

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MARCH/APRIL 2026



‘Choices Matter’

Graduates of Bryn Athyn College celebrate their life-defining choices to attend the College. President Sean Connelly tells why “Choices Matter” is key to the rebranding of what makes the College unique. (Page 100)



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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://newchurch.org/connect/subscriptions/new.church.life>. All issues can be researched back to 1881 at www.heavenlydoctrines.org.

In This Issue

Editorials (page 76) include:

- *Bearing False Witness*: The commandment that we not bear false witness against our neighbor is relevant to the Easter season because lies and betrayal are at the heart of the Lord's rejection and crucifixion. And as the Lord demonstrated that He cannot be destroyed neither can His Word.
- *The Life of Religion*: What does it mean to live the life of our religion? It is not what we learn and know and believe but how we put all that to use in our lives by "letting our light shine."

The Rev. Mark Allais writes a beautiful letter in response to recent discussions in *New Church Life* about doctrine and revelation: what doctrine really is for and where it lives in our lives – at the heart of all that we do. (Page 81)

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., in a Palm Sunday sermon, *Wise Shifts in Perspective*, notes: "As the Lord did for those on the day He rode into Jerusalem, He is constantly striving to shift our perspective – to help us grow in the wisdom of life." (Page 90)

Alan Pendleton offers a thoughtful poem for Easter – *Morning Unbroken* – which, he says, "allows me to show how each 'testament' binds the historical and the eternal, the scriptural and the symbolic, the Word and the Writings." (Page 96)

Sean Connelly, President of Bryn Athyn College, explains in a transcription of a recent podcast about his new vision for the College, why "Choices Matter." It is what the College has always been about – and must always be about – to remain distinctive as the only college in the world that does what it does. He believes the Lord has provided Bryn Athyn College "to help rational thought grounded in (New Church) principles to exist and lead our culture." (Page 100)

In a sermon – *In Search of Holy Ground* – the Rev. Derek Elphick says we all need the experience throughout our lives of walking on sacred ground – "to feel alive, to stay spiritually awake, and to feel the presence of God." (Page 113)

The Rev. Erik Buss presents a sermon on the challenging subject of *Forgiveness*. It is not always easy to forgive. But, “bottom line, forgiveness is a decision we need to make for our own spiritual well-being, independent of what others do or say.” The Lord forgives us because He always looks at us from good. We need to do the same for those who need our forgiveness. (Page 118)

The Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth, who oversees Outreach for the General Church, offers ideas for spreading the church: *Simple Evangelization*. For all the programs over the years, ranging from simple to sophisticated, perhaps nothing is more effective than the old-fashioned inviting a friend to church. We may hesitate, for a variety of reasons, but the experience could benefit people in a variety of ways. Take the step and trust the Lord. (Page 123)

The Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick talks about *The Varieties of Prayer and the Organic Nature of Conversation with God*. “Our Lord wants to hear from us,” he writes. “He wants to connect with us so that He can guide and teach us. But we have to be willing to consciously approach Him and accept and receive what He wishes to tell us.” (Page 125)

We all find ourselves rooted in behaviors – good and bad – says Naomi Reid. The Lord offers us the opportunity to be free of unhealthy behaviors that may have us feeling trapped. Page 134)

Church News (page 148) include:

- Pastoral moves, with the **Rev. Howard Thompson** leaving Australia after seven years for the Washington New Church
- Jacob’s Creek Family Retreat this summer with the theme *Charity*
- Maple Leaf New Church Summer Camp for Teens with the theme *Blessings*
- Academy Summer Camp

Editorials

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

BEARING FALSE WITNESS

During the 2025-2026 society year Bryn Athyn has been having a series of monthly doctrinal classes about the Ten Commandments, the “*Rise Above It*” series led by Ray and Star Silverman. “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*” is the commandment for April, which seems appropriate for the Easter season. Lies and betrayal are at the heart of the Lord’s rejection and crucifixion.

In *Mark 14:56-59* we read:

Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.’” But not even then did their testimony agree.

False witness is not effective unless others agree with it. In this case the agreement of two witnesses was required to pass a sentence. But, as we know, this technicality did not hold them back for long, and they soon found a lie that they all could agree to.

There is a curious statement in the Writings that people are more easily convinced of lies than the truth:

There is nothing that cannot be defended, and falsity more easily than truth. Since every falsity shines in the natural self with its appearances and illusions, and truth only in the spiritual self, it is apparent that falsity can be defended more easily than truth. (Divine Providence 318)

This may be hard to believe. What does it mean that “*every falsity shines in the natural self with its appearances and illusions*”? One answer is that in the natural world we see and experience things that happen in an external way, but have no certain information about what is behind them. For example, we

may see a violent action, but be unaware of why it happened. This means that we are liable to jump to false conclusions about it or be vulnerable to the false conclusions of others.

Another example might be our judgments about behaviors that have traditionally been viewed as wrong or immoral. If these behaviors are not obviously and demonstrably harmful, we may be easily convinced that they are not wrong. These falsities “*shine in the natural self*” because the natural self is the one closest to our senses, and it is therefore the realm where they are most persuasive.

The accusations of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees were all based on what “*shines in the natural self*.” They said that the Lord claimed to be the Son of God, which seems absurd on the natural level, and was therefore blasphemous. They accused Him of being in rebellion against Caesar, playing on the natural concerns of the Roman rulers.

The destructive power of false witness in our own lives is based on this same dynamic. Political unrest is often based on false assertions about what is behind events that are taking place or that have taken place. Personal issues between people, or marital discord, often happen when people make judgments about things that have happened based on misunderstood observations and not on any deeper understanding.

Our misunderstood observations trace back to our basic assumptions, and to whatever narrative we have adopted about things that are happening. We then understand what we see in a way that fits that narrative. If our basic assumptions are false, this leads us to understand what we observe in a way that confirms what is false.

On one occasion I heard spirits talking to one another about the fact that whatever is made a basic assumption, no matter what, can be confirmed in countless ways, and with a person who has confirmed himself in it, it can at length be made to look altogether like the truth even though it is false, and that people can be persuaded more easily of falsity than of truth. (Arcana Coelestia 2477)

Why more easily? The reason is that we are natural, and because “*falsity shines in the natural self with its appearances and illusions*.” This is true even if we are well-intentioned and sympathetic. If our goodwill is not firmly based on what the Word teaches our emotions can be stirred to sympathy or outrage by false assertions and misleading narratives.

People, therefore, whose good is merely natural can be carried away by falsity as easily as by truth, provided that in outward appearance the falsity looks like truth. They can also be led as easily by evil as by good, provided that the evil is presented as good. They are like feathers

| *in the wind. (Arcana Coelestia 7761)*

Our natural sympathies may make us vulnerable to believing accusations based on false appearances. The truth is that although spiritual good is about nothing but love and charity, this is not the way that it appears to our natural self. The restrictions that spiritual truths place on our behavior, and the consequences that it describes relating to disorderly behavior, appear as harsh and unloving to our natural selves.

In the Easter story, the real issue is not about false accusations related to things that the Lord did, but about the rejection of the Lord as the Word, the rejection of spiritual good and truth. We read:

| *In the spiritual meaning, testifying falsely refers to convincing people that a false belief is a true one and an evil life is a good one, and the reverse; but only if these things are done deliberately, not out of ignorance. (True Christianity 322)*

In other words, it was not really about their rejection of the man that was in front of them, but their rejection of the Word of God, and therefore of the Lord and all that He stood for. It was therefore about convincing people that a false belief is a true one and an evil life is a good one.

Our materialistic culture bears false witness by prioritizing material benefits and marginalizing spiritual ones. Spiritual things, such as sexual morality, spiritual truth and religious devotion, do not “*shine in the natural self*” and so we are easily convinced that they are not important, or even that they are mistaken and wrong. Secular culture often views religion as harsh and unloving.

The message of Easter, however, is that not only are the teachings of the Word loving, true and important, but that they cannot be destroyed. They are more powerful than we can possibly understand. They are the key to life and the way to the happiness of heaven. But the truth only shines in the spiritual self, so our challenge is to develop that self by living a life according to the Word. It is in that spiritual self that the Lord rises on Easter morning, and on every morning in the minds of those who are regenerating.

(JFS)

THE LIFE OF RELIGION

One of the best known and most cherished quotes from the Writings is the teaching in *Doctrine of Life 1*:

| *All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.*

We could easily turn that around to say that all of life relates to religion,

and religion is the life of doing good.

Our church sometimes seems bound in layers of intricate doctrine that can discourage even devoted readers. But the Writings themselves assure us that all of this doctrine comes down to the fundamentals of the Two Great Commandments: love and serve the Lord and our neighbor. This is what life – the life that leads to heaven – is all about.

In a gently instructive letter, *What is Doctrine For?* (page xxx), the Rev. Mark Allais says that all doctrine is given to us for the sake of our lives. “Illumination comes from the Lord alone, and it comes through a life that is willing to be examined and changed” in the light of that truth.

Doctrine is there to help us with our lives. Specifically, he writes, “Doctrine is given to help us see our evils and turn away from them. It exists for the sake of life.”

We might wonder what the Lord is asking us to see about ourselves through His teachings – “how is truth is meant to change my life?”

The life of religion then is the work of a lifetime. It is choosing – and being led – every day. This is not meant to be discouraging but to infuse our lives with hope that the Lord is with us every step of the way. It is a life of constant discovery, constantly rewarding.

Part of living a life of meaning is reflected in a sermon by the Rev. Derek P. Elphick, *In Search of Holy Ground*, (page xxx). We all need the experience of walking on sacred ground, he says, “in order to feel alive, to stay spiritually awake, and to feel the presence of God. “Essential to this is not just living in that sacred ground moment but reflecting on what it means – stopping regularly to think about where we are heading and whether or not we need to change course to follow the Lord’s leading.

We have many beautiful, clear statements in the Writings about living a life with meaning. It begins with assurances that it is not what we know that counts, but what we do with all that knowledge:

A person knowing much counts for nothing if he does not live in accordance with what he knows. (Arcana Coelestia 1100)

The life that leads to heaven is not one of withdrawal from the world but a life in the world. A life of piety apart from a life of charity does not lead to heaven at all. (Heaven and Hell 535)

Whatever you love above all else is the purpose you look to in everything you do. This is in your motivation like the imperceptible current of a river which carries you along even when you are thinking of other things, for it is this which gives you life. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 56)

Man is not aware that he is encompassed with a certain spiritual sphere that is in accordance with the life of his affections, and that to the angels this sphere is more perceptible than the finest senses on earth. (Arcana Coelestia 4464)

A life of kindness is the primary meaning of Divine worship. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 124)

When you love your neighbor as yourself you perceive no delight in lovingkindness except in its practice. Therefore a life of loving kindness is a life of useful service. (Arcana Coelestia 997)

For the whole community of mankind, we operate within the collective but always individually – and we are all understood and supported individually by the Lord. Each of us is on a personal journey – but never alone.

And a warning:

Just as love to the Lord and love towards the neighbor make a life of heaven with man, so love of self and love of the world make a life of hell with him. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 257)

So, we have clear guidance about what it means to live a meaningful life of use and kindness. Putting into practice what we know is the challenge.

Consider the shepherds call from the Angel of the Lord. They eagerly spread the good news that the Lord had been born – onto the earth and into our hearts. He wants us to be as the shepherds – spreading the good news of hope and faith among those around us – purposefully, and just by way of quiet example.

We think of our church – any church – as a sacred building dedicated to an organizational understanding of doctrine. But there are no limitations on what a church is. It exists within every one of us who loves the Lord and the neighbor – who purposefully lives the Two Great Commandments. The choice is not bound by culture, geography or doctrinal understanding but is universal – with everyone who actively and purposefully lives his and her faith.

We become more and more a church as we read, learn, understand and take into our lives the teachings of the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine. All of this leads us – by our own free choice and love – to heaven. As we live our life, we “let our light shine” and so become forms of the Lord’s Church – here on earth and as angels in heaven.

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 who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16) (BMH)

Letters to the Editors

Letters to the Editors may be sent to:
Editors of New Church Life
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Or email Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

What is Doctrine For?

To The Editors:

What Is Doctrine For?

Recent discussions about “derived doctrine” have raised important questions, and it is good that they have. When people are confused, thoughtful, or even uneasy about doctrine, it often means they care deeply about truth and do not want to misuse it. That concern deserves respect.

But confusion usually points to something missing. And in this case, what is missing is not another definition, but a clearer picture of **what doctrine is for** and **where it actually lives**.

Is Doctrine the Same as Revelation?

One of the confusions in recent discussions is the idea that *doctrine* and *revelation* might be the same thing. They are not. The Word is Divine revelation. It is infinite, living and unchangeable. It does not belong to the church; the church belongs to it.

Doctrine, however, is not the Word itself. Doctrine is the **form the Word takes in the human mind** so that it can be understood and lived. Doctrine is how infinite truth is received by finite people. If this were not the case, we would not need teaching, explanation, sermons, or study at all. We would simply read the Word and immediately see everything clearly. But we know from experience that this is not how spiritual life works.

So, a gentle question to ask ourselves is: if doctrine were identical to

revelation, why would the Word itself teach that doctrine must be drawn from it?

Does “Derived” Mean Human or Corrupt?

Another concern that has surfaced is the fear that if doctrine is “derived,” it must be human, manipulated, or somehow less trustworthy. That fear is understandable, but it rests on a misunderstanding. All understanding of truth in the church is derived. Not because truth is weak, but because **we are finite**. Derivation is not corruption. It is accommodation. It is how the Lord meets us where we are.

The real question is not whether doctrine is derived. It always is. The real question is: *From what state is it derived?* Is it drawn from humility or from certainty? From repentance or from self-protection? From a desire to be taught or a desire to be right? These questions matter far more than terminology.

Who “Makes” Doctrine?

Some have wondered whether clergy are expected to “create” doctrine, or whether certain leaders possess special perceptions unavailable to others. Here we need to be very clear and very gentle. No human being creates Divine truth. No office grants spiritual authority over another person’s conscience. Illumination comes from the Lord alone, and it comes through a life that is willing to be examined and changed.

At the same time, the church cannot avoid thinking, teaching, explaining, and applying the Word. That work is not optional. It is necessary. So perhaps a better question is: are we asking who has authority, or *how the Lord teaches the church over time?* Doctrine develops not because truth changes, but because people do.

Why Do Differences in Doctrine Appear?

It is tempting to believe that doctrinal disagreement means someone has departed from the Word. Sometimes that is true. But often the deeper reason is simpler and more uncomfortable. Doctrine is received according to state.

Two people can read the same passages, agree on the words, and still understand them differently because they are living in different spiritual states. One may be using truth to examine him/herself. Another may be interested in the intellectual understanding of truth. This is why disagreements persist even when everyone is urged to “go to the Word.”

So, another clarifying question arises: am I using doctrine to let the Word judge me, or am I using doctrine to judge others?

What Is Doctrine Actually For?

This may be the most important question of all. Doctrine is not primarily given to settle arguments, protect institutions, or ensure uniformity. Doctrine is given to **help us see our evils and turn away from them**. It exists for the sake of life.

When doctrine is separated from self-examination and repentance, it becomes something else. It becomes intellectual, institutional, and eventually divisive. Even true ideas can become spiritually harmful when they are no longer joined to charity.

So, we might ask ourselves: Does this doctrine help me see myself more clearly? Does it soften my judgments? Does it lead me toward repentance and a more charitable life? If not, something essential is missing.

The Real Safeguard of Doctrine

Much energy has been spent trying to protect doctrine by categorizing it, labelling it, or policing its origins. But the true safeguard of doctrine has always been simpler. The safeguard is charity.

Not charity as kindness alone, but charity as **honest self-examination and repentance**. Where that is present, doctrine can develop without becoming dangerous. Where self-examination is absent, even the most carefully supported teachings can be misused. This is why the church has always been taught that truth must serve love, not the other way around.

Invitation

Perhaps the tension we are feeling is not a failure, but an invitation. An invitation to move doctrine out of the realm of debate and back into the personal work of self-examination and repentance.

Instead of asking, is this derived or directly stated? Is this authoritative or questionable?

We might ask, what is the Lord asking me to see about myself here? How is this truth meant to change my life?

Doctrine was never meant to replace that inner work. It was meant to support it. And if we keep that purpose in view, many of our fears and disputes may quietly lose their power.

The Rev. Mark B. Allais
Pastor, Carmel New Church
Caryndale, Ontario, Canada

A Hopeful Distillation

To The Editors:

I am a fairly regular reader of *New Church Life*, having subscribed to it from the United Kingdom for probably 40+ years. I've enjoyed the variety of material, particularly in recent years, and find some inspiration as I go about life in a secular setting. But in all those years I have never written to the editors.

I do so now to celebrate, belatedly, two pieces from the September/October 2025 issue that spoke directly to me and echoed my concerns about the Church and about society in general. I would like to thank both authors for their wise, inspiring and succinct articles that address my worries and set out a clear solution.

Bruce Henderson's editorial, *The Challenge of Charity* (p.367), gently and eloquently explained that we are, "*caught in a coarsening culture and are not immune.*" He asks: "*What can we do to uphold charity, kindness and compassion at every level of our lives and institutions . . . ?*" and sets out "*the challenge of charity*" as the answer.

He references, in the same issue, the Rev. Prescott Rogers' letter (p.363), *The Need for Charity*, which is a single-page (330 words) masterclass in succinct clarity. The two pieces together comprise four pages that, to my mind, distil the core of what we should all be about. (They also underpin the call of The Rt. Rev. Peter M Buss Jr. to *A Vision for the General Church: Send Me - Seven Years of Willingness.*)

I retired two years ago from a career teaching in UK state schools. My last nine years were as headteacher of a secondary school (high school principal) of 1,400 students. I saw, first hand, the increasing impact of social media on young people, from the introduction of smartphones to their ubiquity. I know that I would struggle more as a teenager today than I did nearly half a century ago. And I know that today, in more mature years, I am struggling to remain optimistic and hopeful as I absorb the daily news from around the world.

So, I celebrate those four pages, just over 1,500 words, and will return to them every now and then when negativity and despair threaten. I would urge everyone to look them up (<https://newchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/NCL-Sep-Oct-2025.pdf>) and see if you agree that they are a beautiful distillation.

Four pages and then the daily *challenge of charity*. I can summon some optimism for that and I trust that hope will follow.

Stephen Elphick
London, England

What Did He Mean by That?

To The Editors:

Writing about “The Call to Translation in the General Church” in the *New Church Life*, (July-August, 2025), the Rev. Kenneth Alden remarked: “The deep respect for the text of the Heavenly Doctrine which characterizes the General Church equips it for careful examination of the Latin text as a basis for translation. As we continue our practice of first producing a critical Latin edition, a use is seen in more thoroughly examining deletions in the manuscript as well as the text itself.” (p. 319)

When I asked him to elaborate on these concepts, he pointed out that by the “*text*” of the Heavenly Doctrine, he was meaning previous transcripts in the Latin and including the original, quill-penned manuscript by Emanuel Swedenborg.

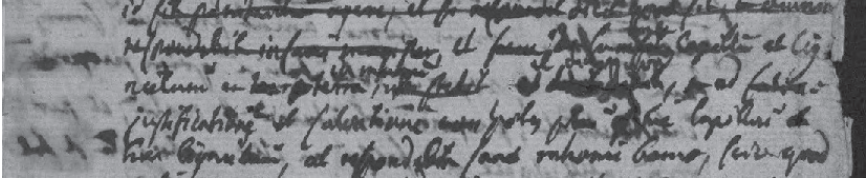
The “*critical Latin edition*” that Mr. Alden mentioned is one where translators will first prepare a very exacting, clean, typeset transcript in Latin of a Swedenborg manuscript, along with copious critical [analytical] footnotes (to pave the way for the actual translation and for the benefit of future translators).

And, it turns out that the “*deletions*” Mr. Alden was referring to are deletions, cross-outs, and even duplications by Swedenborg himself as he worked tirelessly on his manuscripts. In the manuscript for the *Doctrine of Charity*, which is Mr. Alden’s current translation project, he showed me the view on his laptop where Swedenborg wrote two somewhat differing renditions of the same chapters without showing which version should be used. (e.g., nos. 1-12 and nos. 199-208 are both entitled, “The First of Charity.”)

One of the surprising things that Mr. Alden showed me was the fact that Swedenborg used a shorthand system. It appears frequently as unusual squiggles in word endings and with other strange marks which can baffle the uninitiated. Not only must the shorthand be learned, Swedenborg’s hasty scrawl was not entirely consistent, so the marks can vary unexpectedly.

Something about Rev. Alden’s work that he revealed to me was his very extensive, personal catalog of handwriting examples that he made while transcribing the Latin of the *Doctrine of Charity*. Indeed, he is laying a groundwork to help the next generation to master Swedenborg’s draft handwriting – just as an extra labor of love.

But perhaps the most daunting thing about translating from the original manuscript is the sheer illegibility of Swedenborg’s quill-and-ink handwriting. Below is a digital scan of one portion of the *Doctrine of Charity* which shows just what translators have to deal with.



They must be able to decide (frequently letter-by-letter) just what was written. They use magnifiers. They try to find better clarity by looking through the other side of the sheet. They have to be aware of Swedenborg's writing habits. They have to know Latin thoroughly. They have to know New Church doctrine because that remains constant while the manuscript may be unclear. They have to be genuine experts in the English and Latin rules of grammar and spelling. They have to compare their decisions against the decisions of other translators, sometimes without clear resolution. And they are constantly aware that they don't want to intrude on or obscure what the Lord wishes to convey in His second coming.

Rev. Alden noted that if any reader is led astray by a questionable translation, it will most likely be inconsequential, but, if not, matters of life or faith will appear more clearly explained in other places in the Heavenly Doctrines. "The fact is," he said, "earthly language serves to communicate spiritual affections, and that could not happen unless the Lord made use of the innocence of the reader to *perceive* what the Lord wants to convey. If 'apple' is translated as 'peach' the Lord might use the error to communicate something general about 'fruit.' Similarly, the Lord can evoke *good* reader perceptions out of languages as different from the original languages of the Word as are English, Mandarin, Zulu, etc. Where there is a willingness to be led by the Lord, I believe that the Lord will not let defects in translation prevent Him from leading readers toward Himself."

Thank you, Kenneth Alden, for your service to the church and to the Lord, helping to make His message clear to all the world.

Martin E. Klein
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

The Lord's Clear Teachings

To The Editors:

In the September/October 2025 issue of *New Church Life*, Joseph S. David

replies to my letter in the July/August 2025 issue: *Swedenborg Confirms: No Evolution in Creation of Humans*.

Mr. David has misread my letter. He writes about two books and the addition at the end of *Apocalypse Explained* vol 6. I actually quoted from only one book, *The Divine Love and The Divine Wisdom*, which was translated from the Latin manuscripts by the Rev. E.C. Mongredien, in conjunction with the Rev. A. Wynne Acton.

This book was translated and published as one book, definitely not two books as stated by Mr. David. It was previously published also as a single book under the title *Doctrine of Uses*. If he has two books then he is mistaken in criticizing me at all; his two books are not the same as my single book; they must be some other publication.

He is also wrong in criticizing me about my two books that were added at the end of *Apocalypse Explained* vol 6. I wrote in my letter that my single book had been added here at a later stage. I do not know why Mr. David felt obliged to challenge me on this. I don't mind being criticized for what I have written provided the facts are correct, which they were in my letter but not as Mr. David has written. I am surprised that the editors of *New Church Life* did not notice that he was quoting me incorrectly and did not seek clarification before printing his letter.

About the last two thirds of his letter, purportedly a reply to mine, have no relation to my letter. Worse still, he strays off into a discussion about the first ape-like humans of about 40,000 years ago, that is the Neanderthals (scientifically recognized as human: *Homo neanderthalensis*) and their replacement approximately 30,000 years ago by *Homo sapiens* (us) with "new heads, new brains and undoubtedly new souls."

Undoubtedly? Who is Mr. David to judge that? We all have opinions, but "undoubtedly" is, in my view, a strong word to use against Swedenborg's statement that there has been no evolution in the creation of humans. Has our Church been built on opinions or on the Lord's teachings through Swedenborg?

I have no problem with people having opinions. However, in Australia we have our First Nations People, the Aborigines. They are an integral part of Australia's total population and their history goes back well beyond 40,000 years ago. They are by no means Neanderthals, nor have they developed new heads, new brains or new souls.

Many of them are highly educated doctors, lawyers, members of Parliament, teachers and so forth. In other words, many of them come from the upper echelons of Australian society and do justice to a first world country such as Australia. They would feel, and rightly so, outraged at being compared with, let alone equated with, Neanderthals with a new brain and new soul.

Not only that, but the people of the Most Ancient Church had souls, and

as we know from the Word, they were heavenly peoples. I am horrified that the editors of *New Church Life* didn't see the furor that could, and in Australia's case would, result from the New Church attempting to downgrade the Aboriginal population of Australia to Neanderthals, and setting back their civilization by 10,000 years, from 40,000 years ago to 30,000 years ago and by writing and publishing about giving them a new soul.

I can only hope that no one in a position of power ever sets eyes on this degrading letter. Especially do I hope that no one of Aboriginal background sees it. It is the most degrading article I have seen against Aborigines and I assure you that they do not stand back when their racial background is assaulted.

Not only are Mr. David's views incorrect and offensive to the entire Australian population but they are extremely offensive in particular to the Aboriginal portion of its population. It is also totally at odds with what is taught in the Writings and the Word. They are extremely racist views and conflict with all that the New Church upholds. Such views should not have been published and are highly damaging to the New Church.

Mr. David's views almost border on "hate speech" and in Australia, laws have just been enacted making any form of hate speech a criminal offense. These views remind me of the attitudes expressed in South Africa during the Apartheid era that Africans were born intellectually inferior and could only ever be "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

New Church Life is an international publication, seen around the world and represents the New Church. Such views are injurious to the whole church, and against its beliefs and teachings. At the very least, the editors should have published a strong disclaimer. Better still, they should not have published such views.

Mr. David continues with words about the shape of the forehead and other distinctive features. He ends with: "The fact that this becomes universal in the human race when the Neanderthals become extinct tells me that the changes made to the soul were that which would create a new body while it was in the womb, without any help from outside. This tells me that this change was His way of finally bringing an end to the evolution of mankind and giving Him the possibility of angels, which was His will's end." (I think a word has been omitted or the grammar has gone wrong.)

As this doesn't match with Swedenborg's statement from the Lord that there was no evolution in the formation of human beings, I must go with the statement of the Lord via Swedenborg that there was no evolution in the formation of human beings. As I wrote earlier, has our Church been built on opinions or on the Lord's teachings through Swedenborg? We are told that the Lord made the entire universe; could He not have made human beings directly without having to evolve humans via animals and before that from

a single-celled plant? Moreover, if we have to find a roundabout way to get around the Lord's statement that there was no evolution in the formation of humans, where does that leave us when it comes to the explanations of such complex works as the *Arcana Coelestia* and the *Apocalypse Revealed*?

I go with the Lord's teachings via Swedenborg. Others are entitled to their opinions.

Heulwen Ridgway
Canberra, Australia

Wise Shifts in Perspective

A Palm Sunday Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

*Readings: John 12:12-16; Luke 24: 17-21, 25-27; Apocalypse Explained 338;
Apocalypse Revealed 243; Arcana Coelestia 1555:2*

*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered. (John 12:16)
O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe. (Luke 24:25)*

What's really going on? When we see the Lord riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday we know that it is the culmination of his ministry on earth. He knows, as He rides there, that the crucifixion and resurrection are imminent. Proclaiming Himself as King on that day was an integral part of the process.

A major shift was taking place at that time, orchestrated precisely by the Lord. The crowds on that day, knowing of His miracles and teaching, came to witness Him as the Messiah who was taking on the pageantry of kingship. They did know that He is a King, the Messiah foretold. What they did not know is that He was not to be the "King of Israel" in an earthly sense, as they proclaimed. (*John 12:13*) So we would note that they would celebrate Him that day only to go home disillusioned because he didn't fulfill their earthly hopes.

Instead, the message of Palm Sunday, as we know, is that He is a different kind of King. As He would say later to Pilate: "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" (*John 18:36*) Yes, I am a King, but of a spiritual kingdom called heaven and the church.

The disciples themselves, there amongst the crowd, had a better chance of understanding this, but even they needed help. There's a small detail within the Palm Sunday story that demonstrates how they were being awakened to something larger, something more enduring and powerful going on with the Lord than they had known.

As they watched all the pageantry it is said: "*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to him.*" (*John 12:16*) Do you see the shift in their perspective as they sequentially became aware of the Lord's Divine plan and their own place in it?

It's informative to fast forward a week to the story on the Road to Emmaus, because a similar shift in perspective happens to two other people amongst the Lord's disciples. They found themselves walking with the risen Lord without knowing it at first. Most of us know the story – of how Jesus got them to tell Him of the events they had all witnessed, including the story of Palm Sunday

and early news of the empty tomb. They too failed to understand, saying: *“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.”* (Luke 24:21)

Listen to what Jesus said to them the way He invited them to rethink things: *“O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded on them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”* (Luke 24: 25-27) He shifted their perspective, a process that culminated later that day when He dined with them. *“Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him.”* (Luke 24:31)

Other Shift-in-Perspective Stories

I am engaged in a study of the ways the Lord consistently seeks to shift our perspective, just as He did with the disciples. It's His work of leading us to attain wisdom. It's an incredible lens through which to look at the Word. We encounter stories like Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching to heaven, with the Lord Himself at the top making a covenant with him.

So many times the Lord shifted people's perspective, raising their thoughts to a spiritual way of viewing life.

We hear Jacob saying: *“Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.”* (Genesis 28:16) Think of the change for Jacob, from fleeing for his life from his brother, Esau, to having a sense of the Lord's providence and plan for his life.

Or what of Elisha who calmed his servant when an enormous Syrian army surrounded them? *“Do not fear,” he said, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them”* (2 Kings 6:16)

Or how about Samuel – surely Samuel who spoke directly with the Lord would know what's what. But when the Lord sent him to Jesse's house to anoint the next king of Israel, we hear Him say: *“Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7)

So many times the Lord shifted people's perspective, raising their thoughts to a spiritual way of viewing life:

- *You have heard that it has been said to those of old . . . But I say to you . . .* (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, et al)
- *Enter in by the narrow gate (rather than the broad one)* (Matthew 7:13-14)

- *Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. (Mark 10:15)*
- *He who is without sin among you let him cast a stone at her first. (John 8:7)*
- *The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)*
- *But she out of her poverty put in all that she had. (Mark 12:44)*
- Recall also the message we have already heard today: *My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36)*

So much of all this the people on Palm Sunday did not understand. Even the disciples were blind to a large portion of it until after the resurrection, when finally things were able to fall into place for them. They all needed these consistent and repeated prompts from the Lord to think more deeply and wisely, to open their minds to consider the spiritual dimensions of life. And so do we.

In Need of Spiritual Prompts

Why is that? There are so many reasons but listen to just three teachings from the Writings of the New Church – the Heavenly Doctrines.

We have trouble thinking beyond what we can see and touch. The first reminds us that we are often so locked into this world – into what we can see and touch. It’s a teaching about our spirit, and that we live in human form after death – “clothed,” it says, “*in brilliant garments [and] living in magnificent dwellings.*” (*Spiritual Experiences 5684*)

But with people for whom this is a new concept, it says: “*Let them think from sense experience, that is to say from their body and its senses. . . . Will they not then stop here and finally deny?*” Sounds like those many people watching the Lord ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. “*However,*” it continues, “*let people who can be drawn away from sensual and bodily things and be raised above these then think . . . for the first time, can they enter into wisdom?*”

Isn’t it true that much of what the Lord offers is beyond the sight of our eyes or the worldly experience we are born into? Love, safety in the Lord, lasting happiness. True fulfillment and contentment, peace. Wisdom is found in pursuing these things.”

When things go wrong, it’s often really hard to trust. Think again of the disciples, who had the best chance of trusting in the Lord. Jesus said to them

just before He was captured: “*All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night.*” (Mark 14:27) We may recall Peter boldly predicting that he would never stumble or deny the Lord – only to be humbled when later he did deny the Lord at the house of the high priest, when the rooster crowed. With that in mind, as well as our own experience of great turmoil in our lives, listen to this teaching:

As long as temptation lasts, people assume that the Lord is not present, for they are being harassed by evil genii, so harassed in fact that sometimes they have so great a feeling of hopelessness as scarcely to believe in the existence of God at all. (Arcana Coelestia 840)

Many of us, sadly, know that feeling. But mercifully the Lord doesn’t leave us there. The teaching continues: “*Yet at such times the Lord is more present than those people can possibly believe. [And] once the temptation subsides they receive comfort, believing for the first time that the Lord is present.*” We think we know the Lord and believe in Him, but we know that we will be tested.

We often think we know when we actually don’t. In fact, that’s a third thing we’re taught that has us in a place of needing the Lord’s spiritual prompts. We often assume we know more than we do. Interestingly there is a paradox about wisdom known to the angels. We think of those people who live in heaven as some of the wisest and most regenerate or good humans who exist. But listen to what they say about themselves:

Among the angels themselves, who possess a supreme light of intelligence and wisdom, holiness still dwells within ignorance, for they know and acknowledge that of themselves they know nothing and whatever they do know comes from the Lord. (Arcana Coelestia 1557:2)

This passage goes on to make a general statement about us: “*Anyone who does not acknowledge that there is an infinite number of things they do not know compared to what they do know cannot possess the holiness of angels.*” (Ibid.) Another passage describes this wisdom of angels with an analogy: what they know “*compared with what they do not are as a drop of water is to the ocean.*” (True Christian Religion 387) Wow!

How often do we think we know when we really don’t – thinking we know what’s going on with someone else when we really have no idea, or believe we’ve got it all figured out only to find that someone challenges us with questions that we can’t answer, or feel confident in the plan we have for our lives only to encounter a twist of life that requires us to rethink things and turn anew to the Lord for help? Again, we can think of those people laying their palms and clothes before the Lord. They thought they saw the Messiah coming into the capital city. They did, but their understanding was seriously compromised.

True Wisdom

The Lord's effort, however, is to lead us toward greater and greater states of wisdom. He can cause us to learn and grow. He can shift our perspective in helpful ways. He is always willing to work with us. He is always inviting us to the next shift in our perspective that has us cooperating with Him more fully and wisely.

Earlier we heard three short statements about true wisdom that give us direction on how we can cooperate.

True human wisdom consists in perceiving the existence of God, the nature of God, and what pertains to God. This is what the Divine truth of the Word teaches. (Apocalypse Revealed 243)

Do we hear the call to turn to the Lord, who rode into Jerusalem, who died on the cross, who rose again on Easter Sunday – all to be our Savior and Redeemer? If we do nothing else as a result of our time in the Lord's presence today, than renew our commitment to turn to Him and devote ourselves more fully to Him, we will have discovered the single most powerful means to true wisdom that there is. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10)*

We read again:

True wisdom is to see what is conducive to anyone's life to eternity, and to determine oneself according to that, which is done when people not only know these things and perceive them with their understanding but also will and do them. (Apocalypse Explained 338)

Isn't that what people had the opportunity to consider by means of the Lord's teachings? *"My kingdom is not of this world."*

Heaven is a place toward which the Lord is leading us. Spiritual life, and the things of spiritual life, are primary. Think spiritually, not naturally, and we will be wise – or at least on the path to wisdom. And if we live spiritually, as this passage requires, with the things of eternal life in mind, we can come into true wisdom. Not only that but we can come into true happiness, for living in these ways is what allows the Lord to bless us.

Finally we read:

Few if any people know how a person is led to true wisdom. Intelligence is not wisdom but it leads to wisdom, for having an understanding of what truth and good are is not the same as being a good and true person; but being wise is. Wisdom can be used only in reference to a person's life, to what kind of person (he or she) is. (Arcana Coelestia 1555:2)

What kind of people do we want to be? Lord-based? Trusting? Other-oriented? Wise? Humble? Kind-hearted and generous? Free of some of the

hereditary evils that plague us? Able to share Word-based perspectives to others that have truly made a positive difference for us? Content? Useful? All these and more can be ours from the Lord to the extent that we turn to Him and orient ourselves to His path.

Our Next Steps

As the Lord did for those on the day that He rode into Jerusalem, He is constantly striving to shift our perspective – to help us grow in the wisdom of life. Like the disciples, there will be times that we “*do not understand these things at first*” but later “*remember*” and have it all fall into place for us. (John 12:16)

Like those other disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Lord will be walking with us throughout life, even when we don’t know it or acknowledge it, listening to us describe our confusion and sadness, our challenges and frustrations. Always, He will seek for ways to lead us to greater levels of understanding, sometimes even chiding us gently: “*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe.*” (Luke 24:25)

But to the extent that we are paying attention, and make the commitment to strive for the wisdom He so generously offers, there will be times when we come to know of His presence and providence in our lives. Our eyes can be opened, and our hearts can burn within us as we come to realize that the Lord is with us always, and has a plan for our lives that stretches into an eternity of happiness, to the extent that we are wise enough to follow.

Amen.



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Morning Unbroken

Alan Pendleton

In shadows deep, where morning stretched its stride,
Came Magdalene, her sorrow sharp as thorn,
Yet found the tomb unsealed, the stone cast wide—
A hollow crypt, no Lord found there to mourn.

She fled with breathless haste, her voice no form,
“They’ve taken Him – we know not where He lies!”
Then Peter raced, with the Beloved taking storm,
Their hearts aflame with dread and hollow cries.

The younger paused, stooped low to glimpse the tomb –
Castoff linen in stillness now arrayed –
While Peter charged boldly into the gloom,
And saw the folded napkin, starkly laid.

Then light broke soft where doubt had lost its sting:
Disciples saw, believed – though Scripture veiled
Their understanding of the rising King,
As homeward paths drew sighs, where hope prevailed.

But dawn is more than daybreak’s fleeting power –
It is the Lord’s own whisper to us sworn,
A church reborn, a heart remade, each hour,
Where love ignites and faith’s new seed is sown.

For every morn He rises in our day,
And in the soul’s hushed hollows of our breath
The kingdom dawns where shadows lose their sway,
His resurrection’s pulse defies our death.

So let the stone of doubt be rolled away –
In you, in me, His kingdom claims its throne.
When we become a church, He’s here to stay
And then the dawn revived is seen and known.



Morning has Broken on Basilique du Sacré-Coeur Through the Lens of Time (Looking through the clock face of Musée d'Orsay • Paris 2024)

Happy Easter!

“Morning Unbroken” is my synthesis of the resurrection narrative from *John 20:1-10* and its symbolic interpretation in *Secrets of Heaven 2405.8*, which frames dawn as a metaphor for spiritual renewal – regeneration. The poem interweaves the urgency of the disciples’ discovery – the empty tomb, the discarded linens, the dawning realization – with the theological truth that resurrection is not merely a historical event but a living, recurring dawn within the human soul.

Through strict iambic pentameter and an ABAB rhyme scheme, I try to mirror the tension between tangible action (Mary’s flight, Peter’s boldness) and inner revelation (belief dawning “*where doubt had lost its sting*”). My goal is to elevate the Gospel account into a meditation on how the Lord’s rising transcends time, transforming both the collective church specific and universal, as well as the individual heart.

Analysis

1. Structure and Rhyme

The poem adheres rigorously to its ABAB rhyme scheme, echoing the duality of the resurrection’s meaning:

- **Physical and spiritual rhythms:** The alternating rhymes (e.g., “stride”/“wide,” “thorn”/“mourn”) parallel the disciples’ literal race to the tomb and their gradual awakening to divine truth. The meter’s cadence evokes both urgency (“*She fled with breathless haste*”) and contemplation (“*But dawn is more than daybreak’s fleeting power*”).
- **Cyclical renewal:** The rhyme scheme’s predictability mirrors the poem’s theological core – dawn as a daily, hourly recurrence of grace (“*each hour / Where love ignites and faith’s new seed is sown*”).

2. Imagery Bridging Text and Symbol

- **The empty tomb:** The “*hollow crypt*” (*John 20:1-8*) becomes a metaphor for the soul’s potential to receive influx from the Divine presence. The “*folded napkin, starkly laid*” reflects both John’s meticulous detail and *Secrets of Heaven’s* emphasis on resurrection as an orderly, purposeful act (“*when we are reborn and become new, for then the Lord’s kingdom dawns in us, and we become a church*”).
- **Dawn as multi-layered symbol:** The “*fleeting power*” of daybreak evolves into the “*Lord’s own whisper*,” embodying the commentary’s claim that morning signifies “*the arrival of His kingdom*” in both cosmic and intimate terms. Shadows “*los[ing] their sway*” (stanza 6) alludes to the defeat of spiritual darkness through perpetual renewal.

3. Theological Resonance

- **Collective and individual renewal:** The poem mirrors *Secrets of Heaven’s* teaching that resurrection occurs “*overall when some church is being revived*” and “*individually, when we are reborn.*” Lines like “*When we become a church, He’s here to stay*” unite communal faith (“*a church reborn*”) with personal transformation (“*the soul’s hushed hollows of our breath*”).
- **Moment-by-moment resurrection:** The final stanza’s declaration – “*In you, in me, His kingdom claims its throne.*” – captures the commentary’s assertion that the Lord rises “*daily and in fact from moment to moment*” whenever love and faith stir the heart. The “*stone of doubt*” rolled away (*John 20:1*) becomes an ongoing act of surrender, not a one-time event.

4. Tension Between Knowledge and Belief

The poem honors *John 20:9* (“*they didn’t know the Scripture, that He must rise*”) through the disciples’ incomplete understanding (“*though Scripture veiled / Their understanding of the rising King*”). Yet it resolves in *Secrets of Heaven’s* hope: belief precedes full comprehension. The “*light [breaking] soft*” (stanza 4) signifies revelation dawning even where intellect falters, affirming that resurrection is grasped first by the heart, then the mind.

Conclusion

“Morning Unbroken” allows me to show how each “testament” binds the historical and the eternal, the scriptural and the symbolic, the Word and the Writings. It transforms the disciples’ confusion into a universal anthem: the empty tomb is not an end but a beginning, reverberating through every “*hushed hollow*” of the soul. By aligning form (rhyme, meter) with theological meaning, I attempt to make the poem embody its own thesis – that resurrection is a rhythm, a whispered promise, and, echoing the “*Nunc Licet*” annunciation, “*then the dawn revived* (i.e. the internal sense) *is seen and known*.”

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Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth conducts this podcast with Sean Connelly on his vision for Bryn Athyn College: “Choices Matter”

Why Bryn Athyn College? ‘Choices Matter’

Editor’s note: This is an edited transcript of a December 11, 2025, podcast led by the Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth with Sean Connelly, President of Bryn Athyn College.

Bishop David Lindrooth welcomed viewers to this livestream, expressing enthusiasm for conversations about real and important matters concerning the church. He introduced Sean Connelly, President of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, noting that the College has been facing challenging times – and that higher education everywhere is experiencing difficulties.

Bishop Lindrooth believes the College has a vital mission for humanity and the more he thinks about it, the broader and more important that mission becomes. When generations possess theological knowledge about good and evil from the Writings they pass this understanding to their children, who operate from that same foundation even if not actively engaged. However, the next generation will lose this knowledge entirely if it is not carried forward.

He feels that the real crisis in the world today is a crisis of meaning – that our culture is moving away from clear differentiation between good and evil, and the further we get from that clarity, the more our civilization becomes at risk. He believes the Lord has provided for Bryn Athyn College to help rational thought grounded in these principles to exist and lead our culture.

He said this conversation would not cover everything or solve all the

challenges facing the College, but was excited about learning where it is heading and getting to know Sean Connelly as its leader, his hopes and dreams and how they show up in the life of the College.

Sean thanked him for hosting the conversation and was eager to hear from the audience while acknowledging that he would not have all the answers and they would not get through everything. But he emphasized that dialogue and connections are very impactful and meaningful at a real human level.

He described himself as a husband, father and entrepreneur. He is the son of a woodworker and his nicknames are “Mr. Intensity” and “Mr. Safety” (given by his daughters). He leans completely into his passions, and squarely at the center are the New Church and New Church higher education.

He emphasized that this component of his identity came to him very authentically. He did not grow up in the church but came to the Academy Secondary Schools, then made the leap across Tomlinson Road to the College. There he met and fell in love with his high school sweetheart, Holly Goerwitz. He would not have his life, his wife, or his children without New Church higher education.

He thanked New Church education – along with its amazing faculty – for their profound impact. It’s remarkable that 32 years have passed since he graduated from the college. He left with a passion and commitment to write a book someday about applying New Church principles and thought to managing an entity, organization or company. He never expected to be sitting in the seat of President of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and is quite humbled to be doing his small part in ensuring that the institution thrives for the next 150 years.

The Call to Leadership

Bishop Lindrooth asked him why he believes the Lord put him in this position, believing that there are no accidents.

Sean said he is still figuring that out, but the calling was loud and clear at the General Church Assembly in 2024 which he characterized as “Disney for New Church people.” He decided this was the way forward. As an entrepreneur who had never worked his way through the ranks in higher education, although maintaining a loving and caring commitment in his heart, he felt called to this role. He credits his wife and family for blessing him with an introduction to these truths, and believes it all came together in one very moving moment during the Assembly.

As a graduate and alumnus, he felt he graduated with knowledge that he applies to his life every day. Our systematic theology provides no shortage of such constructs, but those that stand out are the Grand Man, Divine Order and

Divine Providence. He reflects on these daily, and they impact his decisions. He believes they are powerful gateways for conversations, both with people familiar with them and those who are not, because they can be rooted in very concrete ideas.

This knowledge is so internal that it feels natural, even though he never expected to be in this position. However, he maintained a strong commitment and contributed a lot of time to these efforts through nine years on the Bryn Athyn Church Board and six years on its finance committee. He believes the whole package coalesced around an authentic calling.

Bishop Lindrooth reflected on his entrepreneurial spirit, suggesting that perhaps this is the time for such a person to be President of the College. He had told Sean earlier that the College might be in a rebirthing process, which calls on that expertise.

Sean agreed, referencing Bishop Lindrooth's opening remarks about the need to lean into something authentic and identify true meaning in leading a useful life. As an entrepreneur, he learned that the purpose behind what you are doing is in direct alignment with what you love. If there is ever a moment when you feel a lack of alignment, you need to pause and reflect on the reasons why. You can have days like that, but if you have months or years like that, something is wrong. For Sean, it was the realization that the future of online marketing was heading in a direction he did not want to commit to for the rest of his life. He recognized this in the moment but did not realize how profound the thought was at the time.

First Year Reflections

Bishop Lindrooth feels Sean (who began as President on November 1, 2024) seems pretty broken into the position and asked him to share thoughts about the journey.

Sean said it is quite humbling that it has been a year but it also seems like more than a year. The feeling that resounds day in and day out is that this is a very rewarding and challenging job that he is lucky to do. He sees where his contributions can help to improve the institution by bringing people together around the future. He is humbled by the support and collaborative interactions that are present every day.

Bishop Lindrooth said a great group of people is showing up for the students every day, which is wonderful. He said Bruce Rogers, who had been on the faculty for years and was a translator, once told him that translation is the art of failure: you are going to fail because you cannot translate something 100% accurately. Bishop Lindrooth felt this is a bit of a construct for the President's role. It is not all about failure, but perhaps about failing forward or

failing well because what Sean is doing involves experimenting. The College is trying to follow providence in freshly plowed fields, not doing things the way they have been done for the last 100 years. It is all new ground, which means there is a kind of discovery that ties into the entrepreneurial spirit.

Sean agreed, noting that the concept of failing, identifying, experimenting and pushing forward in a very thoughtful, intentional, progressive way creates a direct intersection of mission and sustainability. These are the opportunities to make clear decisions on where they are headed.

Vision and Mission

Bishop Lindrooth asked him to talk about vision and mission, what the College will look like in the future, how he sees it changing, and what story people will be telling in five years.

Sean said he hopes they bring to life what they are in the midst of writing in a strategic plan and strategy. It is a collaborative effort by faculty, staff and administration – most of them alumni. At the same time, this responsibility rests on the President’s shoulders, at his desk, and with his pen. This creates a unique intersection of collaboration and bringing people together while ensuring that the institution is here for the next 150 years.

He emphasized that he is accountable for the institution’s sustainability and alignment with its mission. There is no shortage of loving and caring individuals in the global community who share the connection but are not directly responsible for it.

His vision is bringing people together so they are as aligned as possible – a global community committed to success. This starts within the College as high as organizationally possible: Corporation, Board, College Executive Committee, finance committee, and through him to faculty, staff, administration, students, alumni, partners and donors.

Five years from now, he hopes everybody shares a unique understanding and is involved directly in the College’s success. They are mere mortals but when they think about their contributions and how they can direct and align them, they are bringing to life a strategy and strategic plan that inspires this involvement and also directs their energies toward attaining feasible outcomes in a temporal world.

Their North Star is to provide and afford students the best possible outcomes for their education. They bring this to life through three goals being articulated right now. At the summary level, these goals are action-oriented: through teaching, sharing and stewarding, they will ensure that this institution is here for the next 150 years. The College will take market steps toward that outcome over the next five years, which is the window of the strategic plan.

Defining Student Success

Bishop Lindrooth pressed him on what success means, not from the perspective of institutional sustainability but from a student's perspective. He noted that students do not go to college for the organization to be successful; they go to achieve something, and that is the real marker.

Sean explained that at the student level, success is to graduate, walk across the stage, and take with them eternal truths that they deploy in their own knowledge, in their own capacity, as lenses and as a foundation for life, for leading a life of use. That is success, and primarily that is the North Star for why the institution exists. It is a clear declaration of the global audience they want to attract and introduce their offering to, educating them in a sustainable way. In doing that, the College will be successful.

Bishop Lindrooth summarized what he was hearing: equip people with truths so that they can know what it means to be spiritually useful, in the Lord's eyes, then go out and launch, able to live a meaningful life because they have that North Star. This is phenomenal.

He elaborated on differentiation between good and evil, with good being useful things and how you know if you are really making an impact. He referenced studies about the lack of meaning among young people today; they just do not know how to find a life that articulates a deep sense of meaning. They work for the man or go through the motions, then partying on the weekends because they cannot find that meaningful substance. He is hearing that the College is here to deliver some of this.

Sean is here to draw attention to this. The faculty are the ones bringing this to life – delivering the magic in the classroom. Opportunities to bring the institution together are found in the magic that is happening, marketing it in a way that is understood and digestible, then inviting those rich relationships with the student body who want exactly what they offer – that precious pearl of New Church higher education in a very authentic way.

How do they do that in a way that is distinctive and essential? How is this offering unique and valuable in the moment? What are they providing that is unique from everybody else? That is what the College can win at – to be successful and really attract students who want what they have to offer. What are they offering that is in the moment, in the next five, 10, 15 years? What does the world need from their vantage point?

Sean acknowledged these are heady topics. How do we convey them in a way that is a gateway to those who may be aware of them and those who are not? The College needs a relevant and real message that it is delivering but still has not figured out all of how to deliver this. This is an opportunity to think about how to take these truths, these lenses, and convey them in a meaningful way.

What the World Needs

Part of Bishop Lindrooth’s thinking concerns what the world needs versus what it thinks it needs. What can the College offer, knowing that it has the most precious pearl in the universe?

Sean feels this can happen in any area where humans decide to focus. It involves the recognition that we turn to the Lord first in making decisions, recognizing that the impact is not from us but the Lord working through us as vessels.

What students really need today is a long discussion with much to process. Our opportunity is to convey something that is very thought-provoking and much needed in a world full of intrusions, confusion and hijacking of our time. We are in the midst of deployment of the most negatively and positively impactful drug in the world with social media and its impact on society. Coming from an authentic place as a tech entrepreneur, Sean sees fantastic benefits and also some terrible possible outcomes.

He might distill it down to something as simple as pure recognition of our place in the world and our relationship with the Lord. Those are two very profound components. Just by reflecting on and recognizing why we are here, how we are able to direct their energies at accomplishing what they do – which is leading a life of usefulness – provides essential clarity.

Bishop Lindrooth said he has been thinking about this since he was in the college. He believes the educational methods offered through the understanding of theology actually make you smarter than any other method. It elevates people’s intelligence because it connects you with what is deeper and teaches you how to associate what is deeply spiritual with what is present in this world.

Artificial Intelligence is an example. AI connects like with like; it is a two-dimensional kind of intelligence. What New Church theology does – such as correspondence – teaches three-dimensional intelligence, which actually improves your ability to think, so there is a strategic advantage here.

As for life and usefulness, when we think we are on this planet for a few short years and then we are gone, we miss the bigger picture. The impact is three-dimensional, which is the essence of use. It affects all aspects of a person’s relationship. Yes, it should be deployed hopefully in the workplace, but also in friendships, marriage, and so on. It is a very holistic approach to life, which has been illustrated in New Church thinking for a long time. There are countless colleges out there but only one place in the whole world where they can get this.

Sean feels this clicks on many levels. Since he graduated from the College in 1994 he feels he reflects daily on the Grand Man. When you think in terms of if I were to make a decision today, and I recognize that my role, or my

company's role, or my organization's role, is connected to other entities in a similar fashion – analogous to the Grand Man – you ask yourself whether you would be making a different decision than you are making today. Likely you would and recognizing why you would make that decision differently is an interesting construct.

It continually elevates thinking and turns attention to our relationship with the Lord and heaven and the human race, understanding that this is an eternal component to our decision-making. It really impacts us on a day-to-day basis. Those gateways, when thinking about what construct is meaningful to somebody, may be meaningful to me, but may not mean anything to someone else. I'm not in a position to say this must be meaningful to you for all my reasons, because we must be free. There is so much beauty in that knowledge when you recognize your place and your interaction.

That is what he felt lucky enough to receive, graduate with, and take with him. He resonates 100 percent with Bishop Lindrooth's point. Every student, alum, anyone who attends a class on this campus – this what he would love to know continues to have impact. This is what we have been delivering for nearly 150 years, and are committed to doing for the next 150.

Historical Resilience

Bishop Lindrooth noted that the College has been through some hard times through all these years. The market crash in 1929 happened while Bryn Athyn College was here. The First World War happened before the market crash, and the Second World War came after. Those were extraordinarily difficult times.

The College packed up into the Library and was functioning on a shoestring, but it was functioning. The educational goals were still present, and the people who were educated there have had a profound effect on their church.

Theological Underpinnings

How do those theological underpinnings remain the same as the College moves forward – and how are they changing?

Sean feels these underpinnings are the educational philosophy, informed by the theology of the New Church and Emanuel Swedenborg. That has always been the case. Many people are eager to preserve this – he being one of them – while also recognizing that the world and its needs are evolving. That will inform how we approach things.

When we reflect on the reasons for our Charter, its purpose, the mission of the College, and our place in fulfilling our component, the broad commitments remain: they train the ministry, educate the educators, and offer

a New Church-informed liberal arts education as a platform to deliver degrees relevant to the student body in a meaningful way, preparing them for their futures and leading lives of use.

All of that remains, and that has been the deployment and passion of the faculty who bring that magic to life every day in the classroom. When asked what is different, Sean identified one opportunity they are looking at: how to make all of this understood and digestible for the worldwide community – those who may have never heard of us or may not even think of themselves as seekers. How do we reach someone who is really looking for what we are offering and will embrace it?

Answering those questions is the charge of the strategy and strategic plan. It is about making all this digestible and understood in a very real way. This is their opportunity, and not all that work is done. However, people may have heard of “Choices Matter.”

The ‘Choices Matter’ Initiative

“Choices Matter” – just two words strung together that sound very simple. That is intentional. This started out as a working title, and we thought we would use it as a placeholder until something better surfaced. Nothing did.

This is a way to introduce the full recognition that everybody’s choice defines who you are, how you interact with others, and what you do with your life. Ultimately, this informs you and gives you a platform for discovery – going back to the Charter purpose – of an ethical foundational platform tied to a New Church higher education based on the three-fold Word: the Old Testament, New Testament, and the teachings of the New Church.

This is one possible gateway for a conversation with people who are aware or unaware of our offerings in a very inviting way. Historically, the Church and Academy can be very heady about these topics, which can get in the way. Everyone is committed to this very meaningful place in their hearts and in their lives. How do they do this? This is one example of how we can introduce these concepts.

The conversations – which are experiments right now at admissions events with students and parents – are going quite well. There is a real openness and willingness to explore these topics, and then an echo back of understanding.

Sean said the night before at an Applicants’ Reception one student and both parents asked what “Choices Matter” means. He walked through the expression and then identified a world-renowned author, Simon Sinek, and his book: “Start With Why.” Sinek talks about the importance of starting with why, then explaining how you do what you do, and ultimately what you do. This works because that is a natural progression of love, wisdom and use.

When you think about it, this is a doctrinal eternal truth. These are the kinds of truths he believes they hold near and dear. It is about highlighting how this exists today, how they see it in the world today, how the heavenly doctrine reveals this, and then providing the opportunity for people to discover these truths on their own. There is something real there.

Think about AI and the impact it has on today's world, and about the challenges that higher education is facing: the question of relevance, why even go to college? Well, if you want just facts, don't go to college. If you want foundations and transformational lenses that you will carry with you for the rest of your life, that is why you want to go. That is the dialogue to invite people in.

There is an anxious generation today with a craving for real commitment and understanding of how they can make the world better. That is where we guide people and introduce students to discover this on their own. It is not an exact one-two-three or 12-step program to get through, but a very real recognition that is delivered in a classroom through knowing, caring, thoughtful, loving faculty, introducing this to their students in real time.

It has to be very human. It is not just "go study this, take a test, and run through the scantron": that is what AI can do. There is a place for that as well. If we think they are not affected by AI we'd be kidding ourselves. Recognizing this, working with it, and making our offering relevant is key.

The Role of Faculty

Bishop Lindrooth suggested that it comes down to the faculty, does it not? He has thought about this a lot because of the way higher education is being challenged. People ask why they would spend any money at all on it. We can get any Harvard course online for free – the material, the outlines, the readings, it is all there. Why not just plow through that?

But the opportunity exists for in-depth, challenging interactions with people whose perspectives are different, who may see things differently or be wiser. To have a theologically constructed base and then be able to interact freely with people who are passionate about all this as well – in a challenging

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environment, passing through the fire, you get tempered. You come out as a different person because of the way you engage. Once you learn it, once you internalize it, you cannot walk away from it.

He said this speaks volumes about the faculty. Sean can do some of this, but not primarily. It really comes down to the faculty.

Sean – reflecting on how lucky he is to step into this role – identified three pillars:

- Trust building
- Rightsizing
- Reimagining

Asked about his connection with the broad community and faculty, he said he was told coming into this role: “You do not have higher education experience. Who do you think you are?” That is paraphrasing, but the implication was that to come to the institution as president without that background might be presumptuous.

He believes this is one of his greatest strengths because he provides an outside perspective that is mission-driven and focused on sustainability. He was also told: “You cannot do all three things simultaneously. Pick any two.” But we need all three. Trust building is critical while they are rightsizing through the very real constraints they are in financially. That work is not done. And they are reimagining and creating an offering that is relevant, distinctive, and essential – valuable in today’s market.

Who wants this? Do they value it enough to pay for it? What is the College offering that is understood, digestible, consumable and desirable? He says that is the very core – all three at the same time – with a recognition of how they can get from where they are today to that future or end state.

It is about working together, understanding collaboration, maintaining roles and responsibilities, having that handoff, and working through the challenges. They all hold New Church higher education near and dear to their hearts and are committed to its survival. That is the very foundation – through the recognition of trust building, rightsizing, and reimagining their offering.

Navigating Criticism

Thinking about building trust Bishop Lindrooth suggested they are in an era of low tolerance where people are quick to criticize. You can throw things out on Facebook and it gets blasted out into the airways. That makes it a very challenging environment, more so than it has ever been.

Sean thinks it has to be about pausing and reflecting in the moment, being intentional. From a society-wide and global perspective, it is important not to

get caught up in these negative moments. Being intentional about what you choose to do is important.

Audience Questions

Question from Georgia: What is the best single thing you have experienced in your work so far with the College?

Sean said the best thing is hard to be specific but would pinpoint a theme. It is clear that support is coming at just the right time. It is palpable, it is providential, it is unexpected, and very meaningful. It is the source of energy that keeps him going. It comes through texts, phone calls, conversations, high-fives, and recognition that this work is challenging – bringing people together around something that they all know and love and care for deeply.

Bishop Lindrooth asked: What is a single best thing caring New Church people can do to support the College?

Sean said that is an even better question. The single best thing: if you are a student-aged person who is interested, come and take a look at the College. If you an alum who is a parent and you have kids who are age-appropriate or early in the game, invite them to look at the College.

The best thing anyone can do is encourage everybody they know to take a look at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and its offerings. This comes from a very real place in everybody's heart. Alumni and people who come to know them authentically have a real appreciation and care and love for this institution in a very authentic way. So please offer to bring it up in conversations where it may feel appropriate and just give people that invitation.

Bishop Lindrooth affirmed this, noting that as a bishop traveling around the world, he wants people to know that this opportunity is available.

Question: Beyond the general concept of faith, charity and usefulness, can you comment on the extent to which faculty members teaching secular courses bring specific teachings of the New Church into their lectures and assignments?

Sean said this is exactly where there is a handoff between the role of president and faculty. There is a discipline and appreciation for what happens in the classroom environment and the interactions that directly impact the students. In real time, modifying what happens there is not his responsibility. Yet there is a vision and a mission they are articulating, along with a strategy and strategic plan.

They are having these conversations about how far, how deep and how wide, and what they are committing to incorporating within their offering. He

asked the question very broadly: If the Lord is in everything in this world, is there not an opportunity to consider how He can be in everything that they teach?

For example, if the people who created infinite scrolling, and the programmers behind the scenes who understood the impact of the algorithms they created, knew the potential positive and negative effects of what they were making, would they have made the choices to code that platform and deploy it the way they did? You might think: what place does New Church theology, New Church teachings, have in mathematics or in programming?

He would say, probably more likely than not, there are opportunities to explore how to embed this in a very authentic way. But it is not meant to be contrived. A vision for that could be that they work together, with faculty supporting faculty, seeking consensus.

He is not an expert in these areas but they are having these dialogues and questioning how much and how deeply can they incorporate all this. So that when you visit the campus, you graduate, and get your diploma, the faculty can be certain they have given you the opportunity to have as much as they can possibly offer that is distinct and essential.

Bishop Lindrooth told about Dr. Neil Simonetti, who teaches mathematics and science at the College, who was asked what New Church theology has to do with mathematics, and he said that when you start thinking about concepts like “this adds up to this” and formulas, and you begin to see some of the workings of God behind what is happening.

This is happening in the classroom, where teachers get to tell these stories and market them, putting them out to the world in a very authentic way. That is what will attract the students who want exactly what the College is offering.

Question from Minnesota: What are the requirements for new faculty to teach at Bryn Athyn College, and how can people learn more about or interview for teaching positions?

Sean said he is becoming more familiar with the technical requirements associated with being a faculty member. The Faculty Council ensures that certain percentages within the faculty are committed to and aware of the principles of faith that New Church higher education is founded on. He is confident that they are delivering on that in the classroom.

As for what interested people can do to find out more he suggested they contact Dr. Marcy Latta, the Chief Academic Officer, to learn more, or reach out through him. They can learn more and be put in the queue for consideration. And we are always interested in learning and hearing more from faculty in other institutions so that they can be aware of how they might be able to fill future needs here.

Closing Question

Bishop Lindrooth said this had been a really exciting conversation. He wanted to wind up with: What does Sean see as the College's role in different levels of community – local, the surrounding Delaware Valley, and the world – as it develops in the future?

Sean thinks the College's role is to help people lead useful lives globally and to be known for that, and to be known for providing people with these authentic constructs that they can rely on day-to-day. He thinks that comes through every graduate who leaves the institution with that knowledge in heart and mind. That is a profound global impact wherever their careers or their lives of use lead them.

Bishop Lindrooth feels the College will know it has been successful when it is known and relied on throughout the area as the place to find spiritual and academically rigorous or spiritually-based academic wisdom – not just knowledge, but wisdom. People with the biggest questions in life will know they can find answers here.



President Sean Connelly presenting his vision for the College at a Charter Day brunch in the Brickman Center.

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In Search of Holy Ground

The Rev. Derek P. Elphick

Lessons; Exodus 3:1-10; Joshua 5:13-15; Arcana Coelestia 1748, 6844, 6845

We all need the experience of walking on “sacred ground.” We need this in order to feel alive, to stay spiritually awake, and to feel the presence of God.

We need to spend time on “sacred ground” – to be reminded that our lives have a deeper purpose than the predictable, mundane, routine aspects of daily living. This is so that we may feel the influence of heaven and the Lord, and that we may be moved by such spiritual virtues as courage, patience, perseverance, forgiveness, love and gratitude.

A “sacred ground” moment might be being present at the birth of a child, or with a loved one transitioning from this world to the next. A bride and groom stand on sacred ground when they declare their undivided love for each other – when they say, “I do.”

And we stand on sacred ground:

- When we experience an overwhelming sense of peace after going through a bitter struggle or temptation
- When we let go of trying to control everything in our lives and instead put our complete trust and confidence in the Lord, and suddenly feel His presence
- At the top of a mountain, by the ocean – when we recognize that none of these marvels, these miracles, would be possible without God

These “sacred ground” moments tend to be few and far between because we live in a world of time and space and our bodies get tired. When this happens, we have less resilience and may find ourselves being impatient, intolerant, reactionary, unkind and judgmental.

Another reason we might feel far removed from “sacred ground” is that

we live in a world that dazzles us with astonishingly sophisticated technologies that have a way of seizing our attention and interest. They are designed to make our lives more comfortable, easy and pain free.

Part of us might say, “What’s wrong with this?” And one answer could be, “Nothing.” If you had a choice of traveling to a distant land on foot, by horse, by train, or by plane, why not make use of the most efficient, comfortable, easiest, pain-free mode of transportation?

That said, technologies do change the way we perceive the world. Take our modern-day “printing press” – the internet – as an example. Our society had become enamored with our technological capabilities, our electronic screens, and our hand-held devices.

Again, the question could be asked: “And what’s wrong with this?” One answer would be “Nothing,” in that from a hand-held device we can access any kind of information around the world, instantaneously, 24/7. We can connect with other people all around the world – hundreds, thousands, millions – instantaneously, 24/7.

It’s an amazing new frontier – or in the context of this sermon, a new kind of “ground” that we find ourselves walking on.

But there’s a downside to this hyper “connectedness” – that this medium can separate us from God and from each other. It can distort our sense of what’s real and what’s important.

For example, there is growing evidence to suggest that those who use social media as their primary means of building relationships with others actually feel lonelier and more depressed the more they use it. (See *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt and *Lost Focus* by Johann Hari.)

This applies to our current generation – especially the younger generation – but we are all susceptible to the pitfalls of this uncharted electronic territory.

Now, a sermon is obviously not the place to get into all the reasons why this particular technology might be changing the way people perceive the world and each other, but its dangers are very much related to the Scriptural text we are exploring here, so let’s jump right in.

Moses and Joshua, the two great liberators of Israel, were both told to take the shoes off their feet if they wished to hear what the Lord was telling them. In both cases, they didn’t realize they were standing on sacred ground and were actually in the presence of God. Only after they had been mentally prepared – by symbolically removing their shoes – were they in a position to hear the Lord.

Moses and Joshua received important instructions that led to two crucial turning points in the history of the Israelites: their escape from Egypt under Moses’ leadership, and their entry into the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership.

In certain parts of the world, removing your shoes before entering a building or designated space is not only expected – it is done as a sign of reverence and respect. It's a simple ritual that triggers a mental response – a mental cue or reminder that you have entered someone else's "space" and ought to respect it as such.

This tradition fits in with the spiritual meaning of our text. We learned in our reading that the feet correspond to the lowest part of the natural mind, and that the sandals or shoes which cover the feet – thus forming a barrier between the feet and the ground – correspond to "an even more earthly" part of the natural mind. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1798.)

A couple of noteworthy points emerge here: First, the "removal of shoes" describes a mental process, not a physical one. Secondly, we are being introduced to the idea that our natural mind has higher and lower levels to it.

We might be tempted to think of the natural mind as being all one thing but the teachings of our church use very precise language to describe the different levels of the natural mind and how they perform different functions. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1748, 3322, 3761.)

For example, we use the higher levels of our natural mind to create and problem solve, to work on projects, to enjoy a good conversation, whereas we use the lower levels of our natural mind to interpret physical sensations like seeing, hearing, touching and eating.

This precise distinction between levels of the natural mind brings us to the why – to why the removal of shoes plays such a pivotal role in understanding the significance of this text. Again, we learned in our reading that:

*If those levels of the [natural] mind consist solely in bodily and earthly interests the Divine influences coming into [the natural mind] are **reduced to nothing** since they are **incompatible with what is there**.
(*Arcana Coelestia* 6845)*

That's strong language; "*reduced to nothing*."

What are these "Divine influences" which the Lord wishes to share with us which are, nevertheless, "*reduced to nothing*" if we don't become aware of, and cast aside, the barrier that's blocking those influences?

These are spiritual qualities, such as courage, perseverance, forgiveness, love, gratitude – all of which we ask the Lord for in prayer. These Divine influences are also deep states of mind, like peace, order, wisdom, redemption – all of which our soul craves.

The point is this: none of these Divine influences can reach down into the world we are living in – that is, reach down into our conscious natural mind, until two things happen:

1. We, like Moses, must “turn aside” (reflect) to see why the bush burns but is not consumed.
2. We need to symbolically “remove our shoes” because this switch in mental processing helps us realize that we’re always standing on sacred ground. And that we are, therefore, always in the presence of God.

Let’s go back to the world we’re living in. As marvelous as the internet is, it also has no filter. This means we can learn about every disorder, murder, crisis, argument, war, disease, famine, lawsuit, injustice – not just in this country but in every country around the globe. And not just occasionally but every day, or every hour, if we so choose.

And what is the human mind meant to do with all this information? No wonder people have a hard time finding sacred ground.

This gets to the crux of our spiritual lesson because the lowest part of our natural mind – the part that “*consists solely in bodily and earthly interests*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6845) – is incapable of interpreting what it sees in any rational way. As it is a result, it can only react in inflammatory and unhelpful ways because it is defending the base desires and materialistic wants of our lowest self.

So, the first step in making sense of anything that disturbs us is to “turn aside” from the path we are currently walking and simply *stop*.

We are taught that to “turn aside” means to reflect. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6836.)

Reflection is the antidote to the knee-jerk reactions of the lowest level of our natural mind which, like the disciple Thomas, declares that it will only believe that which can be “seen with the eyes” and “touched with the hands.” It is the most stubborn part of the natural mind because it refuses to move beyond what our physical senses tell us, which also explains why it is the last to be regenerated. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6843, 9726.)

This is why “turning aside” and taking time to reflect is so important. It opens our natural mind to the influences of Divine truth, the teachings of the Lord’s Word represented by the burning bush. One teaching simply says: “*without reflection we cannot be reformed.*” (*Spiritual Experiences* 739) Without it we have no awareness of our “*interior life.*” (*Ibid.*)

Spiritual reflection lifts us out of dark places (see *Spiritual Experiences* 733-738) to reveal the sacred ground that is all around us.

This text from the Lord’s Word has many timely lessons. It reminds us that the world cannot produce *food for our soul*, no matter how sophisticated and ingenious our modern-day conveniences and technologies might be. And it reminds us that the world cannot create *meaning* either.

If we wish to go in search of these things, we must go in search of sacred

ground because only on this ground will we feel the Lord's presence. We do this by letting the Lord lead us, and by letting Him help us to "step aside" from the noise and confusion – from the snap judgments of our lowest self which is incapable of viewing life in a rational way.

And so the Lord helps us "remove our shoes" because only then are we in a position to hear His voice. Only then can He talk to us from the burning bush.

So, when the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses! And he said: "Here I am." Then God said . . . take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

Amen.



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Forgiveness

The Rev. Erik J. Buss

Lessons: John 8:2-11; Matthew 18:21-35; Heavenly Secrets 9014.3

For many, forgiveness is one of the hardest things we will ever do. Yet we know the Lord wants us to. Almost His last words were: “Father forgive them.” He told us to forgive 70 times seven times. And we pray: “Forgive us our debts as (or to the extent that) we forgive our debtors.” We receive the Lord’s forgiveness to the extent that a forgiving spirit is in us, so forgiveness is vital for our own souls as well as our present happiness.

And yet it is hard. People hurt us, sometimes in big ways, sometimes small. Sometimes the hurts are done to someone else that we love, which can actually make forgiveness even harder. We have all had these experiences where there is festering pain, where we get angry all over again, where we find ourselves making harsh judgments or feeling hurt as if it happened yesterday rather than years ago. How do we move forward in ways that allow for safety, hope and healing?

What is forgiveness? Let’s assume for now that we are talking about real harm done, not something petty or imagined. Webster’s Dictionary says forgiveness is “to cease to feel resentment against an offender.” New Church teaching says: “That to which no attention is paid is said to be forgiven.” (*Heavenly Secrets 10504*) It’s interesting that forgiveness is easiest to define by its opposite: not feeling revenge and anger, not paying attention to or dwelling on the issue any more.

Let’s think about forgiveness from thinking about the wording of the Lord’s Prayer. We pray: “Forgive us our debts.” When we forgive a debt we say: “You owe me nothing.” It is like signing a receipt saying: “Paid in full.” Saying, “I forgave the debt now you owe me a favor,” is not forgiving the debt; that’s bartering. So, in some ways forgiveness means that person does not owe us something.

Part of our definition of forgiveness must also take into account what forgiveness is not, because false kinds of forgiveness can cause a lot of pain. First of all, forgiveness is not pretending it never happened or not judging anything. We are told in the Word to “judge righteous judgment.” If someone cheats you or lies to you, you are supposed to say it happened and that it is

wrong. If someone says something cruel, there is no virtue in pretending it was not cruel or that it did not hurt. This is a false politeness that gets in the way of forgiveness and allows wounds to fester.

New Church teaching clarifies the common erroneous belief that if someone asks for forgiveness you must automatically forgive and forget. (*True Christian Religion* 459:10) Some Christians might feel that saying this about a wrongdoer does the same thing and ask again and again for the forgiveness you must forgive and forget. This is not forgiveness and it is actually not kind.

There is a big difference between judging (saying it did happen and it was bad), and condemning (saying the person is evil for doing this). This is why the Lord said to the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I pass sentence on you” – meaning, you *are* guilty, but I am not judging you to hell because of it. Echoing the Lord, we can say “I’m not going to pay attention to this, I won’t fixate on it, but I am aware it did happen.”

The second false idea about forgiveness is that we don’t have to “forgive and forget.” Sometimes we need to remember. Obviously, you don’t send your child over to the house of someone who was abusive. You don’t readily trust a liar or give money to a thief. You should not forget someone who could not keep a trust and tell that person more private information. What you do is look at their subsequent life. The Lord said: “Go and sin no more.” The question is: has this person changed? If so, then you might consider forgetting, but until then you need to keep the weakness in mind.

But even if we don’t forget there are different kinds of remembering. You don’t need to remember lest their deeds go unpunished, as if you are the guardian of the consequences for their deeds. Every evil brings its own punishment; there is a universal justice. One way to think of forgiveness is to say: “You did this terrible thing. If in your heart you actually meant it and it was not a mistake, then you are bringing incredible pain into your life. I feel compassion and sadness that you have so much pain.” Thinking of the punishment that is already there eases the need to remember certain parts of the harm done.

We’ve considered some false ideas about forgiveness, so now let’s look at some true ones. Our reading said forgiveness often takes place over years, rather than in a moment. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9014) It takes a while to let go of the pain enough that it no longer features in our lives, that we pay no attention to. We might let go of the anger fairly soon, but trust takes longer to build.

Here is another definition of forgiveness the Lord gives: “To forgive is not to regard any one from [the point of view of] evil but from [the point of view of] good.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7697) That’s a profound statement. The Lord does this to us in that He always looks at us from good and we need to do the same.

When we don’t look at others from good but from the point of view of evil,

we put ourselves in grave danger. Unforgiveness is tied to revenge; you want the other person to *pay*, and the underlying emotion there is hate. It is looking at someone else from the point of view of evil. You can see this when you think about how you beat others up in your mind when angry.

The risk we face, then, is that unforgiving feelings, anger and resentment cause hellish emotions in us that hurt us more than what anyone else can do to us. If you think about it, what others can do to us, however serious, can affect us only from the outside in. Our response, when we let hell in, harms us from the inside out, which is far more damaging. The saying goes that unforgiveness is “drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.” We need to acknowledge the pain of betrayal and hurt, but in a healthy way, one that involves taking responsibility for our own response.

It might seem absurd to think of forgiveness as shunning the evil of hatred or revenge. Maybe part of you is saying: “Wait a minute, *they* hurt *me!* Why should I have to do spiritual work?” Misdirection is one of the main tactics of the hellish influences in our life. Because revenge by its nature sucks us down, it makes a heavenly perspective seem silly. But in the end we are the only people who can change our internal dialog and response, however the feelings and thoughts may have gotten there.

We may wonder: “What if they never say sorry? What if they never see it?” That would be really sad for them and for you. It would be nice if they owned up and helped you to heal. But let’s be clear: their saying sorry is not why you forgive. It helps, no doubt, but forgiveness is something inside. You can see this because if you are in the wrong state of mind, someone could grovel on their knees and you would not forgive. Bottom line: forgiveness is a decision you need to make for your own spiritual well-being, independent of what others do or say.

Something that can help us with forgiveness is hearing the Lord’s words: “He that is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” It is not pleasant to do but think of all the bad things you’ve done over your life. Every

Here is another definition of forgiveness the Lord gives: “To forgive is not to regard any one from [the point of view of] evil but from [the point of view of] good.” That’s a profound statement. The Lord does this to us in that He always looks at us from good and we need to do the same.

unkind word, every selfish behavior, every untrue statement. And now add in all the even more rotten things you've wanted and dwelt on that you never had the courage to act on. It's a pretty big list. Forgiveness comes, in part, when we see that we are more like that person who hurt us than we are like the Lord. It's not us and the Lord up on high and that person down below us. We are all sinners who need the Lord.

This principle is what was expressed in our reading in the parable about a man who owed his master 10,000 talents. This was a vast sum (think \$2 billion). The man forgave the debt. That person went to someone who owed him 300 denarii (think \$20,000) and demanded the money. When the person could not pay him he had him thrown into debtors' prison. The point of the parable is that our job is to look first into our own hearts, and see that we are not perfect, and in fact owe the Lord far more than we can ever repay. From that place of humility, look at the other person. It will be much easier then to see that person from a place of compassion and not of hate.

A way to put these teachings into action is to seek to have compassion on someone who has deeply hurt you – real compassion for the pain that person must be feeling because of the hell in his or her life. Or if they did mean it, or did but don't mean it now, have compassion for the pain and regret they now feel. This is such a healing attitude to look at others from.

As we look to move forward in our lives in a forgiving way, the first step is to acknowledge the harm done. Say it is wrong, unfair, horrible. Do not feel guilty for having been hurt. The second step is to take responsibility for your response. Sadly, harm done to you can let hell into your heart without any choice on your part. And you are responsible for getting it out because you are the only one who can. Forgiveness is saying: "I refuse to do the double damage of letting hell into my heart because of what you did. I will not drink the poison to spite you." Then turn to the Lord and ask Him to help in letting it go.

On this journey of moving forward some other techniques can help. We can ask what is good in that person? When we are hurt by someone he becomes what he did. He becomes "the liar," "the cheat," rather than a person who loves his wife and works hard, but who also lied. In doing this we separate the acting from the person. And the Lord does not look at this attitude: "But Jesus stooped down and wrote in the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear."

We move forward on this journey deeply when we apply the words of the prayer: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." When you think of the hurt that person did you, think of something in yourself that needs forgiveness. It will help you forgive that other person. Or turn it around. If you need forgiveness from the Lord, in what way can you give it? You create your

own vessel that receives forgiveness to the extent you give it out.

Forgiveness may be the hardest of all things we do. It is where we say once and for all, I am responsible for my feelings, and for my spiritual welfare. It is right to feel anger and a desire to protect. It is also right to seek restitution. And that said, it is even more important to say: “You may have done terrible things to me, but I will not allow hell to be in me because of that.”

The Lord forgives us right away. He never holds anything against us. But in order to receive His forgiveness He needs you to give it out. *“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, that My yoke is easy and My burden light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Simple Evangelization

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

Social media have been a productive forum for cultivating interest in the New Church. By publishing videos on YouTube and promoting content on Facebook, the church has successfully shared its theology with tens of millions of people all over the globe. *OfTheLeftEye* has been even more successful in getting the uniquely valuable message from the Lord in His Second Coming out there. Because of social media content, we know that large numbers of people accept and are comfortable with our unique teachings.

That said, social media have been declining in their effectiveness as a platform for conveying our message. With the addition of artificial intelligence, social media platforms have been bloated with poorly created, inaccurate content that increasingly gets published simply to gain attention. With an exponential increase in online misinformation, it is becoming more difficult to find our content amid the noise.

That is frustrating. Online advertising campaigns for congregations don't draw people to us as well as they did before. A pastor can have tens of thousands of followers on his social media accounts, and yet it doesn't translate into new people attending church.

It is not surprising that these forms of "anonymous outreach tactics" are weak solutions for a growing church. Churches are communities of human beings who care for and love each other and look to sharing a presence of the Lord in our worship.

This raises the question of what works in evangelization. The answer is that many of the methods that have worked in the past are still just as important as

they were before. Churches grow when people invite their friends to worship with them. Churches grow when members of the church are willing to welcome newcomers into their homes and church circles of friends. Churches grow when people are willing to care about the newcomers and serve them as they would their friends who are already members. Social media can provide general information on who we are, but that is just a context to allow the traditional one-on-one human interaction that is so important to support people discovering the Lord in their lives.

Frequently, people hesitate to invite someone new to church because of aspects of the church they criticize. All organizations have human aspects and points of difference of opinion about practices. Since all churches are made up of people, there is no such thing as a perfect congregation. But consider this: your friends could actually be really helped by the relationships (both with the Lord and with the other members of the church) because you invited them to church and gave them the opportunity to become familiar with its people and its teachings. There may be situations in the future in which those relationships and the Lord's guidance could be life saving.

Consider the Lord's voice in "the Great Commission" in *Matthew 28*. "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*"

If you have an opportunity to invite a friend, please consider doing so as a way to serve your friend. If you see people you do not recognize at church, greet them and introduce yourself. Your presence in church as an ambassador matters.

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On the Varieties of Prayers and the Organic Nature of Conversation with God

The Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick

Lord, I cry out to You;

Make haste to me!

Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.

Let my prayer be set before You as incense,

The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

(Psalm 141: 1, 2)

When He was here on earth, our Lord gave us His model prayer (*Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11: 2-4*). This Master Prayer sets a high standard for speech with God. Sincerely reciting this prayer can open our minds to receive influx from heaven. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2535, 6476, 6619, 8864, 3285; *Divine Providence* 191.) It is a means of aligning our thoughts with His plans, allowing Him to enlighten and guide us.

In reality, most of the prayers we speak rarely rise to the level of the Master Prayer. Our spontaneous prayers when we are in distress, for the sick who are suffering, or for the success of another's efforts – all of these have their own form and content. And nowhere in revelation are we forbidden from using other forms of prayer. In fact, the requirements for prayer on our part are quite simple, as we read in *Arcana Coelestia* 2535:

“He shall pray for thee.” That this signifies that it will thus be revealed, is evident from the signification of “praying.” Prayer, regarded in itself, is speech with God, and some internal view at the time of the matters of the prayer, to which there answers something like an influx into the perception or thought of the mind, so that there is a certain opening of the man’s interiors toward God; but this with a difference according to the man’s state, and according to the essence of the subject of the prayer. If the man prays from love and faith, and for only heavenly and spiritual things, there then comes forth in the prayer something like a revelation (which is manifested in the affection of him that prays)

as to hope, consolation, or a certain inward joy. It is from this that to “pray” signifies in the internal sense to be revealed.” (Cf. 9475, 10295)

Our role is to speak sincerely with our God while we are thinking of heavenly things that only He can provide. This doesn't mean that our prayers may never contain requests for earthly or material things. It's that these natural things must be secondary to the spiritual ideals and practices required to make these natural things serve a spiritual purpose beyond fulfilling a natural desire. So, we may pray for success here on earth so that we may be of greater service to our neighbor. For health, so that we may continue to support those who depend on us for material, emotional and spiritual support. And for the success of our church and country, so that all who inhabit these may have the opportunity to live in safety and prosperity, and to learn of the heavenly kingdom to come. And while we may often default to the Model Prayer, we also know from experience that when our hearts are deeply moved, we often spontaneously pray, our heart speaking of its own accord. St. Augustine described prayer as “the articulation of love,” and described it:

He who prays with desire sings in his heart even though his tongue be silent, but if he prays without desire, he is dumb before God even though his voice sounds in the ears of men.

Our personal prayers will take a variety of forms, and will change as our states and circumstances vary and evolve. We grow in and through prayer. So how do we cultivate a prayer life that incorporates the elements of genuine prayer and also allows our hearts to freely express the wide variety of desires that it contains? Can a person with a sincere heart pray “poorly”? Is all “speech with God” also prayer? And is there a difference between “speaking with God” and “speaking at God”?

On the Varieties of Prayers

Our Lord wants to hear from us. He wants to connect with us so that He can guide and teach us. But we have to be willing to consciously approach Him and accept and receive what He wishes to tell us. While we may, from our early teaching and experience, default to His Model Prayer, we should not be limited to simply repeating these words. Often our hearts yearn for more immediate relief from distress or to instinctively express profound joy and delight. And so from our hearts we speak to our God, expressing our inner desires to Him. However imperfect these prayers, He wants to hear from us.

His response may not be what we wish, as often we are impatient with His Providence's responses to our personal requests. But we learn how to best speak to Him by speaking to Him. Our communication with our Heavenly

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Father is much like our conversations with our close friends: over time they vary in tone and content, and in extended relationships evolve and grow ever deeper, exposing ever deeper layers of our spirit, as we learn how to better express ourselves with those we deeply trust.

This deep form of friendship (for lack of a better term) is what He desires. He wants us to freely express to Him the secrets He already knows we keep, so that He can guide and teach us how to fully trust Him with all our soul, heart and strength. Trust precedes faith.

Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all. (D.L. Moody)

And so I urge you: carry on an ongoing conversation with God about the daily stuff of life, a little like Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof. For now, do not worry about 'proper' praying, just talk to God.

(Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. Foster, p. 12)

We know from both the New and Old Testaments that the Lord Himself spoke a variety of prayers, and that many people mentioned in both testaments entreated God in a variety of ways.

Jesus prayed for His disciples and all believers (*John 17*); for help from the Father (*Matthew 26*); for those who crucified Him and for His own spirit (*Luke 23*); in thanks to the Father (*Matthew 11*); and in desperation on the cross (*Matthew 27* and *Mark 15*).

There are many examples of prayer in the Old Testament. Here are a few examples of three of the numerous types of prayer that can be found there:

Petition

- Hannah's prayer for a son (*1 Samuel*)
- Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance (*2 Kings 19*)
- Abraham's servant's prayer to find a wife for Isaac (*Genesis 24*)

Intercession

- Samuel's prayer for Israel (*1 Samuel 12*)
- Solomon's prayer at the temple dedication (*1 Kings 8*)
- Moses' prayer as the Egyptian army approached (*Exodus 14*)

Confession

- David's confession to Nathan (*2 Samuel 12*)
- Daniel's confession (*Daniel 9*)

- Israel's confession (*Micah 7*)

Other types of prayers found in the Old and New Testaments include thanksgiving, adoration, supplication, deliverance from enemies and prayer of faith. And the *Psalms of David* contain a wide variety of types of prayer.

Another observation is the wide variety of the circumstances surrounding these prayers. Some were spoken in calm states of reflection, while others were cries of a desperate heart. In many cases the heart spoke without undue concern for the form of the prayer. People prayed where they were, physically and emotionally, their words drawing their spirits closer to God. We may not feel free to be so spontaneous:

Many of us today live in a kind of spiritual apartheid. We segregate out a small corner of pious activities and then can make no spiritual sense out of the rest of our lives. We have become so accustomed to this way of living that we fail to see the contradiction in it. The scandal of Christianity in our day is the heresy of a five percent spirituality. Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. Foster, p. 169)

In many ways, our speech with God will reflect the pattern of our conversations with those close to us. We openly share our hopes, concerns and complaints with our close friends. With them we may rant about the unfairness of life, our struggle to change and grow. And we may share stories of the successes and victories we achieve.

In a similar way, Our Heavenly Father wants us to feel equally safe in feeling vulnerable with Him, confessing our need for His strength and light as we progress through the many varied states of life here on earth. And while we may know what we should do in difficult situations, prayer may provide both more strength and more light to actually carry out our duty.

Our hearts continually desire something, wanting this, wanting that. When we align these wants through prayer with what the Lord desires for us, we invite His influence into our lives. Through prayer we incline our hearts toward God and His plans, and consciously open the way for Him to communicate with us. Sincere prayer allows our thoughts to rise like the smoke of a pleasing incense offering to the God who dispenses all things.

A Prayer Taxonomy

Since prayer is essentially a personal conversation with God, it is difficult to classify the various types of prayers, since our personal experience of praying will be unique. And in one sense, any classification can introduce limitations that don't actually exist when one prays, since our prayers rarely fall into a single category. But in the interest of expanding our understand of the nature

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and uses of prayer, here is a very general classification of 10 types of prayer:

Focus

	Intimacy with God	Self-transformation	Ministry
	Looking upward	Looking inward	Looking outward
Confession	X	X	
Supplication	X	X	X
Intercession			X
Adoration	X		
Thanksgiving	X		
Examination		X	
Meditative	X	X	X
Petitionary	X	X	X
Enlightenment		X	X
Strength		X	X

Obviously, this is a very general classification. But I offer it here to show the potential spectrum of the uses and forms of prayer. While we may, in formal situations, default to the Model Prayer, in many cases our hearts find their own unique ways of expressing themselves.

The Organic Nature of Prayer

| *Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you. (St. Augustine)*

Genuine prayer is the basis of a living relationship with our God. So as our relationship with Him changes and grows, prayers to Him also evolve.

The prayers of a child for a new toy, for a sick parent to get well, or for help with feeling lonely are the instinctive requests of an innocent heart. The prayers of an adolescent for more friends or popularity, help with understanding difficult topics in school, and for getting their parents to understand their struggles, represent a higher level of subjects of concern. The prayers of a young adult building a career and family for safety and success are yet another level. And the prayers of a mature an aging adult who faces the struggles of aging, health, potential loneliness and feeling of uselessness are still another.

Obviously, the prayers that a person may offer as he or she passes through the various stages of life will change, as their relationship to the people and the world around them changes. Prayers for new toys are replaced by requests for help with relationships; these in turn are superseded by petitions for material success and safety for oneself and those for whom one is responsible; and these then fall away as one's focus moves to the challenges of aging.

At the same time, one's relationship with God should also mature. The child who sees God as a distant Father who somehow cares for him is replaced by the adolescent who sees God as a force somehow operating in the world. A young adult gradually comes to see his dependence on Providence in guiding his and everyone else's lives. And the mature adults who, from experience, understands the true level of their dependence on their Heavenly Father. At each phase the person will ask for something different from the Heavenly Father.

Understanding the organic nature of our relationship to God helps us also understand the organic nature of our prayers. We grow in and through prayer. And in praying we learn to pray more effectively.

Pray Fearlessly, Listen Carefully, Live Honorably

The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays. (Soren Kierkegaard)

We rarely come to prayer with pure thoughts and emotions. We offer our prayers from the tangled mass of our current thoughts and emotions. And in praying we seek transformation. Sometimes we ask for some part of ourselves to be changed; at other times we seek the transformation of another's life and circumstances. And on a higher level still, we ask for the transformation of our church and country so that the kingdom of heaven may draw closer to this earth.

The essence of prayer is asking; the purpose of prayer is transformation in some sense.

I believe we must assume that our Heavenly Father likes to be asked. He wants us to openly state to Him what He knows we already want but may yet be unable to receive. In one sense, His ability to help us is limited by our limited asking. So I propose that we ask fearlessly.

At the same time, simply ranting to God about our circumstances isn't likely to bring relief. We may feel better after emptying our hearts before God. But unless we are willing to listen to the answers we receive in prayer, our asking is in vain. We must know the difference between speaking with God and simply yelling at Him.

So, a key element of all prayer is waiting. For in waiting we allow Him

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to change our state so that we may more fully see what He is saying. Our impatience for answers can short-circuit the very responses we need to hear. So, we must learn to wait intelligently, asking in prayer and then continuing with our lives, knowing that in His time we will receive the answer we need – not necessarily the answer we want. And in time we will learn to trust that His responses to our requests are most often better than what we originally requested. He knows best what we truly need.

One way to avoid the yearning for answers to our prayers is to view every prayer as an offering. The child who offers his awkward scribble to his mother does not expect her to reward him for his work, other than, perhaps, to post it on the refrigerator. Similarly, when we see our prayers as an offering to our Heavenly Father – and offering which He gratefully accepts – we no longer expect Him to immediately answer our prayer. He already knows what we need. He is waiting for us to ask. Now we must wait intelligently.

We wait intelligently when we focus on the uses available to us. Useful activity draws a protective boundary around our conscious thoughts, holding out the distressing ruminations that can suffocate our spirit. Our attempts to live by what He teaches are also prayer, and in living this way we can, in one sense, “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18) Indeed, praying without a determination to live so that our prayers may be answered ultimately undermines the very prayers we offer.

In time we will learn to trust that His responses to our requests are most often better than what we originally requested. He knows best what we truly need.

It is because prudence is from God and not from man that the Christian in his devotions prays that God will lead his thoughts, counsels, and deeds; adding also, because from himself he cannot do this. When, moreover, he sees any one doing good he says that he has been led to it by God; and many other like things. How can any one so speak unless at the time he interiorly believes it? And believing this interiorly is from heaven. But when one thinks within himself and collects arguments in favor of human prudence, he can accept the opposite belief, which is from the world. Nevertheless, the internal faith prevails in those who acknowledge God in heart; while the external faith prevails in those who do not acknowledge God in heart, whatever their professions may be. (Divine Providence 191: 2)

A Balancing Act

It's important to live a balanced prayer life. While we may only seldom privately repeat the Master Prayer, preferring to compose our own petitions as life confronts us, it's important to also refer back to the Model prayer. For it is designed to open the way for our thoughts to rise in a manner pleasing to our Heavenly Father. He gave it for a reason.

Swedenborg provided this testimony from his own experience:

Whenever I have been reading the Lord's prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven; and I noticed that there was an influx from the Lord into every detail of the prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the prayer. The influx was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another; hence also it was made evident how infinite are the things contained in the prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them. (Arcana Coelestia 6476; cf. 6619, 8864)

While our personal prayers for our individual needs have their place, the Model Prayer remains central to a healthy prayer life.

Being Vulnerable with Your Heavenly Father

Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit
(Bidden or unbidden, God is present)
(Erasmus, quoted by Carl Jung)

In sincere prayer we have the opportunity to be completely vulnerable to a Father Who can only love us. Our fears that we are unworthy of this love, that we are so corrupted through our heredity and environment, that the Almighty would never listen to our awkward, silly requests, or that our circumstances automatically preclude His concern and involvement in our lives – all of these are false reasonings. None need to stand between us and a God who both rules the universe with ease, and is present with everyone whether they so choose to receive Him or not. (See *Spiritual Diary* 2234)

In prayer we ask that His power and light may become more and more our own. Sincere prayer is a mighty weapon in the hands of an honorable person trained to use it effectively. Let us live so that our prayers may become the means to our becoming the angel that our Heavenly Father wishes us to become.

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He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. (The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence)

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Rooted

Naomi Reid

What does it mean to have roots? What about having a grounded personality? Don't these ideas make us think of something positive?

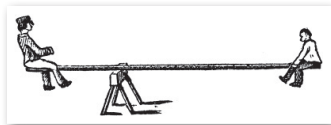
What about the opposite? What if we become rooted in an evil life? What could that look like? I asked an AI image program to generate a picture of a person whose feet are stuck in the dirt, because they have tree roots growing over and around their feet. This is one of the better images that I was presented with.



I have heard the idea bantered around that you can think of your life like a see-saw or a teeter-totter that used to exist in children's playgrounds when I was young. If you haven't seen one, there is a board that is supported in the middle and balances perfectly, if there is no weight on either side. But if two children sit on each end of the board, the side with the heavier child will weigh that side down. I have heard that some people believe that if you do more good deeds than bad, then the see-saw would be weighted toward the positive side and you would likely end up in heaven after you die. However, if you do more bad deeds than good, you would end up in hell because the negative side is heavier.

I entertained this idea for a short period of time, but I knew there was something wrong with it. After some reflection I was shown another idea to consider.

Think of a person who has done a million good deeds in his life, and only one bad deed. The see-saw is heavily weighted toward the good side. Wouldn't that person end up in heaven for sure?



Well, let's just add some more weight to the side of the one bad deed. This person sticks up for that bad deed. He makes excuses for it and has decided that what he did is acceptable and even good (in spite of the fact that the Lord says it is not).

He rationalizes that the Bible was written a long time ago, times have changed, and the Lord would certainly understand. Perhaps the Lord has not caught up with the times? After all, society considers this deed acceptable now, so therefore it must be fine.

When asked about the deed, the person stands by it – strong and proud. He would go to his grave defending this one thing, refusing to budge for anyone or anything. You see, he has become rooted in that evil. His feet are firmly stuck in the ground, and the roots have grown over them so strongly that he cannot be unrooted by anyone. Swedenborg teaches this idea very clearly: “Evils become *inrooted* in a person when he lives in them and loves them.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1077)

I shared this idea recently in a Sunday School class. The children (grades one to three) understood it quickly. I asked what would happen if the Lord Himself tried to pull the person out of the roots that had grown around the person's feet. They said the person's feet would break! Yes – they saw it easily.

I asked them what would that person have to do to get his feet unstuck from the roots. One of the children told me that the person would have to repent. Right again! Next question. How does a person repent? The same child said that the person would have to feel sorry and say sorry to the Lord and also to the person they have hurt and not do it again. Very good! (This child had learned about repentance at summer Bible camp, so she remembered it well.)

So, could we end up in hell just because we are rooted in one little evil? I think the difficult answer to this question is: yes. What? But we have done many good things throughout our lives, doesn't this count? Wouldn't the Lord consider that our see-saw is heavily weighted toward the good side? I think the problem is not with all of the wonderful things we have done throughout our life; the problem lies with being rooted in one evil action or false belief and being absolutely unwilling to repent or see that our belief or action is actually evil in the Lord's eyes.

But isn't the Lord merciful and doesn't He forgive us for our sins? Yes, of course He can forgive us. But what if we refuse to repent from those sins and do what is right in the Lord's eyes, because we don't feel like it? Can the Lord bring anyone into heaven that is firmly attached or rooted in evils? No. We have to get rid of our evils before we are let into heaven or we would ruin heaven for the angels who are living there. Just imagine if our one evil is that we choose to lie, when it is easier to do so, than to tell the truth. Imagine one spirit in heaven who goes around telling lies to angels. It wouldn't take long for

that one evil to cause discord – even among angels.

So, what is our option? We have all done things in our lives that if we are honest with ourselves, we know the Lord does not approve of. After all, none of us is perfect. Since it is clearly not a good idea to become firmly rooted in evil actions or false ways of thinking (that eventually lead to evil actions), we need to look carefully at our lives and ask the Lord to help us repent from the bad things we have done in the past and stay clear of doing bad things in the future. We need to say sorry to those people we have hurt and try our best to make amends to them. One little sorry hardly makes up for all the pain we have caused others if we have spent a lifetime hurting them, but at least it is a start in the right direction.

If we make an honest effort to repent from what we know we have done in the past that hurt others, the Lord can work with this. He can help us become unrooted in our evils and can lift us out of those bonds without breaking our feet in the process.

What if we don't feel like repenting? I believe that no one actually feels like doing this. It is hard work. It goes against what is easy and comfortable. But once we are willing to submit our will to the Lord and follow His ways, we begin the path to heaven. Eventually we may even feel joy in going in a better direction.

Should we expect that the evil spirits will leave us alone and not cause any more trouble for us once we have decided to reform our lives and go in a better spiritual direction? No. I believe that they will fight harder to try to get us to come back to their side. So, I wouldn't expect the path to be easy. But in the end, a life on this earth that leads us to heaven where we are freely able to walk around without roots trapping us in our place, is a far happier existence for us. After all, don't we all want to enjoy the ability to walk freely, instead of being rooted in one evil or false way of thinking, unable to leave that miserable place for all eternity?



NAOMI REID has lived in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, for many years with her husband, John. They are members of the Olivet New Church, where she plans church and social events and also helps with youth programs.

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Life Lines

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

THAT BURNING FAITH

Among all the poignant words and scenes in the Easter story – from “Hosannah!” to “Crucify Him!” and “Father forgive them” to “He is risen” – there is the haunting image of Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem that had just welcomed Him as their king.

He did not weep because He knew what was going to happen to Him later that week. He wept because the people were not understanding all that He had been teaching them throughout His life on earth. He lamented: *“If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.”* (Luke 19:42)

Sadly, we wonder, would He weep today, looking down on us 2,000 years later, with so much of the world still not listening, not following, but despairing the calamity and tragedy all around us? Yes, He might weep, forever willing that we would embrace the peace and happiness He offers. But still He would not give up on us. Always we have hope.

Jesus suffered “most grievous temptations” throughout His life on earth. We know little about them except when He was tempted by the devil. We do know that the hells were doing all they could to cast doubt on His whole mission on earth: to subdue the hells and save the entire human race.

He did this with His resurrection and glorification. Yes, He had wept that so many who had heard His teachings and witnessed His healing did not grasp the meaning for their own lives. They apparently “loved darkness more than they loved light.”

Even among His disciples and faithful followers many of them did not think they would ever see Him again. They did not understand that what He taught still could transform their lives. When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them came from the tomb to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard, *“their words seemed to them as idle tails, and they believed them not.”* (Luke 24:11) No wonder Jesus wept.

After His crucifixion but before He had risen into heaven, Jesus famously joined two of His disciples fleeing the horror of the crucifixion and walking on the road to Emmaus. They spoke of all that had happened as though He was

a stranger. He chastised them as “fools and slow of heart,” and “expounded to them on all of the Scriptures.” Suddenly “their eyes were opened, and they knew Him and he vanished out of their sight.”

When they rejoined the rest of the disciples to share this incredible experience, “They said one to another: Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?”

Earlier Jesus had told His disciples – and all of us: “There are yet many things I have to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will lead you into all truth.” (John 16:12,13)

The disciples – their hearts “burning within them” – went out then and preached the Word throughout the land, but it took more than 1,700 years for that Spirit of Truth to be revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, leading us into all truth – the spiritual sense of the Word.

The Lord gave His disciples a final charge before ascending into heaven, “opening their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,” and teach them to others. And then they “returned to Jesus with great joy.”

Going back to that tumultuous week before the crucifixion, Jesus said to the daughters of Jerusalem: “Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” (Luke 23:28)

We still weep for the children – for all the innocents caught up in the turmoil of the world, and for all those still walking in darkness, oblivious to the light of His teachings. Those who are tethered to their phones, their only link to the world, call it “doomscrolling” – scrolling through endless iterations of bad news without sure guidance or hope.

But this is the joy and the hope of Easter, rising above all the despair of the world and giving us the sure hope of “hearts burning within us” – when we understand all that He teaches and offers us as our risen Lord: that burning faith of hope and trust and love.

Weeping endures for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5)

(BMH)

IN THE ARENA

The new Vision for the General Church – “Send Me” – *Seven Years of Willingness* (New Church Life, November/December 2025) challenges all of us to respond to the call.

It may be a bit of a stretch but this vision recalls for me a favorite quote from another leader calling on citizens to be involved in the destiny of their country. It is from a famous speech by U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt, forever known as “In the Arena.”

The actual title of the speech was *Citizenship in a Republic*, delivered in

1910. Among the most memorable lines were:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who strives valiantly . . . who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who keeps himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory or defeat.

Roosevelt was challenging citizens to immerse themselves in the arena – to “dare greatly” for the worthy cause of an emerging nation.

In 1916 he published a book – *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* – a collection of articles he had written for *Metropolitan* magazine. It included this challenge: “We are citizens of a mighty Republic consecrated to the service of God above, through the service of man on this earth.” Substitute “members of consecrated Church” for “citizens of a mighty Republic” and the calling and conviction are the same. Whatever you are a part of, participate with your whole heart. We only make our lives meaningful with full commitment, whether as a leader or follower.

Freedom is essential to every aspect of our lives, but with freedom always comes responsibility. What do we choose to do with our freedom – or choose not to do?

Teddy Roosevelt’s call to get “in the arena” echoes back to the call that is at the heart of the new vision to grow the General Church in every way: “*Who will go for us? And whom shall I send?*” And the answer echoing back – from the pews, from the “arena”: “*Here I am, Lord. Send me.*”

(BMH)

HISTORY MATTERS

David McCullough was one of the great writers of American history, loved and respected for his books on the building of the Panama Canal, the soaring success of the Wright brothers, 1776 and the rich lives of John Adams, Teddy Roosevelt and Harry Truman. But the inspiration of his writing did not end with his passing in 2022 to age 89. His daughter and others have enriched his legacy with *History Matters* – a collection of his speeches and essays that capture the essence of his lifetime passion that history does matter.

The first chapter offers an example, from remarks when he was awarded the National Book Foundation’s Medal for Distinguished Contributions to

American Letters:

History shows us how to behave. History teaches, reinforces what we believe in, what we stand for, and what we ought to be willing to stand up for. History is – or should be – the bedrock of patriotism, not the chest-pounding kind of patriotism but the real thing love of country.

We could say the same thing about the history of our church, the Academy and New Church education – reinforcing what we stand for and why we love and treasure them.

One of my great memories of David McCullough was his visit to the Glencairn Museum in the early 2000s with the Massachusetts Historical Association – a trip that included a day at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. At Glencairn he gave a delightful talk at a small luncheon that was both a loving tribute to teachers and a gentle admonition that we teach history all wrong. It is not just kings and wars and dates, he said. “It is stories. Tell the stories.”

More of his wisdom culled from this memorial book:

Indifference to history isn't just ignorance, it's rude. It's a form of ingratitude.

I'm convinced that history encourages, as nothing else does, a sense of proportion about life, gives us a sense of the relative scale of our own brief time on earth and how valuable that is.

This is all true not only of the history of nations and ages, but the history of our own church and all that flows from it. I was privileged to be a student during the golden years of the Academy – with the likes of Bishop Willard Pendleton and my father, the Rev. Cairns Henderson, Richard Gladish, Bruce Glenn, Stan Ebert, Sig Synnestvedt, Lawson Pendleton, and in the Girls School Morna and Lyris Hyatt, Margaret Wilde, and so many others. But I do not recall much attention to church and Academy history – just one brief course in junior year. This was different, of course, in the College, for those studying to be New Church teachers and ministers. The rest of us got the love and respect for *Our Own Academy*, but not much of the history – and appreciation for it.

Now we are blessed with the books of the late Richard Gladish on Bishop William Henry Benade, Richard de Charms and John Pitcairn – so much of the rich history of the church and the Academy Movement, with its enduring commitment to New Church education. This is a history of vision, clarity, purpose and courage – tough decisions and clear commitment that are still the bedrock of our societies and schools. We owe these dedicated people the gratitude that history teaches – the sure sense that our history, too, matters.

McCullough is remembered in this book for his conviction that “at their core, the lessons of history are largely lessons in appreciation.”

When we look back at the men and women who dared to dream of a New Church planted in heaven and descending to take root in this needy world, building schools and keeping faith with their founding convictions, our founders deserve our attention, appreciation and gratitude. Everything we have in our churches and schools exists because of them. What drove them to commit to such a brave new course? What obstacles and doubts did they have to overcome? And how are we doing as stewards of their legacy?

Tell the stories and be grateful. History matters.

(BMH)

CHOICES MATTER

“Choices Matter” has become a marketing motto for the “new” Bryn Athyn College but it has always been a central commitment of New Church education at all levels – that our lives and purpose are defined by the choices we make.

Sean Connelly, the new President of the College, uses “Choices Matter” as a gateway for conversations with inquirers about what is unique to this college and its renewed mission.

In the transcription of a recent podcast with the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth (see page xxx), he says:

This is a way to introduce the full recognition that everybody’s choice defines who you are, how you interact with others, and what you do with your life. Ultimately, this informs you and gives you a platform for discovery – going back to the Charter purpose – of an ethical foundational platform tied to a New Church higher education based on the three-fold Word: the Old Testament the New Testament, and the teachings of the New Church.

The relevant question is: why even go to college? And he answers:

Well, if you want just facts, don’t go to college. If you want foundations and transformational lenses that you will carry with you for the rest of your life, that is why you want to go. That is the dialogue to invite people in.

This is what Bryn Athyn College of the New Church is all about – what it has always been all about and must always be all about to remain truly distinctive: the only college in the world doing what we do.

The late Bishop Willard D. Pendleton called his seminal book on our New Church philosophy *Education For Use*. From the innocent beginnings of kindergarten and the primary grades to the point of Academy and Bryn Athyn College graduates taking all they have learned into their lives, it is all about use – and preparing ultimately for the life of heaven as “a kingdom of uses.”

In 1981 prominent editor and philosopher Norman Cousins wrote a wonderful memoir, *Human Options*, which is all about the impact of choices in personal lives and history. “The purpose of education,” he said, “is to make people comfortable and confident in the presence of choices.” That is what life and education come down to – having the spiritual grounding to make good choices in life. We expand on this – that throughout our lives we are choosing ultimately between heaven and hell. And nothing prepares us for that better than New Church education – at all levels, but particularly in college, when students really begin thinking for themselves.

A favorite on many book lists is Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl was a psychologist and survivor of one of the horrific Holocaust concentration camps in World War Two, who quickly recognized that those with no meaning in their lives, nothing to live for, gave up and died. But those who saw purpose – something to live for even in those dehumanizing conditions – were the ones who survived.

We all want to make a difference in our lives – to have meaning and purpose, no matter how grand or ordinary our opportunities. What is important is not the scale of our accomplishment but the intent. Helen Keller said it simply: “Do small things as though they are great things.” We make a difference with everyday choices to follow the Lord and love our neighbors – to live lives of kindness and use, and to be examples for others.

That is why – in Bryn Athyn College and throughout our lives: Choices Matter.

(BMH)

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Music has always had a vital and vibrant role in our church, just as music helps to define every age and culture of our civilization. From the classics of Bach and Beethoven to the jazz of the Roaring 20s and the ballads of “The Oldies,” to rock and rap, music helps to define us – and sometimes alarm us.

Peggy Noonan, who usually writes about politics in *The Wall Street Journal*, but also shares worries about the coarsening of our culture, voiced a concern recently: *Has America Lost its Melody?*

She feels that something has changed in popular music and that it reflects a concerning change in the country. It revolves around sacrificing melody in music for a strident beat – more noise than poetry – and that even young people are choosing more listenable and meaningful music. But the compelling part of her column was her observation about the purpose of music.

Some years ago she found herself seated at a benefit luncheon with opera diva Beverly Sills and they quickly found themselves engrossed in a conversation about music and its purpose. She wasn’t even sure that music had

real purpose but said to her:

Deep down I think music is a stairway God gives us to get to Him. Science is a stairway too, as are all the arts, and at the top of the stairway is truth, and the truth is God.

She believes that “when a moment of really sublime artistic or scientific excellence occurs, the veil between this world and the other thins a little, and we almost see something.” She quotes singer Johnny Cash: “When the Holy Spirit is in the music, people feel it. You don’t have to explain it.”

She finds that people are more and more choosing “old music” that has melody – and purpose. She adds hopefully:

Perhaps this is a hunger too for God, for a connection with something beyond that only a well-crafted, fully felt song can provide. Music isn’t only organized sound shaped in time to spur human feeling, it isn’t only a gift, it comes from a place. A nation’s music comes from that nation’s deepest self – its culture, its society, its understanding of itself and of life.

Think of music we feel to be Divinely inspired, like Handel’s *Messiah*. Think of the music that fills our services and stirs our souls: *O Precious Sign, Silent Night, Calm on the Listening Ear of Night*. They connect. They are our stairway.

Peter Boericke wrote a heartfelt article for the May/June 2012 *New Church Life*: *Oh, Sing to the Lord a New Song* – which celebrates our affections and traditions. He noted examples in the *Psalms* and Writings of the importance of music in our services, from organ accompaniment to four-part harmony in the pews:

Gladness of heart is especially expressed by song, because in song gladness breaks forth, as it were of itself, into sound. The spiritual angels are especially affected by songs which are about the Lord, His kingdom and the Church. (Arcana Coelestia 8261:2,3) All heavenly joy produces gladness of heart, which is expressed by means of singing. (Ibid. 418)

Praise the Lord! Praise Him with the sound of a trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. (Psalm 15:1,3-6)

The sounds of the musical instruments . . . elevate the affection, and the truths give form to it. That this is so is well known to those skilled in the art of music. For this reason the Psalms of David are called

“psalms,” from psallere [to play]; they are also called songs, from singing; for they were played and sung with the accompanying sounds of various instruments. (Apocalypse Explained 326)

Music certainly has its “purpose” in our church services, providing soaring accompaniment on that “Stairway to God.”

(BMH)

50 YEARS OF THE NEW CHURCH IN WEST AFRICA

As the United States marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, we also celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Academy of the New Church in 1876. This year is also an anniversary of sorts for the General Church in West Africa. This 50th anniversary isn't precise. It is an approximation of the time when the New Church began organizing itself in West Africa – as observed from the time that I first arrived in Ghana on June 19th, 1976. Still, it is an occasion to reflect on some of the history of the church there.

The New Church has been in South Africa since the 1800s, and there were congregations in Nigeria in West Africa since the 1930s. Some of the congregations in Nigeria were still active in the 1970s, but have since mostly disappeared, and the new General Church congregations there have had no connection with them.

One enormous difference between early 20th century Africa and the state of things later in the century has been a spectacular increase in literacy and education throughout the continent. One of the results has been an increase in Christianity itself.

In 1980 *Time* magazine noted:

Many churches in North America and Western Europe have seen their membership dwindle for years. But throughout the Third World, and particularly in Africa, Christianity is undergoing the largest numerical expansion in church history.

This has not slowed since that time. Since 1900 Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has grown from 9% of the population to roughly 60% today, with most of the rest being Muslim. The increase in literacy, education and economics is especially meaningful to the New Church since it depends so greatly on people's ability to access and read the Heavenly Doctrine.

These 20th century changes set the scene for the New Church miracle that took place in Ghana during the 1960s and '70s. Ghana was the first West African country to gain independence from the colonial powers, in 1957, and had a more advanced economy than most of its neighbors. This, along

with their appetite for religious information, appears to explain why so many Ghanaians responded to the Swedenborg Foundation's policy of sending a free book to anyone who wrote and requested one.

No one knows how people in Ghana heard of this policy. In the 1960s the Foundation began getting more and more requests from this country. By the late 1960s they were sending them upwards of 10,000 books per year. In a 10-year period, they had sent more than 100,000 books to Ghana, compared with very few anywhere else. In all they probably sent more than 140,000 books to Ghana.

As is often the case with these things, several factors came together in Providence to make this happen. Tom Spiers was the Executive Director of the Swedenborg Foundation from 1960 to 1979 and took a personal interest in sending books to Africa. The Foundation had many extra books, shipping costs were low, and it had a staff that could do the packing and shipping. By 1974 their curiosity about what was happening to all these books led them to send Dr. Sig Synnестvedt, a professor at SUNY Brockport, former teacher at the Academy Secondary Schools and College, and a Foundation Board member, to Ghana to investigate. It just so happened that he had a Ghanaian colleague and friend at SUNY who was only too happy to take him there and show him around.

Sig Synnестvedt's positive report when he returned inspired me to join the Peace Corps to be able to live there for two years and come to an understanding of what this was all about. I was sent to the neighboring country of Togo and lived for two years in a remote mountain village on the border between the two countries. I loved my work, and I was able to travel extensively in Ghana and visit many of the readers and church groups. I was also able to return several times in subsequent years and decades to see the progress that was taking place.

In 1976 there were numerous readers and independent groups with an interest in the Doctrines. Some were contacting the General Conference in England, and the Convention and General Church in America, looking for help. After visiting with several of these and traveling around Ghana, I saw that one of them, a pastor in Tema named Benjamin Garna, was a very effective leader and organizer with an excellent grasp of the Writings.

I was soon traveling regularly with him to places like Ho, Kumasi, Takoradi and Cape Coast, attending churches and visiting with readers. He had a loose-knit confederation that he called the Assembly of the New Church, which had approximately a thousand members. The issue, however, was that although there was enthusiasm for the Heavenly Doctrine, the leaders had no training, and they were enthusiastic about other ideas as well. Many of them hoped for training, but as yet there was no New Church center in Ghana where

this could happen.

In 1980 Bishop King invited Pastor Garna to the General Church clergy meetings, and soon a stream of Ghanaian students recommended by Garna were attending the College and Theological School in Bryn Athyn. William Ankra-Badu was the first to graduate and be ordained in 1986, followed shortly by Simpson Darkwah, Martin Gyamfi, Nicholas Anochi and quite a few others. General Church representatives also went to Ghana in those years – Geoffrey Howard, Bishop King, Willard Heinrichs, Alfred Acton, Grant Schnarr, and others.

The General Church in Ghana was soon well-established and in the 1990s Ankra-Badu began a Theological School in Accra. During the 1990s Segno Kodjo Ayi extended the church into Togo. The Rev. Alain Nicolier also came from France to help out, and in the following decade the church spread into all of the countries that border Ghana – Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, as well as Benin – all of which are French-speaking countries. Soon the Rev. Sylvain Agnes began a French Theological School in Ivory Coast. More recently congregations have also been established, or re-established, in Nigeria.

The Swedenborg Foundation's amazing gifts of books stopped arriving in the late 1980s, a victim of higher shipping costs and less staffing, as well as the understanding that the project now belonged to the General Church. This meant a major decrease in the availability of books. In the Francophone countries the lack of French copies of the Writings has been a serious issue. The hope for the future has been the increasing ability to publish in West Africa, which has recently been taking place in Ivory Coast, and also the rapidly growing ability to use the internet.

Today there are seven congregations in Ghana, with a total membership of 140 adults, 13 congregations in Ivory Coast with a membership of 438, two congregations in Togo, two in Burkina Faso with a membership of 113, two in Benin, and two in Nigeria with a membership of 199, for a total West African membership of 890. These numbers may not seem overwhelming, but a glance at the number of baptisms recorded here in *New Church Life* may demonstrate that these congregations are larger than their formal memberships.

There are 26 active clergy and three retired clergy in West Africa. There are nine in Ghana, 12 in Ivory Coast, two in Togo, one in Burkina Faso, one in Benin, and one in Nigeria. Most of these have been trained in the theological schools in Accra, Ghana, where there are currently 10 students, and in the two schools in Ivory Coast, in Abidjan and Divo, where there are 17 students.

In addition to these there are two elementary schools in Ghana, covering kindergarten to ninth grade, one in Tema with 330 students, and the other in Asakraka with 375 students.

Over these past few decades there have been visits by Bishops Tom Kline,

Brian Keith, Peter Buss, David Lindrooth and Brad Heinrichs, as well as General Church Treasurer David Frazier and New Church educators like Kay Alden and Kathy Schrock, among others. Considering the importance of these West African developments to the General Church the financial commitment from the church has been surprisingly low.

The Rev. Martin Gyamfi has been the Regional Pastor for West Africa since 2010 before retiring last year. He has been replaced by the Rev. Sylvain Agnes, who is in Ivory Coast. In addition, the National Pastors are Eshun Ekow in Ghana, Ayi Kodjo in Togo, Evariste Dakouri in Ivory Coast, and Samuel Lompo in Burkina Faso. The church has grown and improved wonderfully in recent years under Gyamfi's leadership, and we expect this to continue with Sylvain Agnes.

A remarkable thing about the New Church in West Africa is that it did not begin through missionary work, but purely because of a large number of people's interest in reading the Heavenly Doctrine. This was its foundation, and its future will no doubt depend on that continuing love for the Word.

This year we celebrate 50 years, and actually more than that, of the progress of the New Church in West Africa, with prayers for the Lord's blessings in the next 50 years.

(JFS)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

PASTORAL MOVES

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

In January the **Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs** wrote to members and friends of the Washington New Church in Mitchellville, Maryland:

“It is my privilege on behalf of the Episcopal Office, in consultation with your Pastor and Board of Directors, to appoint the Rev. Howard Thompson as the Assistant to the Pastor at the Washington New Church to help fill the role of the Principal of Washington New Church School, which the Rev. Brian Smith will be vacating on June 30, 2026.

“The reason for the appointment is because it will take a while to repatriate Howard and Debra back to the United States after spending seven years in Australia, so time is of the essence. You will have the opportunity to officially call Howard as an Assistant Pastor later if you wish to do so.

“Howard comes to you as a seasoned career minister with an interesting portfolio of experience. Prior to entering Theological School, he was Vice President of Schools Risk Management for Willis Towers Watson, a global insurance provider. After Theological School, he spent one year serving as an Assistant Pastor and the Director of Enrollment for Bryn Athyn Church School.

“Next, he served six years overseas as Pastor of the Colchester New Church in the United Kingdom. Then he went even farther overseas to work for our sister organization in the Australian Conference as Pastor of the Sydney Society of the New Church in Roseville, where he has served for the last seven years.

“Howard and Debra are excited to start this new chapter of their lives with you, and I pray that the Lord in His Divine Providence will bless this placement.”

The Rev. Olaf Hauptmann

The Rev. Hauptmann started in December as the Pastor of the Boston Society in Massachusetts.

JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT

Use: The Soul and Life of All Heavenly Joy
The Rev. Matthew Genzlinger

This year's Jacob's Creek Family Retreat will run from July 23 through 26 in Western Pennsylvania. Every year we have a theme that helps us to focus on specific teachings from the Lord's Word and on how we can actively make them a part of our lives. Two years ago our theme was Charity. Last year it was Faith. It is only fitting this year to finish the trifacta and focus on Use.

Throughout the Heavenly Doctrine we are taught that heaven is a kingdom of uses. (*Heaven and Hell* 219) The delight of all heavenly joys spring from the delight of use. To help us appreciate this, we are invited to think about heaven in the form of a single human body. Each part of this body – or Grand Human – performs a use that benefits the whole.

This year at Jacob's Creek we will be exploring various teachings about use, as we focus on the question vital for us all: How do we allow the Lord to prepare us for our own special and unique use in His heavenly kingdom? Topics will include:

- The trine of love, wisdom and use
- Gradually becoming a form of use
- Being useful versus loving being useful (even evil people can be useful)
- Shunning evils as sins – the only way to make sure your love if use is heavenly
- What if I hate my job?
- Becoming one angel – use and marriage
- Uses in heaven: Are there garbage men? Plumbers? Midwives? Veterinarians?
- Does the Lord really need us? Can't He just do all these things?

This year's pastoral staff will include myself as Pastor, the Revs. **Justin Schorran, Pearse Frazier** and others. The Retreat Directors will be **Jamie and Julie Uber**. With the help of many other dedicated volunteers as well, this promises to be another great year. We urge you to register early because we are capping attendance at 150.

MAPLE LEAF NEW CHURCH SUMMER CAMP FOR TEENS

This year's camp for teenagers will run from June 26 through July 1 at the Ecology Retreat Center in Mono, Ontario, Canada. The theme is Blessings. (*"I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."* (Genesis 12:2))

This week of “friendship building, restorative relaxation and spiritual growth” is open to all teens who have just completed any year of high school.

For information visit www.maplecamp.com or contact **Stephanie Kuhl**, Camp Director, at gic.mapleleafcamp@gmail.com, Facebook @MapleLeafAcademy, or Instagram @MapleLeafCamp.

ACADEMY SUMMER CAMP

Registration is open for the Academy Summer Camp, July 6-11, in Bryn Athyn, for all current eighth and ninth graders. For information visit www.ancss.org/summercamp.



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Announcements

ORDINATIONS, First Degree

The law of the truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and turned away many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should see the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 2:6-7)

Hayford, Benjamin Ebo Saah

At Tema, Ghana, November 23, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Morris, Benedict T.

At Paynesville City, Monrovia, Liberia, November 16, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Karikari, Sylvanus Charles

At Tema, Ghana, November 23, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

BAPTISMS

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

Acheampong, Stephanie Nana Yaa Senami

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, daughter of Jones Acheampong and Monica Afi Enyo Segbenu, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Amu, Elizabeth

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Asante, Angel Oseibea

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Adusu, Ezra Oforiwa

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Asante, Josephine Asantewaa

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Asare, Fredrick

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Betancourt, Diego Mark

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, December 28, 2025, son of Raül Betancourt Gonzalez and India Wyncoll, Rev. Lawson M. Smith officiating.

Danquah, Abigail

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Danquah, Dorcas

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Danquah, Fredrick

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Danquah, Prince

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Danquah, Samuel

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Eads, Ardan James

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, November 16, 2025, son of Jared and Natalie Buick Eads, Rev. Derrick A.M. Lumsden officiating.

Essel, John Atta Panin

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Gabilah, Maureen

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Heinzelmann, Mason Hjalmar

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, January 18, 2026, son of Maximillian and Megan Woker Heinzelmann, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

Ibrahim, Bervelyn

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

McCurdy, Aubrey Lynn

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, January 18, 2026, daughter of Brennen and Sierra Phillipi McCurdy, Rev. George D. McCurdy officiating.

Narh, Kelvin

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Narh, Phoebe

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Nash, Jade Bizan

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 26, 2025, daughter of Ian and Kanami Morimatsu Nash, Rev. Steven P. Gunther officiating.

Teila, Harrison

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Tetey, Reginald Kobby

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Tetteh, Rosaline

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

Teye, Beatrice

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

CONFIRMATION

How can a young woman cleanse her way? By taking heed according to Your Word. With my whole heart I have sought You. O, let me not wander from Your commandments. (Psalm 119:9,10)

Segbenu, Monica Afi Enyo

At Ningokope, Ghana, November 30, 2025, Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs officiating.

MARRIAGE

Truly conjugal love is not possible except between two; neither is it possible between two except from the Lord alone. Engraved on this love is heaven with all its blessings. (Conjugal Love 332)

Beitel-Lockard, Griffin Alexander Beitel and Celeste Elizabeth Grace Lockard

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, November 30, 2025, Rev. Eric H. Carswell officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Blair, Kenneth Bellinger

October 31, 2025, of Cabot, Pennsylvania. 96

Klippenstein, Rachel Carr Adams

October 4, 2025, of Lakeview, Oregon. 83

Closterman, David Malcolm

December 19, 2025, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 82

Linquist, Richard Charles

November 13, 2025, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. 86

Coffin, Robert Franklin

September 6, 2025, of Glenview, Illinois. 93

Richter, Pearl Elaine Jensen

December 19, 2025, of Palatine, Illinois. 89

Henderson, Thelma Pike

December 31, 2025, of Boynton Beach, Florida. 95

Rivera, Florence Ruth Gay

December 5, 2025, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 93

Hunsaker, Marilyn Gunther

January 21, 2026, of Kempton, Pennsylvania. 91

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serve and be served at
newchurch.org/join.

Not sure whether you're already a member? Email freya.williams@newchurch.org



LIVING MIRACLES: Nourished, Uplifted, and Healed by the LORD

Cascadia New Church welcomes you to the beautiful Millersylvania Retreat Center near Olympia, WA for our 4th annual Cascadia Family Camp. Together we will explore three living miracles from the New Testament and how they demonstrate the Lord's amazing power to nourish us, uplift us, and heal us.

with special guests: Reverend Nathan Gladish and his wife, Elise

WHO: Rev. Nathan Gladish (Lead Pastor), Pastor Glenn Alden (Adults' Worship), and Rev. Phil Schnarr (Children's Worship)

WHAT: An all ages, 4-day/4-night family camp with worship services, discussion groups, outdoor recreation, and fellowship time. This year's theme is "Living Miracles." We'll be exploring some of the miracles that the Lord Jesus performed in the New Testament and their deeper implications for our lives.

WHEN: Wednesday, July 22, 2026 - Sunday, July 26, 2026

WHERE: Millersylvania Retreat Center near Olympia, Washington

WHY: To gather and for a shared sense of fun, community, and spiritual renewal.

Registration will be available on our website by April 1, 2026. Please visit our camp webpage at <https://www.cascadianewchurch.org/2026-cascadia-family-camp> for more info and to register.

Please contact our Cascadia New Church administrator, Loisann Openshaw, if you have any questions. Phone: (206) 900-5843 / Email: administrator@cascadianewchurch.org

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