

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JAN/FEB 2011



What is our Message?

In the first of a two-part series the Rev. Derek Elphick examines how we are communicating “our message” — with our own people and with inquirers. Are we connecting with people’s lives, or is there a disconnect? And what might we be doing more effectively? See page 7.

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Bruce Henderson, Managing Editor
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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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NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

We have The Great Commission to “go forth and preach to all nations,” and we have the true message the Lord has given us. Why does it not seem to be resonating as well as we might hope — with visitors and even our own people? The Rev. Derek Elphick begins a two-part series examining the way we spread our message, and what seems to be working in other churches. Are we listening enough to the needs of the people?

Bishop Tom Kline says the Council of the Clergy has not been able to come to doctrinal consensus on the elements of the Holy Supper — and tells why he sees this not as a negative but actually as a high point in the history of New Church organizations.

As we see a resurgence in civility and watch people yoked in dictatorships struggling for freedom, the Rev. Robert Jungé presents a timely sermon on *Civil Responsibility* and the role of thoughtful citizenship. It is a challenging call to the responsibilities of freedom — beginning with charity.

A new feature, *Introducing our Ministers*, begins with the Theological School class of 2009. You can read a profile of the Rev. Coleman Glenn, Assistant Pastor of the Olivet New Church in Toronto, who didn't think he wanted to be a minister — until he left Bryn Athyn for another college. And you can read one of his sermons, *Bitter Waters Made Sweet*.

New Church Perspective is a year-old online project featuring essays by New Church young people. We are pleased to partner with this effort, with an introduction by the Rev. Brian Smith, Assistant to the Pastor in Toronto, who helps oversee the project, and a sample essay, *Why I Believe in Organized Religion*, by the Rev. Derrick Lumsden, Pastor of the Westville New Church in South Africa.

The Boynton Beach congregation, which gave birth to the Eldergarten program in 1995 “to celebrate the age of wisdom,” hosted a very successful session in January with three outstanding speakers. You can read a summary of their presentations: the Rev. Derek Elphick on *All That the Lord Asks*, the Rev. Chuck Blair on NewChurch LIVE and building a church, and Dr. Gregory Rose of Bryn Athyn College on *Islam, Islamism and Jihadism*.

An extensive survey of members and friends of the General Church was conducted last summer by Alicia Simons, Director of Marketing for the Church. This was done online, using a professional marketing firm. A summary of the results of the survey also was distributed online, and is reprinted for any who have not seen it. Watch for a further report from the Church in the future. Last summer we also conducted a survey of *New Church*

Life readers, and you can read a brief report about that response.

Thanks to Dr. Forrest Dristy of the Boynton Beach congregation, we reprint two of his book reviews (*Why Does God Let it Happen?* and *Swedenborg's Garden of Theology*), which first appeared in the *New Church Voice of Florida*. You can also read a review by the Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom of *Principles in Play — Essays in Honor of Rev. Dr. George Dole's Contribution to Swedenborgian Thought*.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

As the new editors of *New Church Life*, we want to let you know what to expect of this venerable publication — what is being retained and what is new.

First, we need to acknowledge our debt — and the Church's debt — to previous editors who have maintained the integrity of *New Church Life* as the official organ of the General Church. This history dates back 130 years to 1881. We especially note the service of the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson (1951 – 1974) and the Rev. Donald Rose (1980 – 2005). Both are lovingly remembered for setting the standard for the *Life* — for their many years of devotion, their doctrinal scholarship and their pithy, timeless editorials. We also thank the most recent editors, the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh and the Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandström, for their distinctive contributions to the doctrinal leadership of the *Life*.

A survey last summer of *New Church Life* readers provided much valuable input about what you like about the publication and what might be improved, which will be very useful to us. (See a brief report on page 48.)

We begin with a commitment to maintain the *Life* as “a magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.” We want the primary focus to reflect the doctrinal thought and life of the Church, particularly as the teachings relate to our everyday lives. We are intent on retaining the best of the *Life's* traditions, while hopefully improving presentation, quality of content and readability.

The most immediate obvious change is the switch to a bimonthly publication, which has been dictated by economics. We are increasing the content of each issue, adding some new content and slightly changing the

cover design. Please let us know how you feel about these changes.

The goal is to make *New Church Life* more relevant and engaging for the Church. One request repeated throughout the survey was for more doctrine and teaching with direct application to life. Everyone loves the teaching that “All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.” (Doc. Of Life 1) This is what our ministers are doing all the time — teaching the truths that lead to the good of life — and we hope *New Church Life* can help people find what they need and what works for their lives. Please let us know of any questions or issues that you would like to see addressed.

It is increasingly easy for people to download sermons, but it is important for the *Life* to continue to offer sermons from a variety of ministers and we will continue to do so. We hope to have more discussions as well — from clergy and lay alike — about moral, cultural and scientific issues in the light of the doctrines. We would love to have laymen and women write about special studies they have done, or how the New Church has helped them in their lives and careers.

It was clear from the survey that few young people are reading *New Church Life*, and many are not that engaged with the Church. This is happening all over and is not unique to our church. But we hope to try to get young people engaged, and let others see what they are thinking. We are starting with a partnership with New Church Perspective — essays written by young people in the Church — and hope to build on this.

Part of engaging young people, as well as others, is increased use of technology. Obviously, older readers still want a publication they can hold onto, but younger people are more inclined to read on a screen. So we will look into possibilities, including online publication, the ability to post comments without writing a formal letter to the editor, Facebook, iPads and whatever else works for potential readers. Suggestions from the younger generation particularly will be gratefully received.

We understand there has been a gap in posting past issues of *New Church Life* online, apparently because of a production issue. We are investigating if there is a way to get the archive back up to date. Meanwhile, this issue and other issues going forward will be posted.

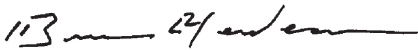
We will welcome letters (ideally brief and always signed) and robust debate, but without personal comments or political agendas. Please send to the editor at Box 711, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, or to the e-mail addresses below.

The New Church is very small in numbers, but very large in the realm of ideas. It is an “intellectual” church in the best sense of the word. We live in an age in which the old order established by the former church is crumbling dramatically. It is also an age in which ideas and opinions are disseminated more widely and quickly than ever before. People are bombarded with information

and with spiritual and moral choices which previous generations did not face. The teachings of the New Church provide the light of truth needed to use this new knowledge and new freedom wisely rather than destructively. *New Church Life* can play an important role in spreading this light.

We invite your response to this issue and our plans, your suggestions about how to improve *New Church Life*, and your engaged participation — as readers and contributors. We want you to feel this is your *New Church Life*.

Thank you.



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What is our message?

First of a two-part series excerpted from a presentation to the General Church Clergy by the Rev. Derek Elphick, Pastor of Oak Arbor in Rochester, Michigan.

This is a sequel to a paper I presented to the Council of the Clergy in 2006, “*How effectively are we communicating (marketing) our message?*” It dealt with evangelization or church growth, but also considered habits, behaviors and trends within the General Church.

I based the paper on two key teachings. The first is AC 5006:3, “*When the church fails to preach life, no one acquires any affection for good,*” which I interpret to mean that when the church fails to meet people’s needs, few are inspired (and for newcomers, not inspired to join.) The second, AR 82, says “*every church in the beginning regards the goods of life in the first place, and the truths of doctrine in the second; but as the church declines, it begins to regard the truths of doctrine in the first place, and the goods of life in the second.*” Has the General Church, historically, tended to place doctrine first or second? I sheepishly suggested: the first.

The focus of this paper shifts from the *how* of spreading the Word to the *what* — from our methodology to our message. I’d like to know if what we (the clergy) choose to talk about is what the people want to hear. Is our message in-sync with their lives or out-of-sync? Do people find our message urgent or sleepy, exciting or boring, theoretical or practical, uplifting or depressing, out-of-touch or in-touch? These are important questions to ask ourselves as a church, even if we find them annoying or uncomfortable, because growth cannot occur unless we are willing to admit there is a problem and room for improvement — the “first-of-charity principle.”

I had three reasons for writing this paper:

1. I believe that until we see more compelling evidence that the public recognizes our existence we can’t let up. If I felt more confident that

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people knew who we were and heard our message, I wouldn't be writing this paper. Or if we heard them saying, "Yes, we know what you're all about and we're not interested," at least we tried. But is such an expectation realistic? Is it a healthy pressure to put on ourselves? Is it even grounded in reality? Do you think it is unreasonable for this church to want more "meaningful contact" with the public? I think "meaningful contact" is well-chosen. It doesn't assume instant conversion but leaves the door open. This is a healthy way to view evangelization.

2. I believe one reason we're not growing is because our official message is not in-sync with the times or applicable to the needs of members and non-members. Getting our message in-sync with our listeners is relatively easy, but there's no point in trying unless we agree a disconnect exists.
3. I want to keep this dialogue going with my colleagues by comparing notes and learning from each other. We need to unite on this use.

PURPOSE

My first paper explained the principles of professional marketing as I saw them applied to the Church, and that good marketing always goes back to the fundamental question, "How can we be more effective (useful)?" If the Church doesn't take the time to answer that question, which takes humility and soul-searching, it won't be in a position to reach out and grow.

Rather than preaching a one-size-fits-all message we need to be prepared and willing to accommodate our message to different audiences. Contrary to what people like to say about this common-sense approach, it is *not* "watering down" the doctrines — a phrase I dislike since it implies fear about talking to people at their level. (We don't "water down the doctrines" when we give a children's talk; we just accommodate the message to the children. Speaking to adults is no different.) Besides, there are twelve gates into the Holy City, not one.

My first paper addressed methodology: *how* we get our message out. There are the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to marketing strategies, and I tried to draw attention to some of the best. (Professional marketing communicates value, which we also must do as a church. If people see the value of our message, they'll come back. If they don't, they won't.) However, a lingering question has to do with the message itself. It's fine to develop a sensible method for getting your message "out there," but what happens if you find it isn't well thought-out or compelling? Or if other churches are close to

preaching a similar message?

So that's the purpose: Analyzing our message from the standpoint of the speaker *and* the listener. The good shepherd wants to know if he is caring for his flock, and a good pastor must always ask himself if his message is resonating with the needs of his people — if it is compelling and relevant for them.

APPROACH

What is our message? The answer is obvious. We preach the good news of the Second Advent. The clergy are called to teach “*the truth about the Lord, about His Coming, and about the things of which He is the author, namely the things that belong to salvation and eternal life.*” (AC 9925) I am 100% confident this is what we are doing. But what are people hearing?

We have to admit that this world of six billion people can't be hearing much about the New Church. Our global membership of 5,000 has remained relatively unchanged for years. How could people be hearing a message of our magnitude with a membership so small? A breakdown must exist somewhere between speaker (clergy) and listener (laity) since our message doesn't impress others the way it does us. If it did, our membership would be vastly different.

Is there anything we can do as a church to sharpen our message — or doesn't it need sharpening? Perhaps the problem lies with the listener, not the speaker. Maybe our problem is that people just don't care or aren't interested. Is the world still not ready for us? Does our size make it impossible to be heard on the world-stage? Does the Lord not want the New Church reaching out to the masses yet?

Maybe it's arrogant and presumptuous to think we can somehow hurry along the descent of the Holy City. Maybe we should be more patient. But in whose hands does the task of spreading the Word belong — the Lord's, ours, or both? Clearly it's both since the Lord cannot work in a vacuum, and must use people to communicate the hopes and dreams of His Church. (See AC 9925, AR 956 and ISB 18) TCR 457:3 reminds us that “*because God loves all people, and as He cannot do good to people directly, but only indirectly through other people, He inspires people with His love...*” Since we have been inspired with a love for His Church the responsibility of spreading the Word obviously rests on our shoulders because the Lord can only do good to people with our

I believe we have a disconnect between what we say and what we think others are hearing, which can disrupt our ability to communicate effectively.

help.

I believe we have a disconnect between what we say and what we think others are hearing, which can disrupt our ability to communicate effectively. This disconnect can happen just as easily with our own church members as with newcomers. Stripped of the obvious discrepancies, members and non-members operate in a remarkably similar fashion, experiencing the same needs, struggles, frustrations, hopes and dreams. So, if we have a disconnect with non-members, we can safely assume it exists to varying degrees with our own members.

The dynamic between speaker (minister) and listener is complex, with all sorts of factors involved in effective communication. Here are three basic scenarios:

1. The listener hears the speaker, understands the message, but doesn't feel compelled to act differently.
2. The listener hears, understands the message, but doesn't agree with it or like it.
3. The listener hears, understands, and is moved to action.

In all three scenarios the speakers make themselves clear. I don't think our problem rests in delivering confusing or contradictory messages. The most consistent feedback we get from newcomers is that our religion makes sense. I always feel good about that comment. Religion does need to make sense, but it also needs to give people practical steps to help them live better lives, and I don't hear people saying that as much. I think our real challenge rests in making ourselves relevant and compelling to members and non-members alike.

Our goal is to get to Scenario 3 where listeners are moved by the message of the Lord's Word and not only *want* to work on becoming better people but feel *compelled* to share the positive, hopeful message of their religion with others.

But is this the way human beings really operate? I think it is. The teaching, "*love is the life of man*" (*Doctrine of Life 1*) is probably one of the best known in our Church. It means we are emotional beings — that we live and move and have our being from *loves*, not thoughts. We're not robots. Feelings give expression to our thoughts and actions which means *love* is the great communicator of all we care about, value and hold most dear.

How does this translate into church members sharing their faith with others? To the degree they feel moved by our message they will feel compelled to share it with others. But to the degree our message isn't relevant or compelling they will not feel motivated to share it.

A recent study by *Euro RSCG*, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, found that people get most of their information from:

- **Word of mouth (34%)**
- Web sites (20%)
- Advertising (13%)

Even more revealing are the sources that “*generated excitement*” about a product or service:

- **Referrals by colleagues or family (40%)**
- Magazines (15%)
- Print ads (4%)
- TV ads (4%)
- Billboards (1%)
- Radio (0%)

This confirms what we’ve known all along: word-of-mouth is by far the most effective method for people learning about something new. You get a new gadget that makes life easier, and you tell your family and friends because you’re excited about it. So, what makes talking about the church — your faith — any different?

The industry calls this *relationship marketing* or *word-of-mouth marketing*, and many successful corporations see it as key to their growth. Another study applies the same data to a church setting, and answers this question: What factors led you to attend Church?

Consider these startling results:

- A “special need” (1-2%)
- They just “walked in” (2-3%)
- The pastor (5-6%)
- Door-to-door visitation (1-2%)
- The Sunday School program (4-5%)
- A church program (2-3%)
- **An invitation from a friend or relative (75-90%)**

I have to assume this statistic applies to us, too, and that 75-90% of the people who join the General Church as adults began by attending when invited by a member or relative.

How often do you think personal invitations go out in the General Church,

or in your own congregation? How often do you notice church members bringing friends to Sunday worship or to a church or school function? I think we know the answer: very little.

According to *New Church Life*, 77 new members joined the General Church in 2007 while 61 members passed into the spiritual world, for a net gain of 16 worldwide. Even if membership weren't that important, our lack of new members indicates that we have a problem.

Why might members hesitate to invite non-New Church friends to church?

In the corporate world companies study their competition to survive. We should do something similar. Competition isn't the right word when talking about churches, but studying what they do, or keeping abreast of what's going on is part of our professional responsibility. The reason is simple: we're *new* Christians

living in a Post-Christendom Era, and while Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists live in our communities too, the people with a profile most similar to us are Christians. So if we want to build bridges with seekers, the logical place to start is with those who share a similar background.

I am well aware of the teaching in the Writings that Gentiles are the most fruitful field for evangelization. (See AC 2986:2 and LJ 74) That makes sense. I rejoice that this is happening in Africa and Asia. But some of us in the Western hemisphere have a fruitful field for evangelization too, namely disenfranchised Christians, and here's why.

Last Judgment 73 is one of my favorite passages. As far as I'm aware, it is one of the few prophecies in the Writings. It says

that while it may seem like business as usual in the Christian world people are nevertheless "*in a more free state of thinking on matters of faith, thus on the spiritual things which relate to heaven, because spiritual freedom has been restored to them.*" What a powerful statement. But what does it suggest? To *whom* has this spiritual freedom been restored? I take it to mean everyone, Christians and non-Christians. But since I'm making a case for reaching out to those most similar to us, let's think about the implications.

To me it says our Christian neighbors are always in a position to hear and receive the truths of the Heavenly Doctrines, if they want. And we shouldn't be fooled by the appearance that nothing has changed in the Catholic or Protestant world in the last 200 years since spiritual freedom has been restored to everyone.

To me, Last Judgment 73 says our Christian neighbors are always in a position to hear and receive the truths of the Heavenly Doctrines — if they want.

Vatican II, in which the Bible was given back to the people, is perhaps the most striking, modern-day example of what happens when people exercise their new spiritual freedom.

But let's consider what we're taught about this new light, this new freedom, given to people on earth as a result of the Last Judgment of 1757. One teaching says, "*the interposing obstacles [in the spiritual world] are now removed.*" (CLJ 12) Now there is "light" in the world of spirits, and "*a similar light with people on earth from which they have a new enlightenment.*" (CLJ 30) This is possible because the heavens "now prevail." (AE 957) The Lord can now "*lead more powerfully and enlighten more clearly.*" (AE 1094) The "*reception of Divine truth and good has become more universal, more interior, more easy, and more distinct.*" (AE 1217) A "level playing field" has been established since all people "*can understand the Divine truth of the Word, receive it when understood, and retain it when received.*" (CLJ 12) Everyone!

Does this mean the dragon of faith alone is as good as dead? No. The allure for entering the sheepfold another way is always present. (See TCR 639, INC 17-19, 25, and DP 279:4) *Last Judgment* 73 also makes it clear that in "*external appearance divided churches will exist as before, [and] their doctrines will be taught as before.*" But the same passage says the listeners are in a new spiritual freedom, which means they may or may not accept the falsities of the former church, and most likely won't! (AR 426) And let's not forget what this number says about the speaker: "*justification by faith alone is the faith of the clergy, not the laity.*" (Also AE 885:3)

So what happens if the speaker discovers that preaching the wrath of an angry God (atonement doctrine) or a life devoid of good works (faith alone) doesn't go over with his listeners? What kind of church does he set up? What kind of message does he preach? Why should we concern ourselves with what our Christian brothers and sisters are doing anyway? What do we have in common with them? A lot, actually.

It seems to me that General Church congregations, stripped of their unique doctrine and mission, are of the same external mold as Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. Our building layouts (chancel, lectern, pulpit, hymnals, pews, etc.) are often similar, as are the programs offered (Sunday worship, Sunday School, Youth Group, private Christian School, adult classes, etc.). So we shouldn't be surprised that Protestant churches in America are experiencing challenges similar to ours. For example, most small-town churches in America rarely break the 200 barrier, and most average 100 or less. Sound familiar? I think it's commonly accepted that most mainline Protestant churches in America are, at best, holding their own, and, at worst, actually declining in numbers.

The few exceptions to this rule seem to be the Fundamentalists, non-traditional churches like the Mormons (*Church of the Latter Day Saints*), and

non-denominational churches like the so-called mega churches. Some of them represent a big cultural shift within the Christian world, which brings us to the following case studies. The first considers the mega-church phenomenon, from the speaker. The second looks inside the mind of the “formerly un-churched,” from the listener. Both reveal surprising insights about people in general, and newcomers in particular.

CASE STUDY #1 — Mega Churches (the Speaker)

The huge, community churches known as mega churches seem to be on the wane after a burst of popularity, suggesting perhaps that people are still hungering most for doctrine they can believe in. But their initial success reveals telling signs of what’s going on in the hearts and minds of disenfranchised Christians. Their message seems to have gotten very close to ours at times, and we know this is possible whenever people use the “face and hands” teachings of Scripture as their guide. (See SS 55, 57)

Part of the appeal of these mega churches is that they make sure they do *not* have the same “look and feel” as mainline Protestant churches. You won’t find liturgies, pews, organs, heavy ritual or “doom-and-gloom” preaching. Robert Putnam, professor of public policy at Harvard University, describes it as one of the most successful community-building institutions of modern times. Almost all mega churches have cafes or food courts, bookstores, sports facilities, child care, youth programs, small groups, counseling programs and support groups for divorce, depression, addiction, financial crises, or the death of a loved one. All provide opportunities for community service.

So with all these trappings and huge crowds, what do the pastors actually preach? What is their message? Well, I’ve gone to some of these churches and heard the message of a tri-personal God, faith alone, that Jesus died for you, etc. But there’s another message that has little to do with the Atonement Doctrine. It runs parallel to, and almost independent of, traditional Christian orthodoxy. It’s taken on a life of its own. What has worked well is that the speakers have studied the needs of the listeners.

This message is full of hope and promise. It’s optimistic. It says, “You matter to God” — that you’re not

The message of the “mega churches” is full of hope and promise. It’s optimistic. It says, ‘You matter to God’ — that you’re not a bad person, you can do better, and God has a plan for you.

a bad person, you can do better, and God has a plan for you. It says your marriage, children, job and role in society are all critically important, and that you must work on these relationships if you want to be happy and at peace with God and your neighbor.

Critics say these mega churches preach Bible-Lite, that they avoid talk about hard stuff like sin, repentance, hell, divorce, etc. Their sermons and books are “heavy” on helping people live better lives (with a strong stand against immoral, ungodly behavior), and “light” on rehashing dark doctrines that don’t resonate with today’s listener. There are exceptions but the pastors focusing on giving people the tools for living better lives make the biggest impact. (Consider *The Purpose-Driven Life* by Rick Warren which has sold more than 25 million copies — apparently because people are looking for purpose in their lives.)

The profile of these mega churches shows they all have one thing in common: the leaders have studied the needs of the un-churched (disenfranchised) and set up a new, fresh way of “doing church” in response to those needs. I’m not suggesting we adopt this church model but I am suggesting that our clergy could learn a lot about healthy, vibrant churches by studying member needs and adapting our message accordingly. The pioneers of the mega-church phenomenon stumbled upon something big when they took the time to ask people why they were dissatisfied with church. We could do the same.

This is one example of what a minister can do in response to the feedback he receives. But what kind of feedback is the listener (newcomer) giving anyway? What are their needs? Are the seekers-turned-newcomers really just expressing “wants” and disguising them as “needs,” or are they frustrated, hurting and disenfranchised for good reason?

CASE STUDY #2 — Newcomers (The Listener)

I base this section on *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched* by Thom S. Rainer, a ground-breaking study of the “previously unchurched” — people who hadn’t been going to church for at least 10 years but recently became active in a church. Rainer wanted to know what these churches were doing that made a difference. Was there a single theme, trend or pattern they shared? What drew these newcomers into the church community and made them stay?

Two major factors prompted people to “try” a church:

- a personal crisis
- a relationship with someone active in a church

Of the two, relationships were the most significant. This underscores the statistic that 75-90% of all newcomers found their church because of an invitation from a friend or relative.

Here are some interesting insights from the book:

- Your church name is hardly a factor for most people when choosing to attend. The value communicated is more important.
- Most newcomers are not totally ignorant about church or religious issues.
- Most have attended other churches, but sporadically — once or twice a year.
- 53% said having someone from the church share their faith influenced their decision to join.
- 90% of newcomers said “doctrine” was important in choosing a church, and it shouldn’t be hidden for fear of being too “deep” or “complex.”
- Newcomers are not concerned only with their own needs. They often want to be challenged to “make a difference” and help people, and seek out a place of worship not just for themselves but for loved ones too.

The most important factor for church growth — one that often determines whether or not newcomers stay and eventually *join* your church — is the pastor and his preaching. Notice how newcomers answered: What factors led you to choose this church?

- **Pastor/Preaching (90%)**
- **Doctrines (88%)**
- Friendliness of members (49%)
- Other issues (42%)
- Someone shared their faith (witnessed) to me (41%)
- Family member attends (38%)
- Sensed God’s presence/atmosphere of church (37%)
- Relationship other than family member (25%)
- Sunday School (25%)
- Children’s/Youth Ministry (25%)
- Other groups/ministries (12%)
- Worship style/music (11%)
- Location (7%)

Rainer says this alone could provide a strategy for reaching newcomers

There are countless factors at play that can help or jeopardize the status of a newcomer in your church. He or she is ultimately in the Lord's hands and we must trust His leading. But some of the drivers have to do with the newcomer, some with your congregation, and a lot with the overall focus and mission of the church.

and, I would add, a strategy for better reaching our own members as well. Almost all newcomers said they used to go to a church. They're not boycotting church — just looking for something they couldn't find.

So if they did visit, what encouraged them to return? What made the seeker-turned-newcomer go the extra step and join the church? Rainer says the pastor and his preaching were such critical factors that he devoted the second half of his book to that issue.

You probably noticed that doctrine also ranked very high on the chart (88%), although this is so closely tied to the pastor and his preaching that they're almost inseparable.

Let me clarify what I think this means. First, it *isn't* saying the tipping point for newcomers rests on whether or not you deliver the perfect sermon. It's simply that *what* you say on Sunday morning, and *how* you say it, are very important to the newcomer. Second, different things become important at different times; it all depends where a person is in the conversion process.

For example, getting a warm and friendly reception is important at the beginning, but then other things start becoming important — like the doctrine, beliefs, customs and practices of the church, how you and your family can get involved, etc.

There are countless factors at play that can help or jeopardize the status of a newcomer in your church. He or she is ultimately in the Lord's hands and we must trust His leading. But some of the drivers have to do with the newcomer, some with your congregation, and a lot with the overall focus and mission of the church.

Rainer says “*membership expectations*” (are there any?) and congregational “*clarity of purpose*” (is there one?) are very important to newcomers. Things like membership classes, small groups and lay ministries become important

points of entry. But people want to belong, and that happens when individuals are given a sense of purpose and direction, when they feel they can make a difference and be useful. It's the pastor's responsibility to make sure all these things come together, but it's a job shared by the whole congregation working hand in hand.

However, with 90% of Rainer's respondents saying the pastor and his preaching were a major factor influencing their decision to *join* a church, it would be foolish to ignore this data or minimize it. When it comes to the overall message of the church and the types of things we choose to talk about (or not talk about), the role of the minister clearly plays a central part.

Part II will consider the church's message, our audience and our mission.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Derek Elphick was ordained June 6, 1993, and into the second degree in 1994. He served first as Assistant to the Pastor of the Oak Arbor Society in Rochester, MI, for one year, then as Pastor of The New Church at Boynton Beach, FL, from 1994 to 2002. He returned to Oak Arbor where he has been the Pastor since 2002. He lives in Rochester with his wife Gay (Hodgell) and five children.

NEW CHURCH DEPOSITORY

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— *Thomas L. Kline, Executive Bishop*

The Holy Supper Elements and the Doctrine of the Church

Rt. Rev. Thomas L. Kline

Two years ago we asked the Council of the Clergy: What are the proper elements for the sacrament of the Holy Supper? And can alternatives be given when someone cannot partake of these elements for medical reasons?

Two things took place as a result:

1. We concluded that the proper elements are fermented wine and unleavened bread. It is significant that we, as a Council, could agree on this, and I would say that this is a clear doctrine of the Church.
2. We arrived at no consensus as to whether alternatives could be offered for those who cannot partake. Some had strong feelings for and others against. Some did not see it as an important issue. And so we came away with a policy of offering fermented wine and unleavened bread as the elements for the Holy Supper, leaving it up to the conscience of each minister as to the question of alternatives, and for him to articulate that alternatives are specifically for those who cannot partake of the elements.

I know there are some, especially among the laity, who would see the clergy's lack of consensus from the doctrines on the alternative question as a negative situation for the Church: "How could the clergy not all agree on alternatives? What is the correct answer? Don't the Writings have all the answers? Why doesn't the Council vote and mandate a unified practice for the Church? Why doesn't the Bishop step in and mandate his final decision? Is it just everyone doing what is right in his own eyes?"

I have to say that I have an entirely different reaction and I want to share it to clarify my view of church government. I believe that our ability to admit that we do not have clear light as a Council at this time and announcing this to the Church is in fact a high point in the history of New Church organizations.

I believe a lesser organization would have bowed to the temptation to mandate a dictate in order to ensure confidence among the laity. A lesser organization would have called for a vote and mandated the results of that vote upon the Church. It would have called for a position statement even in the light of uncertainty.

And what did we come up with? This beautifully humble statement before

the Church: “We don’t know yet and we will continue to go back to the Word before we make the Council’s judgment binding on the clergy.”

This is a statement of wisdom and humility given from the priesthood to the laity. Please read AE 879. When the priesthood make their view of doctrine binding for the Church, rather than the Lord’s Word, the Church is destroyed. And we, under great pressure, resisted that temptation. It was a proud moment for our tiny organization.

I know that our indecision has created many practical problems, but I would rather deal with those problems than cross that line where we put our own opinion in place of the Word of God. I am sharing this thought just to let the members of the Church know how I view church government and the formation of the doctrine of the Church.

So let us continue to go before the Lord in His Word to seek further clarity on the subject. But I feel there is nothing wrong with admitting that we, as a Council, do not yet have clear light. In fact, this humility before the Lord’s Word may be the strongest statement we can make to the Church for its continued health and growth.

Civil Responsibility

A sermon by the Rev. Robert S. Jungé

“One’s country is the neighbor, according to the quality of its goods, spiritual, moral and civil.” (Charity 83)

Love of country can become a spiritual love. If we unselfishly love our country during our life here, we will love the Lord’s kingdom after death. This is a wonderful Divine promise. But love of country is all too easy to counterfeit, to idealize, to praise on special holidays — to honor with words, but not the heart.

But in the Divine scheme love of country is not to be something put on or taken off as natural impulses dictate. Genuine love of country expresses itself through the considered civil and moral decisions we make every day. It is not an abstraction. In fact the doctrines teach that *“no idea can be had of spiritual life except from the things that are in civil life; and therefore if (civil life) is set aside, (spiritual life) falls to the ground until it is no longer believed in.”* (AC 4366) The spiritual and civil do not truly exist separately. A New Churchman, therefore, must be concerned about civil affairs.

Ideally charity brings civil life into correspondence with spiritual life. To correspond means literally to respond together, or to act in sync with each other. When we think of charity, we often think of being charitable to our individual neighbors. But our country consists of a group of individual neighbors, and as such are a collective neighbor. Our country in that sense is a greater neighbor than an individual. And yet being more removed than the individual man who lives on the same street, we sometimes fail to recognize the need for charity toward our collective neighbor — the country itself.

All the varied individuals in the country function together like the organs in the human body. It is a collection of interrelated uses. If we do not do our part the country as a whole suffers. We are not islands. What we do, or what we do not do, affects others. The country’s good, which we are to love and promote, is called the public and common good, because all are affected by it. (Charity 83) All the laws of justice as well as the economic laws are to be enacted to promote a harmony of uses. If we do not become involved, if we fail to perform our use, the country suffers.

The Writings therefore remind us that to serve the public or general good

of society is a matter of conscience. In this sense, many of us identify with causes for the common good among the people where we live. From different affections or convictions, we may differ in our judgment as to the value of these various causes. Inevitably we will see and respond to different needs because human variety itself is created to perfect the whole. The greater the love, the greater the zeal for its fulfillment.

Obviously, if we believe that a cause is harmful we cannot support it, and may even have to resist it. But we are cautioned to avoid contempt for the uses or causes that others support. The common good is enhanced when charity supports the uses of others and enhances their contribution to the whole.

In civil and moral affairs the Church does not ordinarily prescribe specific applications. Exceptions may occur, however, if civil or moral decisions are clearly contrary to Divine Law such as the Ten Commandments. If, for example, the civil law or society's moral standards countenance adultery, the Church not only can, but also should find ways to change those laws and challenge that climate. But in an orderly society the Church should stick to its primary role, which is to teach the truth and lead to the Lord and spiritual life. To become involved in political and civil affairs as such detracts from its spiritual use.

The Writings clearly imply that the Church should allow its members to express their love for their country in many diverse ways — freely and according to their best judgment. Allowing this, nevertheless the Church should teach that its members should be concerned and involved, and that they should be involved from the right spiritual motive, the love of the neighbor. We become involved, not so that we will look good, or make a good impression, but for the sake of the uses involved.

Use to our fellow man is the fundamental driving force behind genuine concern for the common good. We read, "*Our country is to be benefited from love, according to its necessities, which chiefly regard its sustenance, its civil life **and** its spiritual life.*" (AC 6821) "*And its spiritual life.*" Concern for the spiritual life of our nation is part of the Lord's commission to us. We read, "*In kingdoms where justice and judgment are guarded, everyone is restrained from speaking and acting against religion; but still no one can be compelled to think and will in favor of it.*" (DP 129) What is the present spiritual life of our country? What can we do to encourage its spiritual growth? These are questions that we as New Churchmen must ask ourselves.

The Writings are very clear about the role of thoughtful citizenship. "*Those (in heaven) are concerned with civil affairs who in the world loved their country and loved its general good more than their own, and did what is just and right from a love for what is just and right. So far as these from the eagerness of love have investigated the laws of justice and have thereby become intelligent, they have the ability to perform such functions in heaven.*" (HH 393)

“The Lord provides for everyone’s loving the uses suited to his genius; and that love is exalted with the hope of becoming an angel.” (HH 517) Think of it! Through our love for the laws of justice we can become intelligent with the hope of becoming angels. Contrast that with the common expression, “Religion and politics are two things I never discuss.”

But what about loving the general good more than our own? We read, “It is supposed from the sense of the letter of the Word, that (uses) consist in giving to the poor, assisting the needy, doing good to widows and orphans, and other similar actions. These uses, however, are not meant in the Word by the fruits, works and goods of charity, but the meaning is that every person ought to perform his duty, and act in his business and employment uprightly, faithfully, sincerely and justly.

“When he does this he consults the general or public good, thus also that of his country, of a society larger or smaller, and of a fellow citizen, and companion and a brother; for these are the neighbor in its broad and narrow senses.” (Div Wis. XI:4) But how can men regard their work as a way of expressing love of country? Indeed as a way to prepare for heaven? And what of that simple phrase, “Every person ought to perform his duty”?

The general good — the good of our country — exists from the goods of use which you and I perform. (Charity 126) We read, *“It is known that every man is born to be of use that he may perform uses to others; and he who does not is called a useless member and is cast off. He who performs uses for himself alone is also useless, though he is not called so. In a well-constituted commonwealth, therefore, provision is made that no one shall be useless. If useless, he is compelled to some work; and a beggar is compelled if he is in health.”* (Charity 128)

Our goal for our country should be a vital and useful society, supportive of spiritual life as well as moral and civil life. It is, in fact, our duty to work to establish just such a society of useful citizens. It is our duty to try as hard as we can to be useful to others. And it is our duty to try to uphold and sustain the uses of others.

Listen to how the Writings describe the general good in an orderly country: *“There shall be what is Divine with them.”* What simple wisdom there is in our country’s motto, *“In God we trust!”* The passage continues, *“That there shall be justice with them.”* Just government doesn’t just happen. Law and the courts ultimately respond to the values of the people. It is our duty to uphold justice. Further we read, *“That there shall be morality with them.”* Moral law is that which reason sees in the light of Divine Revelation. When the basic unit of society, the family, is morally threatened, our country needs a concerned citizenship.

Every one of us should be concerned to defend the values of marriage and the home on every plane — spiritual, moral and civil. Still further the passage

continues, *“That there shall be industry, knowledge and uprightness with them.”* The proper attitude toward work and education is vital to the general good. It won’t just happen; we have to work for it.

“That there shall be the things necessary to their occupations.” Rewarding and challenging jobs are part of a living society.

“That there shall be the things necessary for protection.” Evil is ever ready to challenge the common good, for that good is the foundation for the life of heaven. Hell hates the life of heaven even as it hates the God of heaven. It therefore hates civil order and will do everything it can to upset it.

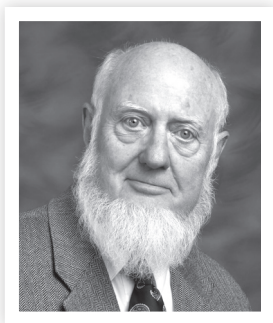
And the passage closes, *“That there shall be a sufficiency of wealth.”* Industry, occupations and protection all depend upon sufficient wealth.

In reality the general good arises from these things in a country, and yet we read, *“It does not come of these things themselves but from the individual there, and through the goods of use which individuals perform.”* (Charity 131) The good of our country comes from the goods of use which each of us performs. It comes *“from the individuals there.”* That’s us!

Freedom and spiritual life are then awesome responsibilities that rest upon moral and civil life — our moral and civil life! Our duty!

Our country can correspond to heavenly society itself. Its good can be responsive to the life and love of heaven itself. That vision can become both a spiritual and natural challenge for each of us. Each of us can do our part and make it our resolve to have our nation fit the description of the doctrine: *“The Divine is there, there is justice, there is morality, and uprightness; there is wisdom and industry. The society in general inspires these into the individuals, and each individual is in charity.”* (Charity 139)

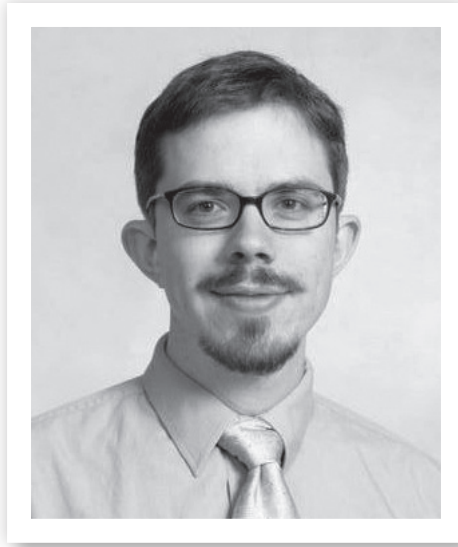
Each individual is in charity! There is only one way. Put our hands to the plow; not look back; and do our duty.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Robert S. Jungé was ordained in 1955 and into the second degree of the ministry in 1957. He is retired and lives in Kempton, PA. Among the many ways he has served the Church are Secretary to the General Church, Principal of the Bryn Athyn Church School, Dean of the Academy Theological School and founding Pastor of the Ivyland New Church near Bryn Athyn. In his retirement he has continued as a

visiting pastor, most recently to the Central Pennsylvania Circle. He and his wife, the late Vera (Pitcairn), have six grown children.



Rev. Coleman Glenn

A Love of Teaching the Writings

When Coleman Glenn was a freshman at Bryn Athyn College, he studied *Divine Love and Wisdom* with the Rev. Prescott Rogers — and wisdom was dawning. When the course was over Prescott took him and another student out to lunch and told them they had the potential to be ministers, if that’s what they wanted to do.

Coleman appreciated the suggestion but thought to himself, “No way.” He was a committed New Churchman but was sure he wanted to do something else.

But the seed was planted. After 15 years of New Church education in Bryn Athyn — including two years at the College — he transferred to Kenyon College in Ohio to major in English and/or Drama. He’d also had dreams of playing football in college, because he loved it so much in high school.

It was when he was away from Bryn Athyn at Kenyon that he realized he

Editor’s note: This is the first of a series introducing ministers of the General Church, beginning with those ordained in 2009. In the next issue: A profile on the Rev. Mark Allais, pastor of the Buccleuch Church in Johannesburg, South Africa.

did want to be a minister, so he came back to Bryn Athyn College to prepare for Theological School.

What happened at Kenyon to change his mind?

“For one thing,” he says, “I saw that a lot of my friends there didn’t have much of a religious or moral framework and were hurting themselves (and knew they were hurting). I realized how the truth of the New Church can be healing. Also, I’ve always liked the idea of teaching, and had seriously considered becoming an English teacher. I realized that what I really wanted to teach, though, was the Writings. When I looked at what I liked doing — teaching, counseling friends, talking about the Writings — these were the things a minister did. It wasn’t so much a realization that I wanted to *be* a minister as a realization that I wanted to *do* all the things that a minister does.”

One of the highlights of Theological School was spending two months in Australia after his second year, living in the Hurstville society outside Sydney and visiting Perth and Canberra.

“It was my first real taste of being a minister, and it confirmed for me that this was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. It was hard — a lot of the time I felt like I had no clue what I was doing — but the people were incredibly welcoming and friendly and forgiving. It was the perfect place to learn to practice what I’d been studying in school for two years.”

Since he was ordained in 2009, he has been the assistant pastor to the Rev. Jim Cooper in Olivet Church in Toronto and visiting pastor to Dawson Creek. “It’s hard to say what I enjoy the most. One of my roles at Olivet and for the General Church in Canada is to be a pastor for teens, which I love. I served at Maple Camp last summer, and helped organize a youth weekend for teens from the Toronto and Kitchener areas in the fall. The weekly youth group at Olivet is always one of the highlights of the week. It’s exciting to talk to young people as they’re really starting to ask big questions and form their own ideas about what’s important.”

When he first went into the ministry, his goal was to teach at the high school level. “I’d still love to do that, but I’ve also discovered that I love all the different aspects of pastoring — preaching on Sundays, giving doctrinal classes, counseling, visiting, etc. I do have a particular interest in helping people to read the Writings themselves.

“The first time I sat down and read a book of the Writings cover to cover (over a period of several months) was *True Christian Religion*, and seeing the way the truth was organized and presented so perfectly was one of the primary things that led me to embracing the New Church as my own. I want other people to have that experience.”

Coleman has loved his travel opportunities. “Sydney is one of my favorite cities — it’s hard to beat the view of Sydney harbor from a ferry on the water at

sunset. But I also love the Peace Country, the area around Dawson Creek — it’s beautiful. There’s a ridge where some friends took me on ATVs where you can see the Canadian Rockies in the distance. It’s an amazing view.”

If he could visit anywhere in the world, he’d choose Scotland. “My ancestors lived there, and I’ve wanted to visit ever since I was a kid. (I did my 6th grade Country Notebook on Scotland.) I like bagpipes and what I know of the culture. I’ve been told the Isle of Skye is one of the most beautiful places on earth, and I’d love to see it.”

Among Coleman’s interests are swing dancing, (“I’m not great at it, but it’s a lot of fun and it’s a great way to meet new people”), and acting. He hasn’t been able to do much of that as a minister, but is teaching drama to fifth graders and helping with the theatrical productions at the Olivet School.

Among favorite books, he lists *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, the Narnia series, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope, and just about any Shakespeare play — but especially *Hamlet*.

Coleman finds it challenging to name favorite passages in the Writings, but offers AC 1812 and Doctrine of Faith 12 — both strong statements about what true faith is.

Bitter Waters Made Sweet

A sermon by the Rev. Coleman S. Glenn

“And they came to Marah, and they could not drink the waters for bitterness, because they were bitter; therefore he called the name of it Marah.” (Exodus 15:23)

This morning we read a story about the Children of Israel’s journeys in the wilderness. It’s easy to read the story without really grasping what the experience was like for them. But if we put ourselves in their place, we might start to understand how this story comes into play in our own lives.

Picture what the experience would have been like for just one of the children of Israel. Picture him in a desert. He has just finished crossing a great sea that was parted before his people so that they could walk through on dry land. And the Egyptians, who since he was born have beaten him, chained him up, and forced him into labor, were completely swallowed up by the sea. Moses and his sister Miriam have just finished shouting out a song to Jehovah, his

God, who has the power to do miracles unheard of by Egypt's magicians. He is going to a new land, a land where he will be free, a land flowing with milk and honey.

He looks around him — at the thousands of his fellow Israelites, at his tribe, at his friends, at his family. And they begin, setting out over the desert for the promised land.

The sand is hot, and there is not any water, but he hardly notices it — he is free! He walks along through the desert, he and all of the other Sons of Israel. At night, they rest, then they start again the next morning. Again, he walks and walks through the desert. The sun is beating down. There's not much vegetation. He hasn't had anything to drink since yesterday. And still he walks along, following an enormous pillar of cloud. Night begins to fall, and the pillar of cloud turns into a pillar of fire, lighting the way.

Eventually, he stops with the others to set up camp. His mouth is parched. His stomach hurts from thirst. His skin is dry and dusty. It seems like another lifetime that he crossed that sea. He doesn't sleep very well. And the next morning, he wakes up, and they start walking again.

The pillar continues on ahead. He trudges and trudge and trudges through the desert. It has been three days since he has had anything to drink. He is close to fainting. His muscles are cramping from lack of water. He knows that he can't go on like this much longer; his body is going to collapse.

And then he sees it up ahead: water! There is a surge of bodies as he and all his thousands of companions rush toward the water. He reaches the water. He leans down to take a drink. He brings the water to his mouth — and immediately he spits it out. It's bitter. It's undrinkable.

The people around him start to discover the same thing. All around him are people spitting out water. The crowd starts to grumble. He hears people shouting out to Moses, "What are we going to drink?" He is almost ready to give up hope; it feels like he will never drink again. And then he sees the people parting. Moses is coming through carrying a large piece of wood, which he carries to the water, and throws it in. A few people take a drink — and then drink, and drink some more! He cautiously approaches the water. He leans down, and he tastes it. And it is sweet! After three days with no water, he drinks and drinks until his thirst is gone.

The experience I just described is foreign to almost all of us. Most of us will never go longer than a day or so without anything to drink, let alone three days without water in a wilderness. But we can imagine the thirst, the longing for water, and the disappointment when we find out that the water is bitter. And maybe you can already start to see what this story might mean in its internal sense.

The Children of Israel had just crossed the Sea of Reeds (mistranslated as

the Red Sea in many Bibles). They were elated. They had escaped from Egypt, and the Egyptians would oppress them no more. Think of the times in your life when you've felt that joy of a new beginning. Times when you looked at your life, noticed that you were sinning against the Lord, and made a commitment to stop.

The first day of that commitment brings a feeling of joy and elation. Finally, you're going to be free — free from the desire to control other people, maybe, or free from lust, or free from the need to tell lies. You have made a commitment to the Lord to change, and you have prayed for His help. You know that you are on the way to the Promised Land.

And then daily life sets in. Maybe for a week, two weeks, a month you see the progress you're making. You catch yourself a few times when you're about to break one of the commandments. But as work starts to pile up, you dedicate less time to your spiritual commitment. You start to fall into old patterns. Maybe you stop reading the Word as often; you stop taking the time to work on your spiritual life.

You haven't given up, but you don't give much thought to these things anymore. And you can feel it. You know that something is missing, that the very thing that gave you such excitement only a little while earlier is gone. You thirst. And it might not even be on a conscious level — just a nagging, empty feeling that you're missing something important. You're trudging through the wilderness, and you are becoming thirstier and thirstier.

And then you realize it: you've stopped focusing on the Lord. You've stopped focusing on your commitment. You've stopped taking the time to think about how to love the Lord, how to love the people around you. Maybe you've stopped reading the Word. Maybe you haven't been going to church. You realize what's been missing. And so with hope you open up the Word to your favourite passage, you attend a doctrinal class, you go to church. You recommit yourself to your goals. You're ready to get back on the right path. You see the cool waters right in front of you, and you take a deep drink.

And there's nothing there. The same words that in the past have inspired you fall flat. You read the Word, but it's not joyful; it's a chore. Your doctrinal class feels meaningless. Church is boring. The waters that looked so refreshing, so cooling, so life-giving, are bitter! And this is a very real feeling, as real as the feeling of the Children of Israel when they discovered that the waters of Marah were bitter.

When you want nothing more than to feel the Lord's presence, to taste the living waters of His truth, and you cannot do it — you feel hopeless. You need these truths. They are what tell you how to live! Without them, you don't even know *how* to love your neighbor! In some cases, you may actually be brought to tears. I'm a bad person. I'll never get this. I might as well give up now —

there's no life in these words, and I'll never find life in them. We groan against Moses, who represents the Lord's Word. If we cannot have water from you, how will we survive?

We call out to the Lord in our anguish. We say, "Lord, give me your truth! I am dying!" And the Lord hears us. The Lord Jesus Christ hears us. He knows that we need truth, and He knows that we feel like we're dying. And He wants nothing more than to give it to us. When He was in the world, He Himself said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst to eternity, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life."

So Jehovah shows Moses a piece of wood, or a tree, and Moses knows that he needs to throw this wood into the water. But why does Moses need to do this? Jehovah is all-powerful, and He could easily make the water sweet without using a piece of wood. But by showing Moses the wood to throw into the water, the Lord shows us what is *really* missing from our lives. "Wood" in the Word represents good. And it is good that will make truth delightful again. It is not truth that we are lacking — the water is right there. But the goodness has gone out of it.

The truth that we found delightful before gave us delight because, whether we knew it or not, it held love within it. Every single *truth* in our *minds* is connected to *goodness* in our *heart* — to love, to kindness, to compassion. And when these connections to the good in our heart are cut off, the truths become stale and meaningless. The truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is God becomes real and powerful only when we *feel* the *joy* of Him acting through us.

The truth that marriages last to eternity is only delightful if we can *connect* to the joy and blessedness of true conjugal love. The truth of the Ten Commandments, for example "You shall not steal," is delightful only when you can *feel* the heavenly joy of *giving* to others replacing the hellish pleasure of *taking* from them. For truth to have life, it needs to exist not just in our heads, but in our hearts as well.

But how can we reconnect to these truths? How do we re-join the truth in our mind to the good we used to feel in them? When the water is bitter, we can't *force* ourselves to feel the love behind the truth. That is the *problem* — even if we know in our minds that the good is there, it still means nothing to us, because we cannot *feel* it. And so we ask the question: what does it mean to have Moses throw the wood into the bitter waters?

The wood that is thrown into the waters is the goodness that we feel in our hearts — a love for our neighbor, a love for the Lord. It inspires us to learn truth and to use that truth.

But the wood is not just good in our hearts. It is also goodness in our lives, in our actions. Throwing the wood into the water means focusing our

attention on how we can serve others, rather than on our own desire to be satisfied. And so return in your mind to that place of desperation. Remember how the Children of Israel might have felt as they watched Moses throw the wood into the water. It seems like such a simple thing; why should this make any difference in the waters? Why would a piece of wood help the situation? How can he be doing only this when we are dying of thirst? How can the simple act of doing good make a difference in the way truth affects us?

But Moses does throw the wood in the water, and the people do drink. How do we throw the wood in the water? We make the effort to apply what we know to our lives even though it feels like a chore. We again make that conscious effort to resist the evil tendencies we've seen in ourselves. We act according to the Lord's commandments, knowing that to break them is to sin against Him.

And maybe for a while, truth will still seem stale and tasteless and bitter to us. But as we keep at it, the wood will start to work. As we add good *actions* to our lives, we start to feel the good *love* in our hearts. And gradually, perhaps with little hope of success, we'll try again to taste the truth. And a miracle *does* eventually occur — those truths that seemed empty come to life again. The water that tasted bitter *does* become sweet. The Lord lifts us up out of temptation, and He leads us to a new sight of truth, to new feelings of love.

Picture yourself now in the place of that Israelite, in the deserts of the Middle East, having just drunk from the now-sweet waters of Marah. The pillar of cloud is on the move again, and with joy and confidence you follow after. Within hours you come to an enormous oasis: not one spring of water, but twelve! Not four or five palm trees, but seventy! Your journey is not complete; you still have miles and years to go before you reach the Holy Land; but after we come through hardship, the Lord blesses us with truth and goodness in abundance. Even though the truth may at times become bitter, we continue to follow it, and the love we feel returns. Then we can see the truth of the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman:

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst to eternity, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life.

Lessons: Exodus 15:22-27; John 4:1-14; AC 8349

New Church Perspective

The Rev. Brian Smith

N*ew Church Perspective* is a collaborative, volunteer-based, online magazine project, launched on January 1, 2010 with an article by the Rev. Derrick Lumsden on New Year's resolutions. More than a year later, NCP has continued to publish weekly articles from more than 35 contributing authors. The articles range over a wide variety of subjects, but each seeks to discuss spirituality and life in the context of a respectful consideration of the Heavenly Doctrines and the Bible. (Below is a recent submission, also from Derrick Lumsden, pastor of the Westville Church in South Africa.)

In the spirit of the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines, NCP seeks to promote the perfection of thought and useful service which comes from a variety of charitably held perspectives. (See *Heaven and Hell* 56 and 71, and *Secrets of Heaven* 1799).

The leadership team (of nine) continues to invite more people into the project to support it in a wide variety of ways — writing, editing, commenting, funding, launching new features, broadening the readership and more. The NCP model seeks to involve as many people and talents as possible, so that no one volunteer carries more than a sustainable amount of work.

Subscribing to receive weekly material for free is easy for any e-mail user. Simply visit: www.newchurchperspective.com/subscribe and choose which features you would like e-mailed to you. Since launching with weekly articles, NCP has added a column which offers brief reflections on a passage in the Heavenly Doctrine or Bible. It also hosts *Chapman Cast*, a weekly audio discussion or interview offered by Pearse Frazier. NCP also features an occasional mixed-media post with video or New Church inspired art.

NCP is pleased to be working its way through year two, continuing to build readership and new content contributors. We warmly invite your participation!

www.newchurchperspective.com

Why I Believe in Organized Religion

The Rev. Derrick Lumsden

“I am athletic, but not sporty.”

“So you don’t like group sports, but do you run?”

“No, running is too boring.”

“So, do you swim or surf?”

“No, I don’t like the water.”

“So, then you train at the gym.”

“No, I bought a membership but never went.”

“So, is there anything you do?”

“No, I am just athletic.”

This is an imaginary conversation. It may seem silly that someone would call himself athletic but not do anything with it. I could imagine another sort of conversation about someone being musical, but not instrumental; creative, but not artistic; academic, but not well read. I also have heard this attitude expressed about spirituality: “I am spiritual, but not religious.”

My understanding of why people say this is because they see the value of spirituality, but also see the faults of religious organizations. I believe these faults are part of the value they provide.

Full disclosure: I am a priest of the *General Church of the New Jerusalem*. It is my job to be spiritual *and* religious. I chose this profession in part because I believe in organized religion.

I can think of four benefits to organized religion:

1. It allows for a greater ability to help others
2. It allows for the advantages of specialization
3. Organized religion is implied by sacred texts
4. It allows for the opportunity to grow personally

Religious organizations exist to help people with spirituality. One way to view religion is as a spiritual path. To progress in spirituality, you must choose a path. Each religion will claim it has a more direct path or will take

you further. I will set aside the differences in religion and why one might offer more value than another. What I want to discuss is the idea that without an organization, a person must wander in the woods and see if he can find the path and manage to stay on it without any guidance. Organized religions offer the value of being able to pass along awareness of the dangers and also the great views that come with walking the path.

Now you might say that mentorship offers the same value. I would challenge that by saying you get the benefit of many mentors in an organization, which offers the guidance and wisdom of many more people. This shared wisdom is of greater value than any one mentor could offer. Because your view can receive the benefit of being challenged and improved by many minds, you actually have a freedom to pursue your interests in a way that would be dangerous on your own. That brings us to specialization.

Just as a community living together provides an opportunity for specialization in profession, organized religion provides the opportunity to specialize in understanding an aspect of spiritual life. All religions have teachings about how spirituality meets everyday life, how the Divine or the universe interacts with people, what happens after you die, what spiritual practices have value, and how to perform them to effect. To neglect any area of spirituality puts you at spiritual risk of losing sight of the destination or the path.

However, as part of an organized religion, you have more freedom to follow an area of understanding that interests you. For instance, I am personally interested in spiritual practices. Because I am part of a religious organization, I am free to explore spirituality through this lens.

If I were by myself, my interest could cause me to focus my religion too much on the practical. However, because I interact with others with a similar knowledge base, they can help me see the blind spots in my practical perspective. They can help me see the power of the Divine revelation or the majesty of the Divine apart from the limitations of my interest. If I were alone in my religion, I would have to be much more cautious about investigating this perspective so that it doesn't lead me astray.

To return to the profession analogy, it would be like a hermit interested in basket weaving. There is only so much time he could devote to the art without beginning to neglect other aspects of his life and endanger his survival. However, if he is a part of a community he could indulge this interest and provide an expertise gained only through a more intense interest and mastery of the craft.

Of course, each person must master basics of life. A basket weaver must be able to dress and feed himself. Spiritually speaking we all need to have a working knowledge of the breadth of spirituality. However, in a spiritual

community, we have more freedom to follow our interests and specialize.

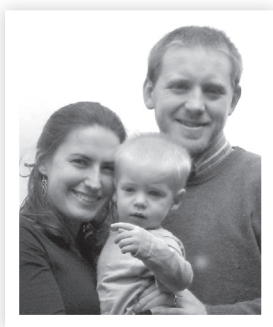
My background is Judeo-Christian. The sacred texts I have studied all imply that there should be an organization of religion. To talk about priests, hierarchy, communal religious practices such as sacrifices or communion, and even a corporate body that has a relationship to God called a nation or church, implies a certain level of organization that involves more structure to spirituality than individual spiritual practice. If the Divine implies such an organization in sacred texts, I imagine He has a reason for it.

One of the reasons that I think God wants us to have organized religion relates to the faults that we see in organized religion. The faults of others force us to face ourselves, to face our reaction to perceived faults, and to help others deal with what we perceive as faults. These challenges will certainly cause what could be called social tension.

Social tension is no doubt an uncomfortable thing, and yet without tension you lose an opportunity to grow. To try to gain strength without some form of resistance is impossible. To try to play a musical instrument without the vibration of some tension is impossible. The tension caused by trying to work with others creates the opportunity for spiritual growth. The tension caused by working with others creates the opportunity for harmony that would be impossible otherwise.

To take your opinion away from an organization leaves it at the mercy of those who disagree with you. To stay engaged with an organization forces you to come to terms with the tension between individual desires and the good of the whole community.

I ask you to engage with an organized religion because I firmly believe you and the organization will benefit, as long as both you and the other members of the organization seek to find a healthy, balanced tension between individual and community.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Derrick Lumsden was ordained in 2008 and into the second degree of the ministry in 2010. He is Pastor of New Church Westville in Durban, South Africa, where he lives with his wife, Eden (King) and two sons.

Eldergarten 2011

Bruce Henderson

Eldergarten was established in 1995 by the Rev. Fred Schnarr as a special week of instruction and socializing for the primarily senior citizen congregation of Boynton Beach in Florida.

The program was developed, Fred said, “to celebrate the age of wisdom by means of instruction and discussion of the doctrines of the New Church, together with the delight of mutual love and friendship.”

Eldergarten has been a great success ever since, generally featuring three speakers, a banquet and many social opportunities. Until this year it was held in the church buildings. This year, under the direction of Bob and Gail Brickman, it moved to the nearby Duncan Center, which offered more space as well as housing.

This year also offered an outstanding program:

- The Rev. Derek Elphick, former pastor in Boynton Beach and now pastor in Oak Arbor, Michigan, speaking on *All that the Lord Asks*
- The Rev. Chuck Blair, pastor of NewChurch LIVE, talking about this experimental church in Bryn Athyn and the importance of variety in worship in his talk *Building a Church*
- Dr. Gregory Rose, who served with the Air Force throughout the Middle East, taught at the U.S. Air Force Academy and now teaches at Bryn Athyn College, with an historic overview of *Islam, Islamism and Jihadism*

ALL THAT THE LORD ASKS — *Rev. Derek Elphick*



The red lettering — where Jesus speaks — is the heart of the New Testament. It includes almost 300 questions He asks — of His disciples, of ordinary men and women, of each of us.

His questions are there to make us think, to teach us, and potentially to transform us. As is written in the Gospel of Matthew 11:15, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” But are we really listening?

Derek quoted Sir Francis Bacon, who said, “A prudent question is half of wisdom,” and Albert Einstein, “The important thing is never to stop questioning.”

Anyone with a young child knows that children learn by asking questions. And this is the way the Lord teaches us.

The Writings, he said, are all about relationships — especially our relationship with the Lord. It is through His questions that He reveals His Humanity so that we can develop a truly human (personal) relationship with Him. As we reflect on His searching questions and think more deeply about how they apply to us, our lives can be transformed.

Derek talked about how children can get so engrossed in a book — illustrated so wonderfully in the novel, *The Never-Ending Story* — that they feel a part of it. This is what happens when we read and really “listen” to the Word and its questions. It is the story of our lives.

The Lord draws us in especially with His questions, which grab our attention, challenge us, humble us, launch us into soul searching about what we are doing and where we want to go with our lives.

The questions often are deliberately confrontational and uncomfortable. Consider the infirm man lying by the pool at Bethesda who could not move himself to be cured when the angel stirred the waters. Jesus asked him what seems a curious question, before healing him: “Do you want to be well?”

We might think, of course he wanted to be well. That’s why he was there. But what about an addict, an alcoholic, or someone in denial about a bad relationship? We have to want to get well before we can be healed.

When we open the Word, Derek said, we become part of a dialogue. It is not a monologue. And a lot of the seemingly simple questions the Lord asks are designed to lift us to another level of thinking, such as: “Do you think I came to bring peace?” “What are you seeking?” And “Have I not chosen you?”

The Lord’s questions are timeless and always perfect because:

- They are the right questions (divine truth)
- They are aimed at the right people, and accommodated for us
- They come at the right time for our state
- They are asked for the right reasons — motivating us toward a better life

These questions are a powerful means of communication because we who have ears are asked to hear and obey.

God’s questions are the ones we should be asking ourselves — as individuals and as a church. The Lord is always asking and awaits our answer. Are we ready to give it?



BUILDING A CHURCH — *Rev. Chuck Blair*

Chuck described the concept of NewChurch LIVE — an informal service aimed at newcomers — as not for everyone, especially those satisfied with a traditional format. It is designed as a “foyer” experience — a first step into the Church.

He quoted *Heaven and Hell* 56, that variety in worship “is the source of heaven’s perfection.” He said that faith is the opposite of certainty and that worship should stretch us beyond our comfort zones, citing AE 365 and John 16:33: “These things I have spoken unto

you that you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but trust confidently, for I have overcome the world.”

The old model of church and community, he said, is an inward focus, with people turning their backs to those on the outside. The new model of a self-creating church is people centered, not pastor centered, looking outward. It is the model, he said, of The Great Commission, where we are called to go out and preach to all nations.

His message in NewChurch LIVE is that a caring life, informed by faith, is the basis for salvation. Charity is at the core. We are not created for ourselves but to serve others, and it is the same for the Church. The Lord is present the moment we start to love our neighbor. It is all about getting down into life and planting seeds for the Lord to do His work.

The will of God is within infinite possibilities. “Our job is to find the joy in the possibilities so that we can joyously proclaim the heart of the New Church — the New Christianity.”

If worship is about the will of God, it is about having the right compass — a process that starts with loving the Lord “and the person right in front of you.”

People want to live lives of purpose and meaning, and worship at NewChurch LIVE is aimed at living your faith in everything you do. Chuck likes to call it a “Monday Morning Church” — taking the Sunday worship experience and putting it right to work in your life.

We love to have control and security in all we do, he said, “but the Lord promises none of these things.” He is calling us to the heart of true charity, and we have a lot to offer the world.

Chuck presented video testimonials from several people new to the Church who feel their lives have been transformed by NewChurch LIVE. A fallen church focused on faith alone is calling to us, he said, and we can give meaning to people’s lives by teaching and living what true religion is — worship with charity.

He said he had no clue where NewChurch LIVE would be in five years because it will grow on its own. The next step he calls 212 — what happens to water when you go from 211 degrees to the boiling point of 212 — which in this case is designing and producing effective services.

This includes finding people's interests, then the right teachings that apply, getting the right people on the planning team, the right speakers, music and format, and inviting the right people. This is something that can work for any church, not just NewChurch LIVE: deciding what are the core components of worship you want, what you are willing to change and what you do not want to change.

Change becomes “a decision to hope” and to go forth confidently “preaching to all nations.” We are called to be disciples (students) and apostles (messengers).

Chuck feels it is important to have an expansive view of worship — to get out of our comfort zones for that one degree of difference (212) where we can really begin to engage and serve others. He knows that NewChurch LIVE is not the format for all, but encouraged everyone to “find what responds to your needs,” plant that seed in the dirt and let the Lord do His work.

He left everyone with the image of a labyrinth as a symbol of life — not a straight line, but full of u-turns and new directions, and always progressing. “God holds all of our journeys,” he said, “within that circle.”

ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND JIHADISM — *Dr. D. Gregory Rose*



Greg has visited and worked in several Middle Eastern countries and served as a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer and Middle East specialist. With so much tension and misunderstanding in the world about Islam and Muslims, this was a very timely and useful presentation.

Islam begins in 610 AD with a revelation through the angel Jabreel (Gabriel) to the prophet Muhammad in Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia. This revelation was later compiled into the Qur'an, or recitation. Its key message is that there is one God and that Muslims are to submit to His will, worship Him alone, and obey His precepts.

Greg cited several numbers in the Writings (such as TCR 833, DP 255, and CL 341) about why in Providence Islam was raised up as a religion to rid the world of rampant idolatry and about their conception of the Lord. Although Muslims consider Jesus a powerful prophet rather than the Divine Human, it is interesting that the main narrative sections of the Qur'an focus on the

stories of Joseph, Moses and Jesus from the books of Genesis and Luke.

After Muhammad's death in 632 AD, a political disagreement over who should lead the Muslim community eventually developed into the sectarian division we see in Islam today between the Sunni majority and Shi'a minority. The Shi'a live mainly in Iran and make up about 15% of the world's nearly 1.5 billion Muslims. Although the religion has its roots in the Middle East, most Muslims live in Asian states (e.g., Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan).

Greg suggested we could think of three main categories in Islam today: traditional Muslims who make up the vast majority, Islamists who want to have a say in political reform and moral renewal, and Jihadists — the militant terrorists. Within these categories there are a variety of approaches to religion in general and to Islamic law, or shari'a. Some view shari'a as a set of ethical guidelines based on the principles and values of Islam, others see it as prescriptions to be followed literally.

He also suggested that rather than seeing events in the world today as a clash of civilizations, we should pay close attention to the clash within Islamic civilization. With increased literacy and access to information comes change in views of the nature of authority and we should expect to see continued social and political turmoil as Muslims work their way through a difficult process.

General Church Survey

Summary of Results

In May and June last year, General Church Marketing fielded a broad survey of Friends and Members of the Church. The survey was designed primarily as input to the Marketing process of developing a Positioning Statement for the New Church. “Positioning” can be defined as clearly identifying what it is that the New Church can uniquely offer people. Truly understanding this is an essential part of learning how to talk to people about the New Church. As such the survey sought to ask people who participate in the Church why they attend and how they feel about the Church. Aside from the basic demographic data, every question in the survey focused on key elements of individual’s very personal experience - what the Church does for them, how it makes them feel, and how they would describe it to an outsider. A secondary objective was to determine how the Church is delivering against the needs of current friends and members to understand the starting point relative to where we want to be. The survey was administered online over a six-week period and we ended up with more than 1,000 responses. Thank you to everyone who responded. The data was rich and extremely meaningful.

Although difficult to briefly summarize the results, it can be collapsed into four key threads:

1. Current Friends and Members of the Church do not question the meaning and value of the New Church theology:

- Even where there is dissent and criticism, there is almost never a criticism of the religion itself.
- The religion is seen as very tolerant of other Christian denominations, and is attractive for being so.
- The Writings are frequently mentioned as being very applicable to life, as are the efforts of clergy to bring the Church’s teachings to bear on everyday life.
- Occasionally there might be some awkwardness in explaining the Second Coming or the role of Swedenborg to an outsider but there is no indication of specific or profound theological doubt.

Editor’s note: This survey was conducted online last year and this summary was also distributed online late last year. This summary was prepared by Alicia Simons, Director of Marketing for the General Church.

2. But numbers indicate that the rate of attrition of existing members could outpace organic growth:

- Church expansion can come through new sites or new geography, but should also come from growing existing congregations. The data suggests, on current behavior, established congregations may drop:
- More than 20% of the people responding to the survey are both attending far less than average and have very low involvement/conviction toward the Church. These people could easily slip away.
- Only 3% of total respondents claim to have joined the New Church within the last five years. Assuming our survey is representative, this “refreshment rate” is notably less than the potential attrition rate above.
- The sample — and we assume the Church — is low in under 35s, which is where the families of the future and long-term members should come. It is also high in over 55s, who are post-family.

3. The results point out significant internal discord exists between different groups of members and between some members and the General Church organization:

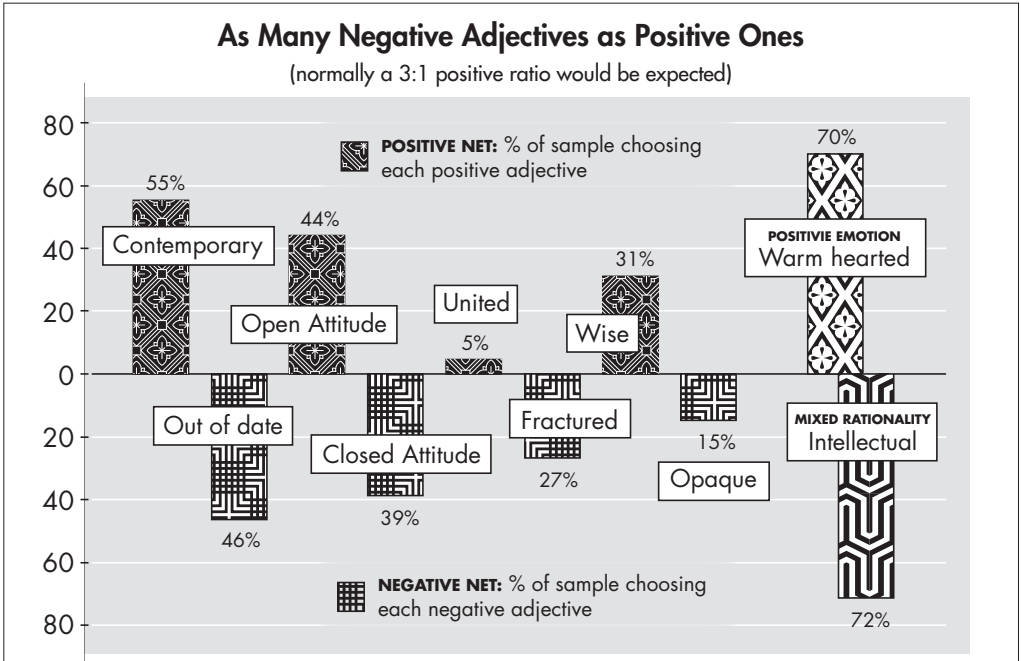
People who took the survey were given several “open ended” opportunities to talk about what they love about the New Church (“I love the New Church is _____”) as well as what issues they may have with the New Church (“I wish the New Church would _____”).

Normally when asked about likes and dislikes, the former exceed the latter by up to three times. This survey was very unusual in that there were often at least as many negative comments as positive ones.

- On being specifically asked what they loved about the New Church, many respondents took it upon themselves to refuse to give any likes and instead protest that the survey obscured the issue of the New Church vs. the General Church.
- Overall the factors they dislike run several pages longer than likes.
- When asked to select certain words to describe the New Church from a predefined list, respondents chose nearly as many negative words to describe New Church as positive ones — this again, is unusual.

The following chart collapses related words people selected to describe the New Church. What is interesting is, again, the fact that as many negative words were selected as positive and how juxtaposed the descriptions are. For example, the chart shows that 55% of people described the New Church in contemporary terms while 46% selected words describing the Church

as “Behind the times”, 44% described the New Church as having an “Open attitude” while 39% said “Closed attitude”, etc.



The next chart makes a similar point and summarizes the open ended questions by subject matter of the comment. The number of dots reflects

I Wish That the New Church Would... (dislikes)				
Frequency Frequency				
Not dilute message to get new members / Have more confidence in original philosophy	••••	Vs.	Have more impact on the wider world	••••
Be proud of our traditional difference Not go 'charismatic'	••		Be less confrontational over doctrine	••
	•		Be more emotional, warmer, less rationalist	•
Be stricter over sin / morality	••	Vs.	Be more accepting/inclusive	••••
			Be more tolerant of divorce/singles/ bachelors	••
Not neglect the long-standing members in favor of new members/outreach	•	Vs.	Be more welcoming to newcomers	••
			Be less clubby/incestuous	•
Have a strong and traditional leadership	•	Vs.	Have women in leadership and as pastors	•••
			Match staff skills better to roles, not all are cut out to do every job well	••
Have a more coherent/less fractured leadership	•••	Vs.	Have a more coherent/less fractured leadership	•••

the frequency with which the comment was made. Again we see juxtaposed opinions on similar issues such as how to approach growth, and the role of women.

It is also interesting to see that throughout the data, a third of the people consistently described the Church as fractured (27% overall) and as shown on the last row of the above chart, there is a common desire to have a more cohesive, less fractured organization.

4. We were successful in identifying guardrails for our eventual Positioning and Communication Strategy:

As discussed above, the primary purpose of the survey was to ask people who attend the Church why they attend and what they love about the Church in an effort to develop a Marketing Positioning for the New Church. The survey asked people in a number of different ways what are their primary motivators for attending the New Church as well as how well does the New Church deliver against these motivators.

The top 4 listed motivators were as follows:

- “Encourages a more useful life on earth” - 65% ranked as a 9 or 10 out of 10
- “Provides a deeper understanding of the Lord” - 63% ranked as a 9 or 10 out of 10
- “Allows me to develop my own personal relationship with God” -59% ranked as a 9 or 10 out of 10
- “Gives me more understanding to live as the Lord wishes” - 58% ranked as a 9 or 10 out of 10

Another very relevant finding for New Church Positioning came from the open-ended question “I love that the New Church is....” and talks about the applicability of New Church teachings to everyday life. A summary of

I love that the New Church is...	<i>Relative Frequency of Comment</i>
	Very applicable to daily life/practical spiritual answers Much more accepting/less excluding of other faiths Answering all the big questions Firmly rooted in Writings/Doctrine/Scripture Innovating somewhat/trying to make progress Providing educational/moral upbringing for children Strong in community and family values Has a determined commitment to integrity Is trying to adapt to/welcome new members Able to inspire closeness to God/make heaven more possible on earth Has a logical/rational theology Offers a forgiving and tolerant Lord Trying to update/modernise to be more accepting
Sidesteps question: Instead talks negatively about fracture between NC and GC structures	●●

responses is in the chart again with the number of dots reflecting the relative frequency of the comment.

One last very key point is the overwhelming description of the Church as Intellectual with 72% of the people selecting this word to describe the New Church. This will undoubtedly play a role in the ultimate positioning of the Church.

In summary, key elements of the New Church positioning will likely include the **intellectual** or rational personality of the Church, the concept of living a **useful** life on earth, the **individual's** relationship (personal relationship) with the Lord, and the idea that the New Church teachings have direct **applicability to everyday life**.

OTHER AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Throughout a series of live presentations of the survey results, several interesting discussions emerged:

1. **The meaning and perception of the word “Intellectual”:** In the first chart, the word “Intellectual” is framed as a negative. The slide does distinguish that it is not negative per se but as more rational versus the emotional description of “Warmhearted”. This does, however, imply a sense of coldness versus being warmhearted. The researchers dug deeper to determine what people meant when they selected the word “Intellectual” and found that for people who chose that word, the most commonly selected other words were “Wise”, “Old fashioned” and “Lacking in diversity”, so in this case, there was a negative bias to the word. That said it is recognized that Intellectual is a specific word in the New Church and can be seen as a potential double-edged sword.
2. **The conflict for people over the interaction between the New Church as a theology and the General Church as an organization:** In the early stages of the survey, people were very vocal about the need to distinguish between these two distinct points. As stated in the above findings, the religion is deeply appreciated by people whereas a number of people feel the General Church is flawed. It is an interesting conflict as when asked in the open-ended question, “I wish the New Church would...”, two very divergent voices emerge and poses an interesting challenge for current leadership.
3. **The double standard in the word “Tolerance”:** Simply as a point of interest, not a “finding” of the survey, it was observed a number of times in the presentation series that although one of the most valued

tenants of New Church teachings is its tolerance of other religions, within the Church organization of today, tolerance sometimes feels in short supply.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

There are two key areas of next steps following the survey:

1. Church leadership needs to digest the results and determine the best strategic path forward.
2. The Marketing function will continue to refine the key elements identified here for a positioning platform for the Church. We have recently completed formalized “Positioning Workshops” which add more detail and depth to the findings here.
 - Once we feel we have captured a true, unique, compelling and simple statement about why the New Church is different and what it has to offer people, we will then begin to talk to people currently unaware of the New Church and see how that promise resonates with them.
 - The findings of the process can ultimately serve as the foundation for any future Marketing endeavors and Outreach efforts by the General Church, as well as by local congregations, and even individuals who find they want simply to explain what the New Church means to them, but sometimes find it hard to articulate.
 - In any application, large or small, compelling communication will be a critical piece of spreading the teachings of the New Church.

As a last word, I would like to personally thank you again for your time and effort in making the results of the survey so rich and meaningful for the Church organization.

Alicia Simons
Director of marketing, General Church

New Church Life Survey

New Church Life asked readers to respond to a survey last year to give us input about what you value in the publication and how it might be improved. We thank the 138 people who responded. These evaluations and suggestions will be most useful going forward with the *Life*. Continuing feedback is always welcome and appreciated.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the returns came from people aged 60 and above. For the most part they are regular readers, are not inclined to read the publication online, are willing to pay more for a subscription, and would prefer monthly publication but generally accept that economics are dictating a switch to bi-monthly.

Among the many useful comments returned with the surveys:

- Don't water down the doctrine, but make it more relevant to people's lives
- Put the *Life* back in *New Church Life*
- Articles need to be more contemporary and challenging; more thought-provoking articles, for instance, on doctrine applied to current issues in science, medicine and other disciplines
- The publication is especially important for people who are isolated from congregations; sermons are particularly appreciated
- More articles from laymen and women
- More use of technology would be appreciated, i.e. online publication and a place where people could exchange comments
- Reflect the life and doctrine of the Church — include governance issues
- People love the Announcements — and often read them first
- Many would like to see a return to Society News
- Letters and discussions are valued — but no politics, please

Editorials

Do You See An Angel?

One of the charming stories of Swedenborg's life is about a little neighbor, Greta Askbom, who used to beg "Uncle Swedenborg" to show her an angel. One day he relented and took her inside, placed her before a curtain and said, "Now I will show you an angel." When he pulled the curtain aside Greta saw herself reflected in a mirror.

There is an important lesson in this — for Greta and for all of us. This is how the Lord sees us — as potential angels. This is the way He wants us to see ourselves. And this is the way He wants us to see others — not focusing on their faults but looking for the good in them, as angels do.

It is not always easy to be angelic. Our inclinations are often to harsh judgments and criticism. But as individuals — and as a church — we are called upon always to put charity first. "You cannot have faith in the Lord unless you are in charity." (Doctrine of Faith 22) And we know that "We cannot become angels, that is, come into heaven, unless we bring something of an angelic character from living in this world." (DP 60)

We do need to apply judgment in situations, in making choices, in evaluating leaders, especially if we are trying to follow the Lord. But we are with the angels when we begin with a presumption of good will. We are with the angels when we live with the mantra: say nothing unless it is true, kind and necessary. We are with the angels when we realize, as Swedenborg wrote in AC 6073, that "charity does not actually become charity until it passes into action and becomes a work."

In the book of Revelation, the Church of Ephesus is called the lampstand church, and is called upon to "do the first works" — which are the works of charity. Doctrine is not the first of the church. Charity is. "For in proportion as a man is in the goods of life, in the same proportion he is really in the truths of doctrine, *but not the reverse.*" (AR 82)

In the published collection of *New Church Life* editorials by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, a perennial favorite is, *The Quiet New Church Man*. It recognizes that as much as the Church needs good leaders, it also relies on those who are quietly "faithful and steady in support of the uses of the Church." They may be in the background, but are always there, "radiating a

quiet but strong sphere of affectional support.” Any congregation is blessed with such a foundation of good will.

These loyal church members do not stand out. “The quiet New Church man” does not dominate in discussions. His quiet ways do not shield ignorance but offer quiet, steadfast understanding of doctrine and applying it to his life. Most important, the editorial concludes, is that “his life is an unselfconscious example for all who are perceptive enough to realize it. Let us not overlook the quiet New Church man in an age which puts so much emphasis on leadership or underestimate his worth. He is a follower of the Lord. As such he is the backbone of any society, and it may well be that he is the salt of the earth.”

Just as we need to recognize and appreciate quiet, steadfast New Church men and women in our congregations, so must we honor those who set the example for “a lampstand church” of always keeping charity first. They are the angels among us.

(BMH)

Where Is The Joy?

We were created to experience joy. This follows from the familiar teaching that the Lord’s purpose in creation is a heaven from the human race. If that is the universal purpose then it is also the specific purpose for the creation of each one of us. Our destiny is to be happy. “Heaven in itself is so full of delights that viewed in itself it is nothing else than blessedness and delight. ... Thus whether you say heaven or heavenly joy it is the same thing.” (*Heaven and Hell* 397)

There are various reasons for believing in heaven, but the strongest support for such belief is a first-hand experience of heavenly joy. A better question than “do you believe in heaven?” is “have you experienced heavenly joy?” But don’t be too quick to answer; the issue is complicated.

All joy comes from love. What we love determines what we feel as delightful. Heavenly joy comes from the two loves of heaven: love to the Lord and love toward the neighbor. We speak often about those two loves, but the meaning of them becomes more real and living when we consider them in terms of the happiness they bring. Knowing that those loves are of supreme importance is one thing; feeling the heavenly joy they produce is something else.

We are told, however, that while living in this world people who love the Lord and their neighbors do not feel any distinct sense of delight from those loves, “but only a blessedness that is hardly perceptible.” After death, though,

that blessedness that lay hidden away and unrecognized in their interiors comes out and is felt.

So just because we are not carried away by ecstasy from on high does not mean we are devoid of heavenly loves. The experience of the joy that accompanies those loves is mostly delayed until we leave this world.

The case is different with evil people. They do feel an immediate sense of delight from the loves that motivate them — the loves of self and the world. But after death that delight is “turned into what is painful and direful.” (*Heaven and Hell* 401)

We can see why the evil find their delight more quickly. They give free reign to the loves that drive them. They follow their base desires down the path of least resistance, while those who are inwardly affected by the loves of heaven must climb upwards, compelling themselves to take the “strait and narrow” path of obedience to the Lord’s commandments.

In other words, those headed for heaven spend much of their life going against the grain, resisting their natural impulses, and “taking up their cross” in order to follow the Lord. Their earthly life is one of spiritual warfare, but it ends in eternal peace. The evil have their reward in this world.

Most people yearn for the peace and joy of heaven, and many strive by means of various spiritual practices to find it. Spiritual discipline is a good thing, and especially needed in our hectic and materialistic age, but we should recognize that there is no shortcut to heaven.

Still, life in this world is not *only* tribulation. The Lord gives us encouraging glimmers and foretastes of what He has in store for us in heaven. Just as we should examine ourselves to identify evils so they can be removed, we might also reflect on the blessings we have experienced.

Even if it was “hardly perceptible,” were there not occasions when you felt some deep sense of heavenly joy? Perhaps it was in response to something beautiful you saw or heard. Or the innocent sphere of little children. Or perhaps you felt another’s joy as joy in yourself. Or the satisfaction that comes with a job well done. Or the supreme example: a foretaste of the conjugal love that makes heaven such a happy place.

The Lord’s kingdom is not of this world, but it is not as distant as it may often seem. It is within you. The sheer joy of it, even if “hardly perceptible,” is within you. Look for signs of it. Rejoice in any hint of its presence. Anticipate a fuller experience of it. It will grow.

(WEO)

The Comic Side Of Atheism

In a recent “holiday message,” British comedian Ricky Gervais stated: “I don’t believe in God because there is absolutely no scientific evidence for His existence, and from what I’ve heard the very definition is a logical impossibility in this known universe.” While it seems foolhardy to quibble with science and the logic of the known universe, quibble we must.

Not that it will change any minds, of course. All beliefs are logical to those who hold them. “Assume the falsest proposition and ask an ingenious man to prove it, and he will prove it.” (*Divine Providence* 286) In fact, it’s actually easier to rationalize a false idea than a true one. (*Divine Providence* 318)

The flaw in Mr. Gervais’ logic is the restriction on the kind of evidence he allows. By limiting it to *scientific* evidence he assumes that nature is everything. The conclusion of the argument (that there is no God) was foreordained by the premise with which it began. He has said, in effect: “there is no God because there is no God.”

“Scientific evidence” pertains to natural things, but God is a Spirit. The proposition (that God exists) which is rejected for lack of scientific evidence, wasn’t a scientific proposition in the first place. Saying “I don’t believe in God because there’s no *scientific* evidence” is like saying “I don’t believe in black holes because there’s no *theological* evidence that they exist.”

All that Mr. Gervais has established is that there’s no natural evidence for God that will convince someone who doesn’t believe in God. But for those who do believe in God *all* scientific evidence (in so far as it accurately represents the facts of nature) is evidence of God’s existence. For them, the *non*-existence of God is a “logical impossibility.”

The premise upon which a believer’s logic rests (that there is a God) is no less valid, scientifically or otherwise, than the assumption the atheist begins with (that there is no God). Scientific evidence can be interpreted to confirm either premise.

“Human reason can, if it will, perceive and be convinced from many things in the world that there is a God....for the universe is like a stage, upon which evidence that there is a God and that He is one is continually exhibited.” (*True Christian Religion* 12)

Therefore: “Beware of confirmations in favor of nature. Confirm (yourself) in favor of the Divine. There is no lack of evidence.” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 357)

(WEO)

Why Do We Believe In God?

When asked why he doesn't believe in God, our atheist friend responds: "No, no, why do *you* believe in God? Surely the burden of proof is on the believer." It seems odd to say that the burden of proof is on those who believe something which most people have always believed, but it's a fair question: Why do we believe in God?

Briefly, the answer is because human beings were created to know God exists, and a predisposition to believe in God is part of our nature. (*True Christian Religion* 8) There is even evidence, some neuroscientists say, that the brain is "hard-wired" to believe in the Divine.

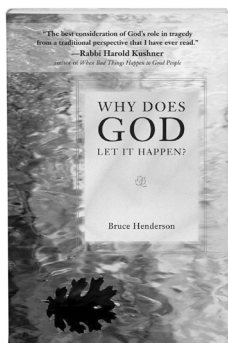
Provided the light of truth flowing into the mind through heaven is not blocked by the misuse of reason to confirm natural appearances to the contrary, it enables us to see reflections of the Divine in the Word and in nature. So although the atheist says belief in God is entirely "subjective," this is not so; there are objective foundations for it.

Atheists are correct in saying that belief in God is a matter of faith, but the way they define faith casts doubt on its reliability. Faith is often called "blind," but real faith sees the most real things of all. "What is faith but to see spiritually that God is." (*True Christian Religion* 22) "The Lord is seen only by faith, because faith is the eye of love," (*Arcana Coelestia* 3863.12) Faith is not "believing in something you know isn't true," as skeptics sometimes define it, but seeing truth because it is loved. And as the old saying has it, "seeing is believing."

Most affectingly of all, we can see an image and likeness of the Divine in the character of people, in their innocence, love, wisdom and various virtues. Which is why love of the neighbor is not a substitute for love of God, as the atheist thinks, but the expression of that love.

(WEO)

Book Reviews



Why Does God Let it Happen?

Author: Bruce Henderson

One of the main reasons atheists give to explain why they do not believe in God goes something like this: If there were a benevolent and all-powerful entity running the universe, there could not be so much pain and suffering as is obviously prevalent all over the world. Its benevolence would oppose such tragedies, and it would have all the power needed to prevent them. People who *do* believe in God can see their point, but they feel that the situation is not as simple as all that.

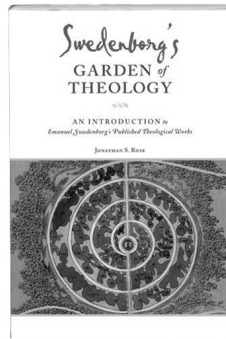
In 1983 a Jewish rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner wrote a book in which he gave his explanation of why a belief in God is possible, and even reasonable, despite the widespread woe that is so apparent. He called his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It found a receptive audience and soon made it onto the best-seller lists.

Now a new book devoted to this subject matter has appeared on the scene. It is *Why Does God Let It Happen?* by Bruce Henderson. This one is especially important because it makes use of New Church theology to provide a well-reasoned answer to the question posed by the book's title. Mr. Henderson's previous book, *Window to Eternity*, gave its readers the New Church view of life after the death of the physical body. His new *Why?* book does the same for the difficult problem of God's tolerance of so much human suffering.

In dealing with this problem he draws on many distinctive doctrines from the Writings. These include the laws of Divine Providence, the preeminence of eternal life over that of the body, and especially the absolute necessity of preserving human freedom. In the course of weaving these doctrines into a coherent and convincing explanation of why the Lord's permission of evil and its resulting pain and distress in no way diminishes His love and compassion for mankind, the author succeeds in composing an easy-to-read introduction to Swedenborgian theology.

This book is the latest in the series of Chrysalis books published by the Swedenborg Foundation. It is brief, well written and interesting. Apparently Rabbi Kushner himself read it with approval. On the front cover this quotation from the rabbi appears: "The best consideration of God's role in tragedy from a traditional perspective that I have ever read." Considering the source, that is quite a compliment; and I totally agree.

Review written by Dr. Forrest Dristy of the Boynton Beach congregation for The New Church Voice of Florida. Reprinted with his permission and our appreciation.



Swedenborg's Garden of Theology

Author: Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose

Swedenborg wrote more than 30 volumes of theological works and a similar number of books on science and philosophy. Think of all the time it must have taken him just to do the physical writing of all those manuscripts, struggling with a goose quill dipped in ink, not to mention the time spent actually thinking about what to write. To me the thought is mind-boggling. When you throw in all the time he spent traveling and performing his duties

at the Board of Mines, clearly he could not have had any time for mundane hobbies. But that's not the case at all. The fact is that he was, in his spare time, an avid gardener. He even went to considerable pains to obtain uncommon seeds from such distant lands as Africa and America. His garden was reported to be a sight to behold.

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose has written a book in which he cleverly utilizes the analogy between Swedenborg the gardener and Swedenborg the theologian. He gave it an appropriate name: *Swedenborg's Garden of Theology*. The idea is to take the reader on a tour of Swedenborgian theology that would be something like a garden tour. The gateway, or beginning of the tour, is Swedenborg's amazing claim about the nature of the assignment given him by the Lord and the unique capability that came with the job: his special ability to live in the spiritual world and interact with its inhabitants.

The tour then proceeds to give the reader an overview of the main sections of this theological garden, such as the humanity of God, the meaning of heaven and hell, and the inflow of the Lord's life into individual people. The pertinent doctrines are all clearly stated with copious references to the Writings themselves. In one section, for example, the reader will find a description of the history of all the churches, in Swedenborg's sense of the word, from the Most Ancient through the Christian. The latter one, as we are told, was facing its spiritual last judgment during the seer's own earthly lifetime; and this major event led to the beginning of the New Church.

Of course even a beautiful garden may have some offerings that do not seem appealing to some visitors. Some people do not like broccoli or yams or spinach, however healthy these plants may be. Mr. Rose acknowledges that the same principle may apply in the case of Swedenborg's theological garden. He refers his readers to certain statements in the Writings that may seem to be sexist or anti-Semitic or even unscientific.

Such statements, of course, can be quite embarrassing to those of us who are firm believers in the Heavenly Doctrines, but there they are and there's no denying it. We may feel better about them if we keep in mind that Swedenborg was, after all, a man of the 18th century who carried with him the intellectual baggage of that period. In providing a new revelation through him, the Lord had to use his mind as it was — not as we may think it should have been.

Mr. Rose is obviously an expert guide for this garden tour. His commentary on the subject is clearly expressed, interesting to read, and thoroughly documented. Anyone interested in learning about Swedenborg's theology would be well served to take the tour.

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Principles in Play

Editor: Rev. Dr. James Lawrence

*Essays in Honor of Rev. Dr. George Dole's Contribution to Swedenborgian Thought,
Printed by Studias Swedenborgiana, Berkeley, California — \$19.95*

This anthology by scholars and colleagues has each chapter broadening the picture of George Dole's involvement in Swedenborgian thought and culture. Jim Lawrence's Introduction presents Dole as the "Thinker at Play," and his intuition that Swedenborg himself "made decisions that amounted to alterations of course in living response to this experience of trying to be an effective author."

Stephen Larsen writes on *George Dole: Ruling Love and Personal Mythology*. He clarifies George's running career, including running a four-minute mile in the very race when Roger Bannister broke that mark in 1954. Larsen later qualified to run with him. It was during such runs when the "oxygen turned him on" that Dole analyzed Swedenborg's contribution to neuro-anatomy, moving into the field of holography, thus combining theology with the new physics of Einstein and quantum revolution.

Andrew Dole takes up *Freedom, Evil and the Problem of Hell*, in terms of theodicy: i.e. God is good, evil exists, how can God then be all-merciful? Citing Augustine, part of the answer is that individuals "freely chose hell" but are not cast there by God. But this runs into the apparent "inflicting" of punishment by God, making the "problem exponentially more difficult." Dole explains that "the widest context of hell, the ultimate presupposition behind it, is a God of infinite love and wisdom." Each individual "makes his soul" to be an end result, and thus he gravitates "toward a community of similar souls."

Jim Lawrence's *Telling the Old, Old Story Anew* recounts Dole's biblical studies, resulting in his "encouraging us to be unafraid of interpreting the Bible for spiritual sense meaning as it pertains to our own lives."

Jane Williams-Hogan in *History and Revelation* honors Dole's "tremendous impact on Swedenborgian scholarship." In the modern age, with the "veils shrouding nature so dramatically pushed aside," we would expect to understand the "inner workings of heaven and the means of achieving it." She traces Swedenborg's personal history in preparation for this task of revelator, including the small works written but not published by him.

W. Hunter Roberts' *Against Solipsism: Dole on Swedenborg, Postmodernism and Morality* investigates Dole's input on "knowing only appearances of truth" but going on to the reality of actual goodness and truth, beyond appearances, and how real our life in accordance with these should be.

Wilma Wake takes up *George Dole's Hologram: From Influx to Transpersonal Psychology*. Dole used a hologram as “correspondence for influx” after he had read works on the hologram by Pribram and Bohm, making him “see Swedenborg’s theology differently.” It rights truth with the quote, “The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things.” (DLW 77).

Alice B. Skinner’s *A Contemporary Compendium* is a selection from Swedenborg “reflecting on contemporary religious questions” revised into a second edition of Dole’s *A View from Within* (1985). The second edition is *A Thoughtful Soul: Reflections from Swedenborg*. She reviews this new edition as an “accessible introduction to Swedenborg’s thought” arranged in a series of spiritual questions. She says Dole “provides an innovative approach to the sequence of topics,” addressing an era when “exclusively materialistic accounts of reality are being challenged.”

F. Garrdiner Perry III with *Perception of Divinity: A Conversation with the Rev. Dr. George F. Dole* follows up on Dole’s treatment of “human prudence being nothing, though it seems to be, as it should” (DP 191). The question is can one focus on the boundary, perceiving the divinity “within speaking and listening”?

David J. Fekete continues with Dole’s *Groundbreaking Contribution to the Modern Translation Movement of Swedenborg’s Writings*. He uses a recent “concise but breezy” rendition of *Divine Love and Wisdom* by Dole, which he says reads as “cleanly as a Hemingway novel.”

Stuart Shotwell’s *Affection and the Bodily: Two Meaning-Complexes in Swedenborg Theological Works* points out examples of Dole’s different uses of affection, such as SH 3665:5 relating to children. He continues this investigation of uses of affection and how they “cut across our current definitions of mental phenomena.”

Harvey F. Bellin’s chapter, *Sharpening Sight: Films by Rev. George F. Dole*, discusses films that are legend in the New Church world. Bellin postulates the relationship between the two worlds as a known fact, then examines Dole’s genius in utilizing this knowledge, such as *Images of Knowing*, with Swedenborg’s Latin prose converted into “vibrant contemporary English” and “opening some new sense.”

Junchol Lee in the final chapter recounts his first meeting with Dole. His anticipation grew to the point where he thought he must already be dead! Imagine his pleasure at being told simply, “My name is George.” Lee addresses his doubts and how to make progress in his studies at the Swedenborg School of Religion. As a result of the dialogue, Dole gave him a new name from the Word, characterizing him as to his spiritual search.

In an Afterword, the Rev. Dr. Dole reflects on the reality of the spiritual realm touched on so often in this work. He muses that the “true authority of

revelation is not in the description of spiritual reality but in the reality that is being described.” And, “No statement is true because it is in the books; it is in the books because it is true,” modifying it only “at least as true as his earthly language could make it.”

Review written by Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE GRADUATE COURSES AT BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE PRIOR TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The coming General Assembly, June 23 – 26, inspired the Dean of the MARS program, Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan, to offer some of its graduate courses to members of the Church coming to Bryn Athyn from near and far. We are offering New Church college graduates the opportunity to study core doctrines in a religious studies framework during a three-week summer session, June 1 – 21.

The Masters of Arts in Religious Studies program at Bryn Athyn College is offering courses in Religious Studies and Core Doctrines of the New Church. There will be 30 hours of instruction in each three-credit course offered. Students may take two courses during the summer session. Final papers or projects will be due Friday, August 5. Tuition will be \$1,658 per course. Housing with kitchen facilities will be available on the college campus.

For more information and an application, please contact: Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan, jane.williams-hogan@brynathyn.edu or 267-502-2501. This is a great opportunity to engage doctrinal and religious issues in a lively academic format.

Life Lines

THE NEW CHURCH AND CIVILITY

This is a good time, in conjunction with the recent rediscovery in America of the value of civility, to remind ourselves that conditions on the civil plane of life are the result of conditions on the spiritual and moral planes. The Lord observed long ago that putting a patch of new cloth on an old garment doesn't work. If we really want to restore civility, a reweaving of the whole spiritual and moral fabric of society — a New Church — is needed.

The main thing that cannot be patched onto the old spiritual order is the New Church itself. This is why there had to be a Last Judgment before the Church could be established in heaven. Little by little, as the reordering of society that took place in heaven is extended into the world, the New Jerusalem will descend more completely from heaven to earth. The New Church is not just one more new thing on the face of the earth, but is an entirely new earth to match the new heaven.

“Behold, I make all things new,” the Lord said. *He* makes. His plan may seem sketchy, and the timetable vague (“a time and times and half a time”), but it is to be expected that the wisdom required for such a vast and complex project will be largely inscrutable to us.

(WEO)

MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN

Dr. Michael Lemole, the neurosurgeon who treated Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords after she and others were shot by a madman in Tucson, Arizona, in early January, said about her remarkable initial progress: “Yes, miracles happen every day. A lot of medicine is outside of our control, so we're wise to acknowledge miracles.” Dr. Lemole, a New Churchman who was born and raised in Bryn Athyn, made the comment on television news programs and it was widely reported throughout the media.

The Test of Permissions

Christina Green was the 9-year-old killed in that Arizona shooting. The Lord said not a sparrow falls without Him being present. But fall they do, and we can't help but wonder why. Permissions, we are told, are part of providence. Evils must be permitted for the sake of human freedom.

We understand the doctrine, we think, but can we ever fully understand *why?* Perhaps not, yet our belief in providence survives. “Faith is the eye

of love.” And if at times the eye of faith is blinded by tears, love still knows what love knows. Pascal was right: “The heart has reasons that reason does not know.” Or as the Lord said in John 20: 29 many centuries earlier: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Meanwhile, Christina’s mother, in the midst of her grief the day after her little girl died, said this: “I have to believe she is in heaven with God and her grandmother — and that somehow God needed her more there than we need her here.”

(BMH and WEO)

THE SEARCH IS OVER

Is Dan Brown, the best-selling author who both entertained and offended readers with *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*, really searching for Swedenborg — without even knowing it?

His current thriller has Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon careening through Washington, DC, in search of *The Lost Symbol*. It turns out that the “lost symbol” is “The Lost Word,” buried in the hidden cornerstone of the Washington Monument.

“Concealed within these pages,” he writes, “there lies a wondrous secret.” The secret is the lost wisdom of the ancients — the internal sense of the Bible.

Brown quotes the familiar passage: “When He the spirit of truth is come, He will lead you into all Truth.”

What he doesn’t know is that this “spirit of truth” is the revelation given through Emanuel Swedenborg, and that revelation — not cryptic symbols — is the only way to explain such “secrets.”

(BMH)

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

When the Lord was on earth, many received Him with joy, but there were also many who found His words outrageous and offensive, and turned away from Him. And He let them go. But those who stayed with Him learned from experience the truth of His declaration: “If you abide in My Word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” In the end, what we *know* depends upon where our spirit dwells, and with whom.

(WEO)

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