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NEW CHURCH LIFE

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A monthly magazine devoted to the teachings
revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg

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I Have A Dream

By Rev. Ragnar Boyesen

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By Rev. Norman E. Riley

Church News from West Africa

September 2009

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Notes on This Issue

We welcome back Bishop Brian Keith with a powerful sermon on loving the Lord. Bishop Keith helps us to identify what love is, and then how to recognize love to the Lord.

The Rev. Ragnar Boyesen was honored to speak at a large exhibition in Copenhagen last February, considering some of the things said by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and linking this to other well-known names, and to the Writings. Did Dr. King refer to Swedenborg?

The Rev. Norman Riley gives us a simple exercise in determining our Source for truth.

Church News from Ghana is a Bishop's Report of West Africa, including the dedication of the new Ebenezer Temple in Tema and a picture of this encouraging event. What joy it must be for our New Church friends there.

LOVING THE LORD

BY RT. REV. BRIAN W. KEITH

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” John 14:21

One of the dominant features in heaven is the Lord’s presence in His spiritual sun. The Lord appears in the heavens as a sun, because all the warmth of love and light of wisdom come from Him alone. And this sun is seen by everyone there in front of their eyes, at a middle altitude. The underlying reason for this is that the Lord leads all the angels, and the angels are constantly looking to Him. The Lord is the first thing of their lives, for they love Him above all else.

This is an interesting teaching, but it is perhaps hard for us to see the significance of this in our lives. After all, we’re here, not in the spiritual world! But perhaps it is also because we are not as cognizant of the Lord in our lives as the angels. Yes, we do think of the Lord – in worship services and in prayers. But how often is the Lord truly before our faces? In our lives? In our loves?

We, like the angels, should always be looking to the Lord. And the answer for how to do this is supplied by Scripture: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). This ideal is stated in the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church this way: a person “would rather die or be deprived of honors and wealth in the world than be drawn away by them from the Lord and from heaven” (*Apocalypse Explained* 419:7). Having the Lord at the center of our lives, so much so that we would not give up an iota of it for fame or money! This is loving the Lord – having Him as our essential focus and attention (*Arcana Coelestia* 8857).

Yet, how many of us feel that we put the Lord first in our lives? And, even when we realize the importance of this, how do we go about it? What is love to the Lord?

For contrast, we can easily see what love to the Lord should not be. It should not be confused with worldly or merely natural loves. So often we speak of “love” in terms of our possessions, our successes, or what gives us pleasure. We refer to “loving” a great meal, comfortable clothing, or some exotic vacation. We may even fall into thinking that the word “love” can be used of those who do things for us – “I just love it when people listen to me.” The danger with such thought is that it is fundamentally self-centered. We are in effect saying that we will love things and people if they will give us pleasure. Such so called “love” is merely natural, cannot last, and will never satisfy our souls.

Love for the Lord is also not created from abject terror – thinking we should love the Lord because otherwise He will cause us grief or punish us with hell. At times in the Old Testament it has this appearance – with the distant and apparently severe presence of Jehovah. And in the early stages of spiritual life someone may think that. But love stemming solely from that sense of fear, which never grows beyond it, is not genuine.

Yes, love to the Lord should not be identified with just a “feeling” of love (*Spiritual Experiences* 5152). It is not a gushy, over-emotional sentiment that sweeps away any rational thought and reflection. It is not like the first romantic sensation experienced by young people, which they mistakenly think is a love for marriage. Such infatuation is usually directed at the external person. To be affected by another’s external appearance, or their external personality, may be an initial attraction, but it is not to know the other person, their character or their interior loves. And, concerning the Lord, we are cautioned against loving His person (*Heaven and Hell* 15;

Apocalypse Explained 433:2, 1099:3; *Divine Wisdom* XI:3). What this seems to mean is that we are not to love the Lord simply because we have read about His miracles, or His personality as it is recorded in the New Testament. We are not to love the man as the disciples saw Him, for they saw as much of His merely human as they did His Divine Human. If we focus exclusively upon that person who walked the earth several thousand years ago, we will tend to have a sensual, natural, love.

This is not to say that we should ignore the image the Lord provided in Jesus Christ. It is important for us to have a visual image of the Lord. This enables our thoughts and affections to be focused and anchored. But this is only to enable our interior love for Him to be displayed in some tangible form.

So, if those ways are not genuine love for the Lord, what is? To love the Lord is to love those things which come from Him (*Heaven and Hell* 15). It is to love His justice, His providence, His mercy, His love and His wisdom (see *Apocalypse Explained* 973:2). It is to love all those things that flow forth from Him in creation which make a heaven from the human race. In one sense, there is nothing else to love about Him, for as He is in Himself, we cannot know Him or be one with Him. But when we see the glorious brilliance of His truths, when we look back and see the good that He has done, then we know what we should love of Him.

This can be seen in any healthy relationship. The things we like in another person are the good qualities which we can sense. Those traits which we enjoy and perceive as useful are what draw us to another, and link us together in the bond of friendship.

There is also an analogy of our love to the Lord with conjugal love, our love for our spouse. Have you ever tried to answer the question of why you love your married partner? Have you ever tried to pin it down, to say exactly what it is about that

person that causes you to love him or her, to seek to be a one with them? Words fail us, for we are not joined primarily to their external appearance, personality, or sense of humor. Yes, these can be pleasing to us, but what we truly love in that person is what they themselves are; we love the good that we see and feel in them which is then exhibited in a thousand ways. This is what we wish to be close to.

Because we love what is internal, the externals of this world do not matter so much to us. It is from this that we are able to excuse their faults, those things which might irritate us, and they in turn are able to live with all our failings! So love between married partners does not lessen with age when youthful appearance passes. Rather it can increase, for that which they love in each other is growing – a regenerating life from the Lord. To love the good of someone else is what we are to love in the Lord, for He is good itself.

Yet love does not exist in a vacuum. If we love another, we are not content merely to sit by and observe them. We desire to be with them, to join them in what they are doing. This is wonderfully expressed in the Writings where we are taught “nothing is more pleasing to one who loves any one, and who believes any one, than to will and do what the other wills and thinks, for it is his sole desire to know his will and thought, thus his good pleasure” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10143:5).

What better description of genuine love and friendship could there be?

Where there is love we desire to be conjoined with the other, and so are willing to do many things that otherwise we would not find interesting. Can you imagine a couple tolerating external differences or dis-similarities for any reason other than an interior love of the other? A friendship does not dissolve at the first sign of disagreement, for something more interiorly binds the two together. Only an external, selfish, relationship is

broken when the other person is temporarily unable to give us pleasure (see *Faith* 21).

To love the good of another implies that we wish to assist it, to join with it in the performance of some use. This is true in marriage, in friendship, and in our love for the Lord.

It is easy to say that we love the Lord, for in itself it involves no effort. This why simply “feeling love” for the Lord is not enough. Those who truly love the Lord, seek to join with Him through knowledge of what He wishes. Where there is genuine love there is the desire to learn every possible thing about the other person. So it is with the Lord, where there is love to Him there is the desire to learn His truths, both those which tell us directly about Him, the doctrine of the Lord, and those which tell us how to improve our lives. As these are learned we can then think as He does; we can form our minds to will deeply what He wills. When we appreciate why hatred is wrong, we will attempt to purge our minds of such thoughts towards our neighbors. As we understand how coveting is wrong, we will try to stop desiring the things of others. And then the process comes into its fullness when we are actually doing what He commands from delight (see *Arcana Coelestia* 10645:4).

Yet simply organizing our minds to think as the Lord thinks is not enough. “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me” (John 14:21). This means that as we go about our daily lives, as we work in our jobs, take care of our homes, and care for others, that life of use is how we express love the Lord. To look for the good in others and to love it is to love the Lord. To obey one of His commandments from conscience, that is, from a love of doing what He would like us to do, is to love the Lord. The reason this is truly loving is that “the Lord loves a person, and from love wills that he may be happy forever, and a person cannot become happy except by a life according to His commandments, because by means of these

a person is regenerated and becomes spiritual, and in this way can be raised into heaven” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10578:3).

Imagine that! We love Him when we receive heaven in our hearts. So going to heaven, or having heaven grow within us here on earth, is how we love the Lord. How can we lose? When we gain the greatest eternal joy for ourselves, we are receiving love from Him and returning it to Him.

Yes, to the extent we hold on to selfishness or a focus on worldly things we do not embrace love for Him. In so far as selfish loves are present, we cannot have true friendship, conjugal love, or love to the Lord. In friendship, in so far as we think of what the other person can do for us, to that extent we are not genuine friends. In marriage, in so far as we think that the other person ought to center their lives on us, conjugal love will be unable to descend into the relationship. In love to the Lord, in so far as we want the Lord to save us without us lifting our hands, or want Him to love our evils so we can avoid change, to that extent we reject His love. So for us to know a lasting, heavenly, love, we are to remove what would prevent the Lord from being close to us.

As we strive to think as the Lord does, as we work to obey His commandments, as we put aside our selfishness, a genuine love for the Lord can grow within. We will appreciate ever more deeply who He is, and what He is constantly doing in our lives, and the lives of others. This love will then infill and inspire our lives. It will lead us to become more useful in whatever employments we have. It will help us to become more caring in how we think of others and how we speak to them. It will transform our lives because we have given them to the Lord – a Spiritual Sun shining before us, leading us. And it will shower forth blessings upon us – not because we have sought them, but because we have shifted our thinking and acting from self to the Lord and His good. “Blessed are they that do His

commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).
Amen.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 7:1-11; John 14 15-31; *Arcana Coelestia* 10578:3

Arcana Coelestia 10578:3

Anyone who supposes that he can love the Lord without leading a life in keeping with His commandments is very much mistaken; for leading a life in keeping with them is what constitutes loving the Lord. Those commandments are truths received from the Lord, and so are such as have the Lord within them. To the extent therefore that those commandments are loved, that is, to the extent that a person is inspired by love to lead a life in keeping with them, the Lord is loved. The reason why this should be so is that the Lord loves the person and in His love desires him to be eternally blessed; and no one can become blessed except through a life led in keeping with His commandments. For by means of these the person is being regenerated and made spiritual, and can then be raised to heaven. But loving the Lord without leading a life in keeping with His commandments does not constitute loving Him, for then the person has nothing within him into which the Lord can flow and raise him to Himself. He is like an empty vessel, in that there is no life at all in his faith, nor any life at all in his love. The life of heaven, called eternal life, is not poured into anyone directly but through some agency. From all this it may be recognized what loving the Lord is, and also what seeing the Lord or His face is, namely, seeing Him with that kind of faith and love.



The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith was inaugurated into the priesthood in 1976, and ordained as Pastor in 1978. Brian began as Assistant to the Pastor in Glenview in 1976, moving up to Assistant Pastor and serving as Principal of the Midwest Academy in 1979. He became Pastor in Glenview and President of the Midwest Academy in 1983. In 1992 he became Dean of the Academy of the New Church Theological School, and in 2002 took over as Principal of Bryn Athyn Church Elementary School. He was ordained as Bishop in 2004

and began his work as Assistant Bishop of the General Church in 2005, taking also the work of Regional Pastor over much of the travel in the USA, and serving as Chairman of the G.C. Translation Committee. Brian lives with his wife Gretchen (Umberger) in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

Zeal and Temptations

[N]o one is let into spiritual temptation, unless he is in the spiritual affection that is called charity; for unless he is in that, there is no combat with falsities and evils, because no zeal for truths and goods...By temptation not only are evils mastered and falsities removed, but also in their place truths are implanted...Therefore by being zealous and repenting, is signified that they may have charity.
Apocalypse Explained 247

**I HAVE A DREAM
MARTIN LUTHER KING'S AFFIRMATION OF AN
UNKNOWN INFLUENCE.¹**

BY REV. RAGNAR BOYESEN

Introduction

The famous expression, *I Have A Dream* has flown across the globe. These inspired words became synonymous with a longing for freedom and dignity throughout the world. Here in Scandinavia Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became known when he got the Nobel peace prize in 1964. Dr. King's civil rights efforts led to the 1963 March on Washington. This effort was a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. In honor of the day, Dr. King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. At the Lincoln Memorial he addressed 250,000 blacks and some whites in a passionate plea for justice and freedom for the black community. He raised public consciousness of the civil rights movement and established himself as one of the greatest orators in U.S. history. His philosophy of non-violence had proven particularly effective as a means against a system of segregation in the south of the United States. The extensive media coverage documented the struggle for equality and the rights to vote for blacks. Daily reporting on the deprivations and cruel indignities suffered by blacks in the south as shown on television soon had its effects. When the daily media also showed the segregationist violence and harassment of civil rights workers and marchers, the nation became aware of the Civil Rights Movement. This movement became the forefront of public opinion. By its sympathetic response the cause of blacks in America was now seen as the most important issue in American politics in the early sixties. "I

¹ A talk at the Annual Health Exhibition in Copenhagen, February 2009

Have a Dream” stood for brotherhood and the will to meet physical violence with “soul-power.” According to the U.S. Representative John Lewis, who also spoke that same day as the President of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Dr. King... “...educated, inspired, and informed not just the people there, but people throughout America and unborn generations.”

As late as a few months ago America’s 44th president, *Barak H. Obama* referred to the orator Dr. King as affirming a dream of a better life in America for all. Both of these black men whose forefathers were slaves, have in each their own way fought for their beliefs. Dr. King, as we all know, gave his life for his belief in the principle of non-violence as he served the human rights movement which he led.

An Unknown Influence.

What, then, is it that influenced this Christian Baptist Pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.? We know that his own father Martin Luther King Sr., also a Baptist minister, was important to him, as were Benjamin Mays and Hosea Williams for their ardent civil rights involvement. Where else did Dr. King find his convictions of why we live here? What might be the meaning behind our efforts and struggle? Could there be anything in addition to the poetic and spiritual messages of the Bible as understood by his denomination which inspired and fed his dreams to give them increased significance? Much has been written about Dr. King’s background, beliefs and courageous leadership. There is one aspect which I believe has not been noted before which needs to be added to the list of influences.

A short statement made by Dr. King less than five years before his famous “I Have a Dream” speech and years later than his doctorate at Boston University gives us a clue. He writes in his own hand on the inside leaf of his own copy of *Emerson: A Modern Anthology*, edited by Alfred Kazin and Daniel Aaron

(New York, 1958) “a profound statement regarding what happens to us when we die.” As we know, Ralph Waldo Emerson was also known for his interest in Emanuel Swedenborg who historically has had a liberating influence as a spiritual voice for freedom in the civil rights movement. Emerson selected him as one of his “Representative Men,” an early mark of Swedenborg’s international fame. It is probably to the famous book *Heaven and Hell* that Dr. King refers when he, true to his habit, writes on a blank page of his own copy of Emerson’s book. I quote:

“Swedenborg enables us to understand why we are created, why we are alive and what happens to us after our bodies die. Swedenborg enables us to have the best possible understanding of God’s message as this exists in those Bible Books which constitute God’s Word.” Signed in his own hand: M.L.K.

These are weighty words from a man of letters and spiritual leadership, a man who appears to have found an important confirmation of life in the writings of this eighteenth century revelator. So important was the literary remains of Dr. Martin L. King Jr. that Morehead College in Atlanta, his *Alma Mater* bought his entire library for 32 million dollars in 2007. His library was for sale through *Sotheby’s* auctions in New York. Here Mr. Edward D. Bosely during an introductory presentation discovered this unique inscription on an empty page of the named book chosen to represent parts of the collection as it was displayed in a glass case. Mr. Bosely fortunately made use of the notebook he had on him.

Seeing the Promised Land.

Here we will refer to the last inspired talk this great Baptist pastor and activist for human liberation voiced the day before he was murdered in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4th 1968. Dr. King was in Memphis to organize a meeting and to give a talk.

He was known for his masterful speeches, which touched the heart of his audiences. This had been a contributing cause of his breakthrough as a spokesman for the *Southern Leadership Conference*, which stood as a symbol for integration and the rights of the black community. This organization he both helped start and lead. From childhood his white playmate had influenced him to be sympathetic to whites. Throughout his adult years he had felt that he was of equal value to the white people of Alabama where he had his home. In his last speech, where he also refers to the fact that his life had been threatened on the way to Memphis that same day, he said among other things:

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Dr. King attempted to live the creed, which so many white people strove to deny the black community at that time. This was the creed formulated at the founding of America as a nation. It stated that '*all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*'. This was the 'high and noble good' he wished all Americans would share one day. Without a doubt this courageous champion of freedom for all, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. now has been able to experience the glorious coming of the Lord. What we pause to reflect on today is what this coming might mean for us who as yet have not in the same way experienced seeing the promised land. To carry these thoughts along the lines of liberating insight which earlier inspired Dr. King we refer again to his reading of Swedenborg, who in one of several ecumenical messages has inspired

countless prominent men and women in history:

It is very common for those who have taken up an opinion respecting any truth of faith, to judge of others that they cannot be saved, unless they believe as they do - a judgment which the Lord has forbidden (Matt.vii.1, 2). On the other hand, I have learned from much experience that men of every religion are saved, provided that by a life of charity they have received remains of good and of apparent truth....The life of charity consists in thinking kindly of another, and in wishing him well; and in perceiving joy in one's self from the fact that others also are saved. But those have not the life of charity who desire that none should be saved except those who believe as they do; and especially is this the case with those who are indignant that it is otherwise. This may be seen from the mere fact that more from the Gentiles are saved than from Christians; for those Gentiles who have thought kindly of their neighbor and have wished well to him, receive the truths of faith in the other life better than those who are called Christians, and acknowledge the Lord more than Christians do. For nothing is more delightful and blessed to the angels than to instruct those who come from the earth into the other life (*Arcana Coelestia* 2284:4, 5).

Without a doubt we can say this about Martin L. King today: If he continues in the next life to stand for the principle of non-violence and attempts to help his fellow brothers and sisters to see the coming of the Lord, such as he did in this world, then he surely belongs to one of the angelic societies which have been given the task of demonstrating the self sacrifice of the Lords own great love, both in the 'promised land' and here in the world.

The man with the great dream who was given to see the coming of the Lord, has by now most likely experienced a confirmation of this dream, and has therefore been given the privilege of sharing his attention and efforts for the equality of people black and white. Dr. King has now personally witnessed that reality which he testifies to seeing in the Bible and in Swedenborg's Writings.

Appreciation.

From history we know that appreciation might come long after someone has died. This is the case both of Dr. King and Swedenborg. Dr. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 and Congressional Gold Medal in 2004. Also a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on the third Monday of January was established as a U.S. national holiday in 1986. An international honor was awarded Swedenborg by the cultural arm of the United Nations, UNESCO. In 2005 its Department for Europe in Paris, decided to include Swedenborg's name on its exclusive honor roll after an initial recommendation by the former dean of the university of Stockholm, Dr. Inge Jonsson. UNESCO decided to include Swedenborg's name as a representative of Sweden to be included on its "Memory of the World" register then consisting of the 123 most important authors in history. This celebrity status has beside Swedenborg been given only to *Astrid Lindgren* and later to *Ingmar Bergman* who towards the end of his life was able to deal with his own existential crisis after reading Swedenborg. It is considered to be a great honor for a nation to have one or more of its famous authors on this exclusive register. In Denmark there are two names on the Memory of the World register: H.C.Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard. Both read Swedenborg.

Freedom as a Theme.

It is as a freedom fighter we honor Dr. King. "Freedom" as a

theme for this health exhibition is particularly well suited when one wants to speak of his importance as a civil rights icon today. Here we refer to Dr. King's own statement on freedom below, alongside two of many statements on freedom from the Writings of Swedenborg:

“It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.” “The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people. For many of our white brothers as evidenced by their presence here today have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We can not walk alone” (Excerpt from the “I Have a Dream” Speech).

All freedom to think and act is from the spiritual man. What is spiritual consist in thinking and willing from heaven from the Lord (*Apocalypse Explained* 540). Does anyone fail to remember and love someone, who out of zealous love for his country fights an enemy to the death, so as to free his country from the yoke of slavery? (*True Christianity* 710)

Who can deny that Dr. King had the courage and fortitude to resist the slavery of prejudice with dignity? Thought and will from heaven have inspired many artists, authors and activists through the ages, both here in the Northern Europe and in foreign countries. Here we will refer to a short catalogue in

honor of the memory of Dr. King, who in daring to fight for his dream of freedom and equality for all, gave his life as a modern martyr. Like Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi who were influenced by Swedenborg, Dr. King was inspired in his struggle for freedom by this visionary of the Bible.

Swedenborg's Influence.

Those who investigate Swedenborg's influence have found traces of his writings through-out the world. Currently he has been translated to 46 languages. It is generally believed that Swedenborg has had a secondary influence on culture, literature, sociology and philosophy through his writings. Here we will mention one Danish example in particular. Søren Kierkegaard owned four of Swedenborg's works. However, it has been claimed that this most likely was not important since Kierkegaard was a collector of books. Actually if one goes to the four volumes in question, which can be found at *Det Kongelige Danske Bibliotek* (The Royal Danish Library) in Copenhagen, one will find Kierkegaard's own handwritten marginal comments in these books. This shows that "the father" of existentialism not only collected, but also read Swedenborg's books, which also is evident in Kierkegaard's later writings.

H.C. Andersen knew Kierkegaard and was well acquainted with current European thought of his time. He, like Dostojevskij, used several ideas from *Heaven and Hell* when he wrote his famous fairy tales. According to the custom of the day he did not disclose his sources.

International Recognition.

Among authors beside Dr. King who have expressed their appreciation of Swedenborg as a modern visionary is Thomas Carlyle from England who writes: "More truths have been revealed in his writings than in any other. One of these suns which will shine brighter as the years pass." The socially engaged British feminist and author Elisabeth Barret Browning

wrote: "...only Swedenborg's philosophy has shed light on the other life. It explains much which earlier was incomprehensible." From America Edward Everett Hale wrote: "Swedenborgianism has done the liberating work of the last century. The statements of Swedenborg's religious works have revolutionized theology." Helen Keller who conquered her blind and deaf handicap wrote with joy of her introduction to Swedenborg and his influence: "I have wandered through sunny landscapes of truth, I have drunk from the sweet waters of knowledge and the eyes of my spirit have been opened. I feel the joy of the visionary who conquers darkness and embraces heaven... Swedenborg's message has meant so much to me!" From Japan: - The well known Zen Buddhist author D.T. Suzuki, who translated *Heaven and Hell* into Japanese claims in his book: *The Buddha of the North* that Swedenborg's religious philosophy is an unfathomable deep. He claims that one who reads his writings with attention and with quiet afterthought, will find elements which are "difficult to dismiss." "Heaven is divine love and hell self-love," he says "while we, in between, must decide our lot for ourselves. Swedenborg called this freedom equilibrium" (Buddha of the North p. 83).

Religion for all.

In itself religion is a living connection to God. Our God and Savior wills to make an angelic heaven from mankind. This is the heavenly reality which Dr. King called "the banquet of the Lord." The way to this banquet goes through the revelation of divine truth. Here Emanuel Swedenborg continues to be a prophetic voice from heaven. A spiritual connection to the Lord takes place primarily when humans act according to His will. The main features of the Christian Religion consist in the acknowledgement and worship of the Lords Glorified Human through actively resisting evil as sin against Him in the effort to perform a use.

A living belief dares to practice personal repentance before engaging in civic action. Good is then supported by doctrine to reach the goal of good for ones fellowman. All people of spiritual integrity can support such a goal and recognize those who uphold the vision of acceptance and peace for all mankind.

Here we again note Dr. Martin L. King's historic significance as an international voice. As a practitioner of the principle of non-violence, his name is written in shining letters on the memory of the world. As he noted in his I Have a Dream speech: "Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring—when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

oooooooo

[I]nterior intellectual light is not manifest to anyone in the natural world, but it is clearly manifest in the spiritual world. This light [is] acquire[d] from ...freedom of speech and of the press, and consequent freedom of thought. With others, who have not such freedom, that light is suppressed because it has no outlet. *True Christian Religion* 807

WHOM CAN WE TRUST?

BY REV. NORMAN E. RILEY

It has not been unknown to hear people say that the Revelation of the Second Coming is too difficult to understand. This brings to mind that momentous occasion recorded in John, chapter 6. The Lord had addressed a crowd of people. After they had heard Him they said, "This is a hard saying; who is able to hear it?" (v. 60) Then they all left Him. He did not go after them to ask what they had wanted Him to say, but simply asked if what they had heard had offended them.

We here note that it is not the truth that offends but that which is in opposition to the truth.

The Lord then turned to the twelve and asked, "Are you also going to go away?" Peter gave the answer for all. "Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

The expression, eternal life, is sometimes confused with everlasting life. The latter is something we cannot do anything about since once we are born we will continue to live. The former however, does require us to do something, since it involves living for the true end and purpose for which we have been created. This is involved in the reply made by Peter.

Anyone of sound reason knows that there can be only one Life, truly such, and that life is God Who is Life in Itself; the Infinite Divine Love and Divine Wisdom. All created things have their life from Him. It is this life in us which enables us to will and think and even "as if from ourselves". Its dwelling place is in what is called the Soul, or sometimes the Human Internal. Fortunately it is above our conscious awareness. If it were not we would be in danger of damaging and perverting it, as we do with so many things. If this took place it would result in total extinction.

Although we are created in the order of life we cannot be born into it. If we were it would be a state of compulsion, which would be contrary to the very nature of the Divine Love which is to give what is of itself for the sake of others. This therefore necessitates a state of freedom of choice which the Lord provides and protects in us.

All things in the natural world, in its three kingdoms, are in the order of their use, which are for the natural alone, above which they cannot rise. Man however, has been created for spiritual uses, which are for eternity. It is for this reason that a Revelation has been given that by means of the truth a choice can be made. When we therefore pray as taught, "Thy Kingdom come" it is that the desire of our life should be governed by the Lord. This however can only take place actually when we shun in ourselves, whatever we find to be contrary to the truth. By this means our understanding can be reformed within us; which is the sight of the Spiritual being born in us.

This is what is meant by the words of the Lord to Nicodemus recorded in John, "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3: 3). This is the reason for reading the Word.

Concerning the Revelation of the Word now given, we read in the *True Christian Religion* 776, "The Second Coming of the Lord is not in Person but in the Word that is from Him and is Himself." "Not in Person," means not a repeat of what He did at His first coming, by assuming a Human in the world for the purpose of Redemption.

"The Word that is from Him and is Himself." What powerful and moving words. When we read it for the sake of life it is the Lord Himself speaking with us. If therefore we read it because it is from Him and He with us, for the sake of His ends and purposes, we know that He will enlighten us when the need arises.

While it is true that we need a faithful translation, it is also true that we do not need any changes from ourselves. This would be to place ourselves above the Lord in the belief that what is from us will be better understood than what is from the Lord.

We are instructed to draw doctrine from the Word. This means drawing together what the Word states in several places where similar truths are dealt with. To this end we read in *Arcana Coelestia* #4197:7, “The command in the representative Church, that every truth shall stand at the mouth of two or three witness and not at the mouth of one only (see Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 12:6, 7, Matthew 18:16) is founded on the Divine Law that one truth does not confirm good, but several truths do, for one truth without connection with others is not confirming, but where there are several.”

Whenever therefore we are tempted to turn away from reading the Word, may the reply made by Peter come to mind, “Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Like Angelic Speech

[T]he internal sense of the Word... coincides completely with the universal language in which the angels are, or with the spiritual speech of their thought. Their speech is spiritual, because their thought is from the light of heaven, which is from the Lord. *Arcana Coelestia* 4387:2

Editorial

THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Why don't we see angels anymore? Angels are part of the Bible Story. The angel of the Lord went up in the flame of a fire while Manoah and his wife looked in terror. An angel dressed as a man of war blocked Joshua's path. Wouldn't we love to see something like that? Well, it may happen, because The Lord can open anyone's eyes "any time it seems good to Him" (*Heaven and Hell* 171). Those Near Death Experiences some people have experienced are treasured. We all wish to qualify for these, especially after reading so much about the afterlife in the Writings. We wonder, "why can't I see it the same way?"

It used to be the case in the Most Ancient Church. "I have been taught that the people of the Most Ancient church, which existed before the flood, had such heavenly characters that they conversed with angels in heaven" (*Sacred Scripture 21 True Christian Religion* 202). After the end of that Church, however, no one could communicate as openly with angels anymore. After the human invention of evil, the human proprium came into existence and began to accumulate tendencies to evils of every kind. Do you know what that does to the Church? "Everyone is producing hereditary evil through the sins of his own doing, and adding this to what he acquired from his parents. In this manner it mounts up and remains in all his descendants...This is the chief reason why every Church degenerates, including the Most Ancient" (*Arcana Coelestia* 494).

Evil tendencies kill the Church. Because of those evils in us, witnessing the same miraculous events today would thereafter effect our spiritual life. The human race withdrew from heaven, necessitating the Advent. The Advent "began" during Noah's

Flood, but was postponed by the Tabernacle and Temple housing the angelic heavens most perfectly. Angels attended the sons of Israel in their rituals, with a ‘buffer zone’ of simple spirits who delighted in the external rites themselves, angels and spirits constituting the cause for the miraculous appearance of the “pillar of fire and cloud.” (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 8588.6, 8788, 8192) That made the Lord’s Advent as if “present” i.e. happening now, for the angels: “Unless these things had been manifested to the angels as present realities by means of the Word, and also by means of all the religious observances of the Jewish Church, it would have been necessary for the Lord to come into the world immediately after the fall of the Most Ancient Church, ...for the Lord’s Advent was foretold immediately the Fall took place, Genesis 3:15.” There was no other way for the human race to be saved (*Arcana Coelestia* 2523).

However, people withdrew from the angels: “But when the human race departed from the good of love and charity it was no longer possible for that light to be provided by way of heaven,” giving wisdom and intelligence to the human race. In order to save the human race, “the Lord out of necessity came into the world and made Divine the Human within Himself” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4180:5). Thus “Jehovah or the Lord flowed in through heaven into the human race, but because this did not suffice when man removed himself from good, the Lord came into the world and made the Human in Himself Divine” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6373).

That is why angels no longer appear: we withdrew from them! The angelic host of angels from the Society Gabriel could not longer provide revelations, and so the “voice of God” dictated the Scriptures instead. If such events were restored and happened exactly the same to us today, our sanity or even eternal existence would be in jeopardy.

Why? Because our evil tendencies would torture us. Unclean spirits flee heaven if they were not yet purified! Yes, it is dangerous for us to experience open communication now. “Miracles ceased” after the Lord’s Advent (*Arcana Coelestia* 1001m A 1001, 1003,4832). The Lord no longer flows into us the way He did prior to the Advent (*Arcana Coelestia* 3061, 6280, 6371, 6831, 9315). Angels are no longer manifestations of the Divine transflux, presenting a “Divine Human” to view; instead, the Lord has His own Divine Human, assumed by birth and made Divine by its glorification. He now appears in His own right, as the Divine Human, witnessed by us in the pages of *Heavenly Doctrine*. So that is where the “religious experience” lies for the future of the New Church: not in any esoteric blend of eastern arts, nor in the enthusiastic types of services known to Evangelicals; but in the *Heavenly Doctrines* and regeneration.

Although the Christian Church did begin with the appearance of angels – both at the birth and death of Jesus – and by means of miracles which established Christianity, this was because “without [miracles which the Lord performed] no [Christian] Church would have been established” (*Spiritual Experiences* minor 4724). Still, no miracles as mentioned in the Gospels, happen today!

This resounding absence is labeled the “death of the immediacy of God” by one Catholic scholar, Edouard Schillebeeckx (1916 -, in *Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord*, Crossroad, 1999, p. 808). He calls this a supreme embarrassment, or the “sorest problem” of Christians today. “There seems to be no direct relationship with God today,” he continues, i.e. direct contact as we read happened in the Bible. People therefore are bent on having a *religious experience* of their own, but they “are hard put to equal the Biblical manifestation.” In an aside here, if anyone does claim “God

spoke to me in a dream,” the universal retort by the scholarly community today is: “That is nothing more than saying ‘I dreamt God spoke to me.’” Thus today’s claim of God’s Omnipotent voice has only the validity of *a dream!* How relevant is that? Swedenborg faced the same skepticism, claiming people would think him “mad” for mentioning to a widow that her husband was watching her at his own funeral through Swedenborg’s eyes! (Cf. *Spiritual Experiences* 5837).

“He only dreamt it.” A “sore problem” indeed. No angels in the living room today! No “Word of God” experience can be validated, especially since any *valid* revelation always results in “the Written Word.” Only the *Old* and *New Testaments* have passed the grade so far. *The Heavenly Doctrines* are the Word of the Second Advent to all New Church members and pass the grade by virtue of conviction.

Well, the “religious experience” of today stands in for the *miracles* of yesteryear. A religious experience today is any attenuation of the barrier between the spiritual world and the natural. Another definition is an “encounter with the divine.” In pursuit of a subjective sensation similar to “nirvana”, many types of activities have come from the east into the west in the last 150 years. It is any subjective sensation of the “bardo” mentioned in the Tibetan book of the dead, the very stuff of reincarnation claims from Daoism, Hinduism and Buddhism onwards, i.e. seeing the past and the future together, or timelessness, or American Indian vision quests. All such religious experiences could be labeled “encounters with the divine.”

The Dominican scholar, Schillebeeckx, whose Christology I studied, traces our own “religious experiences” back to the original “Abba contrast experiences” of Jesus of Nazareth. They are all the times Jesus says, “Father” in the Gospels, which is “Abba” in Aramaic. Schillebeeckx calls these “contrast

experiences” since Jesus saw the Divine on one hand, and all the inexplicable human suffering on the other. We trace a genuine “contrast experience” of our own to the original ones of Jesus, and thus our experiences become “fragments” of the Kingdom of God. Just as Jesus received revelation, He, being now raised and accepted by the Father, sends that same revelation as *pneuma*, the Holy Spirit, to his subjects in the Church (Schillebeeckx, *Church, the Human Experience of God*, 5, 20, 31). Human beings thus “relive” the life of Christ in continuing the mission for eliminating the sources of suffering.

We look on this a bit differently from Schillebeeckx, but thank him for the framework: what he calls “fragments of the Kingdom of God”, i.e. our own revelation “engendered” by our own “contrast experiences,” the Writings identify as *enlightenment* from regarding the Word as holy. “Interior enlightenment from the Lord consists in a man’s perceiving at first hearing whether what is said is true or not true; and exterior enlightenment is derived from this in the thought.” (*Divine Providence* 168). From this he knows how to live. Well, after His Advent, the risen Lord now as a Divine Human, could enlighten all people in a new way: He could, from 2000 years ago up to the present and into the future, “enlighten not only heaven, but also the human race, not only the internal man, but also the external man,” not only “the rational but also the natural” (*True Christian Religion* 109, *Arcana Coelestia* 2776:3, 3195:3, 4180:5). This enlightenment acts as a revelation, but it is based on seeing the Word of the Lord. The *spiritual darkness* invoked on the human race from “naturalism and atheism” which began to take root in the “interior rational mind” on earth, leading up to the Last Judgment of 1757 (*True Christian Religion* 771), was *fomented* by accumulated false heavens in the world of spirits which lay “between the Lord and His Church” so that people “could not be enlightened” (*Last*

Judgment 11). These false heavens were dispersed, and that is when a new enlightenment began! And since the Lord could enlighten both the spiritual and natural halves of their minds, this without a doubt is what accounts for the development of science and technology: rational light in the realms of science. The rational mind was delivered from the trap of false heavens, and *enlightenment* with its own *joy* was restored “in the world of spirits and on earth” (*Continuation of the Last Judgment* 30). The order of heaven could thus inflow into “rational things of men...lest all things perish” (*Apocalypse Explained* 306). Heaven’s order was restored, and can now flow in, along with “spiritual freedom” and a “more free state of thinking on matters of faith” and on “things relating to heaven” (*Last Judgment* 73). That was why, in these new mental conditions in that era of history which also ends up being called “The Enlightenment”, that the spiritual sense of the Word could be revealed, which consists of “interior Divine truths” (*ibid.*). All this also accounts for the beginning - from the 1750s - of Classical Music, and of the true Pianoforte or grand piano. Haydn the father of the symphony composed from the 1750s, Mozart from the 1760s, and Beethoven from the 1770s.

This new enlightenment also accounts for the beginnings of a New Church, with its own priesthood. Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, which is Divine Truth flowing from the Divinely Human Lord, both together with and apart from the Writings which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, is promised with inauguration: this further opens up the perception and disposition to provide proper instruction by New Church priests (*True Christian Religion* 146, 155).

Enlightenment is to the New Church what Schillebeeckx calls the “contrast experience” which engenders a revelation. Such enlightenment is a wonderful potential in the non-New Church world as well. The New Church, however, alters

Schillebeeckx's interpretation, simply by saying our regeneration relives the Lord's glorification. The "contrast experience" is a temptation. But instead of a "revelation", we now have the Heavenly Doctrines! Everyone in the world is "called" to enter the New Jerusalem, which is to accept the Heavenly Doctrines as the Word of the Lord in His Second Advent, i.e. the Word as in heaven, so now also upon the earth. The New Church has no need for any esoteric religious experience, or "nirvana," since reading *Heaven and Hell* supplies it gratis. No other "high" is needed or as trustworthy. Heaven has already opened up, and we visit it at will by reading and hearing the Writings. New Church members uniformly forgo any demand for "proof" of the afterlife. No séance is needed, since it is already self-evident. In fact, requiring a personal "divine" encounter before accepting the Doctrines, would be a bit of an insult: why on earth need to prove it? The afterlife is already a dead certainty!

But some still want to have such religious experiences, or "encounter the divine." The Lord's own disciples wanted it too when they asked shall we "call down fire from heaven" on a village of unbelievers? (Luke 9:54.) The ancient expression of "calling fire from heaven" means to testify of the truth! (*Apocalypse Revealed* 599). However, the disciples were fairly hissing, "We'll show them!" That is why the Lord's reply was, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of." The rebuke stung, because only "...an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matt. 12:38-40; Luke 11:16, 29, and 30). "Miracles are signs" only if people are *good* at heart (*Apocalypse Explained* 706:6) Since the disciples *were* calling for a sign, which *good* people never do, they were ipso facto moved by retaliation. Hence "not knowing what spirit you are of", i.e. they did not know that they were then in an evil state.

Most un-angelic of them.

Instead, the sign of Jonah, i.e. three days in the belly of the whale, is the only “miracle” or “divine encounter” we should need to have, or meet with in our lives. It means the Lord’s glorification! (*ibid.*) The Lord’s own “contrast experience” facing ‘Abba’ the Divine Itself as His own soul. If the Glorification of the Lord is inserted for our own regeneration, then from the power the Lord took to Himself He now after His resurrection, gives us to continue “His Work” in our own “spiritual temptations.” He does the same work over again, i.e. removing from us our evils which He removed during His own temptations. “Once having conquered, He conquers forever.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9718, 9715, 8273). For “..man’s regeneration is an image of the Lord’s glorification” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4353, cf. 3138, 3212, 3296, 3490) “Anything in the Word that means a person’s regeneration also means the glorification of the Human within the Lord; for a person’s regeneration is an image of the Lord’s glorification (*Arcana Coelestia* 3138, 3212, 3296, 3490, 4402, 5688). This is why the Lord, when He allowed John to baptize Him, said, “Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all the righteousness of God” Matt. 3:15. For by this glorification He filled Himself with power, in order in His Divine Human He could keep the hells in subjection forever, maintain the heavens in order, and so regenerate a person, that is, deliver him from the hells and save him (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 10239:5,6). So the ultimate religious experience for the New Church, is regeneration. And since this is what we should strive for, consequently baptism and the holy supper too are spiritual experiences, in which every New Church person should participate. And since the requirement of taking these sacraments involves self-examination and repentance, which scholars call *metanoia*, i.e. a conversion within oneself, such things also are “contrast experiences.” So we add self-

examination and repentance to the plate of religious experiences for the New Church member.

Regeneration however, “is one thing, and worship is another.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10206). It is during worship that much contact with the Divine is sought after. Did you know there is a book of the Writings which deals exactly with religious experience, encountering the Divine? It looks like a manual! However, it not a manual, but a description of Swedenborg’s personal experiences in carrying out his call to write the Writings. We follow at great peril. It is the book *De Verbo*, i.e. “The Word of the Lord from experience.” There we see how Swedenborg could talk with angels in angelic language, but found it was impossible to put this into human language! However, when the Lord inspired him, as He did when Swedenborg “read the Word” (i.e. Sacred Scripture, the Schmidius Bible he had), then there was *nothing* which Swedenborg *could not* put down “rationally and comprehensibly, in natural language.” (*De Verbo* 3:6)

So is this an invitation to experience what Swedenborg did? No. Elsewhere we read how we would meet up with those spirits who strive to “destroy us in thousand of ways” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5863). Instead, *De Verbo* points out that “nothing is superior to the Word of the Lord,” not even “direct revelation from angels”!

“How far indirect revelation made by means of the Word is superior to direct revelation by means of spirits.” Op. Cit 13, title.

You would think that “direct revelation” would hit top marks for “encountering the Divine.” Some would die for this, while others might settle for “astral travel.” But in neither case would we be any better off: “hearing spirits” just as seeing angels, actually addresses the *exterior* part of the human being. Such “religious ecstasy” takes place while the “will is governed by

evil.” A person can “be taught and so to speak enlightened, even though his will is governed by evil” (*De Verbo* 13). Miracles never saved anyone! Seeing angels does *not necessarily* mean we are regenerate. Seeing visions does not qualify us for heaven. Encountering the divine does not necessarily mean we are angelic. All these may have some benefits, but fall by the way compared to the written Word of the Lord. Why? Because only the good can accept it:

“Enlightenment by means of the Word comes by an inner path, while enlightenment by direct revelation comes by a path from the outside. A person is enlightened by the Lord by means of the Word to the degree that his will is intent on good” (*De Verbo* 13). An evil mentality meanwhile would “also disparage the Word of God...Consequently when the natural man reads the Word and seeks to discover where its Divinity lies, but does not find it in the letter on account of its very ordinary style, he at first begins to disparage it and then to reject the idea that it has been dictated by God and sent down to mankind by way of heaven” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9280:3).

Using Schillebeeckx again regarding the “religious experience” today, he predicts that if they “disconnect from Gospel times,” and regard current Church practices as “irrelevant,” then moved by a “surplus of religion in the human mind,” while also yearning for “more social well-being,” they will fill the “empty space in their own way which is sometimes bizarre” (Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, Crossroads, 1996, p. 60) They go “exponential,” turning to “séances, mediums, drugs,” anything whatever as means for attaining the “religious high” of one’s articulation. “Groups of adherents close ranks and chant in unison.”

Instead, the most normal and everyday New Church religious experience of “seeing angels” or hearing “God speaking” is to see the Word as angels see it, namely in the Writings. We are

“consociated with angels” (AR 818), and we “hear God speaking” by means of the Word of Heavenly Doctrine. For although “The internal sense of the Word is chiefly for the angels, it is also for men,” *Heavenly Doctrine* 259) i.e. it is “suitable for men” (*True Christian Religion* 195) “if they are in good” (*Apocalypse Explained* 556:9), and “while living in the world, to be like the angels” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2242:3). Our path to heaven, to commune with angels, to hear God speaking, is by the constant turning to the Writings. The light of understanding truth is mediated by the text itself, by the rational language into which heaven’s secrets have been placed. The ultimate religious experience is thus to read the Writings. And in life, it is to be regenerated, “each according to their occupation” (*True Christian Religion* 580).

Thank you to several Readers of New Church Life, who sent Letters to the Editor in response to the July 2009 Article, “The Love of One’s Country.” Through no fault of the Author of the Article, its publication went against the policy of not airing political views. For the same reason, because this article drew mainly political comments, it has been decided not to continue this debate. The Editor regrets this digression from policy, but welcomed the alertness of Readers and the eloquence of their responses. Any contribution to publication is welcome for consideration.

The Editor

REPORT OF TRIP TO WEST AFRICA – JUNE 2009

BY RT. REV. BRIAN W. KEITH

Our new Executive Director, Dave Frazier, and I just returned from a trip to West Africa. The trip had been originally scheduled to dedicate the newly constructed church building in Tema, Ghana. But we included stops in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Togo. Dave was there both as a representative of the General Church which provided extensive funding for the Tema church building, but also for him to experience the church there to aid in understanding the uses and support issues we face.

The trip went quite well and we were busy virtually the entire time. Things are generally in a good state there, progressing well, but there are also some real challenges – probably something that could be said of anywhere in the church.

We arrived in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, on Friday evening, June 12th. We had expected Sylvain Agnes, one of the two ministers in Cote d'Ivoire to meet us. But, Roger Koudou, the other ordained minister, met us because Sylvain could not get there due to flooding on the roads. (This is their rainy season. The rains only come sporadically, but when they do come they can be impressive and often make travel difficult. That Sunday a storm hit during church, and we could hardly hear the speakers at that time – and they were using an amplified sound system!)

There are two separate congregations in Abidjan, one led by Sylvain and the other by Roger. Sylvain's congregation has been using rented land, on which they have now constructed a cinder block church building with two classrooms and an office. (Sylvain is not worried that he will lose his lease since he is a welcomed presence in that community and now has strong connections with the local political system.) Roger has creatively turned the flat roof of his house into a church, with a free

standing roof constructed above the regular one. The lack of walls also provides a nice breeze!

Sylvain's and Roger's congregations are both in Abidjan, probably a 20-30 minute drive from each other. This appears to be close, but the reality there is that virtually everyone walks to church. This severely limits the distance people can travel to church, so geographic location is critical. One of the challenges here is that when they start congregations on leased premises, lose the lease and have to move, they often lose up to 50% of their congregations who are no longer able to make the trip. It is no wonder that they request funds to purchase land for a church building. This also fits in with Sylvain's plan to plant four other churches in Abidjan. It may seem like a lot in one general area, but is not.

I should also note that Sylvain has founded a theological school. It has six students, five of whom are on track to graduate and be ordained next June. He has inventively stitched together a faculty. He has several local part time faculty who teach church history and other non-doctrinal aspects of the curriculum. For New Church doctrine, he is the primary teacher. But he also has the Rev. Alain Nicolier spend a month with the theologs each year. And Alain, the Rev. Dan Goodenough and the Rev. Göran Appelgren (both of whom are conversant in French, the language of the country and school) provide academic direction and grade papers of the students from a distance.

We started off early Saturday morning with Sylvain leading us to a park on one of their major rivers for six baptisms. Sylvain conducted most of the ritual, and I performed the baptisms. Four were people in their twenties, and the parents of one of the young women, the husband being a fairly high ranking government official. The traditional form for baptisms there has been total immersion, although some just knelt at the river's

edge and I used a handful of water from the river. (While the Writings speak of water applied to the person's head and breast, there is no prohibition about total immersion, which has occasionally been used in the General Church. Christian tradition originated as total immersion, following the Lord's baptism by John in the Jordan River. However, that tradition was modified to using just a handful of water when the church spread to northern Europe and winter baptisms became a health risk.)

Later in the morning we visited Sylvain's new property. This new land was purchased from the local chief, Adolf. It is completely undeveloped land that looks to be on the edge of the city's growth. The chief met us there and we had a land dedication ceremony. This consisted of us joining him in a glass of rum and then pouring the last drops on the ground. This is not a custom Dave and I are used to, but the chief was very pleased that we did this since it showed respect for local traditions. This should help Sylvain's stature in that area.

Sylvain's game plan is to hand off his current church building and congregation to one of the theologs after the expected ordinations next year. Then he plans to found a new congregation and construct a church building on the new property. His goal is a 1,000 member congregation and a building to support that. His vision is that with a base like that, and then smaller satellite churches, led by the newly ordained men, can be supported from his center. This projected facility would also then house the ongoing theological training.

Starting a congregation from scratch might seem like a daunting task. It is. However, in West Africa it is quite viable, as Sylvain and others have already demonstrated.

Returning to the schedule, after a late lunch we visited Roger's group. Actually, we went to a high school complex where Roger teaches. Under a large outdoor pavilion he was

leading an evangelistic revival. There were over 150 people there, and the purpose was to introduce them to the New Church and encourage them to attend services. I spoke here, as I found myself doing at virtually every gathering – whether alerted in advance or not! Dave was also called upon to say a few words, which he got more and more accustomed to on this trip.

Afterward we visited Roger's home and saw his congregation. There were at least 20 adults and probably that many children. Some of these are orphans whom families in the congregation care for. The country's recent civil strife has produced a large number of orphans. He has baptized 35 adults whom he considers members, and plans to baptize about 10 on a monthly basis for the rest of this year. In addition to acquiring a church building, he has a dream of founding a school for orphans, where he can give them quality education and a full instruction in the New Church.

Sunday we held church services at Sylvain's building, with Roger and some of his congregation joining in. We were late getting picked up, and so arrived at the church about 30 minutes late – no problem, since they were enjoying singing and dancing anyway! The service lasted for over three hours, with young elementary school children seated throughout – without making any disturbances! We were marched in by a group of women. Dignitaries, including a representative of the mayor and a couple of other clergy, were seated on the chancel. The service included a regular sermon from me, a holy supper service, a baby naming ceremony (very similar to a baptism but without the water), a five hour play by the women about how to get resistant people to come to church, and then speeches by dignitaries at the end. All these events were punctuated with much religious singing and dancing. The church was filled with a spirit of joy.

After lunch we met with the theologs and wives, then with the theological school faculty. I even had the opportunity to look over the students' corrected papers. Although I do not know French, I could guess at how well they did by the number of comments in Dan Goodenough's distinctive hand style!

That evening we met with Sylvain's board. We talked about the future of the church there and the issues they are wrestling with. These discussions not only informed us about what is going on there, but also connected them to the wider General Church.

On Monday we spent the morning with Roger and Sylvain as they ferried us to the airport. We flew to Accra in Ghana, and had dinner with the Rev. Ankra-Badu and the Rev. Kwasi Darkwah that evening. This was a chance to work out some of the last minute details about the visit and all the upcoming events – June 19th celebrations on Friday, the Tema school graduation on Saturday, and the dedication of the Tema church building on Sunday June 21st.

Tuesday was devoted to traveling to Asakraka, which took the entire day. Asakraka is a small town about 4 hours drive inland from Accra. (It would be much quicker if the road system in Accra were in better repair and not as crowded as it is.) The school of slightly over 300 students is doing well. Their elementary school graduates ranked 5th of the 79 schools in the region this year on standardized test scores. They have recently added a junior high and the pastor, the Rev. Martin Gyamfi has plans for a full high school, college, and theological training eventually.

The impetus to start schools throughout West Africa is impressive. In part it stems from the background of a number of the clergy, some of whom were teachers before finding the New Church. They also see it as a way to quickly legitimize their churches in new areas. In addition, they see it as planting seeds

for future growth with the children, and as a means of introducing the parents of the students to our doctrines – which they regularly do, some of whom have joined the church.

On Wednesday they held their graduation ceremonies in their church building. While not a church service, there was much singing. I gave a talk on the New Church, and Dave and I got to hand out academic and athletic awards. The proceedings took all morning and then we had a light lunch with the faculty.

That evening we met with board members from Asakraka, Nteso and Ofrmase. Ofrmase is where Gyamfi is from and has the earliest New Church presence in the area. It is a small group, but they meet weekly for services. Either Gyamfi or the Rev. Israel Ampen-Darko, who currently assists Gyamfi in the school, helps them out from time to time.

On Thursday morning we traveled to Nteso to see their facilities. Nteso is without a pastor. Gyamfi and Israel also help out here, but Immanuel is the lay leader, who is very gradually training to be a minister. Even given their small size and remote location, they are building a small three room school and hope to open year after next. Surprisingly, there were about 12 people there to greet us, including the chief who has joined the New Church. While it was not a church service, they sang and danced for us. There, like everywhere else, there was a strong desire to have connections with the broader church. (They suggested it would be very beneficial to have visitors there from the US around Christmas time!) Afterwards we met with the chief before beginning the journey to Tema.

On Friday, we celebrated June 19th with a church service in Tema. The scheduled time to begin was 9:00am. While we were there at that time things did not really get started until around 10:00; however, the elementary school children had been sitting quietly from before when we arrived! Regarding their more casual approach to schedules, one Ghanaian noted, “We don’t let

time control us, we control it.” The graduation on Saturday also was scheduled for 9:00am , but did not begin until closer to 10:30am. When Dave asked Kwasi what time church on Sunday was scheduled to begin, he replied with a twinkle in his eye, “the usual 9:00.” We held the service in the new church building. It was part formal program, with me giving a talk about the New Church, and part less formal, with the children doing recitations and engaging in a team contest about facts from the book of Revelation. At a rather late lunch we met with the faculty and talked about the needs of the Tema School.

On Saturday was the Tema school graduation ceremonies, and the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the school. The entire school was present with many of the parents, and an official from Ghana’s Department of Education was an honored guest. The school has over 150 students and scores very well in standardized tests – which are important since it is a major recruiting tool. Kwasi gave a history of the school and forcefully presented its mission, and I gave a talk on New Church education. The students did recitations, dances, and a few plays in French. Again, Dave and I were included in handing out awards.

On Sunday we held the dedication of the Ebenezer Temple, as they have named the Tema church – in reference to the name in 1st Samuel of “God has helped us,” something they deeply believe. It is difficult for us strategic planning European heritage folks to appreciate their attitude to the future and how the Lord’s providence governs all. While they do planning, they know that the Lord has often provided things they have not expected, and things do not always work out as they thought. But they take it in a relaxed stride, living the teaching of *Arcana Coelestia* 8478:3: “Unruffled is their spirit whether they obtain the objects of their desire, or not...” It is wonderful to be in a sphere of confidence in the Lord, and a lack of anxiety about whatever

might come.

On chancel for the service were Kwasi, Gyamfi (who traveled down for the festivities and translated my sermon on how the new church building can be a basis for building the spiritual church in their lives into Twi, the local language), the Rev. Nicholas Anochi, and the Rev. Ankra-Badu. It was a joyous celebration with wonderful music and some dancing. Dave also said a few words about General Church support for the congregation in building the church. A group from the Togo New Church also led the congregation in singing a couple of songs.

On Monday we met with the clergy to discuss organizational matters, financial issues, and general interactions between the church in West Africa and the central offices. Included were the Revs. Segno Kodjo Ayi and Eric Souka, and also Ablam, a new candidate from Togo. They had traveled there for the dedication celebration.

Tuesday we traveled with Ayi to Togo – always an adventure with underpaid police officers who make periodic traffic stops. That evening we had dinner and a meeting with the combined boards of Lome and Vogan, the two congregations in Togo most of whom are under 40 years old. Ayi, Eric, and Candidate Ablam are about the only ones who speak English, so everything is translated from the French. It was a productive and enjoyable time. (While this time we talked business, last year when I was there each board member described why they had come into the New Church. It was incredibly moving to hear them identify specific doctrines of the New Church they have embraced and which mean so much to them.)

On Wednesday morning we traveled to Vogan. It is only about 1 hour away by car, but it is an entirely distinct town and region, separated from Lome by a very large lake. They had lost their lease on the property they had been renting, but were able

to purchase a plot of land on one of the main roads at the outskirts of town. The lot is not large, about 20 x 30 meters, yet it should serve them well.

What was delightful to see, is that they had taken down the same structure they had erected on their rented property, and reassembled it on the new property. Eric has some background in construction, so he was building a low wall and overseeing their efforts. And when we arrived at 10:00 a.m. we were quite surprised to find people in the building. Over 20 adults and about 10 children had gathered there to greet us, including a 10-person choir and band. While not a church service, they sang many hymns and we had speeches about the development of the congregation and the future for them. They are finally secure in a place that they can build from, and it is just across the road from the hospital in town.

That evening we had a church service in the Lome congregation, and afterwards a give-and-take about the future there. It's rather amazing that so many turned out for a Wednesday evening service! The service was filled with music, song, and dance. I preached and Ayi translated. (The native language, Ewei, was used, although they also all know French.) The major issue in Lome is the lack of a permanent home. Unlike Vogan, Ayi's group rents space and is being evicted again in a couple of months. They are still searching for another rental place, hopefully not too far away so the people who have started coming can continue.

On Thursday we began our journey home early in the morning. Ayi drove us to Accra, and we had lunch with Kwasi and his family. Unfortunately, when we got to the airport, we found our flight for Abidjan had been delayed 6 hours, making it impossible for us to catch our flight for home that day, or perhaps for several days later. It took several hours to resolve, and Universe Travel, a church operated travel agency that we

had used, saved the day, enabling us to transfer to another airline with a different route and we made it back not too much later than scheduled.

It is truly amazing to visit a place which is much poorer than we are in the western world, and where creature comforts are sometimes not quite as comfortable, yet there is a powerful dedication to the truths of the New Church. To hear how the Heavenly Doctrines have touched their lives, how they are trying to share that with many others in their countries, and to see how they are industriously building churches, schools, and congregations, is both inspiring and reassuring – we are all part of one church regardless of distance, cultural differences, or material advantages.



Here from left to right, at the dedication of the new Ebenezer Temple in Tema are Rev. Mssr. Martin Gyamfi, Nicholas Anochi, Bishop Brian Keith, Kwasi Darkwah and William Ankra-Badu. The dedication plaque is behind William Ankra-Badu's head.