corresponds to something spiritual. . . . No one has known, however, what correspondence is. In the earliest times, correspondence

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was very well known. To the people who lived at that time the study of correspondence was the supreme field of study. (True Christianity 291; Heaven and Hell 356)

This explains a deeper reason why heaven has been opened to us because the key – a knowledge of correspondences, which was lost – has been found again and given back to the world.

We sometimes forget that the Word, the Old and the New Testaments, was written by means of correspondences. When the Lord came on earth, we are told that He “spoke in correspondences.” (*True Christianity* 201) This is because, “*Divine ideas present themselves in the world in the form of correspondences; therefore, the Word was written entirely in correspondences,*” (*Ibid.*) And so we learn that:

The study of correspondences, which allows the spiritual sense to be grasped, has been revealed today, because the Divine truths of the church are now coming into light . . . (and) the opening of the spiritual sense at this day is meant by John’s vision of heaven being opened. (True Christianity 207)

So, this is how heaven is opened to us – by means of correspondences! What an incredible thought.

A practical way to think of correspondences, both in the Word and in nature, is to think of physical objects as being a “portal” that opens heaven to us. Think about climbing a mountain or drinking a cool glass of water on a hot summer day, or watching the sun rise, or bees at work in their hives, or standing by the ocean, or fishing in a lake, or pulling weeds in the garden.

These everyday activities have a correspondence and, as a result, connect us to heaven. Again, this connection is not symbolic or metaphorical. It’s as real as the love we feel for our loved ones, friends and neighbors. This is because a knowledge of correspondences unlocks a spiritual mind/body connection similar to that of the ancients. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 920)

Another practical way to think of correspondences is to consider the symbols and signs we see all around us. Commercial companies spend a lot of time and money creating a brand or logo because they know that symbols engage people’s hearts and minds, no matter how frivolous or superficial the product or service might be.

There is also a hierarchy to symbolism. The logo or symbol of a sports team, for example, while meaning a lot to fans, is nothing in comparison to a country’s flag or a national monument.

Or think of something as simple as a wedding ring. The ring holds little power or significance to someone who has no knowledge or appreciation of marriage, but wedding rings – those little chunks of gold – are deeply

significant and powerful to those who understand the symbolism. The ring has a correspondence. It opens heaven to those in love.

Now think of symbols in the Word. They hold an even greater correspondential power and significance to the person who understands their function and purpose. So, rather than thinking of them as words on a page from religious books, we know we should respect and revere them, and think of them also as keys that open our hearts and minds – either to the dangers of selfish living or the heavenly delights of living for causes greater than ourselves.

This brings us back to the first thing John sees after heaven is opened to him – a white horse. We read: *“He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.”* (Revelation 19:11)

“Horses” correspond to the power of the intellect – the understanding. These animals project speed and forward motion; galloping, champing at the bit, charging forward. They correspond to the human faculty of understanding. Our mind, our intellect, has the ability to rise above our feelings, emotions and annoyances, into the light of heaven itself. We can do this whenever we want, regardless of how we might feel at the time. This is the *Nunc Licet* promise: to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith. To ride a horse, symbolically, is to put your mind to something and not let up.

The other images connected to the vision of the Rider on the White Horse are a bit more disturbing. We get a description of the Lord prepared for war, clothed with a robe “dipped in blood” with a “sharp sword” coming out of His mouth, ready to “strike the nations.” We are told that for a long time this precious knowledge of correspondences (which unlocks the spiritual sense of the Word) still won’t be recognized or appreciated by everyone because the hells – that dragon of old – still want to “draw blood.” The hells still want to attack and sabotage these powerful, new correspondential connections between heaven and earth that the Lord has re-established in His Second Coming. (See *True Christianity* 207)

It’s a cautionary tale because this is how the knowledge of correspondences was lost in the first place. The hells got a grip on human minds so strongly that people didn’t simply lack belief in spiritual things; they became convinced that earthly living was all that mattered and that our connection to a spiritual realm was an illusion that didn’t exist at all. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 9011; *True Christianity* 291) There’s nothing stopping this from happening again.

But this is not how the story ends because we have a far stronger and compelling message in this text: that John saw “heaven opened” so that he might see the Rider on the White Horse. This powerful image of the Lord – “Faithful and True” – riding on horseback with the armies of heaven at his side is a vivid descriptor of how the Lord in His Second Coming is leading and guiding us in ways that have not been possible since the Golden Age, since

ancient times.

Let us rejoice today because heaven has been opened in such a way that the truths of the Second Coming:

- Re-awaken the human spirit
- Re-awaken everything that touches our senses
- Re-awaken the connection between heaven and earth

The other symbols in the book of *Revelation*, like the Woman Clothed with the Sun, the Child, the Dragon, Michael and his angels – scenes depicted in our 19th of June Pageant – are all correspondential too. They are not metaphorical or allegorical images; they “open heaven” in a very real way, and connect our spirit, our mind, to the birth. The struggle, and the growth of the New Church is in us as individuals and collectively as a church.

Our hearts are filled with so much joy and optimism when a child is born. We look at that child and feel the sphere of heavenly innocence pouring into the room – all the excitement, the happiness, the promise, the hope – all that potential. The same is true when we stop to celebrate the birthday of the New Church. We are filled with the same kind of joy and optimism because

“heaven has been opened again.”

Amen.

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That Serpent of Old

A New Church Day Sermon by the Rev. Brett D. Buick

Lessons: Genesis 3:1-5; Revelation 12, 20:1-3; Arcana Coelestia 6952.4

John's vision on the Isle of Patmos was a vision of the New Church being established on earth. This vision of the New Church is a story about its birth, its struggles, and its future. But it is also a story about the birth of the teachings of the New Church in each of us – our struggles and our future.

The male infant born of the Woman Clothed with the Sun is the doctrine of the New Church being born in our minds from the Lord as each one of us considers becoming a New Church man or woman. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 543) These teachings, though, are immediately under attack by the dragon – both within ourselves and within the church in a collective sense.

This story is a prophecy about what will happen as the New Church is established. It will be attacked by the dragon and will defend itself like Michael. And it will receive help from the earth. This conflict and the outcome are described in *Revelation 12*, which describes Michael and his angels casting the dragon down to earth from heaven where “*the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon had spewed out of its mouth.*” (*Revelation 12:8-9, 16*) We are taught in *Apocalypse Revealed* 564 that this “signifies that reasonings from falsities in abundance, which the dragonists produce, fall to nothing before the spiritual truths rationally understood, which the Michaels, of whom the New Church consists, bring forward.”

So, our job both as a church and as individuals is to be part of Michael's army.

We can fight the dragon by working to understand rationally the teachings of the New Church in the face of “reasonings from falsities in abundance.” (*Ibid*) As the Lord leads us in this effort, this deluge from the dragon will fall to nothing.

In order to see how we can do this, the Lord has given us a detailed description of the nature of the dragon that is posing this threat. This is not a new threat; it has, in fact, been the nemesis of the church from the beginning. This persistent antagonist of the human race is the serpent in the Garden of

Eden who appears as a great red dragon in Revelation. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 715.3; *Divine Providence* 310.5)

Between the paradise of the Garden of Eden and the paradise of the Holy City New Jerusalem, the Word contains the travails of the human race that are initiated by the serpent in the Garden of Eden and end with the locking up of the dragon in the abyss after it makes its last attempt to destroy humanity.

The connection between the serpent of the Garden of Eden and the great red dragon of Revelation is explicit in the text of *Revelation* 12:9, which states that “*the great dragon was cast out, the **ancient serpent** called the Devil and Satan, who seduces the whole world.*” Verses 14 and 15 actually refer to the beast as a serpent rather than dragon. Then again 20:2 states that the angel “[took] hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.” As we can see, the term “ancient serpent” as well as simply “serpent” is used in the Word to describe the dragon in *Revelation*. But this is not the only connection in the text between the serpent of *Genesis* and the dragon of *Revelation*.

The actual nature of the dragon can remind us of the serpent of *Genesis* as well. The description of this dragon in *Revelation* as one who “*seduces the whole world*” is certainly consistent with the description of the serpent in *Genesis* 3:1 as “*more cunning than any wild animal of the field which Jehovah God had made.*”

The Heavenly Doctrine makes this connection directly, identifying “that by ‘the serpent’ [in *Revelation* 12:14-15] are signified seducers . . . [and] the like is here meant as by the serpent which seduced Eve and Adam.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 562) And as the Lord teaches in *Apocalypse Explained*, the internal sense of both the serpent and the dragon is the craftiness of those who “pervert the truths and goods of the Word by means of reasonings from fallacies and sophistries, also from things persuasive, by which the understanding is fascinated, thus by inducing upon falsities the appearance that they are true.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 715.3, see also *Divine Providence* 310.5) And perhaps the clearest teaching connecting the dragon of *Revelation* and the serpent

Our job both as a church and as individuals is to be part of Michael’s army. We can fight the dragon by working to understand rationally the teachings of the New Church. As the Lord leads us in this effort, this deluge from the dragon will fall to nothing.

of *Genesis* is provided in *Arcana Coelestia* 6952.4, which explains that “the ‘dragon’ is the ‘serpent,’ which seduces by reasonings from falsities.”

In ourselves, this evil represented by the dragon and the serpent is the desire from hell to be governed by our own intelligence rather than by Divine truth from the Lord. (See *Divine Providence* 242; *Apocalypse Explained* 739.9) This is what the serpent in Eden wanted Adam and Eve to do – to be governed by their own intelligence; to be as God is what the serpent offered. (*Genesis* 3:5) And we will see that this desire to make our own rules is actually the source of faith alone that has grown into the monstrous dragon in *Revelation*.

Faith alone can be thought of as simply knowing the truth but not living it – a faith separate from charity. And much of our spiritual life is spent identifying where we are doing this and repenting for it. But the dragon justifies the separation of faith and charity by trying to convince us that “good works can contribute nothing to salvation.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 741a)

Yes, good works alone, good works without repentance, good works done from selfish motives, will not open our hearts to the Lord regenerating us, but a life of charity from faith, from a dedication to what the Lord teaches, will. Faith and charity are only separated when we follow the ancient serpent instead of the Lord. And the origin of this separation and its justification is a rejection of the Lord’s wisdom in favor of our own. (See *Conjugal Love* 444) Without the Lord’s wisdom we turn the love from Him into selfishness and then use our understanding to confirm the false ideas that serve our love of self. (*Ibid*)

Without the Lord’s wisdom guiding us, we pursue what we believe from ourselves. And from ourselves we can confirm false ideas like faith without charity. It is this separation of the Lord’s love from the truth He teaches, that leads to the faith in our own intelligence, a belief that we can look to ourselves and the world for the answers rather than the Lord. This is the serpent in Eden and the dragon in *Revelation*. (See *Conjugal Love* 444; *Arcana Coelestia* 6952.4) This is a faith that comes from the ancient serpent, not from the Lord.

The Lord explains to us that one of the devastating effects of separating faith from charity is the denial of the Divine Human of the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4665, 4689, 4724, 4730, *Athanasian Creed* 208) This may seem impossible in the New Church. The very message of the New Church sent throughout the heavens on the 19th of June in 1770 was that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages.” (*True Christian Religion* 791)

But when we begin to hear the Divine voice of the Lord speaking to us in the Heavenly Doctrine, and then are tempted to deny the presence of the Lord there speaking to us, we can be sure it is the dragon trying to seduce us. If this ancient serpent can convince us to see the Lord’s Second Coming as

merely human, not Divine, it can then succeed in convincing us that we can have faith without living what the Lord teaches in His Second Coming. This is faith alone.

This allurement of creating the truth for ourselves, being as God, rather than seeking out what the Lord teaches plainly in His Second Coming, comes from the ancient serpent. The arguments put forth to justify a departure from the Lord in His Second Coming are the flood waters of faith alone spewed forth by the dragon.

As we read in *Apocalypse Revealed* 564, these waters signify “reasonings from falsities in abundance, which the dragonists produce.” These “reasonings” come from the dragon that is positioned to destroy the truths from the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrine if we let it. And we are in the midst of this deluge from the dragon.

So, what are some of these “reasonings flowing from falsities” spewing forth from the mouth of the dragon trying to drown us in falsity to keep us from seeing the Lord teaching us in the Heavenly Doctrine of His Second Coming?

We might hear in our heads these sorts of reasonings trying to drown the clear statements in the Heavenly Doctrine itself:

- It’s just Swedenborg, he makes mistakes, he got things wrong. He was limited by what he knew at the time he wrote the books. It’s not the Lord speaking in the Heavenly Doctrine.
- There are some amazing things written there, but that doesn’t make it a religion.
- We can easily dispense with the parts that are counter-cultural. We don’t have to figure out how to live according to those parts. The Lord is not saying those parts. It was written by Swedenborg.

The Divine Human voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Doctrine can then be muffled by this noisy torrent. His Divine Human presence standing right next to us pressing to be received through His words in His Second Coming then can no longer be heard through the raging rapids gushing out from the throat of the dragon.

But in response to this deluge, we need to be like Michael. We need to advance in our own lives the “spiritual truths rationally understood” that the Lord has given us in His Second Coming. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 564) Indeed, the entire Heavenly Doctrine is spiritual truth that can be rationally understood. (See *True Christian Religion* 508.5) As we are taught in *Invitation*

to the New Church 44, this revelation “surpasses all the revelations that have hitherto been made from the creation of the world.”

And we need not look long before we see the truths that the Lord gives us in His Second Coming testifying to His Divine Human presence there – the truths of the Church that swallow up the flood of the dragon. *True Christian Religion* 779 states: “I have not received anything whatever pertaining to the doctrines of [the New Church] from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I have read the Word.”

In the preface to *Apocalypse Revealed* we read: “Do not believe, therefore, that I have taken anything therein from myself, nor from any angel, but from the Lord alone.” (See also *De Verbo* 13) Further, *Invitation to the New Church* 38 states: “It was absolutely necessary that someone should be introduced into the spiritual world and derive from the mouth of the Lord genuine truths out of the Word.” And finally in *Apocalypse Explained* 1183 we learn: “What has come from the Lord has been written; what has come from the angels has not.”

If we open our rational minds to the Lord in His Second Coming, we will see the Lord’s Divine Human presence there. And He will save us from the sensual thinking that leads to faith alone. He will give us the power to overcome the seductive message of the serpent in Eden and the destructive force of the dragon in *Revelation*.

As it is written in *Apocalypse Revealed* 564: “Reasonings from falsities in abundance, which the dragonists produce, **fall to nothing** before the spiritual truths rationally understood, which the Michaels, of whom the New Church consists, bring forward.”

Amen.



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The Responsibility of the New Church

The Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh

Bryn Athyn Cathedral – September 18, 1994

Lessons: Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:13-16; Arcana Coelestia 10452:2-4

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go
and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. (John 15:16)*

The Lord spoke these words to His disciples. It was the night of His betrayal. As He sat with the 11 disciples, Judas Iscariot having gone out, He prepared them for the end. He also taught them what they must do to establish His church. He had chosen them for this vital work.

Our doctrine speaks of the Lord's church in two types: the "universal" church and the "specific" church. In the broadest sense the Lord's church is one, and is spread throughout the world. This church is not a chosen or elect group. It is a universal church composed of all the well-intentioned and sincere people of the world of whatever faith or creed, even gentile peoples ignorant of Christianity. *"The church in the whole world is before the Lord as one man."* (*Apocalypse Explained* 351:2) All in this universal church may know the joy of conjunction with the Lord in heaven. *"The mercy of the Lord is infinite, and does not suffer itself to be limited to those few who are within the church, but extends itself to all in the whole world."* (*Arcana Coelestia* 1032)

That this universal church may have its life, however, there must also be a specific church. The specific church, sometimes called in doctrine the "church specific," constitutes the inmost part of the universal church, being compared to the heart and lungs within the body which are so vital to its life. The specific church may also be thought of as a hook at the top of a chain of links by which the universal church is connected to heaven and the Lord. Were it not for this specific church, the chain of all good people who are now upheld by it would fall away. The specific church may consist of comparatively few, we are told, yet still perform this vital function for the rest.

But where is the specific church upon which the life of so many depends? What distinguishes it and gives it its essential quality?

We are told that the specific church is that church which has the Word of God and a true understanding of God by means of it. The Word of God, rightly understood, is the link of conjunction between heaven and earth. This is the teaching: *“There cannot be any conjunction with heaven unless somewhere on the earth there is a church where the Word is, and by it the Lord is known . . . without the Word somewhere in the world there would not be conjunction with anyone.”* (De Verbo 40) This conjunction takes place not with a book on the shelf but in the minds of people who have read and understood, and who have obeyed.

In the course of history, the torch of Divine light has been passed from one church to another, each having its time and place in keeping the flame alive in people’s minds and hearts. For a time, the Word of the Old Testament was the special treasure of the Hebrew or Israelitish people, and later of the Jews in Canaan. It was Jesus who told the woman of Samaria that *“salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:22), for until the advent of Christ, the Jewish Church was the specific church on earth on which the religious life of the world depended. Yet He predicted a new church. True light from the Word of the Old Testament was being extinguished by the false traditions of men. Jesus Himself had come into the world to renew and restore the true understanding of the Scriptures and so again give light to all in the earth. As the prophet had declared: *“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.”* (Isaiah 9:2)

So it was that the Lord appointed His disciples to carry the Gospel to the world. *“You are the light of the world,”* He said. The Christian Church became the torchbearer to the world. For centuries Christians who read the Scriptures and thereby knew the Lord God were the link to heaven for all people of good will on earth.

However, just as the torch passed from the Jewish to the Christian Church, so now the torch has passed from the Christian to the New Church. The genuine understanding of the Word in Christendom has perished, destroyed by doctrinal fallacies conceived by men and confirmed in church councils. Therefore, in our era it has pleased the Lord to reveal Himself again in His Word so that the light of truth, almost extinguished in the world, may be restored.

The New Church has been established by a revelation of the spiritual sense of the Word and of the Heavenly Doctrine. In this revelation the Lord no longer speaks in parables but teaches plainly of the Father. By this revelation it is permitted to enter into the mysteries of faith with the understanding. By virtue of this Divine gift – as great a gift from God as the commandments from Mount Sinai engraved on tables of stone, as great a gift as the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose teachings in the Gospels have inspired so many – the New Church has been chosen and appointed the next specific church, the vital heart and lungs of the universal church.

A new and genuine understanding of the Word of God has been entrusted to this church. God is made known and can be loved. Even while this church is yet among comparatively few on earth, still, by virtue of the doctrine it has been given, it is the hope of the whole world.

It may seem a bold and conceited claim that the New Church is the only church now in possession of the key to a genuine understanding of the Word of God that it is therefore the link between heaven and the church upon which the spiritual life of the entire world depends. This, however, is not a matter for conceit but for humility. It is not a claim of authority but an assignment of responsibility. It is the Lord's doing. As He said: "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you.*" (John 15:16)

The New Church has been chosen as the specific church to carry the torch of spiritual light for the whole world just as the Jewish and Christian Churches were chosen in past eras. Therefore, it has unique and special responsibilities. As members of this church, you have been called as disciples of the Lord with a sacred trust.

Often, I hear people in the New Church express a longing to serve their neighbors outside of the church. What a praiseworthy desire! Usually this longing is expressed in a context of social good works. There are so many worthy causes to support in the world today. And we are so few. Perhaps what people often fail to realize is that the function and responsibility of the specific church especially is to serve the neighbor outside, to serve the cause of spiritual life for the whole world.

You want to serve the broader neighbor? You have certainly been called or born into the right church. What you can do as a New Church person can have a more profound effect on the welfare of your neighbors in the world than anything else. You can be the instrument of bringing light and life from the Lord to people in a way that no one else in the world can do. We are not talking here of the individual contact you may have with people outside of the church who may be directly influenced by the ideas you convey to them or by the example of your way of life. The effect of the specific church is broader and far-reaching.

What you do as a New Church person to bring your life into

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conjunction with the heavens has an effect on people you do not know and may never meet. For the touchstone of conjunction in your mind and heart is an avenue for influx from the heavens to countless others. You, with your efforts, are creating a link between heaven and earth. And if we in the New Church do not serve this function, there is no one else who can: not among the millions of Jews or Christians or Muslims, or among the countless people of Oriental or Indian religions.

Here are a few suggestions about our unique and distinctive responsibilities as a church:

We are a sacred repository and a holy of holies guarding, preserving, treasuring the Word which we have received as the sole medium of conjunction between heaven and earth. The exposition of the spiritual sense of the Word and the study of doctrine drawn therefrom should be our continuing love, because this provides the foundation on which the heavens rest and by which there is spiritual communication to the minds and hearts of all well-intentioned people.

There are many intellectual forces at work today, undermining reverence for the Word of God, indeed, for any supernatural authority. When the skeptical sphere of the world destroys all possibility of a simple faith in the holiness of the Word, who will be left to read it with the kind of reverence which alone makes it effective as a means of conjunction between heaven and earth? Only people in a church with the rational and spiritual truths to stave off skepticism and negativism, and to restore to its exalted place of honor the written Word of God.

The Writings reveal that when the Word is being read by a person who

loves the Word and lives in charity, or by a person who from simplicity of heart believes what is written, . . . it is presented by the Lord before the angels in such beauty and in such pleasantness . . . that every particular is perceived as if it had life . . . Although in the letter it appears crude, there are stored up in it spiritual and celestial things which lie open before good spirits, and before angels, when the Word is being read by man (Arcana Coelestia 1767)

So essential to the heavens is this foundation of thought which comes from people reading the Word on earth that the Word is called “*the support of heaven.*” (*Apocalypse Explained* 816)

As the Lord, now revealed in His Divinely Human form, is to be acknowledged in the New Church, so we should make every effort to hold our minds on the thought of His close presence and in the acknowledgment of His supreme power and mercy.

We must beware of intellectualism. Just as light is impermanent, easily

becoming extinguished and darkened, so the mere possession of the Word and mere knowledge of its doctrine is impermanent. Truths can be fixed and engraved on the heart only by a life according to doctrine. So the Writings warn us that a church is not called a church *“from the fact that the Word is there and that there are doctrinal things therefrom, nor from the fact that the Lord is known there, and that the sacraments are there; but it is the church from the fact that people live according to the Word . . . so that the doctrine is the rule of life.”* (Arcana Coelestia 6637)

The specific church cannot fulfill its function as a heart and lungs to the body of the universal church without exercising its responsibility to know truths and to practice living them. Think of these two organs in the body. They are in constant motion. This is the example for our spiritual activity in the church. We need to be inspired, “breathed into,” time and again, with spiritual ideas and principles. This requires instruction. Whether we go to the Word directly or involve ourselves in worship or discussion, thought, reflection and formulating ideas drawn from the Word, is an essential part of our religious life and of our service to the neighbor.

While it is true that the angels delight in their understanding of the spiritual sense of the Word while it is read in its natural sense by children (see Arcana Coelestia 1776), there is an even greater clarity and communication when people on earth read with a true understanding. We are told that interpreting the spiritual sense of the Word from truths of doctrine “opens heaven,” the man then thinking together with angels, and he *“thus conjoins them to himself in his intellectual mind.”* (De Verbo 20)

“Conjunction is effected,” we are told, *“when man perceives the Word in a similar way as the angels perceive it.”* (Apocalypse Explained 950:2) *“To the man of this church, internal things have been revealed, and therefore communication with heaven is effected by means of internal things and not by means of external things as before.”* (Arcana Coelestia 8972:2)

If the lungs are in constant motion, representing the necessary activity of the intellectual mind to think, the heart beats even more often, regularly feeding the body with new life. The church specific, described by heart and lungs in the body, has a need for both intellectual life and the life of charity. The “heart” in the church specific is that life of charity which gives us conjunction with celestial angels, angels of love. (Apocalypse Explained 351)

Often, we neglect this heart aspect of our role as church specific. The Lord sees the whole church before Him as one man, we are told:

In this man, the church where the Word is and where the Lord is known thereby is like the heart and the lungs; with those who are in celestial love the church is like the heart, and with those who are in spiritual love like the lungs; consequently, as all the members, viscera,

and organs of the body live from the heart and from the lungs, and from their influx and consequent presence, so all in the whole earth who constitute the church universal live from the church where the Word is; for the Lord flows in therefrom with love and with light, and vivifies and enlightens all who are in any spiritual affection for truth, wherever they are. (Apocalypse Explained 351)

Both the heart and the lungs are needed for the body to live. Both light and love are needed for the spirit.

Are we responding adequately to the Lord's call and appointment to the uses of the specific church? Let us pray that we may fulfill the responsibilities of the Lord's appointment and that He will grant us light to see those essential uses which, above all others, must be our first love and primary duty.

The Lord's voice is calling, asking: "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" Are we ready to answer in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "*Here am I! Send me*"? (Isaiah 6:8)

Amen.

Lesson from *Arcana Coelestia* 10452:2-4:

They who do not know the nature of the Word cannot possibly believe that by means of it there is a conjunction of the Lord with the human race, and of heaven with the world; and still less they who despise the Word, or make no account of it. But let them know that the heavens subsist by means of Divine truth, and that without it there would be no heavens, and that the human race subsists by means of heaven; for unless heaven flowed in with man, man would not be able to think at all, thus not to will anything rationally.

In order therefore that heaven may subsist, and the human race by conjunction with it, the Word has been provided by the Lord wherein is Divine truth for angels and for men, the Word in its spiritual and celestial sense being of such a nature as to contain within it angelic wisdom itself in so surpassing a degree that it is scarcely possible for a man to form any conception of its

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excellence, although in the letter it appears very simple and unpolished.

From this it is evident that heaven is in its wisdom from the Word when it is being read by man, and then at the same time the man is in conjunction with heaven. To this end has such a Word been given to man. From this it follows that if this medium of conjunction were not in the world, conjunction with heaven would perish, and with this conjunction all good of the will and all truth of the understanding in man, and with these that very humanity which consociates man with man; consequently evil and falsity would be in full possession, whereby one society would perish after another. For it would be as when a man walks in thick darkness and stumbles wherever he goes; and it would be as when the head is in a delirium, in consequence of which the body is carried madly and insanely even to its destruction; and it would be as when the heart fails, causing the organs and members to cease to perform their uses, until the whole body dies.

Such would be the state of man unless heaven were conjoined with him, and heaven would not be conjoined with him unless there was the Word, or unless Divine truth was communicated immediately through angels, as in ancient times. . . . From all this it can be seen what is the use of the Word; but few will believe that the Word is of such a nature and of so great a use.

THE LATE REV. KURT HORIGAN ASPLUNDH passed into the spiritual world in the spring of 2020. He had been a much-loved pastor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Bryn Athyn, and in semi-retirement was the editor of *New Church Life* for several years. His book, *Living the Good Life – Seven Principles that Can Change the Way We Live Our Lives*, was published posthumously in 2023. His wife, Martha (Lindsay), still lives in Bryn Athyn.



FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Gratitude for the New Church

The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

Every year as we approach New Church Day on June 19th, my wife and I always get excited and are filled with gratitude for having the New Church in our lives. I think this unique day should be celebrated with children so that they grow up and develop an affection for the New Church.

One great place to look for celebration ideas is the New Church Vineyard website <https://newchurchvineyard.org/> Once you are at the site, click on the “Themes” button, then the “New Church” button. This will lead you to various coloring pages, projects, talks and videos specifically designed to appeal to children of different ages.

On the subject inspiring children to be thankful for the New Church, I want to share an excerpt from the book I wrote on New Church parenting: *As For Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord*. Following is an edited version from the last chapter: *Teach Them to Thank the Lord*.

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I remember how much my parents regularly expressed their gratefulness for being a part of the New Church and for having been exposed to the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord revealed in His Second Coming. This took the form of toasts to the Church whenever we would have company over for dinner and my father would talk about how the Church is what connected us together. Invariably we would follow that with a song, usually “*Our Glorious Church*,” which I still love to sing in our home when we have friends over.

I especially remember on June 19th when we celebrated New Church

Day how Dad and Mom would set aside the entire day. We would go to a special church service, watch a pageant with scenes played out from the book of *Revelation* depicting the establishment of the New Church, and then have company over for supper to celebrate. As a child I was merely in awe of the pageantry, but it was the beginning of learning to be thankful for the New Church, which was strengthened by the conversations around the dinner table that followed.

I have noticed that other families who have had some success in having their children choose to stay active in their faith in adulthood, often have placed a big emphasis on celebrating New Church Day and thanking the Lord for His Second Coming. Our Church is unique in celebrating this momentous event, and I think it helps to connect us closely to the heavens where angels celebrate this occasion too!

Swedenborg recounts a time when he was meditating on the Lord's Second Coming and saw a dazzling beam of light from heaven and then heard a whole host of angels in a "*long series of voices glorifying . . . the Lord on account of His coming.*" (*True Christian Religion* 625:1) They were singing verses from the books of *Daniel* and *Revelation* which prophesied about His Second Coming and the descent of the Holy City, New Jerusalem. What a beautiful scene, picturing the whole of heaven filled with joy, thanking the Lord for coming and establishing the New Church.

It is useful to share with your children what you are thankful about in the New Church and the teachings which you are particularly grateful for knowing. As they grow up, it will enable them to appreciate what you value and believe, and it will sow the seeds for them reflecting on what they find special about the New Church and the Heavenly Doctrine when they become adults.

For my wife and me, one of the New Church teachings we are so thankful for is the wonderful vision of marriage that the Heavenly Doctrine describes between husband and wife and between the Lord and His church. It is portrayed so beautifully in the scene the apostle John saw while on the Isle of Patmos: "*And I, John, saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*" (*Revelation* 21:2)

While we live in a world that in many ways seems to have such a distorted view of marriage, my wife and I are thankful for the promise in the Heavenly Doctrine where we are told that "*following His Advent the Lord will revive conjugal love, such as it was among ancient peoples.*" (*Conjugal Love* 81:5) It

is interesting that an angel guide told Swedenborg that despite the decline of conjugal love and the worship of God, he was *“sustained by the hope that the God of heaven, who is the Lord, will revive this love, because it is possible for it to be revived.”* (Conjugal Love 78:8)

This spirit of the hope and gratitude for the revival of Conjugal Love is captured wonderfully when the Lord said: *“Again there shall be heard in this place . . . the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: ‘Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever.’”* (Jeremiah 33:10-11) Cathy and I regularly tried to express our appreciation to the Lord for these beautiful teachings about marriage and show our children that it was the Lord who should be thanked for our marriage and for their marriages.

There are also many other teachings from the Heavenly Doctrine for which I am grateful, and I did my best to convey my gratitude for those teachings to my children. Teachings about how the Doctrines for the New Church demonstrate to us that we must be responsible for our choices; that no one ends up in hell except those people who choose to go there; that anyone who acknowledges the Lord and lives by His commandments can be saved; that the Lord is an all-loving, ever-merciful, and infinitely wise God, that genuine charity involves mercy, judgment and justice; and that the Lord’s Divine Providence is in the smallest details. These are just a few of the eternal truths that I am thankful to the Lord for revealing in His Second Coming and making known to the New Church.

One particular teaching that stood out to me when I was attending the University of Florida in my early 20s was when Swedenborg was visiting heaven and saw a crystal temple with an open copy of the Word inside with light beaming forth from it. Above the door there was an inscription in Latin: *Nunc Licet*. The meaning of this was that in the New Church it is *“now permitted to enter with understanding into the mysteries of faith.”* (True Christian Religion 508:3)

This is one truth I became so grateful for as I discussed religion night after night with my studio classmates. Things that remained “mysteries of faith” to them were no longer mysteries to me. I could easily find rational explanations in the Heavenly Doctrine that helped me to understand these mysteries and make sense of any paradoxes. The General Church used to have an outreach phrase that said: “The New Church – A Religion that Makes Sense.” This still rings true to me, and I am thankful to be a part of a church that makes sense out of life.

The last thing that I think is important to get across to children is how

lucky they are to be a part of the last great church on this planet. We are told: *"This New Church is the crown of all the churches that have hitherto existed on the earth, because it is to worship one visible God,"* who can be pictured like *"a man in the air or on the sea spreading forth his hands and inviting to his arms."* (True Christian Religion 787)

What an awesome vision of the Lord we are given and what an incredible privilege it is to be a part of the Lord's New Church and be exposed to the miraculous teachings of the Heavenly Doctrine! We should be extremely grateful to the Lord that He saw fit in His Divine Providence to bring us into contact with His special Church on earth.

We should be humbled and in awe and make sure our children sense the gratitude we have toward the Lord for this great gift. We should remind them that we all have an obligation to obey His voice and keep the covenant He has made with us. *The Psalms* give an inspiring exhortation for families to come together in a spirit of thankfulness: *Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!"* (Psalm 96:7-9)

My parents and grandparents did a great job of conveying to me their love and appreciation for the New Church and of the wonderful truths given to us in the Lord's Second Coming. I never saw them gripe and complain about things they saw that weren't the way they wanted them to be, but rather I witnessed their overwhelming sense of gratitude to the Lord for giving them an opportunity to be a part of the New Church.

It is a powerful lesson for children to have the chance to thank the Lord alongside their elders and praise Him together for this blessing. I am inspired by the vision of many families with young and old from all around the world, who are connected to each other through the New Church and its Heavenly Doctrine, worshipping the Lord together in His Second Coming and serving Him side by side.

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I hope all of you have a wonderful celebration of New Church Day this year with your family and friends. Enjoy the rich traditions that you have been a part of in the past, and don't be afraid to start some new traditions if you feel so inspired!

Contact: Brad.Heinrichs@newchurch.org

On Being Born Again

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish

Have you ever thought seriously about being born again? When a certain Pharisee named Nicodemus came and confessed to the Lord that he knew this “Rabbi” was from God,

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

*Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”
(John 3:1-7)*

The phrase, born again, actually means “born from above.”

It is intended to convey the idea that we are created to live to eternity, but just as we are born naturally into this physical world, so we must be born again spiritually in order to live in the spiritual world. This is not something we can put off until we cross over, because if we do, we will find that the patterns of our spiritual lives will be incompatible with those of that higher world. We need to be born again here, now.

In that connection, maybe you noticed that there are two almost

The phrase, born again, actually means “born from above.” It is intended to convey the idea that we are created to live to eternity, but just as we are born naturally into this physical world, so we must be born again spiritually in order to live in the spiritual world.

identical teachings about this:

“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and then,

“Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot **enter** the kingdom of God.”

Seeing has to do with understanding, as in “I see what you mean,” but entering in has to do with a decided, willful effort. So, the Lord is calling attention to a process that is both intellectual and willful. Specifically, the reference to *water and the Spirit* refers to two baptisms, the first being natural, with water as a sign of commitment to learning the truths of the Word, and the second being spiritual, with a specific decision to live according to those teachings, all of which come from above and urge a spiritual life even in this world.

But in the New Church, ever since its inception as an organized religion, we have tended to shy away from describing our transformation as being born again, no doubt because it seems to suggest an instantaneous change: one day we’re natural, the next day we’re spiritual, a principle held strongly by many churches. Instead, we talk about being regenerated, which is almost the same but carries different connotations.

Still, the simple fact is that birth is the beginning of a new life. And newborns in this world are almost completely helpless until they begin to learn how the world works. Then they have to practice – talking, crawling, eating regular food, reading, thinking, reflecting, socializing, doing actual work, and so on. Finally, but only in the process of learning these things do people really have a natural life worth talking about.

It’s the same spiritually. Being born again (or from above) is just the beginning, and what follows is a lot of learning, followed by practice, and more practice, including many times when we mess up and have to try again, just like a baby learning to walk. The point is, we have to make a start. We do have to be born again!

So, what does this look like? How is it done – not the whole process of living, just the part about being born into spiritual life? We all know we have nothing to do with our own natural birth; all the work is done by the mother when the baby is ready. But spiritually, we like to think WE have to take the initiative. So we get all strung out about making new resolutions and doing what the Lord wants us to do. Yet that makes no sense when we compare the two types of birth.

In fact, we are born again (that is, from above) when we let go and allow the process to begin. The Rev. Brian Kingslake had a funny story in one of his books about twins in a mother’s womb having a conversation. One didn’t

believe in life-after-birth, the other did. The one was quite willing to let go and let it happen; the other, not so much. It was warm and cozy in the womb. But imagine the trauma to mother and child if the birth never occurred!

In this vein, another Gospel story comes to mind, in which a man brought his son to the Lord to be healed of his epilepsy. *“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’”* Almost immediately the father cried out and said with tears: *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”* (Mark 9:23-24) At that point, the healing was done immediately, to the amazement of all who were there.

Of course, the man may have relapsed afterward, being corrupted or living foolishly, we don’t know. The point is that in being healed he was given the opportunity to enjoy a whole new life.

Certainly, the work of regeneration is a life-long process, often involving serious challenges and painful experiences. There are five or six steps that require our attention, as described in our third lesson from *True Christian Religion* 530. This process is illustrated in the Lord having compassion toward the woman caught in adultery, then saying: *“Go and sin no more”* (John 8:11) We can imagine this woman feeling she really had been born again, free from condemnation and able to begin a new life. Yes, she had work to do – a life of repentance and reformation – but at that moment she was “born again.”

And we are born again when we acknowledge the Lord and let go of our effort to figure out what’s best, as if we were in control, as if we could do our own heart or cancer surgery – even if we knew how to do it.

Turning to the Word for other examples of being born again, consider the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. What did he do to be revived after four days in the tomb? Nothing! But when the Lord called him out, he got up and came out of the tomb, hands and feet still bound with grave-cloths, and his face still wrapped as well. (How did he even know where he was going?) So, the Lord told those nearby: *“Loose him, and let him go”* (John 11:43-44) At that point he had a whole new life in front of him, with new freedom to take responsibility for it. He was, in effect, born again.

But notice the support given for Lazarus when he was dying, and when he was revived. The two sisters, Martha and Mary, both appealed to the Lord, despite their doubts that He could really do anything, and were baffled but gratified that He was willing to come to the tomb and comfort them. Then, when He raised the dead man, He told them to free him from his grave-cloths. What can this mean for our own spiritual rebirth?

Well, the doctrines don’t explain this verse exactly, but the grave-cloths clearly represent the falsities or misconceptions that bind us and hold us back from the fullness of life according to the Word. So, if we’re able to do anything at all, we grope around, seeking clues or information in the world around us

until our companions – representing the affections for the truths of the Word – open our eyes and set us free.

Another fun story of a kind of rebirth is the one about the paralytic man who was brought by several men on his bed (or stretcher) to be healed by the Lord. Note that the man himself was stuck; he couldn't move. He depended on others to carry him. And when they came to the Lord, there were so many people around Him that they couldn't get close to Him. So, they went up the stairs – typically outside of a house – tore apart some of the tiles from the roof and lowered him down by ropes into the Lord's presence. There the Lord, seeing their faith, forgave his sins, and told him to take up his bed and go home. (*Luke 5:17-26*)

Again, what can we learn about our own fresh start from this story? It's easy to see how any of us can be stuck, immobilized by all sorts of fears and weaknesses, including sometimes an overwhelming awareness that we have sinned and are not worthy of the Lord's help. That's when it's good to be able to count on our companions to carry us to where we can be with the Lord. Not only that, but everything about the story is symbolic: the men carrying the paralytic are the truths of our own understanding taking us to the Lord, despite our weakness and sense of unworthiness; going up the stairs represents going up to an elevated spiritual state, breaking through the roof illustrates the descent into practical life from the perspective of those ideals, and of course the forgiveness itself is a letting go of the past, so that we can finally start over.

Again, it's not the starting over that is featured in this story; it's freedom to start over, the realization that we are or can be born again, born from above, literally *borne* (carried) from above. We don't do this ourselves; the Lord does it when we allow Him to work with us.

Much the same occurs in the story of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. He had "an infirmity" for 38 years and was waiting at the poolside to see some stirring of the water, which was the signal to get quickly into the pool and be healed. But he didn't have the help he needed to get in before someone else got the benefit of the miracle. So, he just sat there – until the Lord came along and bluntly asked him, "Do you want to be made well?" Then, even as he made excuses, the Lord by His commanding presence inspired him to just get up and walk. (*John 5:1-15*)

We remember also the time when Peter got out of his boat and started walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee toward the Lord. He began to sink when he became anxious about the wind, only to be rescued by the Lord who "*stretched out his hand and caught him.*" (*Matthew 14:12-33*) Our spiritual health, our salvation, is in the Lord's hands, not in our own, except as we learn to co-operate with Him once He pulls us out of our despair.

In fact, miracle after miracle throughout the New Testament Gospels

affirm this principle of healing by faith in the Lord, which is the same as being born again. It's not the whole process of regeneration; it's not the stages of repentance and regeneration that must follow; it's the starting gun at the beginning of the race, the acknowledgment of His authority, the principle of turning to Him in the first place for help and inspiration. Without that, there is no real spiritual life; we remain in the womb of this natural life, seemingly secure, but with no future.

Of course, this faith is not "faith alone." It is the earnest willingness to receive and do what the Lord says. But think again for a moment about how it all starts in the Gospel narratives:

- The leper in *Matthew 8:1-4* did nothing but ask the Lord for help.
- The centurion's servant in *Matthew 8:5-13* takes no initiative of his own to be healed but is healed without the Lord even attending to him, in response to his master's belief.
- The man with the withered hand in *Matthew 12:9-14* simply responded to the Lord's command, as the Lord used the occasion to make a point about the Sabbath.
- The boy healed in *Matthew 17:14-21* did nothing to be healed; he was epileptic! But the Lord healed him as a testament to the power of faith and prayer.
- The blind men at Bethsaida (*Mark 8:22-26*) and again at Jericho (*Mark 10:46-52*) were both healed by the Lord's initiative, based only on His word, His direction.
- The leper in Galilee (*Luke 5:12-15*) also did nothing but ask the Lord for help.
- And the widow's son at Nain (*Luke 7:11-17*), like Lazarus, was dead, unable to do anything! But the Lord revived the boy out of compassion for his mother. What does she represent? The affection for truth! The willingness to recognize and turn to the Lord.

To be sure, the Heavenly Doctrine many times refers to the whole process of regeneration as being born again. For sure, the term, generation, can refer to a lifetime, and not just a beginning. Still, re-generation is being generated anew; it is starting over. And the Doctrine universally declares that this starting

over is in faith – before real charity takes root.

So, when we are in trouble for whatever reason, or when we recognize that something isn't right in our lives, or isn't helping us make significant progress, what can we do? We might try medication, or psychological therapy, or a support group – all of which can be helpful. But if they are not working, or don't seem to be working in ways consistent with the Word, the course of last resort might actually be a faithful, prayerful appeal to the Lord for help. It might finally mean giving up the effort to find our own way, or some secular, natural way out of our problem, by letting go of the effort to choose or control how we might be healed and having it the Lord's way.

And what is that way? Only the Lord knows! But as He said, in many different ways:

Ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes. (Mark 9:23)

It begins with asking. It begins with believing. The Lord's promise is not that we will get whatever we want, but that we will get what is good for us, as we ask in prayer, believing what He tells us.

Consider *Psalms* 37:4: "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." In effect, He will give us what to desire in our hearts, and the power to receive it as we cooperate with Him. Based on this commitment we can be born again every day, and we can be inspired with new life, no matter what we've had to suffer in this world.

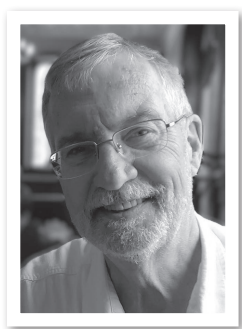
The Lord will give us what to desire in our hearts, and the power to receive it as we cooperate with Him. Based on this commitment we can be born again every day, and can be inspired with new life, no matter what we've had to suffer in this world.

Some relevant teachings

Arcana Coelestia 3212: "And Isaac was comforted after his mother. That this signifies a new state is evident from the signification of 'receiving comfort,' as being a new state; for a state of consolation is new; and that it succeeded to the

foregoing is signified by ‘after his mother.’ . . . When man is being regenerated, he is then becoming altogether another, and is being made new; therefore, also when he has been regenerated, he is called ‘born again,’ and ‘created anew.’ Then, although he has a similar face and a similar speech, yet his mind is not similar; his mind, when he is regenerate, is open toward heaven, and there dwells therein love to the Lord and charity toward his neighbor, together with faith. It is the mind that makes a man another, and a new man. This change of state cannot be perceived in the body of man, but in his spirit, the body being merely the covering of his spirit; and when it is put off, then his spirit appears, and this (provided he has been regenerated) in altogether another form, for it then has the form of love and charity in beauty inexpressible.”

Arcana Coelestia 4379: “When a man is being born again he passes through the ages of life as does one who is born [naturally] and that the state which precedes is always as an egg relatively to the following one; thus that he is continually being conceived and born; and this not only when living in the world, but also to eternity when he comes into the other life; and yet he can never be perfected further than to be as an egg relatively to the things that still remain, which are without limit.”



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Twice Hacked: Cybercrime and Spiritual Attacks

The Rev. Howard A. Thompson

I can say with reasonable confidence that the vast majority of our readers are, like me, “digital immigrants.” I mean you likely did not grow up in the era of digital technology and may not feel entirely fluent in its use. You might remember watching the moon landings live on television rather than learning about them in history class. While technology has brought remarkable advancements, it has also introduced complexities and dangers that can feel overwhelming to navigate.

In our increasingly connected world, cybercrime is one of these dangers. Seniors, in particular, are often targets of online schemes, falling victim to phishing scams, ransomware attacks, and other forms of deception. These criminals exploit trust, fear and inexperience, using cunning tactics to take advantage of vulnerabilities.

A phishing email might pose as a trusted bank, urging immediate action to avoid an account lockout. Ransomware might hold your precious memories hostage, demanding payment for their release. Even a text from a supposed family member claiming to be in trouble abroad can catch us off guard, appealing to our instincts to help. Unfortunately, many seniors have been caught by these scams, losing thousands of dollars and, perhaps more painfully, their sense of security. It’s all a web of deceit designed to steal what isn’t freely given.

Yet, as troubling as cybercrime is, there’s another form of hacking we rarely consider – one that targets not our devices, but our very souls. This “spiritual hacking” isn’t new, and Emanuel Swedenborg, writing long before the digital age,

As troubling as cybercrime is, there’s another form of hacking we rarely consider – one that targets not our devices, but our very souls. This “spiritual hacking” isn’t new, and Swedenborg described it with remarkable clarity.

described it with remarkable clarity. According to him, evil spirits seek to exploit our thoughts and desires, subtly working in the shadows to manipulate, confuse and disrupt our inner harmony. As I have reflected on his Writings, I've been struck by how much these spiritual tactics mirror the methods of modern hackers. Both prey on weaknesses, sow discord, and seek to rob us of peace and freedom.

Let's explore this parallel more deeply and discover how we might strengthen our defenses – both against cybercrime and the spiritual “hacks” that challenge our faith and integrity.

Phishing: The Bait of Deceptive Temptations

Phishing scams real communication, tricking us into revealing sensitive information. In the same way a phishing scam preys on our trust, evil spirits exploit our doubts and vulnerabilities. Swedenborg reminds us to be vigilant, saying: “Evil spirits inject falsities that appear as truths, and they do this by influencing the imagination.” We need spiritual discernment, just as we need a skeptical eye for suspicious emails and text messages.

Secrets of Heaven 2754: [There are spirits who use] innocence as a cover, and mercy, and various positive emotions accompanied by persuasive arguments. . . . They are undetectable and take pains not to be exposed, because they operate in secret. They are also cruel. They cared only about themselves, and even if the whole world had been destroyed for their sake, it would have meant nothing to them.

Secrets of Heaven 1511: Spirits who are caught up in falsity influence our thinking and thoroughly convince us that falsity is true. We cannot see it any other way, and this results from their aura.

Ransomware: Bondage to Guilt and Fear

Imagine being locked out of your computer and seeing a message demanding money to regain access. This is the cruel tactic of ransomware. Similarly, evil spirits try to hold our souls hostage through cycles of guilt and fear. They amplify our regrets and tell us that we are beyond forgiveness, that we are unworthy of grace.

Swedenborg describes how these spirits use what we love and fear to imprison us, much like a hacker uses our data as leverage. He writes: “Evil spirits . . . focus on what a person loves and fears, holding them captive by these until they yield.” But just as we can restore a hacked computer, we can turn to God's love and mercy to free ourselves from spiritual bondage.

Other Planets 72: To teach me what these spirits do . . . a spirit of this sort was allowed to come to me. . . . He attached himself to my left side toward the back and began to criticize me for things I had done and thought, things he was drawing out of my memory, and began to put a dark interpretation on them, but was held back by angels.

Key-logging: Exploiting Our Inner Thoughts

Key-logging malware silently records every keystroke, stealing passwords and private information. Evil spirits act like spiritual key-loggers, monitoring our thoughts and identifying our weaknesses. They don't plant all our negative thoughts, but they watch for opportunities to amplify them, turning a passing worry into paralyzing anxiety or a fleeting irritation into lasting resentment.

Heaven and Hell 579: I have been allowed to find out from experience the nature of the malice of the people referred to as demons. Demons do not flow into people's thoughts but into their affections. They observe them and sniff them out the way dogs sniff out wild animals in the woods. When they notice good affections, they change them instantly into evil ones by using delights in something else to lead them astray in quite amazing fashion. They do this so subtly and with such malign skill that the victim does not notice anything. They take the greatest care to prevent anything from obtruding into thought because this would bring it into the open.

Man-in-the-Middle Attacks: Blocking Divine Connection

In cybersecurity, a "man-in-the-middle" attack occurs when a hacker intercepts communication between two parties, altering or stealing the information. Evil spirits attempt to do the same thing between us and God. They distort the truths that flow into us, making God's love seem distant or His commands unreasonable.

Have you ever felt a moment of doubt while reading Scripture, wondering if God's promises could really apply to you? That's the spiritual equivalent of a man-in-the-middle attack.

Secrets of Heaven 2123: [With] people on earth, who are governed by spirits in contact with [evil spirits] . . . Everything good that is coming into the world of spirits from the Lord by way of heaven is instantly being turned into something evil, obscene, and profane there. Everything true is instantly being turned into something false. So mutual love is converted to hatred, honesty to deceit, and so on,

with the result that the spirits there are no longer capable of perceiving anything good or true.

Denial of Service: Overwhelming the Soul

A denial-of-service attack is an overwhelming assault on a computer system (often a website) driving so much traffic its way that it can't function. Evil spirits overwhelm us with temptations, doubts and conflicting emotions, making it hard to think clearly or act wisely. They seek to paralyze us spiritually, leaving us feeling helpless.

Secrets of Heaven 705: False premises and warped reasoning drown [overwhelm] a person, as they did the pre-Flood people.

The Word uses floods of water as a simile and a metaphor for times of both trial and ruin because these are similar phenomena. During them, evil spirits stream in with their persuasive lies and false assumptions and arouse the same kind of thinking in us. With a person who is regenerating these agitations are trials; with one who is not regenerating, they bring ruination.

These are just a few examples of how both cybercriminals and evil spirits exploit our vulnerabilities – whether through our worldly desires, false ideas about faith, or misunderstandings of the Lord's love and truth. Their goal is the same: to mislead, manipulate, and ultimately harm us.

Whether dealing with cyberattacks or spiritual assaults, vigilance is essential. We secure our devices with firewalls, antivirus software and a healthy discernment; similarly, we protect our souls with prayer, careful study of the Word, and self-awareness. Swedenborg's Writings remind us that just as hackers exploit technological weaknesses, evil spirits exploit spiritual ones. Both require us to remain alert and rely on the guidance of a higher power.

In this digitally connected age, we are increasingly aware of the need to secure our devices from threats. But let us also remember the importance of securing our hearts and minds, trusting that God provides us with the tools and strength to withstand any attack. Swedenborg offers us this comforting reassurance from *Secrets of Heaven* 74:

The tests that we undergo are nothing else than battles between the evil spirits and angels who are present with us. The evil spirits summon up every wrong that we have ever done or even considered from childhood on. So, they stir up both what is evil and what is false in us and condemn us for it. Nothing gratifies them more; it is the central pleasure of their lives. But through the angels, the Lord protects us and prevents evil spirits and demons from pushing beyond the furthest

*limits of our endurance and
drowning us.*

Take comfort in knowing that even in moments of spiritual attack, the Lord is with us, placing limits on what we endure and surrounding us with angels who guide and protect us. Just as we secure our devices against external threats, we can fortify our souls by leaning on God's love, mercy and truth. With His help, we can withstand any trial and emerge stronger in faith and trust.

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Not as the World Gives

The Rev. Grant H. Odhner

(Reprinted from the Newsletter of the United Kingdom)

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you;
not as the world gives do I give to you.*

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

In the Gospel of *John* the Lord's logic often appears to be just beyond us. We're not always sure why one thought follows another. The basic messages are clear. But we are often left with the feeling that there is much more to His statements than we understand!

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night and says to Him: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." And Jesus answers him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (*John* 3:2-3) What? How does this "answer" Nicodemus? Well, it must on some deeper level. But this kind of "disconnect" gives us a sense of the Lord's transcendent wisdom, and of our own short-sightedness.

Another way John's Gospel conveys this is by highlighting incidents of misunderstanding – in which people don't grasp what the Lord is saying, or understand it in a superficial way.

- The Lord spoke of "raising up the temple." He was speaking of the temple of His body. His listeners understood the literal temple (2).
- He told people that to have "life" they must "eat His flesh and drink His blood" (6). His listeners couldn't get beyond the literal words to His meaning.
- A few times He told people that He was "going to Him who sent Him." People questioned: "Does He intend to go . . . among the Greeks?" (7) Or they wondered: "Will He kill Himself?" (8)

- In chapter 11 Jesus waited for his sick friend Lazarus to die before making the journey to visit the family. His intent was to bring Lazarus back to life. He told the disciples “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” The disciples responded, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”
- Later, when He arrived and saw Lazarus’ sister Mary and others weeping, He “groaned in His spirit and was troubled” and He wept. Clearly, He was not disturbed by the death itself. He was not sad for Lazarus or Mary or Martha (Lazarus would soon be raised). The people around Jesus, absorbed in their “present,” could only observe: “See how He loved him!” But Jesus’ pain lay much deeper! His grief was about the human condition. How ignorant and faithless we are! How susceptible we are to hell’s power to hold us in doubt, sin and hopelessness! Lazarus was not just a personal friend to Jesus! Lazarus represented the human race that was in darkest ignorance, in a state of spiritual death! (*Arcana Coelestia* 9231.3) Jesus’ grief was for the human race! And His plan was to bring us back to life.

These incidents in John remind us: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord.” (*Isaiah* 55.8-9). His love for us, and His plan, are beyond our wildest imagination! His foresight in providing for us is so far-ranging that we cannot begin to grasp a thousandth part of it! He is not just speaking to our present state (as we understand it): He is providing for our *eternal* wellbeing! The Heavenly Doctrine reminds us:

The Divine providence differs from all other leading and guidance in the fact that providence continually regards what is eternal, and continually leads to salvation, and this through various states, sometimes glad, sometimes sorrowful, which a person cannot possibly comprehend. But still they are all profitable to his eternal life. (Arcana Coelestia 8560)

It is important to remember this, especially when we are in our “sorrowful” states. We “cannot possibly comprehend” how the Lord can bring peace out of our distress, or bring good from the troubles that we are facing. We cannot possibly comprehend this from our present state.

In our haste and faithlessness we may turn to what is at hand. The “world” offers “quick-fix” solutions that bring a pseudo peace. But this “peace” can come at the expense of our deeper values and principles. It is a kind of “peace”

whose aftertaste leaves us feeling cheap, because we tried to bring it upon ourselves rather than receiving it as a blessing.

But we don't have to stay in that place! The Lord says to us:

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give to you. (John 14:27)

If you continue in My word then you are My disciples indeed.

And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

Trust, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)



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Life Lines

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

THE ONLY TWO QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

A brave professor at the University of Colorado is planning an experiment this fall – an old-fashioned literature course testing whether college students still are capable of reading, understanding and enjoying the great books of literature.

Such courses used to be standard in the liberal arts curriculum. Now much of this “classic education” has given way to pop socialism – and “comprehensive reading” to texting and emojis.

In a recent column in *The Wall Street Journal*, English professor Joseph Bottum laments the demise of book-reading as “the end of what college was once imagined to provide: the art, history and philosophy that give the mind the mental furniture it will need in adulthood.”

Another professor says bluntly: “Most of our students are functionally illiterate. Unable to read and comprehend adult novels.”

Bottum’s experiment this fall will be an old-fashioned course designed to test whether students can still read, and also grasp the essence of what they are reading.

This is a sad commentary on where we are in the age of dumbed-down curriculums and the grade inflation of automatic A’s.

“Students these days,” Bottum says, “are often described as both apathetic and emotionally fragile. Always staring at the rapid flicker of their phones, they have little training in concentration.”

Some of this, he says, “may come from the cultural failure of nerve, especially among humanistic professors, who lost the moral authority that derived from conviction that their classes were the most important in the university. Across the nation, faculty have caved to anti-Western ideology that sees fields as histories of social evil. But along the way, they also surrendered to a vulgar form of populist pragmatism that never saw the elevating purpose of literature. And they completely lost the war for control of the curriculum to bureaucrats who judge course content by the equivalent of customer-satisfaction forms.”

This decline in education is echoed through too many elementary and

high school curriculums, which cater to sociological fads while retreating from the classic standards of “a good education.”

This brings to mind a quote attributed to Plato some 2,500 years ago: “The only two questions that matter are: Who is teaching our children? And: What are they teaching them?”

The close of another year of New Church education – in our North American elementary schools, the Academy Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College – leaves us with a sense of gratitude. Almost all of them faced challenges – mostly for survivability, with budgets and enrollment strained. But they all stand on the distinct and foundational principles of New Church education. They still know – and teach – what matters.

(BMH)

‘WE WHO WRESTLE WITH GOD’

Jordan Peterson may be one of the most brilliant men in the world. He is also on a quest for wisdom. But he is not there – yet.

Peterson is a prolific psychologist, author, lecturer and “social media influencer,” with millions of followers. He is also outspoken against such pop causes as the “woke” culture, so he has plenty of detractors as well.

Among his best-selling books are *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* and *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, which serve an almost universal hunger for meaning and purpose in life. Peterson melds the best thinking of the ages with his own to attract an almost cult-like allegiance.

He is also a biblical scholar, known for extensive podcast seminars of *Genesis* and *Exodus*. His latest book is *We Who Wrestle with God*, and it is encouraging that this is already a best-seller also, because it is 500 pages of intense biblical scholarship and search for understanding.

It’s a quest obviously lacking for New Church readers because he is totally immersed in the literal sense alone, as though the Garden of Eden, Noah and the Ark, and the Tower of Babel are about real people and events – not symbolic and only to be truly understood in the revealed spiritual sense.

Throughout all of this Peterson senses there is something more significant, something interior – that the creation story, for instance, is somehow related to our own creation. He often has brilliant insights and is asking the right questions but is limited in what he can see.

He quotes Jung, Freud, Faust and Goethe, Dante’s *Inferno* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* – even from *The Lion King* and Harry Potter – but never Swedenborg.

How could a man so learned in the great thinkers, philosophers and

theologians of the world not know about Swedenborg and the revelation given through him by the Lord that could answer all his questions?

Well, it turns out Peterson does know about Swedenborg. One senior New Church minister told me he has met Peterson and discussed Swedenborg with him. Another prominent man with New Church connections knows Peterson well, has also discussed Swedenborg and given him books of the Writings. But both sense that he has to find his own way, to “wrestle” with Swedenborg and the revelation given through the Writings until he sees and understands for himself.

We should be able to accept this and not judge Peterson’s unwillingness to recognize the “Spirit of Truth” without hesitation. He is a man given to wrestling to get to understanding – like Jacob wrestling with an angel through the dark of night – without the light of that “Spirit of Truth:” to guide him.

We do our own “wrestling” at times to understand what the Word and the Writings are teaching us – and we have His light to guide us. We also know that the image of Jacob wrestling with the angel, and not letting go until he is blessed, represents our own lifelong struggle of regeneration. We know it is not always an easy path but worth the effort.

We can all resonate with what Peterson sees as our calling:

The life and needs of Jesus dramatize and describe precisely the pattern of upward-striving abandonment of all that is insufficient in pursuit of the perfect harmony that characterizes the heaven that could be spread upon the earth, if only men and women kept their covenant with the Divine, realized their true nature, and adopted the responsibility of walking with God.

Part of our own wrestling – and Peterson’s – is coming to the challenge with a sense of humility. Innocence – not self-intelligence – is the beginning of wisdom. The Lord flows only into a humble and willing heart. And we are all assured:

Everyone whose soul desires it is capable of seeing the truths of the Word in light. (Apocalypse Revealed 224)

(BMH)

THE REAL PROOF OF HEAVEN

Jordan Peterson wrestling to discover truth that has already been revealed reminds me of Eben Alexander, a scientist who found *Proof of Heaven* but resisted the revelation about the life after death.

Alexander, a renowned American neurosurgeon, was outspokenly skeptical about near-death experiences and seeing into the afterlife, until

he had his own miraculous experience that changed his life – but not his understanding.

Because he knew just how the brain works, he could not believe “the phenomenon” of near-death experiences. He dismissed them as dreams and hallucinations.

Then his own brain was attacked by a rare illness that shut down the area within controlling thought and emotion. He was in a coma for seven days and doctors had given up hope. Then he suddenly awakened, miraculously cured. But the real miracle, he says, was the journey he experienced while his brain was “dead.”

He is convinced that he traveled to heaven, met and spoke with “the Divine source of the universe,” and even was accompanied by a guardian angel who gave him a message to take back from heaven. It turned out that Dr. Alexander, who had been adopted as a baby, saw a photograph after his recovery of a biological sister he had never met, and who had died. He recognized her at once as the “guardian angel” he met in heaven.

He wrote a best-selling book in 2013 – *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* -- and became something of a celebrity, telling his story over and over.

In the spring of 2014, more than 1,000 people came to hear him speak in Bryn Athyn. He introduced himself as a lapsed churchgoer who did not believe in life after death. He said his background in science convinced him that only what we see and experience with our senses is reality. He considered himself the least likely candidate to be converted to a profound belief in the soul, God and heaven.

He never thought he would be saying and believing what he now so unabashedly proclaims: that God is present with each of us in every moment; that we need to get in touch with the spiritual life within us; and that God’s unconditional love is always with us.

During that visit he was immersed in a New Church embrace. In the afternoon, at dinner, and after he spoke, ministers, teachers and church members shared the teachings revealed in the Writings about life after death that amplify his own experience. But while he was unfailingly polite, none of it seemed to resonate. He was given copies of the Writings. I sent him my book, *Window to Eternity*, pointing out that Swedenborg himself was a trained scientist with out-of-body experiences that enlightened his own, but got no reply. In all of Alexander’s books, podcasts and public appearances since, I’m not aware of any references to Swedenborg, the Writings, and the revelation from God that corroborates and completes his story.

As we see from reactions to *offTheLeftEye* videos and other outreach efforts, some people immediately “get” spiritual truth as soon as they encounter it and

feel blessed. For people like Jordan Peterson and Eben Alexander and so many others, they have to “wrestle” through their own instincts and prejudices. But the Lord is always at the door, forever knocking, forever patient, forever loving.

(BMH)

INITIATIVE AND EXAMPLE

Denis de Chazal of Montreal occasionally sends me items of interest from *The Economist*, which are always welcome. No one does obituaries of prominent people better, really capturing the essence of the person in elegantly written eulogies. The magazine has more than a million readers all over the world.

A recent obituary celebrated Peter Fenwick, a neurophysiologist identified as “the world expert of near-death experiences,” who died late last year.

Like Eben Alexander, Dr. Fenwick was an expert on brain function and had heard about near-death experiences but did not consider them credible. He even read Raymond Moody’s *Life After Life* but dismissed it as “absolute rubbish, flaky California stuff.”

But then one of his own patients had a compelling near-death experience during a routine procedure, and Fenwick started to wonder about the credibility and consistent experiences of NDEs. He was a graduate of Cambridge and had run a neurophysiology unit at the Maudsley Hospital in London, the largest mental health training institution in the United Kingdom. He is also well known for his best-selling book, *The Art of Dying*.

But his attempt to set up a study of NDEs at Maudsley, said *The Economist*, “was laughed away by its Ethics Committee. The head of the intensive-care unit said such things never happened there. A vicar, horrified, said no one in his congregation had ever experienced such a thing. But all were proved wrong; for in 1988 a BBC documentary featuring Dr. Fenwick brought in more than 2,000 letters from the Great British Public, who not only cheered him with stories of their own NDEs but, when he sent 500 of them detailed questionnaires, also gave him a wonderful database for a study of the phenomena itself.”

Almost 98% had no previous idea of what an NDE was, but told much the same tale: the tunnel, the bright light, the embrace of love and peace – and no longer any fear of death.

Dr. Fenwick was also intrigued with what happens to people who really die and do not come back. He studied philosophers and theories – but not Swedenborg. He was content with what he had come to believe.

The obituary concludes: “In his many talks, he never hectorated like a preacher. He spoke calmly and happily, sometimes with his Burmese cat on his lap. His field of interest, controversial as it remained, filled him with joy and

curiosity. Whatever was to come next, beyond the body, he knew it would be wonderful. He could hardly wait.”

Well, now he knows. And we can be sure he is smiling – perhaps with a cat.

Denis de Chazal did not just smile after reading this obituary and turn the page. He wrote a letter to the editor of *The Economist* – not sure if it would be published. He shared his letter:

It is with interest that I learned the passing of such a remarkable doctor, scientist and writer. While it is sad to see him go, it is reassuring to know that he embraced the next stage of his life with anticipation. Peter Fenwick provided comfort to those who fear the inevitability of death, helping many to come to terms with this inevitable part of life.

One of the greatest challenges in today’s world is the understanding of the soul. While many accept the idea that we possess a body, a brain, and a soul, for some, the soul remains an abstract concept. Dr. Fenwick, however, appeared to grasp its true essence as evidenced in the profound response to the thousands of those who knew exactly what he was talking about, after his appearance in the 1988 BBC documentary.

On this subject, I would also mention the insights found in the book, *Heaven and Hell*, by Emanuel Swedenborg published initially in 1758 and available today, which gives an even fuller testimony to the reality and practical nature of the human spirit after death. Also, Charles Dickens captured this perspective long ago in *A Tale of Two Cities*: “*It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done: it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.*”

There is no doubt that Peter Fenwick is exactly where he wished to be.

No word yet on whether Denis’ letter was published. But he received a most encouraging reply from Ann Wroe, the Obituaries editor, thanking him for his letter and saying:

Thanks so much for your letter. We are of one mind on the subject of the soul. I don’t know how many other *Economist* readers may be also, but I wrote Peter Fenwick’s obituary partly to encourage readers to think about it, and about the truth (as you and I believe it) of what occurs beyond physical death. We should not cover only politics and business. Thank you, too, for reminding me about Swedenborg. I read him many years ago and will now seek him out again.

And I thank Denis de Chazal for writing this letter and promoting Swedenborg and *Heaven and Hell*. This is the kind of initiative and example we all can follow. And it all helps.

(BMH)

THIS IS HAPPINESS

The friend who recommended Niall Williams' *This is Happiness* warned me that it's the kind of book you never want to end. When the end did come all I could do was smile in gratitude.

Niall Williams is the consummate Irish storyteller who finds in the rhythms of humble lives the markers for what life – and happiness – are all about.

It's the story of a fictional town in Ireland, unchanged through the centuries – and what changes and will never change when it is finally hooked up to electricity in the mid-1950s.

Williams' writing is at once the simple reflection of quiet people leading ordinary lives, but profound in revealing how it all captures the meaning of life and the source of happiness. And it all resonates with our New Church understanding of what makes for a happy life – here and in heaven.

His gentle words flow like sun glistening on a country brook, tracing the subtle rhythms of life that can be overwhelming, or pass unnoticed, but define who we are. His writing is captivating. Consider this portrait in words of a small-town pub:

The pubs that followed folded into the night and lost their names. In many there was music, all of it played by suited figures earnest and excellent and entirely absent in vanity or showmanship. It was a mystery to me how before they took up their instruments you could not tell the musicians from the audience. They looked like farmers, grounded ground-men, shy and unshowy, smoking cigarettes and hunkered silent or small-talking over pints, with no evidence at all of their gift. They had no apparent inclination to take the instrument cases out of where they were stacked in the windowsill, until they did. And when they did the air was changed. There was no other way to say it. The smoky, dark corner of a dingy pub forgot that it was a nowhere. It became a locus, a center, and we became a company, focused around tables where, behind abandoned butts smoking in ashtrays and pint glasses paused mid-tide, two fiddles, a flute and a concertina made time stretch so that it was now and back across the ages in the same moment.

I smiled and thought: I've been in that pub. I know those men. I've heard that music. Anyone who has traveled in Ireland will know the feeling.

And that's the magic. It echoes our own experience with family lore and community.

This is Happiness is anchored in the simple rhythms of living in and as a community – being kind and caring with your neighbors, contributing, accepting, content. It is not about the big, memorable moments of life but all the real living in between.

The narrator – a 78-year-old man recalling when he was just 17 in this little town – is struggling with his own faith and understanding of life. An old farmer, who has not had an easy life, looks back and tells him with a contented sense of reality: “This is happiness.”

“It was a condensed explanation,” recalls the boy, “but I came to understand him to mean you could stop at, not all, but most of the moments of your life, stop for one heartbeat and, no matter what the state of your head or heart, say *This is happiness*, because of the simple truth that you were alive to say it. I think of that often. We can all pause right here, raise our heads, take a breath and accept that *This is happiness*.”

Swedenborg tells in the introduction to *Conjugal Love* about people allowed to experience what they imaged heavenly happiness to be – indulged leisure, festive dining, grand living – only to beg for release, for the real happiness of just being useful to your neighbors in a community of love.

It is all that simple, and that profound.

Life holds no joy unless it is active. Angelic life consists in usefulness and acts of neighborly kindness. (Arcana Coelestia 454)

This is happiness. And it never ends.

(BMH)

JOHN PITCAIRN: A GLOWING PORTRAIT

A few years ago, I was not surprised when my wife, Carol, came tapping on the window of my office in Cairncrest – the former office of Harold Pitcairn. She was an enthusiastic guide at Cairnwood and the Cathedral, and when time and interest allowed, she would take guests on an extended tour of Bryn Athyn.

Her guests that day were Bill and Angie Huber, who came to Bryn Athyn to research a book he was writing: *Robert and John Pitcairn – Titans of Rail, Oil and Glass*.

It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship. We both were able to contribute to his research and he says graciously in the Acknowledgments of this just-published book: “Bryn Athyn was an unexpected delight, primarily

because of the exceptional guides through the buildings and grounds. Lisa Parker-Adams and Carol Henderson provided a warm welcome and fascinating insights into the lives and accomplishments of John Pitcairn and his family.”

Bill grew up in the Pittsburgh area where John Pitcairn launched his career. At one time, coincidentally, he had a Pitcairn, Pennsylvania, mailing address. So, he had a natural interest in the titans who made their fortunes in the Pittsburgh area – including brothers John and Robert Pitcairn, and brothers Andrew and Thomas Carnegie. All four of these boys grew up within 50 miles of each other in Scotland, immigrated with their families and became friends as teenagers. (Among other of Bill’s books is *George Westinghouse: Powering the World.*)

His book on the Pitcairn brothers is meticulously researched, beautifully written, and impressively illustrated. Much of the focus is on John – especially of interest to those of us in the church still benefitting from his leadership and generosity. Many of us already are familiar with Richard Gladish’s excellent 1989 biography: *John Pitcairn – Uncommon Entrepreneur* – which is often cited by Bill Huber.

Both of these books paint John Pitcairn as a giant among the Pittsburgh barons, who found success in railroads, the emerging oil industry, and Pittsburgh Plate Glass. But as much as he was a loved and successful leader in industry, he was even more respected as leader of his faith – the New Church and the Academy Movement, including the founding of Bryn Athyn..

Less well known to most of us is brother Robert, who was similarly successful and respected, but never left his railroad career. He was also devoted to his church and a lifelong leader of Shadyside Presbyterian.

Two interesting and telling sidelights in the book that reveal much of John’s character:

When he was named assistant superintendent of the Middle Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad at age 26, he took it upon himself to walk its entire 145-mile length – and he repeated this inspection tour twice a year.

And on the momentous day of May 28, 1879, when officials of the Tidewater Pipe Line Company celebrated the first gushing of 250 barrels of oil per hour, “John Pitcairn was not among them. He had elected instead to attend the General Convention of the New Church in New York City. The oil business took second place to the New Church in John Pitcairn’s mind and heart.”

And that, in essence, is the story of John Pitcairn, whose vision, leadership and dedication still bless the church.

Bill Huber kindly asked me to write a Foreword for his book, which includes:

| Like many of America’s titans of industry – Carnegie, Rockefeller,

Frick – the Pitcairn brothers had humble roots. John Pitcairn started from nothing, and wealth was never an end in itself. He was just 14 when he arrived in America from Scotland with his family and began seeking his fortune. But it was his faith that guided his life, not power and acquisition. In many ways he was the conscience of his peers.

Bill Huber tells the story beautifully, with respect and admiration. He was scheduled to return to Bryn Athyn this June to talk about the book but had to postpone. Hopefully he and Angie will be able to make the trip later in the summer. My wife knew what she was doing when she brought them to Cairncrest those years ago. Whenever they do return to Cairnwood, it will bring the quest full circle. And somewhere, a humble John Pitcairn will be smiling.

(BMH)

D-DAY: ECHOES OF FAITH

June 6 marked the 81st anniversary of the D-Day invasion on the Normandy coast of France that launched the liberation of Europe and restored peace in a fractured world.

New Church men and women were involved in what commanding Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower called “The Great Crusade.” As he sent troops into battle he invoked “the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.” And President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in announcing what everyone hoped would be the turning point in this savage war, first led the nation in prayer.

It was one of the most anxious times in our history – when we looked to military power to restore peace, freedom and order, but also looked to faith to sustain us.

These sentiments were echoed by King George VI – “Defender of the Faith” in England, where the invasion launched, by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who rallied the people as only he could in defense of “Christian civilization,” and by Roosevelt’s insistence that freedom of worship was one of America’s ultimate war aims. The threat of Nazi Germany was not only military oppression but a godless vision for the world.

There was a sudden revival of Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic, reflected in a surge in religious broadcasting and overtones of faith in movie themes. The Allied Forces held solemn services for all faiths before D-Day, and mobile churches accompanied the invasion, supported by more than 18,000 uniformed chaplains. Almost all British and American soldiers identified as

Christian or Jewish and instinctively turned to prayer in foxholes.

Everyone knew what was at stake, and that many of these brave men would not be coming home. Abraham Lincoln said in the depth of the Civil War: "I was driven to my knees because I had nowhere else to go." And that is where President Roosevelt took the nation.

"Almighty God," he began his national prayer, "our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve the Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity."

He prayed for the troops – not only for their strength and valor but for "the steadfastness of their faith." He added solemnly: "Some may never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom."

He concluded: "O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other; faith in our united crusade. Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen."

President Roosevelt clearly understood what the nation needed to hear – and we need to heed the echoes. His instinct was the same as with the people and the troops – to keep faith with God and pray to Him for the peace that only He can give.

An army of brave men won that peace. So did prayer.

(BMH).

MOTHER'S DAY

Some years ago a friend new to the church told my wife she had gone to church on Mother's Day hoping for a warm message about moms – but heard a sermon about snakes!

We are commanded to "honor thy father and thy mother," but don't usually acknowledge the American holidays of Mother's Day and Father's Day from the pulpit.

Last year, however, the Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh preached a sermon in Bryn Athyn Cathedral that day that may not have focused on Mother's Day but at least paid tribute.

The sermon was based on the story in *2 Kings 4:1-7* about a poor widow complaining to Elisha that her husband was dead, a creditor was coming to take away her two sons, and she had nothing in the house but a pot of oil. Elisha tells her to borrow vessels from her neighbors, then shut the door, and pour her oil into all the vessels. Then she was told to sell the oil, pay her debt, and live with her children from the rest.

We all can connect with this story by honoring our mothers for their

selfless love and sacrifice for their families.

When my own mother died at age 97 after a rich, full life, I commented at her memorial service that she had never “worked” a day in her life – but never stopped working. She was a devoted stay-at-home Mom and conscientious pastor’s wife. She did get paid a few times for jury duty and – when her family was grown – was active with General Church Religion Lessons and volunteered in local hospitals. She never really got “paid” for her work – although she would dispute that.

What she did was set an example, echoed throughout her generation. She and my Dad spent the first 11 years of their marriage in Australia, bearing up under the tension and rationing of World War II. They never owned a car or a TV until I was a teenager. But we never felt deprived. Like so many others of this “Greatest Generation,” she made do and never complained. That was an enduring gift for which I honor her still.

Rev. Asplundh concluded his sermon with:

A borrowed vessel many of us here and across the United States might be putting to use today is the honoring and celebration of mothers and motherhood. There actually is some interesting moral and civil history in the establishment in our country, culminating in an act of the U.S. Congress on May 8, 1914, designating the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day. Whatever the observance may include, remember the widowed mother who heard the word of the Lord delivered by the prophet Elisha, and in following that word saved her two sons.

To expand on the sentiment of the prophet John: Greater love hath no woman than to lay down her life for her family.

We see it played out in the history of our lives and the future of our generations. Thank you, Moms.

(BMH)

100 YEARS AGO: GRADUATION AND NEW CHURCH DAY IN BRYN ATHYN

From Church News, Bryn Athyn, New Church Life, 1925, p. 506

On the morning of June 16, 1925,, a large audience of parents and visitors gathered in the Benade Hall auditorium for the Academy Commencement, the higher schools entering in long procession singing, followed by members of the Board and Faculty, who took places upon the stage. The Bishop Emeritus

opened the exercises with prayer, and Dean Doering read the Lessons. The Commencement Address was delivered by Edward C. Bostock, who chose as his title the motto of his class of 1909: "*Be Faithful!*"

The President then presented the awards as follows: Diplomas to 6 graduates of the Girls Seminary and 13 graduates of the Boys Academy; Junior College Certificates to four students; and the Degree of Bachelor of Theology to Candidate Elmo C. Acton. He also announced that the Theta Alpha full scholarships for 1925-6 had been awarded to Miss Muriel Gill and Miss Lynda Hamm; the Deka Medal to Mary Scalbom; the Phi Alpha Upsilon Medal to David Powell; and that Dallam Smith had been chosen as the Sigma Delta Pi Honor Student. A number of other prizes were also bestowed.

The enrollment in the Academy Schools for the year 1924-5 was: Theological School 5; College 26; Girls Seminary 37; Boys Academy 28; Elementary School 119; Total 215

Our observance of New Church Day began with a children's service in the cathedral on the morning of June 19. The address was by the Rev. George de Charms, whom the children were delighted to hear once more after an absence of six months during which the weekly children's service had been suspended.

For the banquet in the evening, the auditorium was beautifully festooned with red and white streamers, and Raymond Pitcairn as toastmaster provided a very fine program. It is seldom that the spirit and sphere of the early days has been stirred as by the speeches and songs on this occasion.

Bishop Emeritus W. F. Pendleton spoke on *The Perception of the Presence of the Lord in the Writings*, Randolph W. Childs on *The Distinctive Social Life of the New Church*; the Rev. Alfred Acton on *The Distinctive Quality of the New Church*; and Bishop N. D. Pendleton on *Marriage as the Very Center of the Church*. The remarks were strongly reminiscent of the early Academy, and with Walter Childs leading the songs as of old the reviving of affectionate memories was complete.

(JFS)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD

Highlights from the meetings of March 21-22, 2025

President's Report

Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. shared updates from a Bishop's Office Review, including a time study and clarification of goals and strategies.

He reviewed progress on partnering more intentionally with Academy leadership. He also introduced a General Church Residency Program that bolsters support for new ministers during their first two years of work for the General Church.

Communications Director **Marijke Bau-Madsen** shared a review of recent General Church messaging with respect to one of the key messages: the General Church works to connect people to the Lord and His Word through cultivating tools and spaces that people can use.

Vice Presidents

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth shared updates on annual clergy reviews and improving methods of remote engagement.

The Rt. Rev. Bradley H. Heinrichs updated the status of schools in South Africa and efforts to better integrate New Church teaching.

Executive Director

David Frazier provided analysis of operating results compared to budget for the six-month period ending December 31, 2024:

- Revenue roughly \$3.6 million favorable
- Expenses of approximately \$3.3 million favorable
- Surplus of approximately \$300,000

Theological School

Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb, Baird Kistner, Karen Stoeller

Andy Dibb highlighted a new fund to support minister training and provided detail on the General Church Residency Program, which increases support for new ministers as they launch their careers.

Baird Kistner reported on first steps of the recruiting initiative, including building relationships with congregation staff to learn more about the qualities of their societies and the roles they are looking to fill.

Human Resources Director Karen Stoeller shared progress on finding programs to develop teachers, ministers and administrative roles.

General Church Outreach

The Rev. Pearse Frazier and Chuck Ebert

Pearse shared a report on the primary activities of the Outreach Department, including improving the newchurch.org website, sharing video and other social media content, facilitating groups and working with societies to support their outreach practices.

Global Healthy Congregations

John Berridge and Jane Enis

Jane shared work done by the committee this year and looking ahead to next year:

- **Key Learnings:** The department is refining a project management system (EOS) based on pilot project experience and focusing on continuous improvement and adaptability
- **Strengthening Congregational Support:** Congregations are engaging with tailored tools and resources to enhance communications, community and sustainability. The Congregational Uses Journal is being tested in six congregations, helping to refine the tool for wider use.
- **Looking ahead:** Priorities for 2026 include refining processes for pilot projects, aligning grant disbursements with renewal objectives, and developing cross-department tools and resources to support congregations globally. This includes continued focus on sustainable growth in West Africa, with the EOS system playing a critical role in driving progress and accountability over all regions.

General Church Education

Charlotte Gyllenhaal, Rachel Glenn, Rebekah Russell and Greg Henderson

Rachel gave an overview of Religious Education Programs including festival family gift mailings around the world. Recently, *The Children's New Testament* was sent as an Easter gift. The team continues to get positive feedback about the refreshed New Church Vineyard website.

Rebekah updated work with General Church schools, including teacher professional development, teacher observations and support of principals.

Greg reviewed strategic objectives, such as improving recruitment, implementing results from a comp study, and working with Bryn Athyn College on offering more New Church education learning opportunities.

Budget and Audit

David Frazier walked the board through the operating, capital and non-operating budgets. All FY26 budgets were passed unanimously.

- **Operating budget:** The General Church is projecting a small surplus. Revenue is up approximately 1% to about \$6.7 million, driven by an unexpected increase in contributions, plus a modest rise in investment income
- **Capital budget:** \$114,000 includes an amount for building repair, plus an air-handling replacement; creation of an eLearning course supporting the Minister Residency Program; plus establishment of a clergy directory on the newchurch.org website.
- **Non-Operating budget:** Net assets expected to increase by about \$2.7 million supporting various projects from 120 funds

Investment Committee

Jesse Cole reported a healthy endowment thanks to market performance and work with SCS Financial, our money managers. While long-term investment has been strong, one- and three-year returns lagged compared to benchmarks for the period ending September 30, 2024.

Real Estate Finance Committee

The board accepted a proposed Tenancy in Common Agreement with the

Tucson congregation concerning ownership and responsibilities of the church property.

Wayne Wadsworth and David Frazier shared preliminary costs associated with options for housing General Church offices:

1. Restore Cairncrest
2. Construction of a new office building
3. Move into existing space in Bryn Athyn

Each option increases financial need in some way. After lengthy discussion about mission priorities and factors other than cost, it was requested that the committee and administration present a recommendation at a future meeting that allows more time to process in moving toward a decision.

Advancement

Greg Clay spoke about the first-annual one-day appeal in March, which sought to increase awareness about the activities and needs of our global services.

Mark Wyncoll reported that it was a successful campaign, focusing on support for worship and clergy in African congregations that brought in many first-time donors. Annual and restricted giving are on target through January.

Human Resources

Jamie Uber reported that the committee recommends a 4.4% pay increase for General Church employees.

Karen Stoeller reviewed two new policies: Parental Leave and Principles of Faith Guiding Work.

GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

The annual meeting of the Corporation on June 28 in Bryn Athyn includes the following nominations:

Six incumbents willing and eligible for three-year terms:

Darren Bau-Madsen – Berthoud, Colorado

Craig Bostock – Treasure Island, Florida

Rhett Brown – Oslo, Norway

Jesse Cole – Glenview, Illinois

Grant Heinrichs – Huntsville, Alabama

Torrance Pitcairn – Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Four new nominees for three-year terms:

Thomas David – Boston, Massachusetts

Eli Echols – Milton, Georgia

Jared Hasen – Caryndale, Ontario, Canada

Murray Heldon – Hurstville, New South Wales, Australia

Nominated to complete the vacated term of Wendy Baker:

Sharon Kunkle – Mitchellville, Maryland

Board members thanked for completing three consecutive terms:

Beth Brock – Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

Kirk Hasen – Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

David Radcliffe – Mitchellville, Maryland

Board member who completed two three-year terms not seeking re-election:

Charlotte Gyllenhaal – Valparaiso, Indiana

The Nominating Committee consisted of: **Kirk Hasen**, chair; **Jamie Uber**, vice chair; **Karen Cooper**, **Lynn Genzlinger** and **Brian Henderson**.

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Highlights from the meetings of February 7-8, 2025

Vice Chair

Shaun Buss was unanimously elected to a two-year term as Vice Chair of the Board, effective with the May meeting of the board.

Managing Director

The board voted unanimously to extend the term of the Academy Secondary Schools Managing Director **James Adams** for two years, or until any governance changes affecting the position are implemented.

Governance Resolutions

As a result of recommendations made in the 2024 Governance Review Committee's report and work of the Executive Committee, the board discussed and then adopted four important governance resolutions:

1. Modifying the College Executive Committee's Bylaws

2. Clarifying and delineating the two distinct roles of the Chancellor (Spiritual Leader and Board Chair)
3. Formalizing the role and existence of an Academy Leadership Team
4. Creating new and expanded Executive Committee responsibilities

The board authorized release of the Governance Review Committee Report to the Corporation.

Bryn Athyn College

President Sean Connelly has devoted his initial energy to building trust, right-sizing, and reimagining the College. These are being implemented with necessary and prudent haste. Despite the difficulty of the task, the Core Cabinet has met with grace, not combat.

The President has been asked to cast a vision on where the College is heading and how financial restraints will be satisfied in the FY26 budget. Steep increases in utility and insurance costs compelled a 5% increase in tuition and room-and-board rates.

New initiatives by the College include a board-endorsed pilot Ethical Foundations Honor Program, managing the Tools4Life summer program (helping to reach legacy families), and is in active discussions with *offTheLeftEye* to partner and generate new content offering that will serve as contemporary forms of publication, to reach seekers.

The board affirmed President Connelly's focus on mission and leading the College toward long-term sustainability and the commitment to provide a New Church higher education to all students interested in learning in the light of New Church teachings, without success being measured by enrollment targets.

Academy Secondary Schools

Thanks to a very generous gift, the Secondary Schools reached their annual fund goals and are able to fund various programs, restore programs that had been cancelled due to lack of funding, and to add to the endowment.

Rise Above It – a spiritual growth and development program based on the Ten Commandments and how they apply to students' lives – was offered by the **Rev. Ray and Star Silverman** to students on a volunteer basis and was enthusiastically embraced. ANCSS is exploring a pilot program allowing students seeking flexibility, not restricted by standard classroom structures, increased educational opportunities, and aligning with the mission and accreditation requirements, to become integrated with the ANC curriculum.

Glencairn Museum

Due to cost of the infrastructure improvement project (paid from endowment), increased costs for insurance and utilities, and a change in the endowment payout method, Glencairn is facing a 20% decrease in income, which is likely to curtail some of its unique offerings.

Glencairn faces hard choices on how best to deploy its resources. Having an integrated and coordinated ANC-wide strategic plan will assist in this effort.

Treasurer

Duane Hyatt provided his annual Endowment Projection Report. Deficits remain the principal driver of sustainability. Market returns cannot be controlled. Deficits can be, and controlling deficits ensures sustainability.

Finance Committee

Concern about how long it took for large endowment gifts to constructively impact revenue causes the Finance Committee to re-examine the endowment payout method. It developed a new procedure that no longer fixes the payout using a 36-month rolling average of the endowment as of a specific date, but instead uses the rolling average to set an annual payout rate which will be applied to shares outstanding each quarter. This will allow endowment gifts or excess withdrawals to have full impact on the payout. The board unanimously adopted this new method but delayed its application to Bryn Athyn College until FY28.

Advancement

This year 100% of board members have contributed to the Academy. Corporation participation is lagging. The online giving platforms is transitioning to Blackbaud, which will accommodate “digital wallets.”

Investment Committee

Although the markets performed well in 2024, the Academy’s public equity performance lagged behind benchmarks. The Academy holds 30% in private equities. Whether it should hold a smaller share of fixed-income investments is being examined.

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

The Rev. Scott I. Frazier, Incoming Dean

On April 4, 2025, the Bryn Athyn Society heard three presentations from the Theological School. There were two dissertation presentations by graduating students: *Hatred* by **T.J. Jackson**; and *The Human Memory in the Heavenly Doctrines* by **Daniel Calvo**.

I then presented, as the incoming dean, the current state of the school.

Mission: The Theological School has not changed its mission:

The purpose of the Academy of the New Church Theological School is to inspire, inform and train future New Church priests to serve the Lord God Jesus Christ as He builds His Church among people by means of his Word. (Adopted July, 2003)

More specifically, the Theological School provides pastors for the General Church as its main objective, as an accredited program within Bryn Athyn College of the New Church. We have a faculty of priests including: the **Revs. Andrew M. T. Dibb, Grant H. Odhner, Stephen D. Cole** and the **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.**, as well as several laymen who teach subjects such as speech, business and experiential education. The Rev. Dr. Dibb is stepping down after 17 years and I will officially become dean July 1, 2025.

Our program involves 125 credits and takes 3-6 years to complete. We intend to graduate three students this year and have at least seven students in the school for the 2025-26 year. These students will be a mix of in-person and remote, full-time and part-time, traditional degree and certificate. While we are still working out exactly what certificates mean for employment, we hope the addition of a certificate program (along with the remote and part-time options) will allow more men to pursue the ministry and serve the General Church. Below is a quick breakdown of the two paths:

Traditional (full-time):

After 1st year: Regular Student

After 2nd year: Candidate

After 3rd year: MDiv Degree, White Stole

After Residency: Blue Stole

Certificate (half-time):

After 2 years: Candidate

After 4 years: White Stole

After 6 years: MDiv Degree, Blue Stole

We are excited and hopeful that the Lord will continue to bless our endeavors in this important use, and as our outgoing dean likes to remind

everyone: if you know of any men who would like to explore joining the ministry, please encourage them to contact me.

CALLING FOR MEMORIES OF THE ACADEMY MUSEUM

Do you have memories of the Academy Museum when it was located on the third floor of what is now the Academy of the New Church Fine Arts Building in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania? If so, Glencairn Museum would love to hear from you!

Wendy Closterman, who teaches at Bryn Athyn College, is researching the history of the Academy Museum before its objects were combined with Raymond Pitcairn's collections to form today's Glencairn Museum (<https://www.glencairnmuseum.org>). She would love to hear your memories, whether big or small.

To contribute a memory about the Academy Museum, please contact her at wendy.closterman@glencairnmuseum.org or 267.502.2998. If you would like to be interviewed, please let her know.

SUNSHINE RETREAT

The Rev. Justin and Denali Schorran

Sunshine Retreat: A Weekend of Fellowship and Fun at The New Church at Boynton Beach, Florida, March 28-30, 2025.

The New Church at Boynton Beach hosted its very first "Sunshine Retreat." It was a weekend designed to bring together church members from all over Florida for a time of community, worship and connection.

The retreat kicked off on Friday night with a warm and inviting potluck dinner, where the Boynton church community welcomed friends, old and new, from across the state. This weekend would be about more than just learning: it was about building lasting relationships.

Saturday morning began with a peaceful worship service to set the tone for the day. Afterward, adults gathered for an engaging class and discussion focused on an essential question: *How do we share our faith with others, especially those unfamiliar with the church?*

It was inspiring to hear personal stories of how the church's teachings had impacted lives, sparking rich conversations and new perspectives. Meanwhile, the children took to learning how to sing a beautiful version of the Lord's Prayer with both instruments and their voices.

In the afternoon, participants gathered for a shared lunch before heading off to explore the area. Some went on a scenic local hike, enjoying nature's

beauty while bonding over shared stories. Others took a quiet afternoon to recharge. We all returned for an exciting evening of fellowship, featuring a spirited Bible Jeopardy game and more time to visit and connect.

Sunday's church service was a highlight, with the children's touching rendition of the Lord's Prayer serving as a moving prelude to the morning's worship. The service itself was the conclusion of a series on the *History of the Churches*, focusing on the New Church and the awesome privilege and humbling responsibility it holds. It emphasized the church's role in working with the Lord and His new revelation to usher in the spiritual era of the New Church into the world. The weekend wrapped up with a lunch, filled with laughter and goodbyes, as everyone shared their thoughts and reflections before heading home.

The first Sunshine Retreat was a heartwarming success, creating meaningful connections through shared meals, thoughtful discussion, and joyful worship. Thank you to all who participated! We hope this retreat will become a cherished annual tradition that continues to bring us closer together as a church community.



SUMMER CAMPS

Living Waters Family Camp

The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

Now is a great time to start a family tradition where grandparents, parents and children can go to a summer camp to worship, learn, pray and play together. These family camps provide fantastic opportunity for the Lord to store up cross-generational New Church remains.

This 11th annual Living Waters Camp will run July 17-20 at the Hidden Valley Christian Camp near Paisley, Ontario, Canada. The ministers on staff, including myself, are the **Revs. Todd J. Beiswenger** and **Justin E. Schorran**.

The theme is *The Covenant*. The sacred covenant that the Lord makes with each and all of the human race is contained in the Ten Commandments. We will take a deeper look at the nature of this covenant that the Lord makes with each of us.

The sheer volume the Heavenly Doctrine has to say about the Ten Commandments is amazing, and hopefully all those attending the camp will come away with an idea that not only are they vitally important but that these laws were given for our happiness.

The camp is within easy driving distance of Olivet and Carmel New Church, and an easy trip across the border from the northern United States. The camp includes cabins and rooms, plus service hookups for campers.

Scholarships are available through the General Church of Canada. To register, and for information, go to: <https://livingwatersfamilycamp.wordpress.com>; email LvingWatersFamilyCamp@gmail.com, or call Brad Heinrichs at 215-870-0591.

Maple Leaf Academy

This camp will be held July 5-11 for teenagers at the Ecology Retreat Center, Mono, Ontario, Canada. It is designed as a week of friendship, relaxation and spiritual growth.

To register and get information visit www.maplecamp.com or contact Stephanie Kuhl, Camp Director, gcic.mapleleafcamp@gmail.com.

Jacob's Creek Family Camp

See the information in the March/April 2025 issue of *New Church Life*, page 187.

GATHERING LEAVES

Gathering Leaves 2025, an international retreat for all Swedenborgian/New Church women will be an in-person and online event, September 25-28, at the Temenos Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The theme is *Remaining Rooted Through Adversity*.

The theme was chosen because of so much turmoil, anger and divisiveness in the world today, as well as our own stresses, challenges, turmoil and despair. How do we stay balanced? How do we do self-care? How do we set boundaries? How do we negotiate conflict? How do we stay rooted in our faith and trust in God? How do our Swedenborgian teachings guide us in these times? What wisdom do we carry as women that might bring solutions and healing?

Women are invited to consider participating as a workshop presenter or plenary speaker (remotely or in person), worship leader, music coordinator, musician or activity leaders. We hope to offer a small honorarium.

For information, go to www.GatheringLeaves.net.

Announcements

BAPTISMS

Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:10,14)

Amaro, Elijah Dominic

At Blackfoot, Idaho, February 18, 2025, son of Brenden and Marivic Simpoo Amaro, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

Blon, Isabelle Molaho

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, August 18, 2024, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Crompton, Robert Henry V

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, March 15, 2025, son of Robert IV and Brandy Asplundh Crompton, Rev. Barry C. Halterman officiating.

Davis, Dean Christopher

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, March 27, 2025, Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh officiating.

Djezou, Elise Ahou

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, February 15, 2025, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Koffi, Catherine Affoue

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, February 10, 2025, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Koffi, Edmond Yao

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, February 10, 2025, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Kouadio, Fidel Kouakou

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, February 15, 2025, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Kouassi, Barbara Akissi

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire, February 10, 2025, Rev. Honoré A. Aka officiating.

Lynch, Tillie Elizabeth

At Sherborn, Massachusetts, February 1, 2025, daughter of Wyeth and Marnie Peters Lynch, Rev. Grant H. Odhner officiating.

Mbila, Langelihle Lintle Zayna

At Buccleuch, Johannesburg,
South Africa, December 22,
2024, daughter of Vusi and Lineo
E. Mbila, Rev. Mandla Sitole
officiating.

Nandje, Donacienne Affoue

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire,
February 15, 2025, Rev. Honoré A.
Aka officiating.

Rodriguez, Angel Delgado

At Ourense, Spain, April 9, 2025,
Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith officiating.

Slowikowski, Adam Andrew

At London, United Kingdom,
February 9, 2025, Rev. Grant H.
Odhner officiating.

Tang, Lana Truong

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April
17, 2025, Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh
officiating.

Zouzou, Mohle Stephanie Estelle

At Bouake, Gbêkê, Côte d'Ivoire,
February 15, 2025, Rev. Honoré A.
Aka officiating.

BETROTHAL

*The marriage of good and truth is from the marriage of the Lord with the Church,
and this from the marriage of love and wisdom in the Lord; for good pertains to
love, and truth to wisdom. (Divine Providence 21)*

Hauptmann-King, Olaf

Hauptmann and Annina King

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,
January 20, 2025, Rev. Walter E.
Orthwein officiating.

MARRIAGES

*The origin of love truly conjugal is from the marriage of good and truth. All
conjunction of good and truth has joy within itself because this conjunction is
the heavenly marriage within which is the Divine. (Arcana Coelestia 4572)*

**Campbell-Elphick, Brent Storm
Campbell and Maxine Karin Anne
Elphick**

At Cape Town, Western Province,
South Africa, March 15, 2025, Rev.
Joel C. Glenn officiating.

**Gomes-Lima, Geraldo Correia
Gomes and Leila Mendonça Lima**
At Lafayette, Colorado, February 14,
2025, Rev. David C. Roth officiating.

**Foord-Vosper, Jordan Michael
Foord and Jessamy Lara Vosper
At Zinkwazi, KwaZulu-Natal,**
South Africa, February 14, 2025,
Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

*Those who are in heaven are continually advancing to the spring of life, and to
a spring so much more delightful and happy the more thousands of years they
live, and this to eternity, with increase according to the progressions and degrees
of their love, charity and faith. (Heaven and Hell 414)*

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