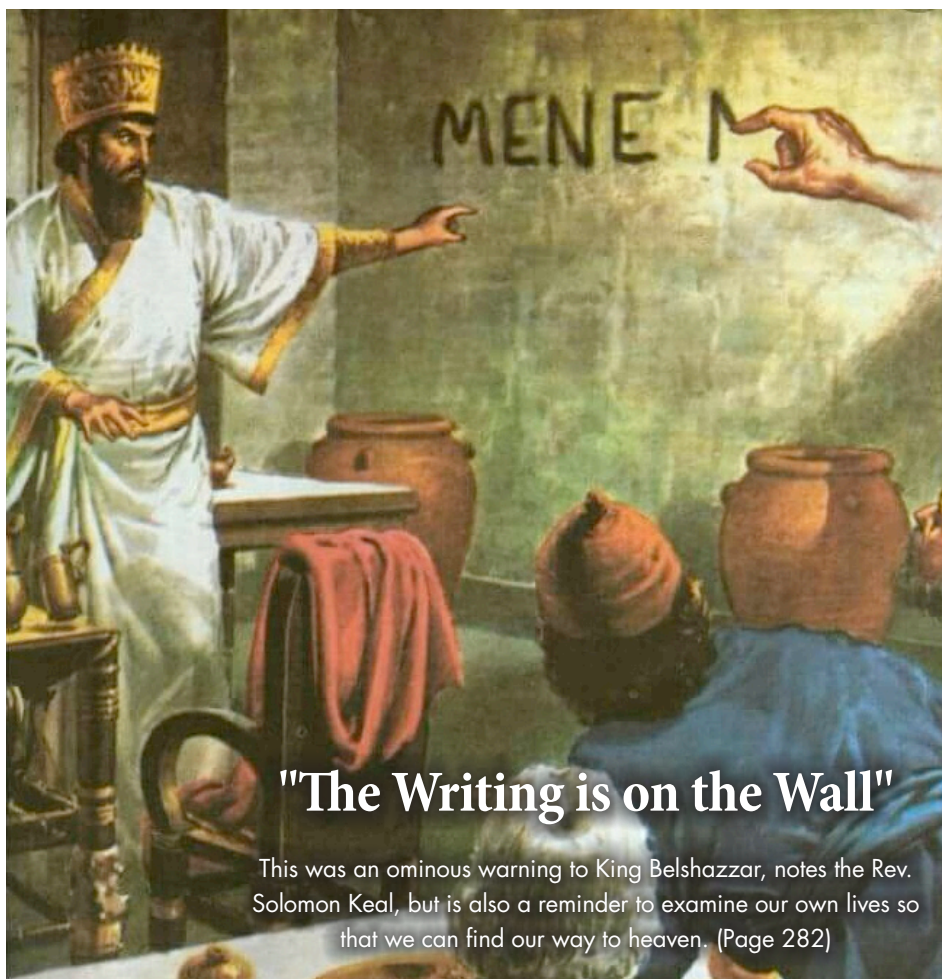


NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JULY/AUGUST 2018



"The Writing is on the Wall"

This was an ominous warning to King Belshazzar, notes the Rev. Solomon Keal, but is also a reminder to examine our own lives so that we can find our way to heaven. (Page 282)

Note: There is no extra cost for the use of color on the front page.

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New Church Life

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

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In This Issue

Editorials include:

- *Leaven or Lump?* How does the leavening of bread relate to the uniqueness and value of Bryn Athyn College in the world of higher education?
- *Hope*: There is much despair in the world around us – a sense of hopelessness. But to believe in the Lord and trust in His providence is to live with confident hope and optimism. We also reprint a 1955 editorial by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, *A Living Hope* – the very hope that sustains our New Church faith.

In a sermon on *Thought* the Rev. Jeremy Simons says we should reflect on what goes on in our minds – both consciously and subconsciously – because our habits of thought and reflection have a great impact on our happiness. It is important for us to notice and be aware of the things that occupy our thoughts. “The Lord’s suggestion is that if a person dwells on natural things they will be anxious, but if they tend to think about spiritual things they will be at peace.” (Page 276)

Continuing on this theme the Rev. Solomon Keal offers a sermon on *The Writing is on the Wall* – an ominous warning about Belshazzar’s life, and our own. “We are asked to account for the thoughts we entertain, the words we speak, the behaviors we manifest, the choices we make, the actions we take,” he says. “We should examine our thoughts and feelings, our hearts and minds, our will and intellect, our words and actions.” This is not an easy or pleasant task, but it is ultimately necessary and rewarding. (Page 282)

In his commencement address for Bryn Athyn College Brent Pendleton asked graduates to consider: “What is your passion? What are your gifts?” He framed their education in the perspective of the Bryn Athyn Historic District and told the graduates: “I believe the very reason you are here today can be found in Providence, and what you have discovered is that the key to true success and happiness is not just what you love to learn but what you learn to love.” (Page 289)

In a tandem commencement address for the Academy Secondary Schools Bruce and Molly Cronlund talked about the milestones of life – and the forks

in the road that often get in the way of “plans.” These seniors, they said, are well prepared to recognize the opportunities that pop up in life and to pursue them. (Page 295)

In a poignant valedictory for the Academy Girls School Qi Rebecca Xiao told how overwhelming it was to come to the Academy from her native China and be intimidated by the tall trees and imposing stone buildings. But she quickly learned that the Academy is all about being loved and learning to love. And she stopped noticing the trees and buildings, instead seeing people – and a lot of smiling, loving faces. (Page 300)

Just as the descending holy city New Jerusalem is “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” the Rev. Alan Cowley says we need to prepare ourselves to be receptive of the Lord. “The only church which really works toward our salvation,” he says, “is not a place one goes to attend, it is the relationship with God inside every individual’s heart and mind that one must attend to.” (Page 303)

Dr. Allen Bedford of Bryn Athyn College has written a book based on a personal study: *Forming a Partnership: Reading True Christianity as a Personal Guide to Faith*. You can read the Preface and Chapter One beginning on page 308. Chapter Two will be published in the September/October issue. Once the completed book is available we hope to publish a review by one of Dr. Bedford’s colleagues.

Church News (page 332) includes:

- The nominee for the next Executive Bishop of the General Church and the process from here
- Bryn Athyn College graduates and awards
- A new College faculty member
- Academy Secondary Schools graduates and awards
- The May meeting of the Academy Board of Trustees
- General Church Corporation
- General Church clergy retirements
- A new book by the Rev. Dr. George F. Dole: *The Universe and I – Where Science and Spirituality Meet*

Editorials

LEAVEN OR LUMP?

Yeast is the leavening agent used in baking bread, but more generally leaven is defined as "an element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify a whole." An example would be the kind of education offered by a small religious college. It can influence the world very significantly, even though in the eyes of the world it is practically invisible. The worldly culture in which such a college is embedded is like a large bowl of dough, while what the college adds to that culture is like the spoonful of leaven that causes dough to rise.

The implications of this comparison for our own Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and its mission are obvious. Small though our College is, it can change the world. Its influence is subtle and mostly unrecognized, but it is profound.

I ran across this comparison in an article by R. R. Reno in *First Things* magazine, in which he contrasted two small Christian colleges that he had recently visited with his own conventional alma mater.

His first visit was to Christendom College in Virginia, founded in 1977 in an abandoned elementary school with a handful of students. "It's a small place (500 students), a nullity in our vast system of higher education, and out of sync with what our world considers to be important," he says. "It does not take federal money. Its curriculum is traditional, ordered toward the end of nurturing faith and reason rather than preparing young people to climb the greasy pole of meritocratic status."

Then a couple of weeks later he visited an even smaller school in an even more remote location, Wyoming Catholic College in Lander, Wyoming (150 students). "There, as well, the curriculum is traditional, organized around great books. The college does not dovetail with today's educational-industrial complex."

These descriptions are worth reflecting on. Federal money not accepted. Traditional curriculum organized around great books and designed to nurture faith and reason. "Out of sync with what our world considers to be important."

Rather than instilling conformity with the dictates of political correctness, the purpose of these little colleges is to nurture faith and acquaint them with works of timeless wisdom. They do not offer a narrow education focused on preparing them for a particular career, but strive to help the students develop the kind of clear thinking, from solid, time-tested principles, which will be invaluable to them in whatever career they go into.

The visits to these two small Christian colleges led Reno to reflect on his own alma mater near Philadelphia, which is also relatively small (about 1,000 students). It is a very highly respected and selective liberal arts college, with a "vast and grand" campus and large financial resources. And yet it seems to him that the little, obscure colleges in Virginia and Wyoming have something essential that his prestigious alma mater lacks.

"I am grateful for the professors there who mentored me when I was young," he writes. "But when I view the place objectively, I can see that it is a well-appointed cog in the existing social system in America, feeding talented young people into the meritocratic machine. It's a place that adds dough to the lump – high-achieving, high-quality dough, but not much in the way of leaven."

The smaller religious schools are not perfect, he notes. The faculties teach an exhausting course load. But he was impressed by the "confident, joyful purpose in educational missions that are genuinely supernatural in their ambition."

"There's lively yeast at Christendom and Wyoming Catholic, and not just at those places. America is full of faithful schools, colleges, programs, initiatives, revived religious orders, and new religious movements." He then spoke of another "nano-institution with paltry resources" (Augustine College) but that nevertheless offers "a one-year Christian liberal arts program for kids who want serious intellectual and spiritual formation before entering college."

Note these descriptions: "Genuinely supernatural in their ambition." For students who want "serious intellectual and spiritual formation."

Reno concludes: "It's easy to get pessimistic right now. Lots of powerful forces in America seem to be turning against us. Our increasingly secular cultural and political regimes have little in the way of new life in them. Cynicism and careerism disfigure many talented young people today. These are not qualities pregnant with a vital future for the West. It will be those few who are looking upward, those who have a sense of the transcendent possibilities, who will be able to lead us toward something new, something culturally alive."

As long as the Heavenly Doctrine forms the core of its curriculum, its influence radiating out into all the subjects taught, Bryn Athyn College of the New Church will never be a place that "just adds dough to the lump," but will continue to stand among "those few who are looking upward." In fact, because

of the vitality of the Truth it serves, it will continue to be preeminent among them – not in the world’s eyes, perhaps, but in the sight of heaven.

(WEO)

HOPE

The hope of every generation is that the future will be better for the next. Such wishful thinking is giving way to doubt and despair. Science fiction books and movies project a dystopian view of the future. Our culture is in free fall, untethered to morality. We are menaced by terrorism and nuclear threat. More and more people are abandoning religion as irrelevant and turning away from the light for the dazzling allure of technology. Peace is elusive in a quarrelsome and spiteful world. Many still cling to hope – that things happen for a reason and there has to be something better. Others just worry and wonder.

Even in the church many of us look at our slow growth and burgeoning challenges and wonder where we will be in 20 years. Is there hope? But if we have faith in the Lord, and the leading of His providence, New Church men and women cannot help but be optimistic.

Remember how Moses hesitated when he was asked by the Lord to lead the children of Israel out of slavery. Moses was a simple man and saw no hope for himself as a leader. “Who am I,” he asked, “that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” The Lord assured him simply, “I will be with thee.” (*Exodus 3:11-12*) That is what He says to us in our lives too. And that is what He says to the Church: “I will be with thee.” Always. That is the hope to sustain us.

That is the message throughout the Word. It is at the heart of the Christmas story – the Lord coming on earth to subjugate the hells, guarantee our freedom, and become a visible presence in our lives. Hope is the promise of Easter – triumphing over death and evil, and offering the life of heaven for all who choose it. And hope is transformational in the Last Judgment and Second Coming – the New Church descending from God out of heaven, the ultimate hope of the world.

There is nothing new about a sense of hopelessness. The children of Israel lived with it for 40 years in the wilderness. Many people still resonate with the signature pessimism of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden* – in a far simpler age more than 160 years ago: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

Back in the relatively tranquil May of 1955 the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson was moved by the hopeless mood he sensed even then to write an editorial for *New Church Life – A Living Hope* – which still speaks to our faith and our concern. That editorial is reprinted below:

As distinct from desire or wishful thinking, hope has become a rare thing in the world; so rare that men are asking seriously if it is possible to live without it, and whether they must not try to do so. There is, indeed, an influential and popular philosophy which takes the literally helpless condition of man as its starting point; and although the Christian Church has adapted to its own theologies, in the larger issue it seems to have no specific message of hope. Indeed the churches have so often identified themselves with the hopes of the world, preaching those which are now recognized as illusions, that their gospel has become suspect in the eyes of a weary and cynical generation.

The New Church man whose faith is firmly grounded in the Writings views the world scene from a privileged vantage point. In the Heavenly Doctrine he finds a living hope; one which is not based on human choice or preference. But is founded on the promises made by the Lord at His second coming and on the revelation then of the laws of His Divine Providence. And this hope has nothing to do with what he would like to be true; it is a perception of what has been revealed by the Lord; an assurance which counts without question on the reality of the Lord's end and the means He is using to achieve it.

This hope is not a vague idealism, a naïve looking on the bright side of things, or an attempt to keep up courage; nor is it the hope which, despairing of earth, looks only beyond the grave. It is rooted in reality.

In one sense it is centered squarely on this earth, and it requires the men and women of the church to take a long and careful look at the dark side of things. They know and face the fact that their world is living in the age of a consummated church, the vastation of which must be ultimate increasingly. But it is their conviction that behind all the evil which apparently threatens the world with destruction is the Divine Providence operating to establish the Lord's kingdom, not in some far off realm beyond the skies but in the hearts and minds of men and women on earth.

They know that only those evils are permitted which can be bent secretly to that end. And they know that eventually the Lord's kingdom will prevail on the earth. However, this conviction has not been made possible because we are more worthy than are others to escape uncertainty, but because we have from the Lord the ability to serve as instruments for the slow upbuilding of His kingdom, and that we may do our part with deep assurance as to the outcome.

We would add only these assurances from the Lord's Word:

I will not leave thee comfortless. (*John 14:18*)

That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. (*Psalms 78:7*)

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. (*Jeremiah 17:7*)

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. (*Lamentations* 3:26)

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee. (*Psalms* 33:22)

(BMH)

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

RATIOCINATION

More often translated “reasoning,” this term describes the process of arguing whether Divine and spiritual things exist in which those indulge who inwardly doubt and deny, and who approach such things from sensuous and scientific ones. Ratiocination, which always favors man’s principles, takes the place of understanding with the unregenerate. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 7352; *Heaven and Hell* 464)

Thought

A Sermon About What Goes on in Your Mind

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

Lessons: *Luke 12.22-34; Spiritual Experiences 733, 734; Arcana Coelestia 3796*

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Luke 12.27)

One of the greatest freedoms that people have is the ability to think about whatever they like. There are almost no boundaries or limits whatsoever. In this passage the Lord asks you to think about lilies and to compare His minute care of them with His care of you. The idea is that this will give you confidence that He loves you and cares for you, and that you don't need to worry.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you have to consider this. You can think whatever you want in response to these words, or not pay any attention at all.

Our topic today is the mysterious nature of human consciousness. It is the capacity that people have to direct their thoughts and attention, to notice or not notice things, to reflect or not reflect on whatever they choose. Everyone is conscious of the world around them in a slightly different way, and a person's conscious thought is influenced by many factors. But even though many things compete for your attention, and few people are complete masters of their own thoughts, this is an area of your life where you have more freedom and more control than any other. Our topic is how your thoughts affect your happiness, and especially how important it is to reflect and be aware of the nature of your thoughts.

The Heavenly Doctrines have a great deal to say about this topic, and especially about reflection. Reflection is the practice of thinking about things, and of noticing and considering their nature, particularly the nature and

quality of your own thoughts and intentions. In *Arcana Coelestia* 3661 reflection is said to be “the mental view of a thing, how it stands, and what its quality is.” It is also called an “internal telling and saying” (*Ibid.* 2862; see also 3608), because people speak within themselves, asking questions and giving answers: “What is this? What is happening here? Am I doing the right thing? Is what I am hearing true?” Everyone asks himself different questions and, and according to the Writings, your habits of thought and reflection have a great impact on your happiness.

The Lord’s saying about the lilies urges you not to worry about your external life. Yet this kind of worrying comes naturally to people. As you sit you may think about the nature of the building we are in, the people that are around you, what you are going to do today, or any number of other things, all in addition to your purpose for being here and the lessons you may learn. You may also think about yourself, how you look, and how you feel. People tend to think about themselves, and also about the obvious external circumstances that affect them at any given moment. This is how minds work.

But many of the things that people tend to think about bring with them the kind of worrying that the Lord warns us about in our text. We read: “There are various objects of thought, which, while a person is held, or his reflection is kept fixed on them by spirits, occasion much disturbance.” (*Spiritual Diary* 3624)

Swedenborg goes on to list various objects of his own thought, such as money, the future, the things that he needed to do, the state of mind of the people around him, what they thought of him and his work, things that he needed to buy, and similar things. Swedenborg says: “Whenever I was held for some time in this kind of reflection, spirits would immediately throw in inconvenient, troublesome, and evil suggestions, with confirming facts and anxieties. But I observed that when I had not been in the thought of such things for months or years, I had no care about them, still less did they give trouble. These are the reflections of thought, in which whoever is detained, he is the more infested by evil spirits the longer the reflection is continued.” (*Ibid*)

The fascinating thing here is the suggestion that your peace of mind is not so much the result of your circumstances, or of how you think about things, but simply the kinds of things that you tend to dwell on. Regardless of whether

Everyone asks himself different questions and, and according to the Writings, your habits of thought and reflection have a great impact on your happiness.

The point is that it is important for people to notice and be aware of the types of things that occupy their thoughts.... The Lord's suggestion is that if a person dwells on natural things they will be anxious, but if they tend to think about spiritual things they will be at peace.

you have a lot of money or little money, if you think frequently about your money you will become discontent. Whether you have few friends or many friends, the longer you consider it the more unhappy you will become. The unhappiness is inherent in the subject matter itself. A strong characteristic of depression is that these kinds of thoughts revolve endlessly in the depressed person's mind, and the person feels powerless to escape them.

When the Lord says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat," He doesn't mean that people shouldn't think about or plan for food and clothing for themselves and their household. It's not wrong to think about your finances and social life. It is only that the more you think of these things the more likely it is that you will

start to worry.

The point is that it is important for people to notice and be aware of the types of things that occupy their thoughts. For the Lord gives people the power to direct their thoughts in whatever direction they wish. The Lord's suggestion is that if a person dwells on natural things they will be anxious, but if they tend to think about spiritual things they will be at peace. So He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."

What is it to think about spiritual things, to seek first the kingdom of God? A person might say that it is to meditate on religious subjects, but this is only partly true. We read: "Spiritual life is acquired solely by a life according to the commandments in the Word. These commandments are given in a summary in the Decalogue." (*Apocalypse Explained* 902)

The essence of this life and these commandments is to love God and love the neighbor. It is important to meditate on religious subjects, but real spiritual thought is to care about and therefore to spend time thinking about the welfare of other people and not simply your own welfare. Spiritual thought is to care about and therefore think about how to serve the Lord.

If you think about your employment for the purpose of serving others, or about your marriage and family, or about organizations that you are involved with, or about individuals you are doing things for, or about yourself for the

purpose of self improvement – this is spiritual thought because it is keeping the Commandments. It is a way of thinking that is not just about working either. There are many people who are constantly motivated by love for others and consideration toward them, whether they are working, relaxing or socializing – this is seeking first the kingdom of God.

Surprisingly, though, it is not that easy to know whether or not this is what your own thought is like. In one sense the development and cultivation of the kind of self-awareness a person needs to have to know this is what religion is all about. We read:

If people would attend to reflection, they would find more arcana in the doctrine of reflection than in any other. (*Spiritual Experiences* 738)

The doctrine of reflection is an entire doctrine, and without it no one can know what the interior life is. Without reflection from the knowledge of truths no one is reformed. (*Ibid.* 739)

This makes sense if you realize that religion is all about learning to consciously make the spiritual choices that lead to heaven. If you are unaware of your own choices and your own nature you aren't really consciously making the choices, and are likely to be following your own inclinations away from spiritual life. But the subject is complex because it involves all the secrets of how the door to heaven is opened in a person's mind and life. It is no small thing to wake up spiritually and become aware of your own true nature. So it is called here an entire doctrine, containing more arcana than any other, involving all the secrets of learning, self-examination, repentance, the development of conscience and many others.

It is no wonder that this kind of awareness is said in the Doctrines to be rare:

At this day there are few who are being regenerated, and still fewer who reflect. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4245; see also 4366.2, 5224.2)

People do not know (about their own nature) because they do not reflect upon it; and no others can reflect upon it than those who think interiorly; that is, in their spirit abstractly from the body. (*Ibid.* 10604.2)

There are many things that block your awareness of your true nature. We are told that thought from self prevents us from reflecting, but thought from the love of others has the opposite effect. "Charity leads a person to reflect upon the evils within him." (*Charity* 181) But the lack of charity takes away reflection, so that, "People perceive the delights (of their desires) but reflect little upon them; for the delights . . . take away reflection." (*Divine Providence* 113)

It is interesting that delight takes away reflection. In a negative sense this

It is interesting that delight takes away reflection. In a negative sense this means that when a person is immersed in a self-centered delight it is difficult for him to examine it rationally.

means that when a person is immersed in a self-centered delight it is difficult for him to examine it rationally.

But this teaching has a positive sense as well, for we read that “Spirits and angels have no reflection except what the Lord gives them.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2107; also 2199)

There are teachings that explain that a striking difference between life in the next world and life in this world is the nature of the things they reflect on. (*Spiritual Experiences* 4716) They do not think about the externals of their life in heaven. They barely notice them, because they are completely

caught up in the delight of what they do.

In this world, people’s constant thought about external things robs them of many delights. Instead of enjoying an occasion it is common for people to have their mind elsewhere. But an angel who is protecting a person from evil spirits does not reflect on whether or not he is having a good time or if he will be late for dinner. He is fully and whole-heartedly in the love of it, and this love takes away external reflections not connected with the use. There is no anxiety about the outcome or about the future; the angel is completely happy in the present, since he trusts in the Lord.

People can learn to have that same immersion in the delights of heaven by consciously choosing these delights over immersion in worldly delights. We learn it mainly by involving ourselves to the best of our ability in our work and responsibilities for the sake of other people. If these things interest us we will habitually meditate on them.

Our lesson spoke of the importance of looking at ourselves from the viewpoint of others, “or allowing others to reflect upon us, and to say what we are like. Then for the first time we are able to know ourselves. Otherwise we can never learn, but remain in our own illusions, and from them, reflect upon others.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 734)

We also read that if people want to know what they are like “they have merely to take note of their feeling of delight - whether it is on account of his receiving praise and glory, or whether it is on account of his performing some unselfish service. If it is the latter delight which he feels, genuine affection is present in him.” The passage adds: “A person is able to find these things out in himself, but not in others.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3796) There are many similar

suggestions in the Word as to how we can know our thoughts. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1102.3; *Charity* 4; *Divine Providence* 61)

So in asking us to consider the lilies the Lord is asking us to reflect on our lives, to think about His love for us, to ask ourselves where our treasure lies. It is not something that anyone can make us do, and no one in this world will ever know if we are doing it or not. We are completely free to think about what we want. But if you are interested in finding the joy that the angels have, and in escaping the anxieties of this world, you will be interested in reflecting on these things. The Lord's purpose is to take away your anxieties and replace them with the happiness of heaven.

Do not fear little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches or moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Amen.



The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons is semi-retired and serves as the Chaplain of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Most recently he served as pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, and has also served in Glenview, Illinois, and Kempton, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Allyn (Edmonds), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: Jeremy.Simons@brynathynchurch.org

So in asking us to consider the lilies the Lord is asking us to reflect on our lives, to think about His love for us, to ask ourselves where our treasure lies.

“The Writing is on the Wall”

The Rev. Solomon J. Keal

Lessons: *Daniel 5: 1-5; Apocalypse Revealed 313; True Christianity 530; John 8: 6-11*

In the same hour the fingers of a person's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. (Daniel 5:5)

"I can see the writing on the wall." This is a familiar phrase meaning that we know something bad is about to happen. This phrase has its origin in this story from *Daniel*. From the perspective of King Belshazzar, the "writing on the wall" was bad news; it was indicating the imminent end of his reign. But what does this story mean in our own lives? Is the "writing on the wall" always an indication of bad news?

"*Mene, mene, teckel, upharsin.*" Even if Belshazzar recognized these Aramaic words, he didn't understand what they meant. Reading the words as nouns, it could have been describing kinds of currency or weights or measurements: "*mina, mina, shekel, peres*¹ (or half-piece)." Belshazzar could have wondered: "Why is there a list of coins on my wall?" And even if he had read the words as verbs, as Daniel did, it was still a riddle: "numbered, numbered, weighed, divided." *What does that mean?* Daniel explained that it was a message from God meaning that Belshazzar's value as a king had been *numbered* and *weighed*, and that his kingdom would be *divided* from him.

It's a mysterious and fascinating story in the literal sense. In the New Church we know that all the stories in the Word are truly valuable because of the inner meaning hidden inside the symbolism – much like the meaning hidden in the "writing on the wall." So, what is the meaning or the message for us in this story? And is it bad news, or is it maybe good news when we understand it properly?

In the New Testament, the *gospel* or "good news" is the message that through the process of repentance there is hope of turning our lives around, changing our lives for the better, and through regeneration, eventually becoming angels in the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus said: "Repent [or change], and believe

1 The word "*peres*" (the singular of *upharsin*) could also have been a play on words indicating both that the kingdom would be "divided," and that it would be given to the "Persians."

in the gospel [or good news].” (*Mark 1:14-15*) But, when the Lord helps us to become aware of the bad habits we need to change, we often don’t initially take that as good news. It can feel like the Lord telling us we’re in trouble, like the writing on the wall.

As I was reading what the Writings of Swedenborg teach about the meaning of this story, I was struck by how much it reminded me of the steps of repentance outlined in the Heavenly Doctrines. In *True Christianity* it says that the four steps of repentance are: “to examine ourselves, recognize and admit to our sins, pray to the Lord, and begin a new life.” (No. 530) The “writing on the wall” could be a way of describing our process of repentance and spiritual change.

The first word on the wall was *mene*, meaning “numbered.” In *Apocalypse Revealed* it states that “to number in the spiritual sense means, symbolically, to know the character of something.” (No. 364) This could be connected to the first step of repentance: to examine ourselves.

Just as an accountant might crunch the numbers on a business, we are asked to “crunch the numbers” on our spiritual lives. *Secrets of Heaven* states: “‘numbered’ means what is brought to a conclusion, as when a line is drawn under a list of figures at the end of a calculation.” (No. 10217:5) We are asked to account for the thoughts we entertain, the words we speak, the behaviors we manifest, the choices we make, the actions we take. We’re asked to “do the math” on our spiritual life.

In Twelve-Step terminology this could be like “taking a moral inventory;” holding ourselves accountable. And just like an accountant, we are not necessarily making a moral judgment, but simply non-judgmentally taking note of all the relevant data on our lives. Examining ourselves means finding out the truth about our lives; the good, the bad, and the ugly. And so “to number . . . symbolically means to know its character in respect to truth.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 313; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 3104:4)

We might wonder why the word “numbered” is repeated: “numbered, numbered, weighed, divided.” It reminds me of the phrase often used when cutting a piece of wood: “measure twice, cut once.” Perhaps it is also repeated for emphasis, as an important first step. But *Apocalypse Explained* indicates that it is repeated because “‘numbered, numbered,’ signifies exploration in respect

We are asked to account for the thoughts we entertain, the words we speak, the behaviors we manifest, the choices we make, the actions we take. We’re asked to “do the math” on our spiritual life.

We should examine our thoughts *and* feelings, our hearts *and* minds, our will *and* intellect, our words *and* actions. This is not an easy or pleasant task.

to good and in respect to truth.” (No. 373:3; see also 453:4)

We should examine our thoughts *and* feelings, our hearts *and* minds, our will *and* intellect, our words *and* actions. This is not an easy or pleasant task. As is said in *Psalms* 56:8: “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?”

Self-examination can leave us feeling exposed and vulnerable. But it’s useful to remember that the purpose is

not so that we can be humiliated, but so that we can be raised up by the Lord into greater happiness. As it says in *Luke* 12:7: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” And in *Psalms* 90: 12: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

The second word on the wall was *tekel*, meaning “weighed.” This could represent the second step of repentance: to recognize and admit to our sins. It’s one thing to examine ourselves and identify our good and bad habits. But if we don’t actually *care* about what we find when we examine ourselves, then we won’t be able to make changes for the better. We actually have to *feel the weight* of our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, choices and actions. *Numbering* our lives uses our intellect, but *weighing* our lives is felt in our will and our heart. And so the Heavenly Doctrines indicate that “to weigh . . . symbolically means to know its character in respect to goodness.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 313; see also *Arcana Coelestia* 3104:4; *Apocalypse Explained* 373:3)

This is the part where we take responsibility for the things we’ve said and done. That can be a pretty heavy thing to do. We feel it in our heart. In *Samuel*: “Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.” (*1 Samuel* 2:3; see also *Matthew* 23:23) Recognizing and admitting to the mistakes that we’ve made is like being weighed. It can feel like bad news.

The third word on the wall was *upharsin* (or *peres*) meaning “divided.” This could be connected to the fourth step of repentance: to begin a new life. (We will come back to the third step of repentance later). “To divide . . . symbolically means to disperse.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 313) “Divided; signifies dispersion and expulsion from the good and truth of the church and separation therefrom.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 373:3). Expelled from the goodness and truth of the church?! It continues to sound like bad news! But

this is actually good, because what we want is for the Lord to help us divide what is good in our lives from what is bad.

As it says in *Matthew 25:32*: “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.” And in Genesis: “And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness” (*Genesis 1:4*; see also *Genesis 1:6-8*; *Psalms 29:7*) The Lord can help us to separate, divide and disconnect from our bad habits, and help us build a new life around our good habits.

One of the important things to keep in mind when reading stories from the Word is that all the characters in the stories represent parts of us. Belshazzar², as king of Babylon, represents selfishness and the desire to control other people. “‘Babylon’ or ‘Babel’ means in the Word the love of dominion.” (*Apocalypse Explained 1029:10*) “Loving ourselves [in a negative sense] is wanting what is best for ourselves alone and not for anyone else unless we ourselves will benefit.” (*True Christian Religion 754*) This kind of “self-love is nothing but the conviction that we answer to ourselves alone. . . . From [this love] flows every kind of evil, such as hatred, vengefulness, cruelty, adultery, deceit, hypocrisy and godlessness.” (*Arcana Coelestia 1326*)

Belshazzar on the throne symbolizes the times when this kind of selfish and domineering love is ruling in our hearts. He had taken the gold and silver vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem and used them for himself; like the times we take the good and true things the Lord is giving us, and use them for selfish purposes. We can take the Lord’s love for us and twist it into love for only ourselves, which becomes arrogance and pride and eventually hatred. We can take the Lord’s truth and pretend that we own it, and then sometimes we use it to hurt people.

The “writing on the wall” is the message from the Lord that this selfishness and domineering in our lives needs to come to an end. It’s time for Belshazzar to be deposed, and be divided from the kingdom. But when we’re stuck in that place, we can’t help but hear this with Belshazzar’s ears as bad news for us. “How will I be happy unless I focus on what I want? How will I be happy unless I can control the other people in my life?” The writing on the wall seems like bad news.

But there are other characters in this story that represent other parts of us. Belshazzar’s queen remembered about Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams and divine messages. “Queen” in the Word often represents wisdom or faith in God. (See *Arcana Coelestia 3183*; *Conjugal Love 21*; *True Christian Religion 137.5, 177.3*) So this queen could represent the wisdom to know that we need to ask the Lord for help.

2 “Belshazzar” means “Bel (a Babylonian god) protect the King”

Self-examination can leave us feeling exposed and vulnerable. But it's useful to remember that the purpose is not so that we can be humiliated, but so that we can be raised up by the Lord into greater happiness.

This is step three in the steps of repentance: pray to the Lord. When we feel confused about how to change, or depressed about our many mistakes, or like we need to carry the world on our shoulders, it's important to turn to the Lord. We are not meant to carry all that weight alone. Prayer can help us remember that we are not alone. The Lord is our true source of happiness, and the One who does the real work of regeneration. And so through prayer we can be reminded to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." (*Psalm 37:7*) Help is available, and so the Queen called for Daniel to help decipher this riddle.

In a previous story, Daniel³ had been given the Babylonian name "Beltshazzar" (*Daniel 1:7*), which is very similar to the King of Babylon's name: "Belshazzar." It's almost as if they are two sides of the same coin; Belshazzar and Beltshazzar symbolizing two different sides of us: the selfishness ruling in our hearts, and the humble but wise spirit that the Lord wants to elevate.

In this story Daniel is the part of us that is closest to the Lord (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5223:4); the part that sees things clearly; the part that is mindful and aware; and can read the signs.

Daniel could represent "our inner self, our true self . . . our intelligence and our type of love." (See *True Christian Religion* 156) It's the part of us "in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God." (*Daniel 5:11*) It's the part of us that can be "enlightened" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 383), and is capable of "living wisely." (*Doctrine of the Lord* 48) And it's through this process – the "writing on the wall," the steps of repentance – that our "Daniel" part is elevated, and made a "ruler in the kingdom." (*Daniel 5:29*) It's the "Daniel" part of us that knows that repentance is good news.

One of the memorable parts of this story is the fact that a mysterious hand writes this message on the wall of the palace. What does "writing on a wall" symbolize? The Heavenly Doctrines teach that a wall "symbolizes the Word in its literal sense." (*Apocalypse Revealed* 898) So in one sense the "writing on the wall" is simply the Divine Truth from the Lord in the pages of the Word.

3 "Daniel" means "God is my Judge."

We might sometimes find ourselves looking at that “wall” and wondering, “what does this mean?” It often doesn’t seem to make sense at first. And even when it becomes clear that the Word is calling us to repent, the Belshazzar part of us sees it as bad news, but the Daniel part of us knows that it’s good news. It’s foretold by the Lord that through repentance our selfishness can be deposed, and our true inner self can be elevated.

There are other “walls” that can be vehicles for the Lord’s truth as well. “A wall symboliz[es] truth in outward expressions.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 132) For example, our bodies can be a kind of external “wall” through which the Lord sends us messages. When I feel a tickle in my throat, I know that the “writing is on the wall” – that I’m getting sick, and I need to drink more water and get more rest. When I’m engaged in a debate with someone and I feel my heartbeat rising, I know the “writing is on the wall” that I may be getting angry and if I’m not careful I might say something I will regret.

The “wall” of “truth in outward expressions” might also come through other people. When I say something to someone and I see their face fall, I can read the “writing on their wall” and examine whether my words were inappropriate. We can also use the spiritual practice of journaling to read the “writing on the wall” of our own thoughts and behaviors.

I might write a journal entry noting that: “This kind of negative thinking doesn’t usually go well for me,” like Daniel reminding Belshazzar of the fate of Nebuchadnezzar before him. The “Daniel” part of us can read all of these kinds of “writing on the wall” as useful information that can lead to making better choices, through a process of “numbering, weighing, and dividing,” or in other words: repentance.

Finally, there are two other places in the Word where it describes the Lord writing something with His finger⁴. One is of course the description of the Lord writing the 10 Commandments in stone with His finger; a kind of “writing on the wall” which lists things we should avoid doing. Both stories might feel a little bit like the Lord pointing His finger at our faults and flaws. It can feel like bad news.

But there is another place where the Lord writes with His finger, and that is the story of the woman caught in adultery in John chapter 8. In that story, rather than being accusing or condemning, the Lord simply wrote on the ground with His finger, saying “Whoever is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” (*John* 8:7)

The Lord writing with His finger was giving them all the space to examine their motives, admit their own sins, and make a better choice; or in other

4 Assuming the writing on the wall was written by the finger of God (see *Daniel* 5:24,26; *Last Judgment* 54).

It's not a condemnation from the Lord about our impending doom; rather it's a loving reminder from our Divine Parent to watch where we are going, so that we don't get hurt, so that we don't hurt other people, and so that we can find our way to the kingdom of heaven.

words: to be numbered, weighed and divided. Rather than being punished for their cruelty, the accusers were simply convicted by their own consciences. Rather than being stoned, the woman was given the chance to repent and begin a new life, as the Lord said: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (*John 8:11*)

This is the "writing on the wall." It's not bad news; it's the Lord giving us a "heads up!" It's the good news that we can change for the better, if we pay attention. It's not a condemnation from the Lord about our impending doom; rather it's a loving reminder from our Divine Parent to watch where we are going, so that we don't get hurt, so that we don't hurt other people, and so that we can find our way to the kingdom of heaven.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."
(*Psalm 90:12*)

Amen.



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What Is Your Passion? What Are Your Gifts?

Brent Pendleton

A few months ago when President Blair asked if I would speak at your graduation, I simply smiled and said, “Why me?” And Brian said: “Well, many of the students see these somber portraits of mostly men in robes and business suits, and are familiar with names like Pitcairn, Asplundh and Brickman, so I thought a message from the past could be inspiring. And . . . you’re the oldest person I could find!”

Seriously, there probably will not be another time in your life when so many well-wishers will be asking you to figure out: “What do you really want to do? What do you love?” And worse yet, “What are you good at?” But the questions I ask you today are: “What are your passions? What are your gifts?”

But what *is* passion??

Long before Google it was traditional to consult the oracle known as Merriam-Webster. So I looked up “passion” which is simply defined as “an overwhelming feeling.” I said to my daughter who was sitting nearby, “that’s not too inspiring.” And she said, “Pops, it also means *suffering*.” So, as you await your diploma and wonder how many minutes it’s going to take for an old guy from the Historic District to sit down, I assure you my graduation gift to you today will be: it’s short.

You are about to be handed a piece of paper recognizing your degree that says “you’ve been educated.” But we all know it’s a lot more than that. It’s a gift that you’ve earned through hard work and survival skills which carry the love, trust and commitment of your parents, your teachers, family members and friends who have supported you through the years. And while this gift

The questions I ask you today are: “What are your passions? What are your gifts?”

In his book *Education For Use*, Bishop Willard D. Pendleton explained that education in essence is learning to understand what you value – that “a true measure of a person is not what he or she knows, but what they do with the knowledge they have accumulated.”

may seem daunting, the good news is you’re about to enter the freest period of your life.

Some of you will choose to continue your education, a Masters or even a Ph.D. Others will choose to furiously sort through career opportunities and get a job – imagine that! A few of you may even choose to travel and see the world, or like me at graduation, not have a clue. Whatever you do, relax – because you’re only in the early stages of figuring out what you really care about and you have ample time to change the world.

To make this point, in his book *Education For Use*, Bishop Willard D. Pendleton explained that education in essence is learning to understand what you value – that “a true measure of a person is not what he or she knows, but

what they do with the knowledge they have accumulated.”

On a lighter note, in a fictitious graduation address attributed to the Australian film director Baz Luhrmann, he said: “Don’t feel guilty if you don’t know what you want to do with the rest of your life. The most interesting people I know didn’t know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year-olds I know still don’t.” So as you start your journey, relax – you’ll get there.

Just to put things in perspective, I grew up in the Eisenhower years where the most risqué things on television were Elvis Presley, Ed Sullivan, and later The Fonz. Sadly, my youngest son just told me that I’m not even a “Baby Boomer,” and am instead officially part of the “Silent Generation.” So, as I gaze out over the Class of 2018 as latter millennials, masters of social media who are about to be set free, here’s a little bit about the Bryn Athyn Historic District that I believe really relates to you and the journey you’re about to begin.

First, you don’t have to be a mathematician to figure out that no one alive in Bryn Athyn today actually knew John Pitcairn, whose fortune truly established the Academy Schools. There are a number of us older folks here today for whom **B.A.** stands for “**Before Apps,**” and we actually knew Raymond, Harold and Theo Pitcairn and enjoyed family life in Glencairn, Cairncrest and in the

buildings known as the Lord's New Church.

Some of us also had the privilege of knowing Lester, Carl and Griffith Asplundh, whose families – along with the Brickmans – have provided the buildings that you have studied, worshiped and played in over the last four years.

What is important to know about these people of the past is that even though some of them started with very little, they each found their passion in different ways. Whether in architecture, craftsmanship, aeronautical engineering, art collecting, or in utility construction and landscaping, they all had one thing in common: the Church and Schools came first.

So why is all this important to your journey?

Maybe it's because all of the people in those old-fashioned portraits were once young just like you, and they struggled with everyday problems in sorting through the even harder decisions of what is right and what is wrong. But more importantly, what we know about these captains of industry is that they were actually humble people who always realized that they were profoundly affected by their teachers, ministers and mentors with whom they all worked closely to build this town and institution -- who gave us the gifts we have today.

So I'd like to share a personal story about passion, gifts, and how even in Bryn Athyn, history can repeat itself.

Like some of you who come from afar I was born in Pittsburgh, and my first-grade class considered me an outsider. On the other hand, once I moved to Bryn Athyn I had the privilege and fun of growing up in Cairnwood with a lot of brothers and sisters who thought that life on the hill running back and forth between Glencairn and Cairnwood was all very normal.

Today many of my friends in the Historic District point out that I may have started at the top but have been working my way down ever since. After an Academy education and one year at Bryn Athyn College, I graduated from Lehigh University and then had an unremarkable two years at General Electric.

One day my uncle pulled me aside and said: "Brent, selling refrigerators and washing machines is fine, but if you're looking for a change Puerto Rico is booming." So I packed my bags and headed to Puerto Rico to seek my fortune. Fifty-four years later, my wife Dina still points out that I found her.

"Well, that's all great you say, but hey, we're still here trying to graduate and this isn't all about you." True, but like me, there will come a time in your life, maybe soon, maybe later, where something you've been working on – a relationship, an opportunity, or something you didn't realize how much you cared about – is the very thing that changes your life. In other words, learning what you love, your passion, can be an unexpected gift. Certainly my gift came in unexpected ways.

All of you will experience something in your life at some time and some place where you'll say: "This is what I was meant to do, this is what I love to do, and this was an unexpected gift."

I along with many of you know the story of Bryn Athyn's founding, which started on Knight's Hill, where Cairnwood stands today. That's common knowledge. However, what's not common knowledge is the love story between John Pitcairn and Gertrude Starkey, where after a bit of convincing she agreed to become John's wife.

What I didn't learn until much later was that Gertrude, my great-grandmother, was really the moving force in planning the entire estate, Cairnwood Farms, and the loop road of South Avenue and Alnwick Road

that make up the Historic District of today.

Working with Carrère and Hastings, the architects who later designed the New York Public Library, and Elliot & Olmstead who planned the grounds, it was really Gertrude who laid out the town, and created the home that became the social center of the Church. Yes, John's travels and business skills provided the funds, but it was Gertrude – who before women could even vote – provided the leadership that has inspired many of us in the Historic District today.

Let's fast forward almost 100 years into the mid-1980s, when Cairnwood was sitting empty, falling apart. Both Glencairn and Cairnwood had been given to the Academy and while Glencairn was slowly becoming a museum, Cairnwood sat empty for years and frankly there was some serious discussion about tearing it down. And this is where history repeated itself.

Once again it was the women of Bryn Athyn, understanding the history and beauty of this Beaux Arts building, who stepped up and created a designer show house, inviting the public in and using their creativity and contacts to invite hundreds of people from the Philadelphia area to see what could and should be restored. Gertrude would smile.

Now back to you. All of you will experience something in your life at some time and some place where you'll say: "This is what I was meant to do, this is what I love to do, and this was an unexpected gift." There's a saying, "You can't go home again" – but fortunately in my case this wasn't true.

After the show house, the Academy asked me and my cousin Lynn Genzlinger if we could put together a committee to find a use for Cairnwood that would prevent demolishing the house or becoming a continuing financial

burden to the Academy. The gift that I received was the chance to work with family, friends and volunteers who through their unselfish efforts have created what the Historic District is today.

Like almost all college graduates in America today who are heading off in different directions, life has a way of filtering out the tough times, and 20 or 30 years from now your memory will drift back to your years here. Maybe it was walking the green lawns of the Historic District with a really close friend, or at a service watching the blue beams of light come down from the stained-glass windows to the altar of the Cathedral.

Or maybe you stood with Brian Henderson in the tower of Glencairn on a clear day seeing the skyline of Philadelphia. Or a few of you may have even volunteered, working with Shannon Walko or Lisa Adams in Cairnwood. It's those special moments in life, like scoring a goal in a lacrosse game, singing in a chorus, or even buying that not-so-great painting at Bryn Athyn Bounty that come back to you years later.

However, when you think of it, these poignant moments can be experienced in many good colleges and universities in the United States and beyond. Sometimes in our enthusiasm for New Church education, we forget that high levels of education, kindness, mentorship, personal development and even finding your passion or your gifts are not exclusive to Bryn Athyn College.

So what really sets Bryn Athyn College apart from all the rest? **The teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg.**

A wise New Churchman I know said it better than I ever could. "For those of you new to our doctrines, please know that the expectation is not that you necessarily join the Church or are as yet completely enamored with our teachings. The hope is, however, that you acquired an interest in, and respect for, a logical explanation as to living a useful life, a purpose beyond one's self, and that as you reflect over time, you remember what you learned at this College and will want to embrace the values and faith which were kindled here."

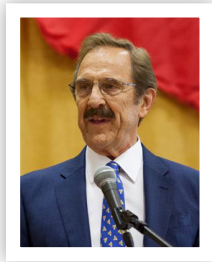
One of your professors also reminded me that in her book, *Light In My Darkness*, Helen Keller said: "In Swedenborg's philosophy, true life is the heart's capacity for joy fulfilled."

This beautiful Monel metal key actually opens the west door to the Cathedral, but as a symbol it is obviously much more than that. It was a gift given almost exactly 100 years ago, representing the legion of artisans who worked on these historic buildings, and it clearly represents the passion and love they had for their craft. But for you, the graduating Class of 2018, I believe the very reason you are all here today can be found in Providence, and what

For you, the graduating Class of 2018, I believe the very reason you are all here today can be found in Providence, and what you have discovered is that the key to true success and happiness is not just **what you love to learn... but what you learn to love.**

you have discovered is that the key to true success and happiness is not just **what you love to learn . . . but what you learn to love.**

It's that love that surrounds you today from your teachers, your parents, your coaches, your mentors and all your friends who have helped you prepare for a wonderful life here, and most importantly, the life hereafter. Whether you as a graduate remain here and teach all your life, or only return 30-40 years from now, at some point in your life a still, small voice will remind you why you were here.



Brent Pendleton is the eldest son of the Rt. Rev. Willard and Gabrielle Pendleton, husband of Dina (Gelpi), father of three children, and proud grandfather. He has had a long career in international resort development and “has been grateful for some survival skills, many of which came from family, teachers and a very important year at the Academy College.” He was one of the driving forces behind the designation of the Bryn Athyn Historic District, and is still very much involved. He says his passion is bringing people together in ventures that

can change lives forever. He and Dina live in Bronxville, New York. Contact: brent@pendletonassociates.com.

Milestones . . . and Forks in the Road

Bruce and Molly Cronlund

(Bruce) Good morning. And what a morning it is. When you graduates went to bed last night, you were still technically high school students. When you go to bed tonight, you won't be. The nouns you might choose for yourselves tomorrow will be very individualized – but none of you will be a high school student once you've walked across this stage, shaken a couple of hands, collected a rather fancy piece of paper, listened to a few boring speeches, and walked out that door back there. We call this a milestone event. One that helps you to mark your progress through the various expected stages of life.

(Molly) However, milestone events are kind of strange things. Chances are pretty good that when you wake up tomorrow morning, you won't feel any different than how you felt when you woke up yesterday. Despite the pomp and circumstance of this day, not much has changed for you. You will still be the same person you have been for months. Yet, the entire world around you will perceive you differently.

Yesterday, you were a high school kid. Tomorrow you will be a high school graduate adult. You won't be noticeably taller, you won't be noticeably smarter, you won't be noticeably better looking, or anything, yet you may feel as though the whole world around you is looking at you differently.

(Bruce) That's the way it is with milestone events and rituals. For some reason we are compelled to mark the passage of our lives as we work our way through them by sticking little flags in the ground as we go along. Boom – I was born. Boom – I miraculously survived 365 days in a row, so I deserve a cake, some presents, and a song. Boom – Someone decided that I needed to spend less time at home and more time with other kids, so I started kindergarten. Boom – I completed 13 years of schooling in an educational system and got a piece of paper.

With every one of these milestones, you are not perceptively different immediately before or immediately after. You are still the same you, and yet it can seem as though the world pivots around you at those moments.

(Molly) That's okay. Just go with it. Because when you string all these milestones together, there will have been many small, yet significant, changes that have occurred because of them. That's really the point. To gauge your growth and progress against some socially and culturally agreed upon standard. To make sure you're heading in the direction you are supposed to go.

(Bruce) Up until now, looking around at your classmates to your left and to your right, you've all had pretty much the same set of milestones, because up until now the path of your life has been primarily in the hands of others – your parents, the school system, society. After this though, your paths will begin to diverge.

The milestones that one of you experiences from this point going forward will not be the same as the next person's, because as adults you are increasingly in control of the direction of your own lives. I don't even want to give examples of the kinds of paths and divergences you all will experience, because quite frankly my crystal ball doesn't work very well.

(Molly) So what will your future milestones be? Some of you (not many) are pretty certain that you know what you want to be, at least for a while. I am talking about those of you who already know what college or vocational program you are enrolling in, what career you are planning to pursue, and what steps you need to accomplish to get from here to there.

(Bruce) Others of you may have some idea about your path for the next couple of years, but no idea beyond that. You know what you'll be doing for college, but maybe you aren't sure what you will be studying. And you certainly haven't figured out what your career will be.

(Molly) And then there are those of you who might only have the next few fun-filled weeks of minimal obligations mapped out before you, but no further.

(Bruce) In 1985, when I sat right where you are sitting now, I was firmly in that first group. I knew exactly what my path was going to be. I was going to four years of college, then four years of medical school, and then I was going to have to buy a ton of baskets to put all the money in. That was the plan, professionally – to get a job that was going to earn me the most money possible.

So, of course, I wound up majoring in English, graduating into a recession, being an unemployed actor, joining the Air Force, getting married, having kids, wandering through three different careers before finding my calling – Internet Technology Consultation – in my 30s. And while I am far from hurting for money, I think it's fair to say that my actual income has fallen far short of my goals at high school graduation.

It's not that I was no longer interested in making lots of money. It's just that as I kept moving forward, and forks in my road would present themselves, the alternatives I was presented with were almost always more interesting than what Plan A was offering.

I chose Plan B many times along the way. Majoring in English instead of the sciences. Becoming a Russian linguist in the Air Force instead of a computer programmer. Becoming a corporate classroom trainer instead of being a systems administrator. And then ultimately, choosing to work for an internet startup rather than a large multinational conglomerate.

(Molly) As for me, I graduated from a high school quite similar to ANC, where my academic focus was in the arts and sciences. I had dreams of one day designing beautifully engineered products for a sustainable modern world. So, my Plan A was to major in interior design and architecture at Louisiana State University. Then I switched to anthropology (because I discovered people are super interesting to learn about too!). Unfortunately, I ran out of college funding my junior year, had to leave the university, and decided to start over somewhere else and moved to Texas.

My Plan B was just as meandering and interesting as Bruce's. I worked many interesting and sometimes mind-numbingly boring jobs. I met many different people from all walks of life. I learned how to pay rent, budget for monthly expenses, get my car fixed (when it often broke down), and even do fun things on my own.

Eventually, I joined the Air Force (making me a fourth-generation military veteran in my family), completed training as a Chinese linguist, and served our country for six years. Always wanting to complete goals, I applied to and was accepted by the University of Pennsylvania, and finally graduated in 2005 with honors.

I chose to work in Student Support at the Bryn Athyn Church School, then to become a Teach for America Corps member, and then chose to teach four years of high school science in Philadelphia, eventually choosing to become a science teacher here at ANC.

(Bruce) The consequences of our Plan B choices along the way were two-fold. On the one hand, my choices made it very difficult for me to be fabulously

wealthy – in terms of my bank account. But on the other hand, our choices made our lives incredibly rich. If we had not chosen to be linguists in the Air Force, we would not have gone to language school, learned Russian and Chinese, lived in Monterey, California, and Hawaii, and most importantly, Molly and I would not have met each other.

Which means, we would not be standing up here today. Because Derek, along with our other two incredibly smart, talented and funny kids, would most likely not have existed. And perhaps, had I not majored in English and learned how to communicate effectively and give speeches like this, we would not have been asked to speak to you all here today.

(Molly) Have you heard the expression, “Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans”?

(Bruce) In the New Church, we talk a lot about the idea of providence, and while I am far from what you might call a serious scholar of all things Swedenborgian, I can say that this one concept resonates within me. It seemed to me, as I was making my way through life, that sometimes I was just kind of winging it, and sometimes my Plan B choices were downright perplexing to those around me. Yet, as I look back at the milestone events of my life so far, I see a clear pattern of growth and progress, purpose and direction, that was unseen along the way. As though there was a plan, even if I didn’t know what it was at the time.

As you make your way forward in your lives, it is important to have goals to work toward. One of my favorite proverbs is: “Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.” If you don’t have goals to work toward, you have action without vision. A nightmare.

(Molly) On the other hand, in the words of author Ursula K. Le Guin: “It is good to have an end to journey towards, but it is the journey that matters in the end.”

I implore you to keep your eyes open along the way for the opportunities you never expected. You can revise your goals as you grow; it isn’t a sign of weakness if you change your direction. And maybe at one of the forks in your path, you will see a Plan B opportunity that takes you in a whole new direction. A direction that presents you with whole new goals, and allows you to become a different person than the one you envisioned here today. You won’t always take Plan B, or Plan C, or Plan D. Sometimes Plan B just doesn’t work out. But at least you looked at it, evaluated it, and made a choice.

(Bruce) Then, when you get to be our age or older, the hope is that you

will be able to look back, see the unseen patterns and the undetected growth and progress, and most importantly be able to say to yourself, “Boy, there were some weird left turns, but what a great life it has been.”

(Molly) As we look on your faces today, that is our wish for you in your future -- that you have the opportunity to live a great life, to examine the unexamined, to travel the untraveled, to pursue the unexpected.

(Bruce) I’ve always believed that luck is simply the ability to identify an opportunity and having the gumption and grit to pursue it. So, we wish you all good luck and happy travels. In 30 years, please come back and tell us what you have learned about yourselves. We can’t wait.

Thank you.



Bruce Cronlund graduated from the Academy Boys School in 1985 and from Hamilton College in 1989, majoring in English with a minor in psychology. He served in the U.S. Air Force as a Russian linguist. He and Molly returned to Bryn Athyn in 1999, enrolling their children in the Bryn Athyn Church School and the Academy Secondary Schools. He has worked for Digital Wave Technologies for the past 20 years and has been involved in the Academy’s Senior Project class. Contact: bruce@cronlund.com



Molly Cronlund graduated from the Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts in 1986, attended Louisiana State University and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with honors in 2005, majoring in bio-psychology. She is also an Air Force veteran and a Chinese linguist. She says she “absolutely loves” being a science teacher in the Secondary Schools. Contact: molly.cronlund@ancss.org

Feeling Loved and Loving at ANC

Qi Rebecca Xiao

Ten months ago, the first thing I noticed when I stepped onto this campus was the trees. They are even taller than the HB classroom! These trees, and the impressive stone buildings they surround, stood like guards, pronouncing: “We have our own history and legacy.” Then I told myself, I don’t belong here. Everything was different from what I was used to. I was a foreigner.

However, it’s actually a great thing to be a foreigner, because when you are a stranger in a strange land, you have a pair of fresh eyes. As someone

who has attended four different high schools – two in China and two in the United States – I saw the aspects of ANC that those of you who have been here longer might not notice anymore.

Early on, one of my friends who was also new said: “People are so nice here. They smile at each other.” I agreed with her. In fact, the second thing that struck me when I arrived was everyone’s kindness and the strong connection and loving relationship between each individual.

Of course, the New Church teachings are the most distinctive part of the Academy of the New Church, but what I noticed is the difference these teachings make to life here at ANC. I was not raised Swedenborgian, or religious at all for that matter, but looking back at this year I see the

Of course, the New Church teachings are the most distinctive part of the Academy of the New Church, but what I noticed is the difference these teachings make to life here at ANC. . . . Looking back at this year I see the most pervasive spiritual message here is loving your neighbors.

most pervasive spiritual message here is loving your neighbors. And our teachers model that for us.

In the morning, Mrs. Schadegg may appreciate your new haircut or comment on how you did in your game yesterday when she shakes your hand. In dance team, Miss Sarah will check in with her daily, “How are you?” If you are terrified by a Human Body test, Mrs. Odhner is willing to spend all her lunchtime with you talking through the entire study guide.

Or maybe you just want someone to talk to. It could be to relieve your stress or simply to share a little story. You can go to Mare’s (Mary Odhner) and sit around in that tiny space talking about random stuff. Or you go to David Keith’s classroom during assembly period, just to play with his experiment set-ups. I remember the time I got extremely homesick and Miss Erica (Cantley) gave me the most curing hug in between classes.

Whether you noticed or not, here at ANC your teachers are always willing to listen and help, and I can tell you that *they love you so much*.

When you are loved, you learn to love others. You plan senior projects to raise money for charity. You collect Delta Mu hours, not just to make your transcript look nice. Before each performance of *Shrek The Musical* we prayed and one of the seniors would step into the circle and speak the most encouraging words with gratefulness and love, bringing tears to the eyes of many cast members. Also, we sang many birthday songs to each other in homeroom. Out of all the schools I have been to, ANC has the most loving vibe. That vibe, and loving energy, may seem normal to you, but it’s what makes ANC shine so brightly in my eyes.

To be honest, it can be very difficult to get into a new culture and tradition. But here at ANC it is less difficult than I thought it would be. In 10 months I have received thousands of smiles and hugs. It’s the message at ANC about loving and being loved that helps people come into the fold and ultimately feel welcome. And when you feel welcomed and loved you can be more brave.

This year I did a lot of things for my first time. I made my first oil painting. I learned ballet in dance. I made the best tennis serve ever. I baked my first batch of cookies – as a punishment for not wearing my sunglasses in a tennis game. I joined the musical and became a fierce guard protecting Lord Farquaad. Each time I experienced something new, I learned. And each time it became easier

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to step out of my comfort zone.

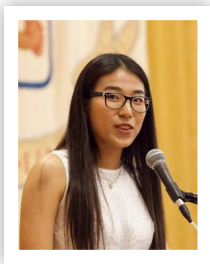
When we want to try new things ANC provides opportunities and activities for us. These activities help us to discover our potential and interests. None of the schools I went to would allow me to fill my schedule so tightly with activities as ANC did. I am so grateful for these experiences.

Now when I walk on the path all around the campus, the height of the trees does not stand out to me. Instead I see the people under the trees. We smile and talk to each other, and play with the pink petals as they fall on the ground around the Sketchy Benches. We are all seniors together – the Class of 2018. The connections we created between each individual are what make us one class, and they are what will remain in our memories after we have gone our separate ways.

Now, as we begin the next phase of our lives, what we acquired from ANC will allow us to have a pair of fresh eyes wherever we go. You may notice a lot that others can't. Please don't worry about the strangeness you might face as you embrace new situations, activities and opportunities, because we are students from ANC. We are deeply loved and we know how to love others.

As time goes on, if you no longer notice things like incredibly tall trees or impressive old stone buildings, that is probably when you feel like you belong, just like I do now.

My classmates my friends, our teachers, thank you. And thank you ANC.



Qi Rebecca Xiao came to the Academy for her senior year after attending two high schools in China and one in Arlington, Virginia. Girls School Principal Kira Schadegg says: “She came to us through Yi Pan, who is our best consultant. She really understands our culture and sends us really super kids.”

Preparing to be Receptive of the Lord

The Rev. Alan M. Cowley

Then I, John, saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for the husband. (Revelation 21:2)

Life in this world is an amazing thing, isn't? We all experience hardship, pain and depression sometimes, but we know that when our lives are happy life is a good thing. The Lord wants us to be happy! Our happiness is the reason we have been given life and given the Word. Happiness is why the Lord has given every culture some form of Sacred Scripture. The Word is a guidebook to happiness, as are the Scriptures of other religions. Yet, there is one very persistent hell which gets in the way of us seeing Divine revelation in this way. It is a hell that thrives on separating people from one another and causing strife between them.

Around the world there are hundreds, if not thousands, of religions which claim to be the one true religion. Each has an explanation as to why their teachings or lifestyle are better than the others, and many take pride in the belief that they are His chosen people. Historically, we too in the New Church have fallen prey to this human arrogance. This influence from hell seeps into all faiths and creeds, working to divide and separate people from God, and to breed hatred among the people.

We don't have to look far to see the effects this has on our lives. It may start with stating a simple truth, "I believe in the One true God" – but then that inevitably and indirectly states that someone else's God is a false god. Already there is tension, and if we play this out further not only does each person have his own god that he believes in, he will have his own take on the teachings of that god.

Think how many different Christian denominations there are who presumably worship the same God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they are at odds with each other about what Jesus teaches. Instead of focusing on what brings us together, it is more common to focus on that which divides.

The only church which really works toward our salvation is not a place one goes to attend, it is the relationship with God inside every individual's heart and mind that one must attend to.

Atheists also have a god, though they would not call it that. They, just as much as religious people, make the same claim: "I am right. You are wrong." Their gods are more secular, whether it is a specific moral code, a lifestyle, or even themselves, everyone has a god. A god in this sense is simply what one thinks is the most important thing in existence, the ultimate truth. Each person's "church" is the body of teaching from and about that god, and the life lived from those teachings is to worship that god.

So, whose church is the right church? Maybe none of them! The only true church is not possessed by any individual or by any organization. The one true church belongs to the Lord alone. This is the church which John saw "coming down out of heaven from God." (*Revelation* 21:2) It is the tabernacle of God: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is *with* men (people)." (*Ibid.* 21:3)

The New Church celebrates the 19th of June as the birth of our church. That date marks the beginning of this form of Christianity, but consider what this New Church is without any organizational ties. Imagine what it is apart from who is right and who is wrong and see the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God to be a dwelling place for Him in all people.

From this perspective the Church is not ours; it is the Lord's with us. We cannot claim to being an elect; we can only pursue its life and prepare ourselves to be receptive of the Lord, because it is through the adaptation of our lives that we enter its gates. It is through preparation that we enable ourselves to be conjoined with God by love.

This is a personal journey in many ways; no one can do it for us. There is no specific church that we can attend which will guarantee our salvation. The Lord says: "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'see here,' or 'see there!' For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you." (*Luke* 17:20-21)

The only church which really works toward our salvation is not a place one goes to attend, it is the relationship with God inside every individual's heart and mind that one must attend to. Attending church is good and useful. It is a place where we receive instruction, assistance, encouragement and companionship on our spiritual journey, but no organization can make the claim that it offers salvation. Salvation is the Lord's alone.

John's vision of the descent of the New Jerusalem describes a very specific symbol for the kind of preparation we must do. He says that the holy city came down "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (*Revelation 21:2*) This symbol is not a new one in Biblical terms. The Lord's Church in the world is often described in terms of a marital relationship with God.

The Word also often describes a profane image of this relationship. Different cities and peoples are called harlots and adulterers because of the way they treated their relationship with the Lord. But, in this instance, we see the Bride of the Lord in a very positive way. This prophecy of a New Church, one that is "prepared as a bride," describes the Lord's intentions for His Church in a very beautiful way. This church, the one God wants to establish in all of us, is the quintessential image of beauty, purity, chastity and joy.

Think for a moment about a blushing young bride preparing for her wedding. She and her husband-to-be would spend countless hours planning every detail: special clothes to buy, guests to invite, and food to prepare. The couple should also spend time planning out their future together, learning about one another, and focusing on how they can work on becoming one flesh.

The preparation a couple should do for betrothal and marriage is like the preparation we each should do to approach the Lord. It is a process of self-examination, of reflecting on what we need to do to become better people and better partners. It is a process which is capped by changing the negative aspects of our character.

The Lord tells us, "cease to do evil, learn to do good." (*Isaiah 1:16-17*) He also tells us to "repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." (*Matthew 3:2*) What else is repentance but examining our lives and intentions for impurity and evil, asking God for the strength to fight against them, stopping the actual behavior, and beginning to live a new life? And how else can we do that than by learning what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is false, from the Word God gave us to teach us such things?

Returning to the image of a bride on her wedding day: are we as careful and as thorough in our preparations as that bride would be? Do we think about the day in which God calls us up to heaven as a day we must prepare for? What expectations do we have about the way life should be after death? Life will be different and better, but are we already living into that life? Know this: we do not magically change into a different person when we leave this world and enter the next. The tree really does lie where it falls. How prepared are we?

God's purpose in joining with us is to make us happy. He says: "I will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain for the former things have passed away." (*Revelation 21:4*) He wants to do this for all who come to love Him. We are taught in the Lord's Word for the New Church that the 144,000 who

This New Heaven and New Earth are open to all people; the gates are never closed! And in order to be conjoined to the Lord, we must work to love what He loves. He loves people.

love others outside of Himself, to desire to be one with them, and from Himself to render them blessed. (*True Christian Religion* 43)

Joining with the Lord is not brought about by being right, nor by the division of people caused by arguing about different doctrines. Loving the same things He does and joining with other people in charity is what heaven is all about, what the Church should be all about, and what joins us with the Lord. This is the New Jerusalem.

Loving the same things He does and joining with other people in charity is what heaven is all about, what the Church should be all about, and what joins us with the Lord. This is the New Jerusalem.

were sealed as a part of the new heaven “symbolize all people who acknowledge the Lord as God of heaven and earth and are governed by truths of doctrine springing from the goodness of love, received from Him through the Word.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 348)

This New Heaven and New Earth are open to all people; the gates are never closed! And in order to be conjoined to the Lord, we must work to love what He loves. He loves people.

The essence of God consists of two things, love and wisdom; while the essence of His love consists of three things, namely, to

No matters of doctrine at all, provided they are drawn from the Word, are refused recognition. They are acceptable to the Lord provided that the person who possesses them is leading a charitable life, for everything in the Word is able to be joined to that life. But the interior aspects of the Word are able to be joined to that life. But the interior aspects of the Word are able to be joined to the life present in the interior good that flows from charity. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3452)

[As long as] love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor – that is, the good of life, is the essential thing; then churches, however numerous they may be, make one church, all of them being one in the Lord’s kingdom. (*Ibid.* 2982)

The New Church is a church which grows in our heart as we learn about the Lord and the good of life He teaches. When we adapt our lives to put away

things contrary to what is good, the Lord will help us to love what is good. He does this for everyone who is willing. Through this process we become a part of that beautiful city, the New Jerusalem!



The Rev. Alan M. Cowley is pastor of the Boynton Beach Society in Florida and visiting pastor in Bonita Springs, Florida. He was previously pastor of the Michael Church in London, England. He and his wife, Susan, live in Hypoluxo, Florida. Contact: pastor@newchurchboyntonbeach.org

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

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RECEPTACLE

By receptacles are meant the very essential forms of men. Men are forms receptive of life from the Lord, and the human mind therefore consists of receiving vessels. Note, however, that by this term the Writings do not mean inert vessels to be infilled but vessels which react, freely and responsibly, to the influx of life. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6138, 5531)

Pursuing Faith

Allen Bedford, PhD

The article below is based on the preface and first chapter of my planned book, *Forming a Partnership: Reading True Christianity as a Personal Guide to Faith*. The second chapter, “Religion Misused and Corrected,” will appear in the next issue of *New Church Life*.

The idea for this book came as I read True Christianity as part of a program supported by the New Church Faculty Summer Study Fund. I found the text to be most powerful when I pursued it with the purpose of changing my life.

I had a similar experience when I read *Divine Providence* three years earlier. Even though these works might be approached philosophically or as theological discourse, I found them to refer repeatedly to inner experience and to how we can allow the Lord to modify that experience such that our outward behavior can be, more often than before, a blessing to others. These encounters with the text, when personal change was my purpose, were so powerful that I wanted to share the experience.

I have studied these works and others of the New Church canon before, but in my earlier readings I was motivated mostly to gather information to improve my understanding of New Church doctrine. These readings were useful and led to changes in my personal beliefs and to changes in emphasis in my professional work. For example, an in-depth study of *Heavenly Secrets* chapters 12 and 13 caused me to modify the curricular goals and pedagogy I use in my chemistry courses [at Bryn Athyn College]. What I found, though, in my recent readings – with personal growth as my motivation – was that I had been viewing external realities of suffering and disorder in the world as unrelated to my own choices.

Observing this suffering and disorder outside of myself allows me to harbor objections to the ideas that God exists, is loving, and is engaged in creation. But reading *Divine Providence* and attending to the way it keeps referencing our internal experience, led me to realize that instead of blaming the Creator for allowing too much evil in the world, I should use my awareness of and objection to that evil as motivation to search within myself for destructive

desires. In short, if I am disturbed by the suffering in the world, then I should do something about it. And that something starts by addressing disorder within myself.

After having this realization, I turned to *True Christianity* and began to view it as a personal guide toward faith. It is a highly organized work and I had wondered why it was organized the way it was. According to *True Christianity*, there is a “divine design,” and the divine design is that we form a partnership with the Lord (§105). Forming that partnership requires several steps, and the chapters of *True Christianity* may be viewed as moving the reader in sequence through those steps. That view strengthened as I engaged with the work over two years, resulting in my writing a book about how *True Christianity* shows us why we should, and how we can, cooperate with our Creator.

Another question I have been wrestling with is to identify how New Church theology addresses the most significant challenges facing society today. If we could identify that, then we could base the outreach work of our congregations and educational systems on meeting those challenges with the special gifts offered by New Church teaching.

I imagine that as a church we are missing some of the opportunities to make these connections in part because we are distracted by the many details of New Church doctrine. I have been looking for ways to understand those details within a grand design that makes more obvious the special and crucial contributions made by the New Church canon.

Perhaps the central challenge facing relatively wealthy, well-educated and politically and religiously free societies is the notion that religious belief and practice are at best optional – that we are perfectly fine if we ignore or dismiss spiritual purpose. I believe that New Church theology addresses that challenge and does so in ways that may be unique and necessary.

I imagine that as a church we are missing some of the opportunities to make these connections in part because we are distracted by the many details of New Church doctrine. I have been looking for ways to understand those details within a grand design that makes more obvious the special and crucial contributions made by the New Church canon.

With the thought that New Church teaching might have a special role in assisting a spiritual awakening, and with my experience reading *True Christianity* as a personal guide toward faith, I resolved to write a book about how I have experienced that challenge and awakening in my own life.

The first three chapters of the book address three questions: why have faith; why aren't faith communities more obviously successful than they are at making the world a better place; and, why turn to Swedenborg in a pursuit of faith? The rest of the book searches for answers within the pages of *True Christianity* to basic questions about personal faith and faith practice.

I am grateful for the generous support of this project by the Academy of the New Church Carpenter Fund and by the New Church Faculty Summer Study Fund, and for the time to work on it that was provided by a sabbatical leave funded by Bryn Athyn College.

PREFACE: WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING IN THESE SPACE-AND-TIME SUITS?

What are we here to do? We find ourselves alive, sentient and clothed in a space-and-time limited physical body on planet earth. Unless our existence is nothing more than a convenient if not also an unimaginably unlikely accident, there must be some point to our being here. Our bodies enable us to sense and act in our physical environment and our minds allow us to harbor countless thoughts and cares. Why do we have these capabilities?

When I was a small child my native country, the United States, was engaged in a highly focused, national effort to send people to the moon. On July 20, 1969, two-and-a-half months before my fourth birthday, the Apollo 11 astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, landed successfully on the moon and became the first human beings to set foot on a physical world beyond planet earth. They also became the first to collect samples from that alien world and return with their collections safely to earth.

In order for Armstrong and Aldrin to accomplish this mission – to go to the moon, walk its surface, collect geological specimens, and return to earth – they required more than a decade of training, an army of engineers, mathematicians, and construction workers, who, in turn, depended on hundreds if not thousands of years of accumulated knowledge, the financial resources of hundreds of millions taxpaying citizens, 203,400 gallons of kerosene, 326,770 gallons of liquid hydrogen, and 417,300 gallons of liquid oxygen, and materials and engines that can withstand the stresses of 7.5 million pounds of thrust. They also required space suits that could enclose them in an earth-like atmosphere and at a human-friendly temperature range since on

the moon's surface there is no air and the temperature is either extremely hot (about 260 °F in the sun) or extremely cold (about -280 °F in the dark).

Imagine if Armstrong and Aldrin were unclear about what “giant leaps” they were taking for humankind when they took their “small steps” off the lunar lander's ladder. What would have happened if somehow their memories had faded as they traveled from the earth to the moon so that by the time they arrived they no longer knew why they were there or where they had come from?

Perhaps they would decipher some meaning from the crackling earthling voiced instructions they heard in their headsets, but if they had forgotten who they were or what they were doing or that there were millions of people back on earth watching and listening in on their lives, it is most likely that they would consider the disembodied voices as phantoms or delusions and dismiss them.

Armstrong and Aldrin, though, did not forget their history or their purpose when they arrived on the moon. They were there to do two things: set foot on the moon and collect lunar samples to bring back to earth. The clarity of their purpose and the intensity of their training made loss of focus a nearly impossible cause of mission failure.

Neil Armstrong understood the goal. He switched on the video cameras and collected a moon sample within minutes of climbing through the hatch of the moon lander. On the thigh of his space suit he had a “contingency pocket.” Its purpose was to receive anything grab-able from the lunar surface so that if for some reason Armstrong and Aldrin had to make an emergency launch they would be bringing at least a small piece of the moon back to earth.

Powerfully obvious signals were at work in focusing attention on the task at hand. It is almost inconceivable that Armstrong or Aldrin or any of the people directly involved with the mission would take their eyes off the goal. Clarity and singularity of purpose were achieved in 1969 as human beings yearned to visit the moon and bring some of it back to earth.

As a very impressionable preschool-aged kid, I experienced what it is like to have the whole world focused on a single peaceful goal of realizing something new and powerful – transcendent – for the human race. It is not likely that in my lifetime another event will match or surpass the global singularity of purpose achieved with the first moon landing, but I have the body memory of what that experience feels like and I know from it that human beings of varied nationalities and cultures can share a common, peaceful goal. I have seen society so focused on a singular cause that the larger group can actually feel the “giant leap” that was achieved in two individuals’ “small steps.”

Having experienced clarity of societal purpose, I know that it is possible for billions of people to want the same thing, and for hundreds of thousands

of people, supported financially by millions of people, to work out how to do it and put the means together. And I know what it feels like when no such common purpose exists.

The Apollo 11 moon mission is a greatly simplified and double-layered metaphor of the situation we find ourselves in on spaceship earth. The first layer is one of scale. Though much was required to allow Armstrong and Aldrin to travel to the moon and back, much, much more is required for us to exist on the earth.

Just a few of the necessary conditions are:

- A sun generating the right amount of heat and light and with sufficient mass to form a solar system
- An earth of the appropriate mass to receive and retain abundant water and acceleration to achieve a stable orbital path around that sun to be exposed to the right amount of heat and light
- Sufficient earth volume to generate heat within the core and radiate it to the surface at a sustainable rate such that the tectonic plates remain active for billions of years
- A large moon orbiting close by that moves the earth's oceans and stabilizes the earth's rotation
- A solar system that includes several gas giants that protect the earth by intercepting many asteroids that could potentially crash into it
- And the endless laws of physics and chemistry and biology that make it possible for the physical matter of the planet to assemble itself into semi-stable structures and systems and eventually into living forms.

The Apollo spacecraft replicated enough of the critical conditions necessary for human life such that a few human beings could separate themselves from the earth and rely for a short while on their artificial home. Meanwhile, spaceship earth is providing these and many more necessities for all the planet's passengers.

The second layer of the metaphor concerns purpose. While the purpose of the relatively simple Apollo spacecraft is widely understood, the purpose of the much more complex and complete spaceship earth is not. Why are we on this spaceship? Are there samples we should be collecting? If so, what are they and where should we be taking them?

Imagine the disappointment, shock and outrage the millions of people watching the moon landing would have felt if Armstrong and Aldrin lost sight of their purpose and used their 22 hours on the moon ineffectively. What would have happened if they lost the opportunity to walk on the moon because they got into an argument or a physical altercation, or maybe they just wanted to take a break from their stressful journey and "chill to some tunes"?

With the much greater preparation needed to support life on earth than what was needed for a few humans to visit the moon, imagine the much greater disappointment possible if we fritter away our time here and somehow miss our mission. If there is a purpose behind creation, then we who may be created in that purpose have an urgent need to discover it. What would happen if I and others applied the same creative, collaborative, disciplined determination that was evident in the space race to discovery of the purpose behind creation itself, and, once armed with that discovery, worked to accomplish the mission we are traveling in this physical existence to do?

I wrote this book to help me find that purpose, using my own experience as my foil, as if I were both experimenter and experiment. As such, much of what I consider relies on the circumstances of my life. My parents' personal journeys brought them into a Swedenborgian faith group a few months after they were married. I was born into that faith and my parents relocated from northwestern California to southeastern Pennsylvania with the purpose of placing their children into a church-based school system. Their sense of purpose in how they wanted to raise their children has had the strongest influence on my life.

This upbringing taught me to look to religious faith in my quest for purpose, and this book is an exploration of faith as a path toward realizing the highest ends for which we were created. However, as a person who experiences significant doubt and times when I am more comfortable seeing life as an accident than as a purposeful adventure, this book explores faith with skepticism and even suspicion of ulterior motives.

I am comfortable with scientific thinking and I agree with many of the criticisms humanists raise against religious belief. I am appalled at how faith or religious practice have been used to do great harm. I have found, though, that a strict elimination of spirituality or the transcendent is not satisfying and I have concluded that loss of religious faith is perhaps as dangerous for human society as is living with unhealthy faith practices.

Most human beings seem to have a deep-seated hunger for faith, or at least spiritual purpose, and when people step away from traditional forms of religious practice they often seem to become unable to live in strict empiricism. Instead, they seem to become vulnerable to superstition or very odd beliefs that are at least as impervious to reason as are some of the religious beliefs

If there is a purpose
behind creation,
then we who may
be created in that
purpose have an urgent
need to discover it.

The purpose of my writing this book is to share my engagement with Swedenborgian theology in my quest for living in faith in the hope that it might be helpful to others who seek paths that work for them.

they escaped.

Spirituality seems to be an inescapable part of human experience, like hunger and sexual desire. Religions that have withstood the test of time have found ways to discipline human spiritual experience to accentuate what is uplifting in that experience and warn against what leads people astray.

When people are “spiritual but not religious” they step away from the benefits of the hard-won lessons learned by their forbears. At the same time, religions that have survived for centuries have also had ample opportunity for self-centered people within their ranks to turn religious practice and belief to benefit

themselves. Religion is, in other words, necessary but treacherous territory.

Raised a Swedenborgian, I have been exposed from birth to the theological critique and understanding Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) developed in the 18th century. Swedenborg was brought up a Swedish Lutheran, his father being the bishop of Upsala. By all accounts, Swedenborg was a brilliant student with wide-ranging interests.

In the second half of his life he devoted his attention to what was right and wrong in the Judeo-Christian religious worldview. Through his many volumes of theological discourse, he sought to separate what was true and false and what was right and wrong about the religious texts, systems and practices he knew, all the while with careful attention to what the Bible teaches in its layers of meaning.

Though there are moments in Swedenborg’s texts that strike me as potentially damaging by being possibly incorrect or misleading, on the whole I find his analysis compelling and his general conclusions beautiful. I found his culminating work, *True Christianity*, to be particularly helpful as I pressed my own questions about why and what I should believe and do in my life. In short, I found *True Christianity* to be for me a personal guide toward living the kind of faith that I believe would make my life and the lives of those with whom I interact healthier and happier.

The purpose of my writing this book is to share my engagement with Swedenborgian theology in my quest for living in faith in the hope that it might be helpful to others who seek paths that work for them.

As Armstrong and Aldrin did on the moon, we visit our planet, our natural world, wearing our space-and-time suits – our physical bodies. And, like Armstrong and Aldrin, we are here for a purpose. Paraphrasing a statement often attributed to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955),¹ we are spiritual beings having a natural, a *space-and-time*, experience. How do we make good use of that experience? What samples are we to collect and bring back to our native land? How do we find out?

The title of this book, *Forming a Partnership*, is the summary answer. If we are spiritual beings created by the greatest Spiritual Being, and we are now in the natural world having a natural experience, we need to forge a partnership with our Creator to find our purpose here and our path back to our true home. Swedenborg's work *True Christianity* has helped me in this search and I hope that my sharing my experience can help you with yours.

CHAPTER 1: PURSUING FAITH

This book is about finding faith – a living, heartfelt faith; a faith strong enough to pull us up from being overwhelmed with concern for self and respond more often to impulses to love our neighbors and seek their benefit with at least as much focus and energy as we seek our own. If there is a loving, generous Creator and if the Creator calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves, then living in this kind of faith would, bit by bit, move ourselves and our world into being a more accurate image and likeness of what our Creator intends.

This sought faith, though strong, would not be free from doubt. Rather, it and doubt would coexist in a sacred bond. If we arrived at a faith free from doubt, then that would be no faith – that would be certainty; it would be an “immovably determined opinion,” and those are dangerous. One who is certain needs no faith. No, this faith would be supple and dynamic – open to new concepts and appreciations and to others' religion and religious practices and be a blessing to those with whom we interact.

Why is it difficult to find a faith like that? Much of this book is devoted to working out that problem – to naming and overcoming obstacles to a healthy faith that is a blessing to others. The primary obstacle is, I believe, ourselves. We are born with, and most of us cultivate and strengthen, a remarkably robust self-concern. This regard for self is powerful enough, in many cases, to move us to gratifying our own desires even when doing so hurts other people.

A faith that lifts us away from gratifying self is life threatening to the part

1 “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” On page 138 of his book *The Joy of Kindness* Robert J. Furey attributes this statement to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Wayne Dyer (1940-2015) also attributed this statement to Teilhard. So far, though, no one has found this statement in Teilhard's published works.

of us that sees ourselves as the most important object of our time and attention. There is, then, a big, important part of us that wants nothing to do with a faith that changes the center of what we love.

However, it is also true that thoughtful, well-intentioned people have raised legitimate objections to religious faith. One of these objections is that believing in something that cannot be proven is counter to the sensibilities of people who hold high regard for evidence-based reasoning. Another objection is that all too often people who profess strong religious belief do things that horrify most of us.

To a thoughtful person who seeks to live in peace and to give others the opportunity to live in peace also, the fact that there are people who stridently believe in something that cannot be demonstrated and from their belief act in ways that damage others' lives is sufficient reason to eschew religion altogether. If religion produces such monsters, they say, then we are better off with no religion. I am sympathetic to this line of thinking.

One problem with this humanistic solution is that simply wishing religion out of existence does not make religion go away. Another problem is that if we were capable of discarding religion, then we would be tossing aside something that has brought true meaning, peace and joy to countless millions, and we would be cutting ourselves off from the positive effects on ourselves and those we contact that a healthy religious life can bring.

We would also be naysaying the perhaps few hundred people in world history who, through their living faith, have somehow transcended the bonds of normal experience and demonstrated for the rest of us much higher capabilities of the human spirit as a force for good than has been achieved through any other means. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Helen Keller, and the 14th Dalai Lama come to mind.

Our empirical sensibilities, which advise us to avoid believing something that cannot be tested objectively, can be allayed somewhat by appropriate humility when we consider the possibility that there *may* be a Creator who is not touchable through empirical approaches. If that is the case, then denying anything beyond what we can measure could be denying the very Cause of our existence and what that Cause might be calling us to be. That realization might make us shudder.

For significant portions of my life, and even to this day, I have difficulty accepting the possibility that there may be a God and that that God cares about all the people throughout the cosmos. The thought seems too outlandish to believe. If there were such a God would the world be as it is? And why would God be hidden?

Religious practitioners ask me to believe in God, even though God

cannot be demonstrated to my senses. They ask me to believe that God is all powerful and many of them also ask me to believe that God loves us, even though we are all aware of countless examples of senseless human suffering. And they recommend religious practice as beneficial, even though we know from history and current events that religious practice can exacerbate rather than alleviate suffering. If religious belief and practice are such benefits to the world, then why is it easy to find examples of religious communities being unmoved by or even causing suffering, or inflaming hate and sometimes even inciting violence?

The rest of this chapter addresses three questions:

1. Is it rational to believe in God when God's existence cannot be demonstrated?
2. If I decide to pursue faith, what guidelines can I use to avoid falling into harmful practices?
3. What reliable sources exist that inform our quest for faith?

Is Faith Rational?

Some people, I think it is fair to say, do not need much support in overcoming the evidence-based objection to belief. They point out that many things in life cannot be scrutinized or demonstrated empirically and that therefore insusceptibility to empirical demonstration is insufficient reason not to believe something. For example, the very fact that we care about anything is evidence that an important part of our lives, maybe the most important part, makes self-evident that the wholeness of our experience is wider than what empiricism encompasses. How would we measure the strength of a care? If we insist on believing only what can be measured, then we should be ready to drop everything that we care about since we have no way objectively of measuring our care.

Though I find this line of reasoning helpful, it does not go far enough for me to overcome my skepticism toward believing in a God that cannot be demonstrated. It is too much of a leap for me to conclude that since I cannot know everything about myself empirically that therefore I must accept the possibility of God's existence. I need something more compelling than that.

One approach I do find compelling was put forward famously by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) – Pascal's Wager (c. 1660).² By no means does Pascal's approach solve the whole problem, but for me it overcomes the trickiest part of the logic puzzle – that it is irrational to believe something as important as the existence of a purposeful Creator when that existence cannot be proven.

² Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*, Part III §233.

Pascal’s Wager can be represented simply as a set of logical steps and a decision matrix:

1. Either God exists or God does not exist. Reason cannot decide.
2. You must decide which to believe. There is no opting out.
3. Consider the gain and loss in either choice (see Table 1).
4. Since the gain/loss is very great if God exists and, by comparison, trivial if God does not exist, then it is logical to assume that God exists.

Table 1: Pascal’s Decision Matrix.

	God exists	God does not exist
Live in faith	Infinitely great gain	Finite gain or loss
Live without faith	Infinity great loss	Finite gain or loss

The first two steps are simply a stating of the situation in which we find ourselves. God may or may not exist. We cannot know for certain one way of the other. However, according to Pascal, we cannot opt out of making a decision about which we believe because if we decide not to decide, then we are essentially deciding not to believe. Pascal frames the decision as necessary because he anticipates that the only way to achieve the “infinitely great gain” in the choice matrix above is if we decide to believe.

Since we face uncertainty on the question of God’s existence and yet face large differences in outcomes depending on whether God exists or not and whether we believe God exists or not, we should consider our choices and their consequences. This is where the decision matrix helps. The choice we face is whether to believe that God exists or that God does not exist.

Pascal’s construct gives four potential outcomes to the situation and the choice we make regarding belief:

1. **God does not exist** and we live as though God **does not** exist. In this case we might live more as we please than we might if we believed God existed, which means that we might be more willing than believers are to indulge our pleasures, and we would not be duped into believing a fantasy. This may lead to a happier life in some ways. However, we would also miss out on the comforts religious believers feel in the face of difficult circumstances. The outcome is some finite net gain or loss in the happiness we feel during our lifetime.
2. **God does not exist** and we live as though God **does** exist. In this case we would be believing in a fantasy and as a result of that fantasy we might deny ourselves certain opportunities for indulging our desires for fear of eternal consequences. This could be a loss of pleasure. On the other hand, we might feel happier than those who do not believe

because we comfort ourselves with the peace that belief brings. Again, the outcome is some finite net gain or loss in the happiness we feel during our lifetime.

3. **God does exist** and we live as though God **does not** exist. In this case we would be indulging finite pleasures at the expense of infinite displeasure. This outcome would be bad for us and the consequence would greatly outweigh any gain or loss in either of the first two cases since we would be living in denial of the very purpose of our existence.
4. **God does exist** and we live as though God **does** exist. In this case we would be “numbering our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom” (*Psalms* 90.12). Living in this way might discipline our enjoyment of finite pleasures because our eye is on living in line with the Creator’s purpose in forming us. This outcome would be good for us, and, as in the previous case, the consequence would greatly outweigh any gain or loss in the first two cases.

Though Pascal’s layout of the situation has several problems, what his analysis demonstrates well is that we have a choice to make and that we must make because the differences among the potential outcomes are great. Furthermore, the choice we must make cannot be informed by objective evidence. However, because the question is potentially of the greatest possible significance, making a decision with insufficient evidence is, in fact, logical. And the most rational decision we can make is the decision to believe that God exists. This is because the potential gain by believing that God exists is much greater than any potential gain or loss we would face in any of the other three outcomes.

It is possible to argue that we may not have to make this choice and still be in safe territory even if it turns out that God does exist. For that to be the case, both belief and the way we live our lives would have to be unessential in God’s eyes. Put another way, if we have nothing that we need to learn from God, then we are fine if we do not believe in God.

I see the situation this way: though I can doubt God’s existence, I have no doubt that if God does exist, then I would be extremely foolish to believe that I have nothing to learn from God. Therefore, I disagree with those who argue that we can escape safely the question of God’s existence. Because both deciding against God’s existence and deciding not to decide keeps us uninterested in learning about God and what God wants from us, deciding not to decide is equivalent to deciding against God’s existence.

For me, Pascal’s setup is a breakthrough. It overcomes my resistance to deciding an important question without evidence. I remember that as a young teenager I feared the possibility that I might be tricked into believing that God

exists and that there is life after death only to find out in the end that God does not exist. Eventually I realized that even if I were tricked in this way I would never know it. If God does not exist and there is no life after death, then I would never know that to be the case; there would not be a moment when I awaken after death to realize that there is no life after death – that would be impossible! I remember laughing out loud at that thought.

Returning to Pascal's decision matrix, it is obvious that the real differentiator in outcomes is in place only if God exists. The outcomes of our choice in that case have, in Pascal's analysis, infinitely great consequences. The outcomes of our choice if God does not exist are trivial by comparison. This realization should drive our attention to the possibility that God may exist and make the best choice we can, given that possibility. Pascal urges us to "wager, then, for belief."

Many people have raised objections to Pascal's Wager. Some of these objections are that the wager does not inform us about which God to believe, it does not enlighten us on which moral code to follow or on any type of life beyond the physical one we live now, and it assumes that we can force ourselves through logic to believe in God. Each of these objections is valid, but none of them touches the most important aspect of the wager – the recognition that we have an extremely important decision to make and yet there is no evidence to inform that decision. In this situation it is *more rational to decide without evidence than it is to avoid making the decision*.

Though Pascal's formulation may be seen as a cautionary response to protect against negative consequences, I find the situation more compelling as a calling to a more joyful existence. If God exists and is loving and generous and wants to share joy with us, then hearing and following God's guidance in our lives gives us access to living more fulfilling and meaningful lives than would be the case if we ignored the Creator's advice.

Pascal's wager suggests that belief is no less rational than disbelief. However, deciding to believe because of a logic puzzle is not likely to, on its own, produce true belief. If we follow Pascal's advice and urge ourselves to believe, then we should embark on a quest for faith that we feel wholly and not just logically. In short, if God exists then we should not only believe in God's existence but also engage actively in trying to figure out what God wants us to do. There is no more worthy pursuit.

Guidelines for Pursuing Faith

Having decided that belief in God and living a life in line with God's intention is worth our consideration, how might we embark on this journey? How do we avoid the damaging pitfalls we see ensnare others?

What we are searching for is a faith that we feel as whole and sincere – heartfelt. A quest for such a quality should involve that quality along the way. Cool, objective rationalizations do not take us there (or we would be there already). So, in this quest we need to be willing to bring our whole selves. This is not just an intellectual pursuit. It must also be a pursuit of a new way of living, a way of living with God. If God exists and is seeking to connect with and transform or call us, then we should open ourselves to transformation or a heightened sense of purpose.

In this quest we need to be willing to bring our whole selves. This is not just an intellectual pursuit. It must also be a pursuit of a new way of living, a way of living with God.

Opening ourselves to the possibility of responding to God means that we are opening ourselves to the possibility of personal transformation. That transformation may or may not be something that we want. It would be appropriate at this early stage of our journey to set boundaries on our pursuit. For example, we might experiment with wholehearted belief for a period of time, perhaps a few weeks or months. At the end of the chosen period of time we could then evaluate the experience of belief and contrast that with our experience of non-belief to see what impacts belief had on our lives. If those impacts seem to be positive on ourselves and on others, then continuing the journey would make sense.

Another safeguard we can apply is our highest ability to reason. We should be searching for faith principles that are reasonable – that bear up to scrutiny, our own and others'. We might develop for ourselves intellectual guardrails of reasonability. To that end, I accept three fundamental assumptions that guide my quest for faith. The first two are that:

1. God is loving beyond comprehension and has prepared a life for us that is much, much greater than we can imagine.
2. Religious belief and the life it inspires should be a blessing to the lives of those we encounter.

The first assumption is key to all the rest and is the topic of Chapter 4. In brief, the leading idea is that if God is infinite, then God's capacity for love and generosity should be well beyond how human beings feel love for one another and practice generosity. If this is the case, then the life God calls us to is greater than we can imagine before we respond to that call.

Another way to phrase the second assumption is that religious practice should uplift life – should make life more beautiful, expansive and exciting than life without religion. Therefore, religious ideas or practices that reduce the positive things we could do, oppress us with guilt, put down others, or make life more miserable than it would be without religion are in some way misguided. Worshiping a Creator whose nature is to bless people should have people living blessed lives.

The first two assumptions together suggest principles that I find reasonable:

- God is relevant to all people
- What God seeks from us is relevant to all people
- Concepts of God and what God seeks from us allow for variety
- Living this faith brings inner peace and blesses the world

The first principle comes from the notion that God loves all people. If God loves all people, then true concepts about God would not exclude anyone. There are no humans privileged or left out simply by ancestry, ethnicity, nationality, or time and place of birth. The true nature of God, if it could be known, should be as meaningful to one person as to another.

Similarly, if God created humans purposefully, then all humans would have opportunities to fulfill that purpose. The way we hear the call and the path we follow in answering it will vary (see the next point), but all people are called.

Since God the Creator must be greater than creation itself to have created it, and since all things within creation are smaller than the wholeness of creation, then it can be said that the Creator is infinite and created things finite. Finite things are incapable of fulfilling infinite potential, but each finite entity has an opportunity to reflect some finite portion of infinite purpose. Therefore, the greater the variety of ways finite entities reflect, each in their own way, infinite purpose, the more complete the reflection of that purpose becomes. The path we seek for ourselves then is, our path. It is not someone else's path. As finite beings responding to infinite potential, we should welcome and celebrate there being many, many paths to God.

The last principle is, simply, a realization of the first two fundamental assumptions. Living in faith should bring us lives that are more fulfilling to us and more blessed to those we contact than would be the case if we lived without faith.

The first two fundamental assumptions and the principles that follow from them lead me to look for ways of knowing reliable things about God and what God is seeking from me. This leads to the third fundamental assumption that guides my quest for faith:

3. Sources of authority exist that assist us in pursuing a lived faith that is a blessing to others.

If God exists and loves and calls us to lives that bless others, though we see easily that in many cases the way we live our lives is not a blessing to others, then there must be means by which God leads us away from our native tendencies and into those actions that do bless others.

Sources of Authority in our Quest for Faith

What are these sources of authority? Here I draw on the wisdom of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral – the four sources of theological authority accepted in the Methodist faith:³

1. Scripture
2. Reason
3. Tradition
4. Personal experience

I find the Quadrilateral helpful both in listing the places I can turn for authoritative information in my quest and for reminding me of the balance necessary among these sources. Taking some liberties with the traditional understanding within Methodist practice, I understand the four sources of authority in these terms:

Scripture: In the Wesleyan tradition, scripture is the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, but in a broader sense this source or authority would include any sacred text accepted by the cultures that use it as divinely inspired. The key characteristics of this source of authority are that it is a text, not written by oneself, and accepted as authoritative by a substantial number of people.

This source is static (set in writing) and can be examined by any number of people and may be understood in various ways. The person engaging with this text is different from the people who wrote it, and so the reader is in a position of receiving what is written. The text is what it is and the serious reader must grapple with what is written, but the text is also amenable to interpretation and interpretation is open to debate.

Of the four sources of authority, scripture is the most external from self and objective – the most capable of being shared among a community of believers. In our quest for faith we need to find texts that we may come

³ For more information on the Quadrilateral see for example Ted A. Campbell's *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, pp 35-42.

Similar to the advantage a physicist has through studying the discoveries of previous physicists, a person seeking a heartfelt, sincere faith is well served by studying what other people have discovered in their faith journeys.

potentially to accept as sacred. Coming to trust the text requires time and trial.

It is possible to accept a text as sacred because other influential people in our lives encourage us to do so, but in the end we must develop our own personal trust with the text in order for the text to have true authority in our lives. This trust can develop as we read a text carefully, interpret it as best we can, live in light of that interpretation, and observe the impact our living that interpretation has on our lives.

Tradition: In the Wesleyan sense, this source of authority refers mostly to the way serious theologians and organized churches have understood

and practiced their faith. In our quest for faith we are well served by attending carefully to how other people have lived their faith. Similar to the advantage a physicist has through studying the discoveries of previous physicists, a person seeking a heartfelt, sincere faith is well served by studying what other people have discovered in their faith journeys.

I understand this source of authority to have two kinds of references, one belonging to groups or communities and the other specific to individuals. Both have value. Noting how communities past and present understand and practice their faith can be helpful to us. But often the most inspiring examples of faith lived well are those given by people who stand out in how they understand and live their faith. Abram, Moses, Elisha, Jeremiah, Jesus, Buddha, Saint Francis, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and the Dalai Lama are examples. Seeing how faith has moved individuals in ways that transform themselves and their society shows us the power faith can have for good.

This source of authority is related to the first in two ways. First, as we seek to find a sacred text we can come to trust as authoritative in our lives, longstanding traditions of accepting certain texts as sacred can be a tremendous help. Second, as is the case with a sacred text, tradition stands outside of us. We are the recipient rather than the creator. In the first two sources of authority we are witness more than we are actor. We respond to rather than play a part in creating the source of authority. With the remaining two sources of authority the balance shifts the other way.

Reason: For what we encounter in scripture or in tradition to have meaning in our lives we must reason about it. If God created us, then God also created our ability to reason. We should bring the full force of our best thinking to our quest for faith and in applying that faith to how we live. Reasoning is, of course, internal to a person, and yet we can share much of what we reason.

The challenge is putting words to our thinking. Similarly, we can encounter other peoples' reasoning as they share it with us, but others' reasoning has no real meaning to us unless we "follow" it – work out the reasoning for ourselves. So, this

source of authority is internal, but can be influenced by others. It is also more malleable than are the words in a sacred text or the facts of how others have lived.

We cannot be on a quest if we do not engage our intellect. We need to know that we are on a quest and we need to "try on" the concepts and experiences we encounter, seeing how these shape our understanding and, ultimately, our actions.

Personal experience:⁴ Scripture is the most external of the sources of authority and personal experience is the most internal. To some degree personal experience can be communicated, but the real power of it cannot be. We cannot pick up the totality of another person's experience, nor can we cause another person to feel what we feel. Our own personal experience is the place where a heartfelt faith takes root, and so it is crucial to engage our experience in our quest for faith. We cannot build faith with something that feels untrue.

When we encounter a religious idea or doctrine and we turn it over in our minds, wondering how that concept or doctrine affects our lived experience, we are giving ourselves the opportunity to build an internal faith. When we

We cannot be on a quest if we do not engage our intellect. We need to know that we are on a quest and we need to "try on" the concepts and experiences we encounter, seeing how these shape our understanding and, ultimately, our actions.

⁴ In the Wesleyan understanding, this source of authority is based mostly on how other people have experienced their faith. However, I have included that element with "tradition," reserving "personal experience" solely for what an individual knows or feels from lived experience.

feel something to be true or not true within ourselves we have a kind of bodily understanding that is both strong and not shareable. If we attune ourselves to our inner conscience and if our Creator is “standing at the door knocking” (*Revelation* 3.20), then it is in our personal experience where we may most intimately encounter our Creator.

In my experience, this intimate source has on occasion brought powerful insights on concepts or values I had encountered earlier in one of the other sources of authority – usually scripture. Once the experience is had, its power on our understanding is great. Because of this power, it is important both to give credence to it, acknowledging it as a source of authority, and at the same time balancing this source with the other three.

If we were to use personal experience alone as a source of authority, then we would be in real danger of engaging our own fantasy as our authority. By remaining sensitive to scripture, tradition and reason, each of which in dialog with others, we can sense the difference between valid, personal insight and delusion.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral encourages us to find and read texts we have reason to believe may be powerful and reliable in our quest for faith, open ourselves to the wisdom of others who in communities or in ways that transformed their communities lived their faith fully, reason carefully about what is conveyed in sacred text and in how others have responded to those texts, and give ourselves room to build and test our faith through our lived experience. I value the Quadrilateral because it guides me in building my faith through external, communal, and internal channels, and reminds me to balance these sources of authority. I should not accept or reject something simply because it is written, or another person wants me to believe it, or I have an idea about it. Instead, I should check the concept or teaching with all four sources of authority.

A Word about Scripture

In Wesleyan practice, scripture is the primary and sufficient source of authority. Methodists hold it to be sufficient in the sense that scripture tells us all we need to know for our salvation, and that it is primary in the sense that anything learned from the other three sources must be checked against what is taught in scripture. (Campbell 36)

Among other arguments in favor of scripture’s primacy, one is that the external, fixed nature of scripture provides something substantial that we can engage. Another reason, of course, is that many accept these texts as divinely inspired, meaning that they are an external vehicle of God’s message to us as members of the human race. If we are on a quest for faith, then there is no

more important source of teaching for us than God's teaching.

On this quest, what I should pay attention to in texts understood to be divinely inspired, is what those texts say about the nature of the Creator, the human condition, and what the Creator is calling me to be. The purpose of sacred texts is to uplift life above what it would be without divine revelation. If divine revelation is involved, then what can be known through natural human actions is not the point of the text, even though familiar experience is often the surface level topic.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) argued that the purpose of scripture is to "tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."⁵ We are on a quest to know something about the nature of God and what God wants from us. If scripture is divine revelation and informs our quest, then it is important that our reading of it be for the purpose of guiding our spiritual quest rather than for shortcutting the usefulness of understanding the material world in natural terms.

I should engage sacred texts with questions about what I need to do in my life to be a blessing to others, and I should anticipate that if I actually do hear the Creator's voice, then the experience will cause me to take action in my personal life. Upon their encounters with the divine Abram left his father's house and became a blessing, Moses removed his shoes and then liberated a nation, and Paul went from fighting Christianity to helping establish it. If God is present in scripture, then we can expect that our encounters with it will move our lives in ways that we did not anticipate. Scripture is about changing *our* lives.

Summing Up

Pascal argued that we find ourselves in a "game" being played from which we cannot escape, and that we can choose to play this game by the Creator's rules or by our own. Further, he argued that even though we cannot know for sure whether there is or is not a Creator or divine rules, it is far better for us to choose to believe in a Creator and live by the Creator's rules, as best we understand them, than otherwise, since the consequences if indeed a Creator exists, are mighty.

If we are moved by Pascal's logic enough to overcome a natural resistance to believing something that cannot be known (generally, disbelief of the unknowable is a good practice), then we might seek to build in ourselves a

5 "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany," 1615. <https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Galileo-LetterDuchessChristina.pdf>, p5, Accessed June 21, 2018. Galileo attributed this statement to "an ecclesiastic of the most eminent degree," whom he and others later identified as Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607).

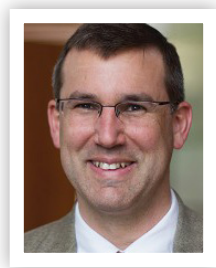
reliable faith or belief, rather than one that we pretend at because we cannot defeat Pascal's logical conclusion.

In this quest for a heartfelt faith we might look for qualities that we feel are most helpful in a faith practice and avoid those that are destructive, and this criterion may lead us to identify reasonable principles of the kind of faith we seek. With these general attributes in mind, we might also identify sources of authority or teaching in our quest. Borrowing from the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, these sources of authority could include sacred texts, traditional understandings of those texts, reasoning about doctrinal points and how doctrine applies to life, and our own lived experience.

This chapter addressed three obstacles or objections to faith. One objection is that it is impossible to demonstrate whether God exists. The second is that faith practices too often harm people. The third is that there are no ways of knowing about God (if God does exist) or what God wants for and from us. Along with Pascal, I have argued that given the situation we are in, it is reasonable to assume that God exists. I have suggested that we can find principles that guard against developing faith practices that damage people. And I have argued that we do have sources we can draw from, should we choose to use them, that can inform us of God's nature, why we exist, and what God calls us to be.

If faith is reasonable and if there are sources available for religious believers to follow, and if a reasonable faith is one that makes the world a better place, then why are there very many examples of greatly damaging actions done by people who claim allegiance to God? I address this question in the next chapter.

**Coming in September/October:
Chapter Two – Religion Misused and Corrected**



Allen Bedford is associate professor of chemistry at Bryn Athyn College, where he has also served as Dean of Academics. He and his wife, Gillian (Gladish), live in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: allen.bedford@brynathyn.edu

Declarations of Faith



THE REV. JEFFREY SMITH

Bryn Athyn Cathedral, May 27, 2018

“The Lord our God, the Lord is One. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” From His Divine love and wisdom, the universe was created. From Him we think, breathe, love, and have freedom of choice.

The Lord revealed Himself in the Old and New Testaments and provided an understanding of those revelations in the Heavenly Doctrine. These three revelations together are a roadmap that will take us from wherever we are to the Lord.

It is by means of the truths of the Lord’s Word that we are reformed and regenerated, that is, reborn. Through reformation and regeneration, the Lord changes us from being naturally-oriented into being spiritually-oriented people. The Lord effects this change in us when we learn true ideas, differentiate between good and evil, and take a step toward what is good.

Taking a step toward good is taking a step toward heaven. Heaven is the state of peace, joy, and happiness in which we find ourselves when we seek to serve our neighbor and shun our selfish inclinations. By failing to shun our selfish inclinations, we are choosing to remain in a hell-bound life. The Lord in His Providence works relentlessly throughout our journey of life to pull us out of our selfishness and into eternal heavenly happiness.

The Lord made us to travel this journey of life with a partner. As the heart and lungs are a pair that give life, so are love and wisdom, good and truth, charity and faith, female and male. The one was not made to live without the other. These pairs are not opposites, but rather complements to each other, one enriching the other with what it would otherwise lack.

This union of female and male is made to last to eternity in heaven. It becomes stronger only as each partner puts away their selfishness in order to be regenerated. This is only possible with the truths of the Word. It only happens when each partner approaches the Source of everything good and true: the one and only Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the

Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.



THE REV. JUDAH SYNNESTVEDT

Bryn Athyn Cathedral, May 27, 2018

I believe in One God, in whom is a Divine Trinity, and that He is the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. (*Arcana Coelestia* 14; *True Christian Religion* 2) When He was in the world, the Lord permitted all of hell to attack Him, so that He could put hell under His control, make His Human Divine, and so restore spiritual freedom to mankind. (*Apocalypse Explained* 328:5) I believe that the Lord has come again, unveiling the internal meaning that is within the Word. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4; *Heaven and Hell* 1) I believe that the Lord is at this day establishing

His New Church, which will worship the Lord alone. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 839:7) I therefore believe in the Gospel proclaimed by the Lord's disciples on June 19, 1770 that the LORD GOD JESUS CHRIST reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages. (*True Christian Religion* 791)

I believe that the Lord is eminently present in the literal sense of His Word, teaching and enlightening people from it. (*Sacred Scripture* 50)

I believe that a person while still in this world ought to be anxious to acquire a conscience (*Arcana Coelestia* 3957:7), formed by the Word (*Ibid.* 2053), so that he may receive a new heart of charity (*Ibid.* 977), and thus gain strength from the Lord to endure spiritual battles. (*Ibid.* 762) I believe that when many people shoulder the responsibility of spiritual life, and give glory to the Lord (*True Christian Religion* 3; *Arcana Coelestia* 1937:3), they are the church, the Lord's bride: "Blessed are they who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb." (*Revelation* 19:9; *Apocalypse Explained* 252)

I believe that from the spiritual marriage of good and truth descends the marriage of husband and wife (*Arcana Coelestia* 9961:3), and that love truly conjugal is the seedbed of heaven (*Conjugal Love* 143), the precious jewel of human life and the repository of Christian religion. (*Ibid.* 457)

I believe in the existence of heaven and hell, and that all who have ever lived are alive in the spiritual world today (*Heaven and Hell* 456:3), and that everything we think and feel is from our association with angels and spirits (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 278), the angels working with the Lord to free us from hell and draw us toward heaven. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5992)

I believe that my job is to teach truth, and lead people by means of that truth to all goodness of life. (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 315)

When a priest is moved with a desire for the salvation of souls, he is moved by truths themselves, because it is by means of these that he leads souls to the Lord, and thus to heaven. It is my purpose, then, to look to the Lord, flee evils as sins against the Lord, and honestly, justly and faithfully do the work of the priesthood. (*Charity 160*)

Hide Your face from my sins, and wipe away all my iniquities.
Create for me a clean heart, O God; and renew a firm spirit in the midst of me.
Cast me not away from before You, and take not the spirit of Your holiness from me.
Return to me the joy of Your salvation; and let a noble spirit support me.
I will teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall return to You. (*Psalms 51:9-13*)

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

RECIPROCAL

This term relates to the reaction of truth to good. Truth from the Lord enters the mind from without through the Word; good from the Lord inflows by an inner way. When man makes the truth his own, or as his own, by obedience to it, it reacts with the good that inflows from within, and this reaction is what is meant by reciprocation. It should be noted that both the action and the reaction are of the Lord, but the latter is effected through man as if of himself. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2954; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 115)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

NOMINATION FOR EXECUTIVE BISHOP

Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. has been nominated by the Council of the Clergy and affirmed by the General Church Board of Directors as the next Executive Bishop of the General Church. His name is now placed in nomination before the entire church for the opportunity to affirm his name. Ballots will be sent out in July by the postal system giving each General Church member a voting number. Members can then respond either electronically or by mail.



If you have not had the opportunity to see his *curriculum vitae* and nomination statement on the General Church website (www.newchurch.org) I encourage you to do so. Additional information, such as samples of his sermons and other work, will be posted there in the near future.

Pete will remain in his current position for the 2018-19 year and, assuming an affirmation by the laity, then assume the office of Executive Bishop on July 1, 2019. During this upcoming year I will work with him on the transition, preparing him for the office.

In addition to the nomination statements, I'd like to share with you some of the comments made during the selection process regarding his strengths and what he will bring to the office:

"Peter is a gifted leader – doctrinally and in his preaching and teaching. He has been a superb pastor, caring for his flock and serving them well. He listens well and attempts to incorporate all into the discussion and outcomes. Pete is highly organized and gets a great deal done. He excels as an administrator and manager of people. He can deal with the details but also has a visionary big picture view. He cares deeply about the New Church, the General Church and all the individuals in it. He has traveled widely throughout the church, including internationally, supporting congregations and people everywhere. He has been a leader of New Church education and he is currently the head of General Church Education. In addition, he has excellent decision-making reflexes, seeking ways to promote uses and bring people together in them. And on top of all that, he has a genuine humility and love of everyone."

If you have any questions about his nomination or the selection process, please contact one of our ministers who would be happy to discuss it with you.

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT AND AWARDS

Bryn Athyn College conferred 37 Bachelor of Arts and nine Bachelor of Science degrees at its 141 commencement on May 26, 2018. There were also five Associate in Arts degrees (all in absentia), one Master of Arts degree, and three Master of Divinity degrees.

The graduates represented five countries (Canada, Ivory Coast, Philippines, Sierra Leone and United States), and 10 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and South Carolina).

The commencement address was delivered by **Brent Pendleton**, who graduated from the Academy Boys School in 1955 and spent one year at the Academy College, then graduated from Lehigh University. He grew up in Cairnwood and was a driving force in the designation of the Bryn Athyn Historic District. In his career he has been active in international resort development. His commencement address appears on page 289.

Many photos, in addition to those on pages 339 through 341, have been posted on the College website, www.brynathyn.edu, and Facebook page.

Here are this year's graduates:

Associate in Arts:

Kenneth Burkhardt, Surfside Beach, SC

Pierce Cartier, Meadowbrook, Pennsylvania

Cade Gurney, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Elizabeth Jackson, Bryn Athyn Pennsylvania

Alex Langlotz, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Bachelor of Arts (* indicates *cum laude*)

Anthony Astorino, East Haven, Connecticut

Zabrinah Ayers, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Connor Buick, Kitimat, BC, Canada

Daouda Camara, Man, Ivory Coast

Anthony Carbone,* Warminster, Pennsylvania

Jonathan Carr,* Crofton, Maryland

Ahmai Cole, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Michael DiSalvia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Karina Duran, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Tahnee Eisenhauer-Marotti, Oyster Bay, NY

Sean Feyler, Dedham, Massachusetts

Nolan Frame, Vernon, BC, Canada

Lara Hulon,* Wyncote, Pennsylvania

Alexander Hyatt,* Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Michael Kelly, Levittown, Pennsylvania

Freya Kistner, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Steffi Geronimo, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Patrick Lynch, Tewksbury, Massachusetts

Natalie Manogue, Warminster, Pennsylvania

Nora McWilliams,* Philadelphia, PA

Angela Moretti,* Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

Paul Napierkowski, Philadelphia, PA

Anthony Notorfrancesco, Clifton Heights, PA

Zachary Odhner, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Christian Rivera, South Cotabato, Philippines

Teri Roberts, New York, New York

Gioanna Romano, Warminster, Pennsylvania

Marin Roth,* Longmont, Colorado

Zeniyah Sanders, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Daniel Schauder,* Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Justin Schorran, Kempton, Pennsylvania

Leanna Smith,* Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Mark Strange, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Daniel Uber,* Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Hanna Vaysberg, Holland, Pennsylvania

Raymond Weissler, Massapequa, NY

Ciara Zayas, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Bachelor of Science (* indicates *cum laude*)

Laura Clymer,* Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

Sarafina Jackson, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sabrina Colbridge,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Katherine Morrill, Maple Shade, New Jersey

Eric Gardner Jr., Chester, Pennsylvania

Marian Sesay, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Coleton Graham,* Hershey, Pennsylvania

Kathleen Vandegrift,* Jenkintown, PA

Miranda Hyatt,* Mitchellville, Maryland

The Valedictorian was **Daniel Uber**.

Academic Awards:

Overall Academic Award: **Laura Clymer**

Departmental Academic Awards:

Biology: **Kat Morrill**

Business: **Jon Carr**

Education: **Eric Gardner** and **Kathleen Vandegrift**

English Language and Literature: **Angie Moretti**

Human Society: **Alex Hyatt** and **Dan Uber**

Performing Arts: **Leanna Smith**

Psychology: **Daniel Schauder**

Religion: **Leanna Smith**

Athletic Awards:

Female Scholar Athlete: **Marie Daum**

Male Scholar Athlete: **Zach Brock**

Female Athlete of the Year: **Shelby Puccio**

Male Athlete of the Year: **Cameron Leech**

Master of Arts

Craig Bostock, Treasure Island, Florida

Craig Bostock was the Valedictorian.

Master of Divinity

James Barry, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (*in absentia*)

Jeffrey Smith, Glenview, Illinois

Judah Synnestvedt, Kempton, Pennsylvania

Judah Synnestvedt was the Valedictorian.

NEW COLLEGE FACULTY

Kurt Frey, Ph.D., will join the Bryn Athyn College faculty in the fall term as an assistant professor of psychology.

Kurt has a B.A. in psychology from Millersville University and an M.S. and Ph.D. in social psychology from Purdue University. He has worked at Yale University as an assistant professor and at the University of Bridgeport as an associate professor. He has also been an adjunct at the College of New Rochelle and Norwalk Community College.

His research focuses on social psychology. He co-authored a book, *Experiments with People: Revelations from Social Psychology*, in 2017. He is working on another book, *Theories About People: Wisdom from Social Psychology*.

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION AND AWARDS

The Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools graduated 63 students on June 9 in Bryn Athyn. This included 33 students from the Girls School (22 with honors) and 30 from the Boys School (11 with honors). This year’s graduating class included students from four countries (Belize, China, Dubai and the United States) and 10 states (Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Tennessee).

The commencement address was given by **Bruce and Molly Cronlund**. (Page 295)

Many photographs, in addition to those on pages 342 through 344, have been posted on the Academy Secondary Schools Facebook page, and at www.ancss.org, courtesy of **Holly Adams** and **Serena Sutton**. There is also a youtube video of the commencement ceremony on the Facebook page. (Link to the Facebook page at www.ancss.org.)

Graduates of the Girls School (* indicates with honors)

Samantha Alden, Freeport, PA

Emily Martin, Bowie, MD

Elizabeth Allen,* Rydal, PA

Megan McQueen,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Avery Asplundh, Bryn Athyn, PA

Lauryl Mergen,* Corbett, OR

Allaina Brock,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Nitza Mizhquiri,* Chicago, IL

Kathryn Caywood,* Bristol, PA

Stevie Murphy,* Bristol, PA

Nora Connelly,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Sophia O’Hagan,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Kevyn Dewees,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Gretchen Roscoe,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Ava Elder , Rochester, MI	Adelaide Schenk , Huntingdon Valley, PA
Rachel Fink ,* Jenkintown, PA	Aspen Schulz-Klippenstein , Belize
Rong Guo , Beijing, China	Rayna Synnestvedt ,* Bryn Athyn, PA
Tori Harley , Philadelphia, PA	Ellie Taylor ,* Hatboro, PA
Onyé Harvin , Philadelphia, PA	Waverley Wadsworth ,* Marietta, GA
Angela Hollingsworth , Ooltewah, TN	Annika Wallace ,* St. Joseph, MO
Caitlin Irwin ,* Willow Grove, PA	Carly Welsh , Philadelphia, PA
Victoria Kline ,* Huntingdon Valley, PA	Qi Rebecca Xiao ,* Guangzhou, China
Mikaloh Klippenstein ,* Maysville, MO	Yuchen Zhang ,* Shenzhen Guangdong, China
Ryann Kolb ,* Meadowbrook, PA	

The valedictorian for the Girls School was **Rebecca Xiao**.

Theta Alpha Gold Medals were awarded to:

Nora Connelly
Kevyn Dewees
Rayna Synnestvedt

Honorary Girls School Diplomas were awarded to:

Alexandra Hanlon
Christina Bales Irwin
Dawn Reuter Wadsworth

Graduates of the Boys School (* indicates with honors)

Michael Antonyuk , Philadelphia, PA	Cole Lambertus ,* Bryn Athyn, PA
Theodore Baltz , Rydal, PA	Andrew LaPenta , Abington, PA
Paul Banguebe-Kazeem , Glenn Dale, MD	Breca Lawing ,* Bryn Athyn, PA
Gannon Blair ,* Huntingdon Valley, PA	Daniel Lindrooth ,* Bryn Athyn, PA
Raymond Bochneak , Huntingdon Valley, PA	Erik Lindrooth ,* Bryn Athyn, PA
David Closterman III , Doylestown, PA	Conor McGrath , Huntingdon Valley, PA
Benjamin Cranch , Bryn Athyn, PA	Chris Moretti , Jenkintown, PA
Derek Cronlund ,* Abington, PA	Milo Navarro , Bryn Athyn, PA

Declan Durand ,* Huntingdon Valley, PA	Timothy Radcliffe , Mitchellville, MD
Jeffrey Feng ,* Jiangsu, China	Samuel Alden Simons ,* Easton, CT
Nathan Harris , Dubai, United Arab Emirates	Ethan Timbers , Glenside, PA
Seamus Hogan , Huntingdon Valley, PA	Kevin Vandergrift , Jenkintown, PA
Kaelan Jackson , Cherry Hill, NJ	Colt Weil , Huntingdon Valley, PA
Thomas Jackson ,* Huntingdon Valley, PA	Drake Wille ,* Huntingdon Valley, PA
Joseph Kees , Huntingdon Valley, PA	Charles Wynn , Rydal, PA

The valedictorian for the Boys School was **Breca Lawing**.

Boys School Faculty Awards were presented to:

Declan Durand (Gold)

Drake Wille (Silver)

An Honorary Boys School Diploma was awarded to:

Jesse Johnson

Academic Awards

Academic Excellence Award

Hope Odhner

Emilie K. Asplundh Performing Arts Award

Serena Boyesen

Theta Alpha International Essay Winners:

First place: **Carling Brock**

Second place: **Madison Zagorski**

Third place: **Isabelle Kline**

Presidential Scholarship from Bryn Athyn College:

TJ Jackson

Mikaloh Klippenstein

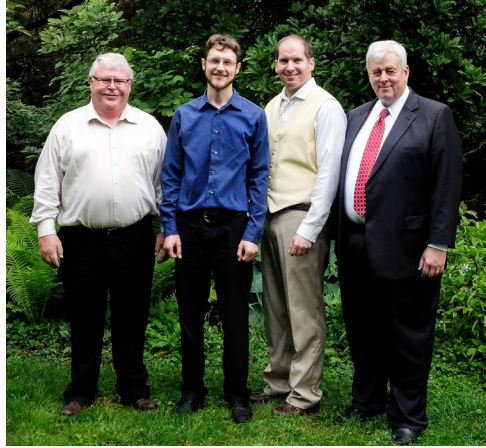
Paul B. Synnestvedt Memorial Award:

Benjamin Cranch

THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL GRADUATION AND ORDINATIONS
(Photos courtesy of Gretchen U. Keith)



Judah, with wife, Lydia, and son, Laif



Left to right: Dean Andrew Dibb, Judah Synnестvedt, Jeff Smith, Bishop Brian Keith



Students, left to right: Richard Glenn, Judah Synnестvedt, Jeff Smith, Christopher Dunn



Judah Synnестvedt



Jeff Smith

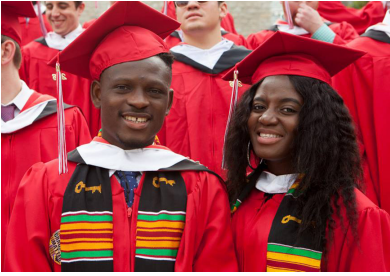


Theological School Faculty and Students, left to right:
 Richard Glenn, Bishop Peter Buss Jr., Judah Synnестvedt,
 Dean Andy Dibb, Jeff Smith, Mary Williams, Rev. Grant
 Odhner, Christopher Dunn, Bishop Brian Keith



Judah Synnестvedt,
 left, and Jeff Smith

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT 2018
(Photos by Serena Sutton and Holly Adams)



Daouda (David) Camara and Marian Sesay



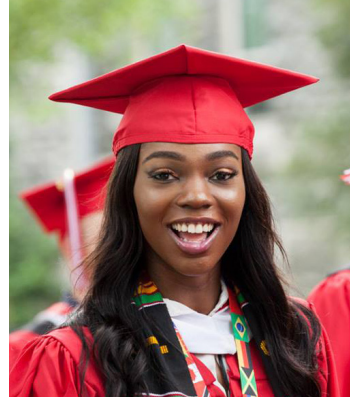
Leanna Smith



Mark Strange



The commencement selfie



Zenyiah Sanders



Eric Gardner



The Faculty



The Procession from the College



Graduation ceremony in the Asplundh Field House



Valedictorian Dan Uber



Zabrinah Ayers



Commencement speaker Brent Pendleton



The graduates



The celebratory cap toss

ANC SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION 2018
(Photos by Serena Sutton and Holly Adams)



Parents Beth and Sean Lawing, graduate Breca, grandparents Walter and Kathy Orthwein



Ryann Kolb and Rachel Fink



Senior Class Presidents Declan Durand and Onye Harvin



Nora Connelly and Ava Elder



Honorary Diploma recipient Jesse Johnson



Simon Daum leads the Senior Class Song



Post-graduation mingling



Rebecca Xiao and teacher Erica Cantley



Mike Antonyuk's Diploma Dance



Caitlin Irwin low-fives her father, Jeremy Irwin, before getting her diploma



Brad and Andrea Cranch with son Benjamin



A Girls School Selfie



Valedictorian Breca Lawing



Honorary Diploma recipients Alexandra Hanlon and Dawn Wadsworth



Commencement speakers Bruce and Molly Cronlund, with son, Derek



Seniors singing their class song



The Klippenstein Clan, bracketed by Linda, left, and Glenn, right



Honorary Diploma recipient Christina Irwin



Girls School Athletic Director Spring Silverman and Rachel Fink



Libby Allen, Caitlin Irwin, Lauryl Mergan, and Megan McQueen

Major Athletic Awards

Girls School

Outstanding Sportsmanship: **Allaina Brock**

Outstanding Female Athletes: **Megan McQueen** and **Ryann Kolb**

Boys School

Payson Lyman Award (*for Charity and Dedication*): **Daniel and Erik Lindrooth**

Stanley F. Ebert Award (*for Courage, Integrity, Perseverance, Sportsmanship and Scholarship*): **David Closterman III**

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Highlights from the May 4-5 meetings of the Academy Board of Trustees:

Bryn Athyn College – Brian Blair, President

Enrollment of close to 400 is anticipated for the 2018-19 academic year.

Ground will be broken in August for the new Student Union, which will include a fitness center, health clinic, café, student lounge and presentation areas.

Residential life management and policies are being revamped, and security needs upgraded.

The College is anticipating \$1.8 million deficit next year but a balanced budget in the 2020-21 school year.

Academy Secondary Schools – Jim Adams, Managing Director

Strategic planning is connecting finances and programs, making it easier for the MSA accreditation process.

The Schools are exploring adding “hands-on” courses by partnering with local businesses and finding ways to partner with home-school families.

Recruiting is increasing for New Church students – locally and in North America.

A \$1.53 million deficit is projected for next year. The Annual Fund budget has been reduced to reflect donors giving to endowment. Financial aid need has been increasing each year. A very small freshman class will be entering from the Bryn Athyn Church School next year.

Glencairn Museum – Brian Henderson, Director

Recent programs have included Easter art – perhaps the only exhibit of its kind in the nation – and **Nishan Yardumian’s** religious art.

The museum is sharing more art with the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which brings expert evaluations to our own collection.

Cairnwood Estate – Shannon Walko, Director

Cairnwood, has purchased a liquor license, with state approval expected in the coming months. This will increase revenue from events and provide greater legal protection. A projected deficit is coming down thanks to increased rentals.

Advancement Committee – Susan Asplundh, Chair

Setting up a fund to support New Church candidates in PhD programs is in the final stages.

Highlights from the June 20 meeting of the Board:

The proposed new Student Union building for Bryn Athyn College was examined and approved by the Finance and Real Estate Committees. Enlarging the building from 23,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet will significantly enhance its use to the College.

The additional cost of \$4.5 million will be covered by donors. Operating costs will be covered by rentals and student fees.

Concern was expressed about the risks of additional capital and depreciation costs, as well as the status of depreciation funds. Assurance was given that once the budget is balanced depreciation funds will be built up again.

EXTENSIONS

Three-year contract extensions were approved for Managing Director **Jim Adams** and Treasurer **Duane Hyatt**.

FINANCE

Claudia Horner is retiring after 25 years of service in the Financial Office and the Board expressed thanks for her service. **David Butler**, who has worked for the Academy previously, has been hired as a replacement.

The sale of Fieldcrest has been settled, with \$6.3 million to be placed in endowment set aside for the debt. A decision to allocate some of these funds to the schools will be made after an *ad hoc* committee report later this summer.

Tina Bartels is shifting from Business Manager for the Academy

Secondary Schools to Controller for the entire Academy. Traditional business manager functions have been handled by various offices. Support Tina has been offering to Jim Adams will be handled by Finance Office staff, overseen by Tina. Tina will continue to support Glencairn and Cairnwood.

GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

At the June 30 meeting of the General Church Corporation in Bryn Athyn, three people were elected to three-year terms on the Board of Directors: **Cheryl B. Cooper**, Bryn Athyn, PA, **Rene H. Johnson**, Russell, PA, and **Wayne Wadsworth**, Marietta, GA. **Ethan King**, Huntingdon Valley, PA, was elected to complete the term of a member who resigned. That term runs through 2020.

Re-elected to the Board were: **Bengt Boyesen**, Kempton, PA; **Amy Buick**, Jenkintown, PA; **Wade Buick**, Kempton, PA; **Stephanie Klippenstein**, Maysville, MO; **Jennifer B. Pronesti**, Bryn Athyn, PA; and **Ned Uber**, Pittsburgh, PA.

Retiring with appreciation from the Board were: **Gregory Baker**, Huntingdon Valley, PA; **Dawn R. Wadsworth**, Marietta, GA; and **Thayer York**, Lake Forest Park, WA.

RETIREMENTS

The Rev. Lawson M. Smith, pastor of the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church, has informed the society that he will retire at the end of June 2019, at which point he will have served 19 years in Kempton. A process has begun to find a replacement.

The Rev. Philip B. Schnarr stepped down as pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church School at the end of the school year in June. Phil had left his position as director of the General Church Office of Education in 2007 to serve as interim principal at the school. He has since served as school pastor, including leading the chapel program, teaching and supporting other religion teachers.

The Rev. Eric H. Carswell, pastor of the Bryn Athyn Society, commended Phil for the energy and passion he has brought to his many roles. The school's religion program will be led by the **Rev. Solomon J. Keal**. Meanwhile, Phil will continue to teach religion to the fifth grade and the school is "very grateful for all Phil has done for BACS."

Bronwen M. Henry has announced that she is stepping down from her work with General Church Outreach, where she has been working since 2000.

She says she is sad to leave the team but feels called "to focus my energy on local church work and my painting ministry." She will continue her work as Small Group Coordinator for Bryn Athyn Church.

NEW GEORGE DOLE BOOK

The Swedenborg Foundation has published a new book by the **Rev. Dr. George F. Dole**, *The Universe and I: Where Science and Spirituality Meet*.

In this book, the Foundation says, "Dole takes readers on an exploration of humanity's nature and purpose with a unique theory of consciousness and existence that unites research and evidence from the scientific community with the spiritual and religious wisdom of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Dole writes in his Preface: "This book grew out of a lifelong interest in the interface between science and religion, rooted in my immersion in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, a brilliant scientist and challenging theologian. More specifically, it took concrete form in the source of an effort to update myself on the present status of the dialogue between these two disciplines; and most specifically, it came about as a better way of understanding my reading of Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*."

On the back cover, **Dr. Ian Thompson**, a nuclear physicist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, who has spoken in Bryn Athyn at Swedenborgian conferences, writes: "The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole's book makes important strides toward reconciling modern science with the principles of theism as elucidated by Emanuel Swedenborg. On the way, Dole exposes a whole host of obstacles that scientific thinkers impose upon themselves, and he ultimately illustrates the common ground between their work and his own. Dole's efforts here go to show that we need more thinkers such as himself who can help make that ground a large enough place for us to live, move, and have our being."

OAK ARBOR PROPERTIES

The Oak Arbor New Church in Rochester Hills, Michigan, has nine new premium half-acre vacant residential lots available for sale for a discounted price to New Church members.

Development of the Oak Arbor community started in the 1980s and we are in the last phase of creating a beautiful subdivision with single family residential homes and condominiums. Oak Arbor is a diverse development consisting of approximately 50% New Church families and our church building, located within the subdivision, is a hub of activity for both church and community events.

Please reach out to us if you have any interest in our new lots. New Church members have the exclusive right to select lots before they are put on the market for sale to the general public on July 9, 2018. There is no expiration date on the New Church member pricing.

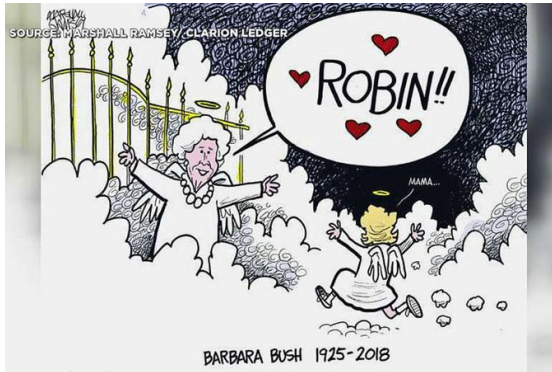
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GOLF BENEFIT

The New Church congregation of the Sower's Chapel in Sarver, Pennsylvania, is sponsoring its Annual Golf Scramble on Saturday, September 1, at 2 p.m.

Friends are invited to come and golf or join the group for dinner as part of the annual Golf Scramble Fundraiser. The proceeds benefit the Freeport Meals On Wheels, the Cabot Foodbank, and a New Church congregation in Ivory Coast, Africa. Go to <http://www.sowerschapel.org/golf-scrabble/> to find out more, register, or contribute.

Life Lines



THE GIFT OF HOPE

It's been a while since Barbara Bush, former First Lady of the United States, passed away in the spring, but a lot of people still are living on the hope she bequeathed to them.

Throughout their long lives in the public eye, George and Barbara Bush mourned the loss of their daughter, Robin, at age 3, and talked openly of their confident faith that they would see her again when they moved from this world.

This cartoon by Marshall Ramsey of the Jackson, Mississippi, *Clarion-Ledger* captured that spirit. Indeed, it made such a powerful connection with the human spirit – especially with parents who have lost a child – that it quickly went viral. It was cited on TV networks coverage of Mrs. Bush's funeral and was reprinted and re-tweeted across the land.

Marshall Ramsey wrote a column in *USA TODAY* about the impact of his cartoon, quoting a letter from a father who had lost a college-age daughter to a car accident: "My heart swelled as I took note of (the cartoon) because of our own loss and our desire to be able to see our own daughter again." After describing her loss he said: "I just hope that at some point in time we are able to greet her as indicated by your touching artwork. Thank you for such a heart-warming moment."

Surely there is no greater pain for a parent than losing a child. We all have

been touched by it, either directly or indirectly. We are blessed in the New Church with the sure knowledge that all such parents and children will be reunited again, and it is one of our most appealing teachings to offer to those searching for comfort. But it is almost an innate perception that “we will see our child again” – part of the Lord’s mercy in helping people deal with their sorrow.

This was a repeated theme in letters sent to Mr. Ramsey:

- It’s really special to all moms (including me) who have a child in heaven. It is a beautiful depiction of what we imagine it will be like to see our child again!
- Thank you. Those words don’t seem nearly big enough right now for the incredible gift you have given our community . . . a community of bereaved parents. We are a tribe of people being forced to live here on earth without one or more of our children. Your beautiful tribute to the beloved Barbara Bush and her daughter Robin reminded us of something very important: Our children are waiting for us. It hurts so much to be apart from them and I’m going to be honest; there is a part of me that is jealous that Barbara gets to see Robin again. I am waiting for my turn. But yesterday you published a piece of hope. Someday we will be reunited, and I’m not sure I can articulate just how much that soothes the aching heart of a bereaved parent.”

Ramsey said he’s drawn many obituary cartoons, usually well received, but what made this one different? “Because I didn’t approach it as a cartoonist. I drew it as a dad.”

He had read about the Bushes and the loss of their daughter. “Here was a person who had everything, yet had suffered the hardest loss a parent can face. I thought about my own kids, how much pain I would feel if I were her and how I would hope for healing.” And then the idea came to him.

It worked because it connected with the hope and faith that sustains us all. That faith is tested every time we hear of a child dying of cancer, in an accident, or from the horror of a school shooting. But even in the midst of tragedy we see signs of the Lord’s love and mercy leading to good – beginning with an outpouring of love and kindness from friends and strangers.

The Lord offers His comfort throughout the Word. “Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matthew 19:14*) But if people also find their hopes stirred by a cartoon that’s fine too. The Lord works in marvelous ways.

(BMH)

“KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS”

The word "keep," like most words, has quite a range of meanings. One is to **preserve or hold** onto something: "Keep the peace." "Keep the faith." "Keep a secret." "This is a tradition worth keeping." "Keep someone you love close to your heart." You might say of an especially fine example of something, or of a person: "That one's a keeper."

Along with "hold onto" there is the idea of **taking care** of something. "Keep up your property." "Keep your records up to date." "Keep the Sabbath holy." A lighthouse keeper takes care of a lighthouse.

"Keep" also means to **obey (or observe, comply with, conform to, adhere to)** something: "Keep the rules." "Keep to the schedule." "Keep to the script." "Keep in step." "Keep your promises and your sacred vows."

"Keep" is also used when we speak of **protecting** something or "keeping watch" over it. "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." (*Psalms* 141:3) "Shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." (*Luke* 2:8)

In olden times, the fortified tower of a castle was called "the keep." It was a **sanctuary**. A protected place in which the occupants could "keep safe."

An employee who "keeps his nose to the grindstone" (maintains his work ethic, takes care of business) and thus "earns his keep" (the salary that sustains him) will "keep his job" (protect and hold onto his job).

"Keep" may carry several meanings at once. Someone asked Benjamin Franklin, as he was coming out of the Constitutional Convention: "What have you given us?" "A Republic," he replied, "if you can keep it." In other words, if we want to hold onto and continue living within that form of government, with the protections and benefits it provides, we must watch over it, take care of it, and adhere to the fundamental principles that make such a civil order possible.

Preserve, retain, care for, protect and obey . . . "keep" has all these shades of meaning. This helps us appreciate how much meaning there is in the Lord's simple injunction: "If you love Me, keep My Commandments." (*John* 14:15) And: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (*John* 15:10)

So, keep the commandments, and keep in touch with them. Keep them before the eye of your mind, and close to your heart. Preserve them in your memory; Maintain their freshness and power by reflecting on their significance and many applications. Faithfully abide by them, that is, obey them. Let them establish the parameters of your thoughts, words and deeds. Make them the foundation and walls of your mental house. Then you will be abiding in them as well as by them. They will constitute a sanctuary in your mind, and when

evil approaches they will protect and preserve your soul.

(WEO)

DA VINCI AND SWEDENBORG

An acclaimed new biography, *Leonardo da Vinci*, by Walter Isaacson cannot help but conjure comparisons with Emanuel Swedenborg. They were not contemporaries. Leonardo died 169 years before Swedenborg was born. But both were geniuses across many fields, far ahead of their times. A major difference is that da Vinci's vision was limited by his worldly lens. Swedenborg's was immeasurably enhanced by spiritual sight.

Leonardo had little formal education but a passionate curiosity. He is best known as an artist – *The Last Supper* and *Mona Lisa* – but was also a prescient scientist, inventor and engineer. He probed the intricacies of human anatomy and the endless wonders of the cosmos. Like Swedenborg he envisioned a flying machine and discovered workings of the human body that would not be confirmed for centuries.

The publisher of Isaacson's book says of da Vinci: "His creativity, like that of other great innovators, came from standing at the intersection of the humanities and technology. He peeled flesh off the faces of cadavers, drew the muscles that move the lips, and then painted history's most memorable smile on the *Mona Lisa*."

In her classic 1952 biography, *The Swedenborg Epic*, Cyriel Sigstedt wrote: "In his versatility, Swedenborg has often been compared to Leonardo da Vinci, who divided his attention between paintings and mechanics, inventions and armaments. The lines of their lives do often seem to run parallel, for both were speculative students of nature and both were unable to confine their genius within the limits of one profession. Both were forerunners of modern discoveries and far ahead of their times."

Isaacson offers a classic illustration of da Vinci's quest to understand life by going back to the beginning with a drawing – at once scientific, anatomical and philosophical – of a fetus in the womb. He writes: "It is good as an anatomical study, but purely divine, almost literally so, as a work of art. We can see ourselves embodied in the wonder of creation: innocent, miraculous, mysterious."

"Leonardo," he adds, "was aware that his fetus drawing had a spiritual quality that transcended his other anatomical studies." But, sadly, da Vinci saw nothing spiritual in it.

"Leonardo's rejection of Church teachings on the soul was done without drama or angst. He was naturally comfortable with scientific humanism and tended to look at the facts. He believed in the glorious and awe-inspiring

nature of creation, but for him these were things to be studied and appreciated through science and art, not through the dogmas handed down by the Church.”

It’s interesting to speculate how he might have responded to Swedenborg and the revelation given through him. He seemed to sense a deeper meaning in the nature he exalted. Isaacson says: “His comparisons between mad-made machinery and the handiwork of nature produced in him a deep reverence for the latter.”

Leonardo himself wrote presciently: “Though human ingenuity may make various inventions, it will never devise an invention more beautiful, more simple, more direct than does Nature; because in her inventions nothing is lacking and nothing is superfluous.”

But his vision was limited by his earth-bound perspective. He saw all this marvel and perfection as the random product of Nature, not an omniscient Creator. He did not see in all that beauty what Swedenborg described: “The universe is like a stage on which proofs are constantly being demonstrated that God exists and that there is one God.” (*True Christianity* 12)

(BMH)

INCAPACITATION AND THE APPROACH OF DEATH

Very old or very ill people sometimes feel their life in this world is no longer serving any use. “Why doesn’t the Lord just take me?”

There is no easy answer. This is a cry from the heart, not an academic question, and any answer, true though it may be, is likely to sound canned, superficial, and just an attempt to be soothing. Teachings from the Word can certainly help, but ultimately people in this situation need to find an answer in their own heart.

I saw an example of this on a television program called “Into the Night: Portraits of Life and Death.” (PBS, March 26) In it, several people, including an astrophysicist, a preacher, a philosopher, an “artisanal mortician” (!) and a surgeon who was dying of cancer all reflected on mortality. The surgeon’s story came last and was quite inspiring.

He spoke about a good friend. That man happened to be a woodworker, and we saw them working together building a coffin for the doctor when the time came. The friend said he would come to the dying man’s bedside, carry him to the bathroom, wash him, do whatever needed to be done. The surgeon was incredibly moved by this. “Can you imagine a friend like that?” he said. “Having a friend say that to me makes all of this worthwhile.”

Then he reflected more broadly on his approaching death. He didn’t want to die, he had a loving wife and grown children he was close to. But he realized that the experience he was going through, hard as it was, brought a blessing

with it. He was obviously a good man, loved by his family, and had lived a useful life – but he felt strongly that what he was going through was making him a better person.

"Acknowledging my mortality is absolutely what has taken me to where I am," he said. "If I had to say in a nutshell what it has done to me, it has re-written my capacity to love and my ability to see love in the world. People ask me: can you do this without having a death sentence, and I don't know. But I have come to believe that I would never go back to the way I was before I had incurable cancer." And he repeated: "I would never go back."

The work we were born into this world to do is not just external, but internal. It is the work of regeneration, which is really done by the Lord, who is always working to strengthen and purify our spirit. In providence, every experience we go through, happy or sad, and right until we draw our last breath, can contribute to our spiritual growth and preparation for life in heaven. As we age, our physical and even mental capacity to be of use in the world diminishes. But our most important task during our life on earth is not earthly, it is spiritual, and that is a use no one ever outlives.

(WEO)

"JUDGE WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT" (JOHN 7:24)

Besides its blind spots, every age also has its own fresh insights into what is good and true. So it's no use just railing against "the times we live in" – no era is entirely bad, just as none is entirely good. It is necessary, then, for us to make judgments about each of the various issues that come to the fore in the age we're living in. "Is this right or is it wrong? Is it inspired by heaven or by hell?" This is what we have to ask ourselves.

Something to beware of is basing our judgments on affection alone, since affections may be merely natural and selfish. We have been endowed with the faculty of rationality so that we can govern and guide our affections. What we want to avoid is having the understanding simply dance to the will's tune. (The Writings use a more emphatic metaphor to describe this condition – see *Divine Providence* 144.2) In that case, instead of the rational refining and elevating the will, as it is meant to do, the will drags the understanding down to its level. Then rationalizing replaces reason. So we need to be aware of the will's tendency to bend the faculty of reason to confirm whatever the will desires, and resist it. "Take the falsest proposition and ask clever individuals to justify it, and they will." (*Divine Providence* 286)

But how can we – willful, selfish, natural creatures that we are – possibly tame our natural passions and short-circuit the devious reasoning they enlist to justify their goals? How can we gain an enlightened rational capable of

making sound judgments about the moral and spiritual issues that confront us? It is only the light of revelation that can lift us above ourselves.

The Lord has told us to judge rightly when confronted by the various human problems the world wrestles with: "Abide in My Word, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Free from the confusion and sophisticated snares set by the hells in their perpetual effort to profane and destroy every good and true thing, and if possible drag heaven itself down into the mud.

(WEO)

"WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?"

This is a catchy saying, and certainly a fine question to ponder in deciding how to behave. The Lord has taught us that we should love one another as He has loved us. We should, of course, always strive to do what Jesus would do. Like every truth, though, this one can be bent by self-righteousness, the desire to rule over others, or a political agenda.

There was a story on the evening news recently that showed a television preacher exhorting his followers to send him money so he could buy a new jet plane (he already owned two or three) for \$54 million. Jesus told him to appeal for this money, he said, because the new plane would have a greater range than his old ones, and thus enable him to spread the Gospel more efficiently, without having to stop to refuel as often. Oh my.

Ask what Jesus would do, but at the same time humbly acknowledge that you may well be mistaken in what you think that is. Isn't it a truism that the Lord works in mysterious ways? The workings of Divine providence are deliberately hidden from us. We don't know for sure what the Lord intends in any situation. And it is very easy to imagine that He would endorse what we happen to desire.

It is good to ask *yourself* what Jesus would do about a situation you are facing, but something else again to ask that question of others in such a way as to imply what they should do.

One time a man came to the Lord and said: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But the Lord replied: "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" (*Luke 12:13-14*) The Lord does not dictate our actions, and we would not want Him to. Nor should we try to use what we presume He would say about something in order to manipulate someone else's actions.

What the Lord has done is to reveal the truths we need to form a genuine conscience to guide us. The best (and really only) way to get an idea of what Jesus would do is to search the Scriptures, let them form your conscience, and

act accordingly.

And let others follow *their* conscience, rather than telling them to do what *you think* Jesus would do.

(WEO)

BRAVE NEW WORLD?

In a new book – *World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech* – Franklin Foer makes the case that Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple are transforming the world and taking over our lives.

The conceit is captured in Google’s “master plan”: “The company wants to create machines that replicate the human brain, and then advance beyond.... Taking on this grandiose assignment, Google stands to transform life on the planet, precisely as it boasted it would. The laws of man are a mere nuisance that can only slow down such work. Institutions and traditions are rusty scrap for the heap. The company rushes forward, with little regard for what it tramples, on its way to the New Jerusalem.”

It is interesting – and telling – that he cites the “New Jerusalem” but says their challenges are the laws of man, not God’s.

The technological genie being unleashed by Google and others is “artificial intelligence.” Foer says the “high priest” of this new “religion” is Ray Kurzweil, “who believes fervently in AI and yearns for the heaven on earth it will create. This paradise has a name – it’s called the singularity.”

“In his telling,” Foer writes, “humanity is about to place a lead foot on its technological accelerator – we’re on the threshold of massive leaps in genetics, nanotechnology and robotics. These developments will allow us to finally shed our ‘frail’ and ‘limited’ human bodies and brains, what he calls our ‘version 1.0 biological bodies.’ We will fully merge with machines; our existence will become virtual; our brains will be uploaded. Thanks to the scientific leading, we can tell you the singularity will dawn in the year 2045.”

And George Orwell thought *1984* was scary.

But even the high priests are having trouble fitting the human mind into virtual reality. “Philosophy couldn’t emancipate the mind,” Foer writes, “but technology just might. Google has set out to succeed where Descartes failed, except that it has jettisoned all the philosophical questions that rattled around in his head. Where Descartes emphasized skepticism and doubt, Google is never plagued with second-guessing. It has turned the liberation of the brain into an engineering challenge – an excuse that often fails to ask the basic human implications of the project. This is a moral failing that afflicts Google and has haunted computer science from the start.”

And that is the failing that dooms artificial intelligence. It can work its

marvels – many for the good of humanity – but it cannot reflect, think from love, and elevate itself spiritually.

In his sermon on *Thought: What Goes on in Your Mind* (page xxx) the Rev. Jeremy Simons says: “Everyone asks himself different questions and, according to the Writings, your habits of thought and reflection have a great impact on your happiness.”

Indeed, we are told that there are “more arcana” on the subject of reflection in the Writings than any other subject. But the power and importance of reflection is not even a blip in the realm of artificial intelligence.

In his article in the May/June issue of *New Church Life – Coming Soon to a Church Near You: Robot Priests?* – the Rev. Todd Beiswenger is not worried about AI robots taking over the pulpit because they can never give us what the Lord can.

“For me,” he said, “all of this brings up the question of what it is to be human. Academics, philosophers and the like have put forward all sorts of ideas, including having ‘heart,’ ‘empathy,’ or ‘spirit.’ The Writings give us a different answer as to what it is to be human: ‘For a person is human because of intelligence and wisdom – essentially truth and good respectively – which people have solely from the Lord.’” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2305)

He adds: “The Lord isn’t telling us that if we just program a will and understanding into a robot that we’ll have a human. He’s telling us that all these things have to be in place and connected back to Him in order to receive life. We need that ‘door’ for the Lord to enter into our soul and mind. Silicon chips just don’t receive the Lord’s life the way a human does.”

AI does not reflect on what it means to approach the New Jerusalem, which is why it will never get us there. It will keep on serving and concerning us, but is forever limited.

Artificial intelligence may be real. Artificial wisdom never will be.

(BMH)

“A CORRECTIVE AGAINST THE AGE”

What with one thing and another I’ve forgotten just about all I learned about Kierkegaard in a long-ago college philosophy course, but that phrase, “a corrective against the age,” has always stuck in my mind. I think it’s a great way of describing the use of the church in every age. Each generation inclines toward its own peculiar errors, and the church provides a corrective to them.

Of course, churches also go through their own successive ages, and decline. I believe the New Church, as a spiritual entity with its roots in heaven, will be forever young, but the particular organizations of it established in this world are subject to the same entropy (as we might call it) that all earthly things are.

But in so far as a New Church body maintains its focus upon the eternal truths of revelation, it can serve as "a corrective against the age." It is essential that such a corrective exist; without it, the world would be even more of a mess than it already is.

Being a corrective, though, means that the church will always be somewhat at odds with the world around it. How likely is it that a church can enjoy the world's acclaim and bask in its popularity while at the same time serving its use as "a corrective against the age?" The Lord warned His disciples: "You will be persecuted."

(WEO)

FAIRY TALES AND REALITY

It seemed like all of England and half of America were mesmerized by the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in May. Of course, it evoked poignant memories of the fairy-tale wedding of Harry's mother, Diana, and father, Prince Charles, whose marriage sadly devolved to turmoil and tragedy, becoming more grim than Grimm. There's a moral in that fairy tale too.

Every wedding begins with the same starry-eyed dreams as Charles' and Di's – and Harry's and Meghan's – storybook settings, if not the pomp and pageantry. It is worth recalling what the Archbishop of Canterbury said at the wedding of Charles and Diana, because he understood what powerful symbols they were – and what responsibility they were taking on. The same is true for Harry and Meghan – and really for all of us..

"There is an ancient Christian tradition," he said, "that every bride and groom on their wedding day are regarded as a royal couple – kings and queens of creation.

"On a wedding day it is made clear that God does not intend us to be puppets but chooses to work through us, and especially through our marriages, to create the future of His world.

"A marriage that really works is one which works for others. Marriage has both a private face and a public importance. If we solved all our economic problems and failed to build loving families, it would profit us nothing, because the family is the place where the future is created, good and full of love – or deformed."

And there is the enduring message, extending from Harry and Meghan through all our hopes and dreams – for happy marriages and stable, loving families. Wherever we fail to do that the reverberations ripple through the spectrum of our culture, creating an undertow that pulls us all down.

Hopes were stirred in millions of hearts by the inspiring spectacle of the royal wedding. But the hope really lies in all of us keeping the faith – that

“God does not intend us to be puppets but chooses to work through us, and especially through our marriages, to create the future of His world.”

(BMH)

THE GENERAL CHURCH IS NOT THE WHOLE OF THE NEW CHURCH

All churches should strive to be the best embodiment they can be of the religion they represent. But it would be hubristic to assume that the General Church represents all there is to the New Church as a spiritual presence in the world.

Our prudence and efforts are *part* of the Lord's providence in establishing His Church, and, we assume, the success of our little organization does contribute to the progress of the New Church as a whole. That belief inspires us to support our church body and strive to make it as perfect as we can.

But because we have such high aspirations, I sometimes think we overreach and are too self-critical because we aren't accomplishing all that we would like.

The danger is that a sense that we are failing, because of our church's small size, will cause us to focus so much on efforts to recruit new members as to distract us from the uses which the General Church is especially good at. The fact is that despite its small size the General Church is carrying out essential New Church uses that no other branch of the Church is ready to perform or interested in taking up.

The uses of the General Church are various, but its *specialty* is New Church education. The founding of the Academy of the New Church, from which the General Church was born, was inspired by a perception of how vital education is to the success of the New Church.

The full statement on education from the 12 "Principles of the Academy" reads: "The true field of Evangelization is with the children of New Church parents. Schools are needed that children may be kept in the church sphere until they can think for themselves." That principle, and the vision it represents, is foundational. The school system the General Church operates, from kindergarten through college and theological school, was built upon that basic principle.

The other uses of the Church are all sustained by New Church education. These include Divine worship formed by, and centered upon, the open Word; deep doctrinal scholarship; and when possible the establishment of communities in which a New Church sphere prevails and conjugal marriage can be preserved and supported.

(WEO)

NEW CHURCH EDUCATION IS OUTREACH TOO

External evangelization is not an alternative to internal evangelization (education of the children of New Church parents), but an adjunct to it. It was in New Church schools, after all, that the workers in the field of outreach were steeped in the truths that inspired them to take up that use, and which constitute the message they now broadcast to the world at large.

I've referred to New Church education as "internal evangelization," but it's not just internal. Even children who were "born in the church" are really not in it until they choose, as rational adults, to make the church their own. Before then, even though they are easier to identify and more accessible to us than other potential converts, they are in fact outside the church, and we have an even greater responsibility to evangelize these people of our own making and bring them into the fold than we have to convert the world at large.

And, as the 140-year experiment in New Church education has proved, the effort to convert our own children is the "most fruitful" evangelization program of all.

(WEO)

THE WOMB OF THE GENERAL CHURCH

The Academy used to be called "the educational arm of the General Church." I think a more apt metaphor might be "the womb of the General Church." What other evangelization program delivers a new class of 100 or so students every year, year in and year out, who are committed to attend several religion classes every week for nine months each year for a number of years?

These potential new members are not just contacted, but taken under the wing of the church's educational system, where their faith can grow for years, usually with strong support from their families, and in the company of close friends who are on a similar voyage of discovery.

In the world around us college students are demanding "safe spaces" on campuses – defined, ironically, as places where they won't be exposed to ideas they may not like; ideas that challenge the orthodoxy and dictates of political correctness.

A New Church school, however, offers a genuinely safe space, a spiritually safe place, in which real learning, ordered by eternal truths, can take place. The goal of such education is to create a protected, loving, peaceful environment open to the influence of heaven, so that the students' minds can grow and blossom according to the Divine plan for their development.

(WEO)

BROKEN WINDOWS

Back in 1982 social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling developed a theory called “Broken Windows.” It was as profound as it was simple. The idea was that if minor crimes and disorders – broken windows, vandalism, littering, graffiti – are tolerated and left unaddressed it will lead to more crime, anti-social behavior and civil disorder.

The theory has been tested in many settings, most famously by the police commissioner and mayor of New York City in the 1990s, with dramatic results. As broken windows were immediately repaired, litter cleaned up and graffiti scrubbed another message was conveyed and overall crime rates dropped.

The broken windows theory also applies to our culture. As increasingly vulgar language is tolerated in movies and television, as wanton violence is glamorized, and sexual promiscuity becomes “the new normal” for a vulnerable generation, our whole culture is degraded. The solution is as simple as broken windows – but requires all of us to recognize the tipping point and resolve to clean up the social environment before it inevitably becomes worse.

The “broken windows” of our culture affect all of what we see and often sadly come to accept. But it doesn’t have to be that way. The things we value always look brighter through clear perspective and “clean windows.” Even better through stained glass.

(BMH)

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

Two high profile suicides in the spring – people who seemingly “had it all” – riveted attention on the crisis of suicide in our culture. Suicides rates have been rising throughout the United States since 1999. And always the questions in their wake: What could we have done to prevent these? What can we do to prevent another? And always echoes the refrain: You never know what private battles anyone may be fighting. Just be kind. Always be kind.

(BMH)



ADVANCEMENT

A Planned Gift is a special way to support the uses of the Academy and the General Church.

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“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6



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