

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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Peace Amidst Chaos



Think of a hurricane—a swirling mass of raging wind and rain leaving destruction wherever it goes. Now think of the eye of the hurricane, a place of calm in the centre of all that mayhem. This is a picture of a spiritual reality—that God is present even in the worst of circumstances. The storms may rage about us and within us but God is there with His calming influence if we just reach out for Him. Swedenborg experienced the truth of this in the spiritual world (see ‘God’s Presence in Chaos’ on page 3). Despite appearances to the contrary, God does run the universe but He ensures that people have freewill. We may worry about the state of the world and feel like we need to be more in control but we need to break free from worry (see page 2) and hand control back to God. He is with us on our life’s journey every step of the way (see ‘Take Flight’ on page 4) and there will be miracles that happen when we will know for sure that “the Lord is in this place” and that we are on the right path. When you find yourself overwhelmed at a crossroads in your life or in the middle of disorder of whatever nature, take time to breathe and feel the presence of the One who made you and will never forsake you. Then take His hand and you will be led to a place of peace (see ‘When God Seems Absent’ on page 6).

Peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Break Free from Worry

Glenn MacFrazier



Everyone worries about the future from time to time. Personally, I worry about being successful at my job. I worry about my children being happy and healthy. I worry about things in the news, like war, and politics, and terrorism. What do you worry about?

Thankfully, I don't worry all the time. In fact, because of my faith, I have learned how to deal with worry so it doesn't last. Sure, fear about the future returns from time to time—sometimes quite forcefully. But I now know three powerful truths that help me escape from anxiety, when I remember to use them. Following them transforms my life, and I would love to share them with you.

The Lord God Jesus Christ is in charge of everything.

This is the best news ever declared! Think about it. If we could put one person in charge of absolutely everything—the laws of physics, the workings of our very bodies, the events of our lives, our eternal destiny—who would we choose?

Worry comes from the false idea that we are in charge.

First of all, it would have to be someone wise enough to handle all of the decisions and complications in life and the world. This means someone with the ability to see the big picture while at the same time managing every last tiny detail without messing things up. Just as importantly, though, it would have to be someone who loved everyone equally. In fact, it should be someone whose capacity for loving is unlimited, whose patience is infinite, whose heart desires to make every one of us, no matter our faults, as happy as we can be. Finally, it would need to be the most powerful person we could find.

Well, that person is the Lord. He created everything, and He continually rules over all of it and each of us in every last detail. He is Love itself and Wisdom itself, and He is in charge. As it says in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, believing in the Lord is the most basic form of faith, and “to believe in Him is to have confidence that He saves.” (*True Christianity* 2:3)

So why do I ever worry?

There is a part of me that wishes I was in charge

of everything.

You see, we're all born with the desire to run our own

lives. This sense of self-ownership is natural, and—in its proper place—useful. It's one thing to have faith that the Lord is in charge of every last detail of our lives and another thing entirely to be constantly aware of it. The Writings of Swedenborg teach that if we were actively aware of “the working of divine providence, we would not act freely and rationally, and nothing would seem to be really ours.” (*Divine Providence* 176)

So the Lord keeps His government of everything hidden behind the scenes. He doesn't want us just to wait around passively for Him to act, and He doesn't want us to feel cramped or over-controlled.

But this sense that we own our own lives often gets out of control. Because we don't see the Lord's hand actively running everything, we naturally tend to assume that everything that happens is caused either by ourselves, by other people, by nature, or by chance. And that's where worry starts. How can we trust that other people will make the right decisions? How can we leave our lives at the mercy of uncaring nature? Or of blind chance? It's too risky!

So we try to control everything around us. We try to control our environment. We try to control future events. Eventually we try to control other people. In the end, our natural desire to take care of ourselves leads us to the selfish desire to control everything. In short, worry comes from the false idea that we are in charge.

But we aren't infinitely wise, or infinitely powerful, or infinitely loving. Only the Lord is. I know that if I were truly in charge of everything, I'd make a complete mess of it all in very little time.

So what do I do when I find myself going down this path of worry?

If I ask the Lord to take away my need to control, He will, because He loves me.

More good news! In the Writings of Swedenborg we are taught that when we pray for heavenly and spiritual things, the Lord will answer us in our heart with “hope, comfort, or some inward joy” (*Secrets of Heaven* 2535). They also teach that to change our lives, we need to

examine ourselves, identify something that is against the Lord's will, and then pray to Him to remove it from us. This is real repentance, and it works.

So when I find myself starting to worry, I name that worry for what it is: my selfish desire for control. Then I ask the Lord to put it back in its place, to take away some of my selfishness so that I can once again have faith in how He runs the universe. And when I am sincere in this prayer, He acts. And He will do the same for you. He's just waiting for your permission.

Now, He doesn't take away our need to control all at once. We wouldn't like that. But gently, over time, as we repeatedly invite Him in and acknowledge that He is in charge, He transforms us, little by little. Does this mean that we shouldn't think about the future at all? No. the Lord wants us to plan for the future—to take care of ourselves and our loved ones. Once we've made our plans, though, He wants us not to worry about them. As He said to His disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

(Reprinted from New Church Connection Issue 2, 2007)

God's Presence in Chaos

Walter Orthwein

The first month of the year, January, is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and endings, doorways and gates. He had two faces, one looking back to the past, the other looking forward into the future.

Looking back on the year just ended, marred by "wars and rumours of wars," including violent attacks on civilians, may well make us anxious as we look forward and wonder what this year will bring.

But there is another direction we can look—namely up, to the God whose providence is eternal and who watches over us every moment of every year.

The following is an account of a spiritual experience Swedenborg reported. It is reassuring and gives us reason to be hopeful when the world seems to be falling apart.

He says there was a crowd of many spirits about him making a noise that sounded "devoid of order."

They were complaining that everything was going to destruction; for in that crowd nothing appeared consociated, and this made them fear destruction. They also supposed that it would be total, as is the case when such things happen.

But in the midst of them I perceived a soft sound, angelically sweet, having nothing in it that was out of order. Angelic choirs were there within, and the crowd of spirits devoid of order was without.

This angelic strain continued a long time; and I was told that it represented how the Lord rules confused and disorderly things which are without from what is peaceful in the midst, by which the disorderly things in the circumference are brought back into order, each from the error of its own nature. (*Spiritual Experiences 5396*)

Looking back at world history we see that there has always been plenty of noise and disorder. But we can also see, in the light of revelation, that within the outer world of conflict and turmoil there is another world, a world of peace and harmony, from which the soft voice of heaven is ever calling the world back into order.

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

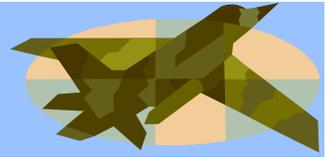
(Reprinted from New Church Life Jan/Feb 2016)



Take Flight

Bryn Athyn College of the New Church Charter Day Address

David Roth



Have you ever taken a trip on an airplane to a place you've never been to before? It can be a bit nerve wracking, especially for an international destination. Most likely it's a bit exciting as well. You get on the plane, find your seat, put things away and then the flight attendants come on with the spiel about putting your luggage away, where the lavatories and the exits are located, etc. Everyone ignores them. They tune it out. No one looks up. They just keep doing what they were doing.

I have been on enough flights to know that sometimes it goes smoothly and quickly, and sometimes it can feel like a nightmare that will never end. One time I was on a flight to South Africa—a 17 hour flight, with a two year old on my lap. And soon after we took off his diaper leaked all over me. So I flew drenched.

To my mind, taking a trip on an airplane is a bit like being in high school or college. Think about the definition of the word education. It means, "to lead forth." The heavenly teachings given through Emanuel Swedenborg say, "All education is an opening of the way." The questions then are: "Where are you going?" "What way are you headed?" Well, you might say, "I'm buckled in—I can't go anywhere?"

You are created from Divine intention and purpose because you have a part to play.

Sometimes we question the point of school. We question just having to sit there and study and learn. "When do I get to do something that is practical?" Well, that's good. We all have that desire to be useful and put things into practice—to DO something. And we have a very strong, built-in desire for freedom. And that is by Divine design. Anything that is really going to become part of who we are has to be

chosen in freedom and done from a place of full rational sight. There is a tension there because we all want to be free.

But the adults in our life don't always agree that we are ready for that. They say we are in a developmental stage. Well, you are in a developmental stage of your life where you are working on developing and perfecting your rational mind. The rational is that part of your mind that sees evidence in the world around us, the things of nature, of sensory evidence. Then it compares that with what we know in our spiritual mind—the truths we know, the information we have learned about higher things. And it compares those two sets of information and tries to make a choice—hopefully, a choice that is good.

I like the airplane analogy, because the airplane has that ability to rise above our normal plane of life—to rise above the ordinary and view things from a higher perspective. Education does that for sure. Think of all the incredible things that one can learn and create. You can be given a chance to express

yourself through different mediums: maybe it's art, or music, or poetry, or dance. Or to be able to imagine incredible possibilities through mathematics, science, physics and biology. Or be carried away by compelling events in human history, and take some of those lessons you learned and use them for life today. Or learn about strategy, sportsmanship and teamwork through sports. Or open up to new cultures by learning a new language. There are so many other things I could talk about.

Even more amazing than that to me are the higher truths—the spiritual truths—we can learn that help us: to start to understand who the Creator of the Universe is; what the plan for human life is; what is the purpose of being. We are taught that we are not born for our own sake but for the sake of others. Just think about that for a moment: "I am here, not just for me, but I am here for the people around me. To serve. To contribute."

You are not an accident. You are not a mistake. You are created from Divine intention and purpose because you have a part to play—a part that matters and that is vital. Think about the example the Lord gives us of the human body—all these different parts. They are so very different but work and function together as one. What if I were to ask you which part you would be willing to give up? Can I have your hand, take your liver? Which one are you ready to give up? We are kind of attached to all of them. We like them. We find they are useful.

And you are created to be free, to have choice. All kinds of blessings and opportunities are not going to just fall into your lap. You have to use your free will. You have to make choices. You have to summon up somewhere within yourself that drive—to discover your passion, to discover who you are and then you have to learn about it. And then practise, and practise some more, and then some more.

Well, Charter Day is a celebration of obtaining, and being granted the right, as an institution, to help you, and many who have come before you, and many who will come after you, to realise their dreams and pursue their calling. And hopefully, like in the story of Jacob, those dreams will draw their inspiration from something higher, something that considers the greater good. In that story think of the angels ascending. We might say, "What good, Lord, are you asking of me?" as we go about our life, "What is it that I can do?" Those angels ascending.

Then think of those angels descending: listening for that guidance, for those messages or inspiration from above. They can send you up as high as you are willing to go in finding value, and finding meaning, usefulness and eternal happiness. And we are not talking about in some far distant future, but now—today and every day. That is a pretty amazing thing. Think back to that flight analogy for a moment. What is the part of the flight that everyone ignores? It's the instructions

on safety. “Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard that all before.” In one sense I think of spiritual and religious instruction being about our safety—about our comfort and happiness. Just like on the airplane, a lot of people ignore it, tune out. And that might not be the best strategy for success.

One time my wife and I were on a flight from Denver to London, but had to stop in Washington, DC. So on that first leg we did all the normal things: we ignored the flight attendants as they gave us the information we needed. Everyone continued what they were doing. A couple of hours into the flight someone came on the intercom and said, “The tyre blew up when we took off and we need to prepare you for a crash landing,” then added, “We are going to go over the safety instructions again.” This time EVERYONE paid close attention.

As we descended I held my wife’s hand and prayed and thought about a lot of things. There were a lot of those “should haves” that I thought about and those “what ifs.” As we got closer you could see out the window all the fire trucks and ambulances arriving alongside us. And we landed safely. There had been an error in reading the tyre. It had mistakenly said that the tyre had exploded.

Life can be difficult. We can have our fair share of crash-landing moments. You have a unique opportunity to learn all about things that really matter in your life—more than anything else you learn in life ever will. Things that will last forever. Things about your eternal life. Not only how things function but the deeper questions of why? For what reason? How is God present in the world? How is God present in these tragedies? Why didn’t He stop them? Could He have stopped them? What is true happiness and how do I find it? So I invite you to pay attention to those safety instructions. There is vital information there for you!

The greatest thing you will learn in your lifetime—and it will take your whole lifetime—is to learn how to love. To truly love—to love selflessly, to love wisely. And we need Divine help to show us how. We need Divine truth and revelation to show us.

From many years of trying I can tell you it is tough! I still have so much to learn, so much to practise, and so much to change about myself. Part of me wishes I was just like a dog or some animal where I just could follow my instincts—eat, sleep, catch some Frisbees, be off the charts excited about just about everything. Where I don’t have to learn everything; it’s just built in. If I make a mistake I will be told “Bad boy!” If I do the right thing I am told, “Good boy, that’s a good boy!” And I get some treats.

But I know that being a human being with all of its challenges is such a gift. It is wonderful to keep learning and growing and exploring. There is so much to discover. We are on a journey. We are being led somewhere. We may not know exactly where it is, but we need to trust that the Lord is there and He is with us on every step of that journey. And sometimes you will get those Stairway-to-heaven moments like Jacob. I want to tell you about one of those moments for myself.

We had two children and were thinking of adopting some more. So we signed up with the Foster-to-Adopt programme in Denver, Colorado. We worked with them doing all the training for many months. Then after a while a couple of opportunities came forward but they weren’t right for our family. It was heartbreaking.

We finally decided to go with a private agency in a city north of us. Part of that process was to consider names we would use if we adopted a child. One day my wife came home with a name that she really liked. It was Malik. So we talked about it. “Yeah, that is a really nice name for a boy.” And we went on with our lives.

Then one day we got a phone call from the adoption agency. It was the Friday of the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend. They said, “There is this little boy in Tupelo, Mississippi, that we want you to think about adopting. He was born prematurely so he is still in the hospital. It will be a couple of weeks before you can go gather him if things progress. We want you to think about it.”

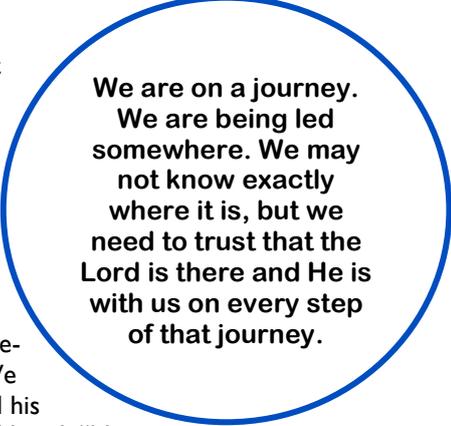
So that is what we did that whole long weekend. We talked about it with our family and with our children. We told the children: “There’s this little boy who we have the possibility of adopting. We need to talk about it and think about it.” My nine-year-old daughter said, “We are going to adopt him and his name is going to be Malik.” I said, “Not so fast,” but she was insistent. “Well, we ARE going to adopt him and his name IS going to be Malik.”

We responded, “We might not be able to adopt him and he might already have a name. that might not be the right name for him.” She was quite certain, “We are going to adopt him and his name is going to be Malik.” This went on during the whole weekend.

By Tuesday afternoon I had grown impatient, so I called the adoption agency. They said, “Oh good, I am glad you called. There is a fax coming in from the agency in Tupelo.” She started to read off the medical history of the parents and more about the child. And then said, Oh, what’s this? It looks like a name. Yes. The birth mother named him. His name is Malik.”

It was one of those moments when you say, “Surely the Lord is in this place....How awesome is this place!” We were given a beautiful sign. And we did adopt him.

So I invite you to buckle up and enjoy your trip. Amazing things await you—and you may want to pay attention to some of those instructions that are given along the way. You may want to build a relationship with the Lord—the most important relationship of your life.



**We are on a journey.
We are being led
somewhere. We may
not know exactly
where it is, but we
need to trust that the
Lord is there and He is
with us on every step
of that journey.**

(Reprinted from New Church Life December 2015)



When God Seems Absent

Ethan McCardell

Jacob woke up and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn’t even aware of it” (*Genesis 28:16*).

I was reading this the other day and thought, “How many times have I felt the same way Jacob did?” Looking back over my life at challenges which in many ways felt like game breakers (when I was going through them), I realise that they turned out to provide exactly the lessons I needed to move forward.

Thinking about preparation for Easter, there’s just as strong a parallel to the story of the disciples. The teachings of Swedenborg talk about the mindset of the disciples and why they were chosen in this way:

“The reason why the Lord spoke (to the disciples) in the way He did was so that they would receive those external truths (basic teachings) and through them be introduced into internal truths (the deeper meaning for our lives). Inside the external truth which the Lord spoke, internal truth was stored away, which after a while comes to light. And when these things come to light, the more external truths are dispelled and simply become tools we can use to think about internal ones” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3857).

I thought about the road to Emmaus—when the disciples were walking along with a man they had met and didn’t know it was Jesus. They were interacting with God Himself and didn’t quite see it. If they had, and had seen that the whole of their lives was going to convey a spiritual message to all people about how to have a relationship with Him, they would have been overwhelmed and fought against it.

The same is true for us, isn’t it? If I had seen early in my life—while struggling with thoughts

about whether I’d ever get married, have friends, overcome issues of disability, or hold down a steady job—that each of these forks in the road served to strengthen (rather than detract from) my relationship to God and other people—I really believe I would have fought against it. Each of the “watershed moments” occurred because I had to make a choice, not because some foretold destiny was thrust on me.

Our faith becomes real when we choose it. If you don’t live it, you don’t really believe it.

I can look back on many of those “big picture moments” in my life now, and sense the current of the Lord’s leadership through them. In my mind, this is really what discipleship is all about: connecting the true ideas you know to the life you’re living in such a way that, even though you can’t see what the outcome’s going to be yet, in a sense you stop worrying—and trust. Trust that if you’re a willing participant in His plan—as Psalm 27 says, then the Lord will take care of me.

As we approach Easter, I think of this a lot. Were there times the Lord Himself faced doubt about the goal, times He struggled against a desire to fold under the pressure of people’s selfish tendencies? Absolutely. But He didn’t. He trusted in His Divine Mission. He took on our temptations and our challenges as human beings, and He overcame them all, so that we could be free to choose Him again and again.

So the next time we come to a fork in the road that feels overwhelming, let’s take the path where we see “the shadow of the cross” - the one we know we can’t walk alone—and our Helper will be there to lead us from the temporary struggles of life in this world to the eternal peace of heaven.

(Reprinted from New Church Connection Issue 1, 2007)

Our faith becomes real when we choose it. If you don’t live it, you don’t really believe it.



*Sometimes we get discouraged
When things don't turn out right,
We struggle so to work it out
With all our fleshly might.*

*When we're backed up in a corner
And nothing's worked we've tried,
We know the only hope for us
Is a miracle from God.*

*Friend, I don't know why it is
But this I surely know,
The miracle you need will come
When to Him you go.*

*He'll work His will in perfect time
So that when you tell the story,
There'll be no doubt to all who hear
That God gets all the glory.*

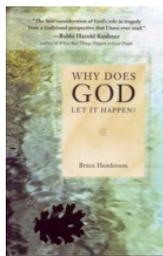
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