



Bringing a Swedenborgian Voice to the Greater Christian Community

DAVID J. FEKETE

Swedenborg teaches us to serve and be of use whenever and wherever possible. While our church nurtures our spirituality, it is in the world outside our church that we act and bring our gifts of loving service to our fellows through our vocation and in all our personal affairs. One important and powerful opportunity for service is in conjunction with our brothers and sisters of different Christian denominations in the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA (NCCC).

Over the days of October 15–17, the NCCC met in the Washington DC area for its Christian Unity Gathering. People of many different races gathered together to confront and transform racism. We attended study groups, lectures, worship services, and seminars in Christian unity. The NCCC contains thirty-eight member denominations, including The Swedenborgian Church. Our voice is a valued one, even in such a large community, a voice we need to continue to bring to the NCCC.

The NCCC is made up of four Convening Tables, or study groups that take on specific issues as follows:

- 1) Interreligious Relations
- 2) Faith and Order
- 3) Christian Education and Faith Formation
- 4) Joint Action and Advocacy



I represent our church in the Faith and Order Convening Table. The Faith and Order Convening Table decided to divide into three sub-groups in areas of current concern in the world:

- 1) Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World
- 2) Climate Care/Creation Justice
- 3) Violence and Genocide

I told him that when I read a new Bible passage, I ask myself, “How can this make me a better person?” He said that he couldn’t comprehend thinking that way.

The study group I am in is Climate Care. We met on the first day of the Christian Unity Gathering. Our first day was a twelve-hour, intense work session, with a few coffee breaks, lunch, and dinner. The Climate Care sub-group is working on a short book that will contain different voices related to climate care. It will have liturgies, scholarly articles, and short stories.

One story I like is an old story from the Greek Orthodox tradition. It is about a man who beats a donkey mercilessly, because he thinks that he owns the donkey. He is informed in a

vision that the donkey is God’s, and not the man’s to do with as he pleases. Reading this story, one thinks first about animal rights. But the donkey can also be a metaphor for the created world, which is God’s and not ours to abuse as we please. One of the several liturgies in the book is a powerful one about a blessing of water—a central ritual in the Orthodox Church. The liturgy contrasts blessing water with polluted water from Flint, and even the Jordan River. Blessing water renders it holy in the Greek Orthodox tradition, and everything that water touches is blessed. One group member asked the question, “Would you baptize with water from Flint? Would you bless with polluted water?” My story is a dialogue between a college professor and a Swedenborgian minister who are touring the area of Concord, Massachusetts, visiting historical sites and enjoying the bright fall colors. When they reach the Emerson house, they begin to talk about Swedenborg, the Bible, greed, and eco-justice.

As always, my experience at the NCCC grows my awareness of other religious perspectives. This year, I learned more about the Greek Orthodox denomination. And as is the case so often at NCCC meetings, my education occurred in a hallway, between meetings. I learned that the Bible, for

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The Editor's Desk



Grief and Hatred

Grief comes in many forms; it varies by individual and by circumstance. The death of a child, a spouse or partner, a parent, or a sibling will bring different feelings, usually including grief, and the manner and age of death bring different feelings with them. Nonetheless, the pain and suffering, the sense of permanent loss can be deep and abiding, and the need for comfort and hope presses on most who have lost a loved one.

But there is another kind of grief, a grief that comes not from the loss of a loved one or even someone we know, but that comes from a loss in the family of humanity. When we love our neighbor, we cannot but grieve when airplanes are guided into office towers or a gunman enters a school, a nightclub, an office, a temple, or a church and, fueled by hatred, fails, as Swedenborg puts it, to allow God's goodness to flow through him.

The tragedy of the massacre of worshippers at Tree of Life Synagogue in the Squirrel Hill section of Pittsburgh is a fresh, open wound on the fabric

of our national community. Having grown up in Pittsburgh, having many good times with friends in that wonderful community (including a television friend, Fred Rogers), I feel that loss intensely.

In the case of 9/11, the hatred was directed at America, and by inference, all Americans; in the 2015 Charleston church shooting, at African-Americans; and in the Tree of Life shooting, at Jews. (It would be impossible to list all of the mass murders and individual hate crimes that have transpired just since 2000 in the space available.) We cannot know the mental state of the perpetrators of these crimes, whether or not they can be classified as mentally ill, but we do know from their histories that they were motivated by blind hatred of "the other." Tellingly, hate crime perpetrators may focus on one target, defined by ethnicity, religion, gender, culture, nationality, race, or any other minority factor, but they unflinchingly subscribe to a full menu of "otherness" hatred. The "others" are almost exclusively minorities, locally, nationally, or globally, with the addition of hatred and targeting of women. Social psychologists have theories on how this happens in individuals, but one thing is certain: the hatred profile is informed, supported, and encouraged by group identity and participation.

We appear to be experiencing a resurgence of hate crimes in the last few

years. Why is this? Undoubtedly, social media and advanced communication technology have abated the dissemination and spread of hate-based misinformation about minority groups, but, alarmingly, the language of hate groups is parroted by some news commentators, political leaders, and otherwise rational and caring people.

What can we do in our grief? We can continue to allow God's goodness to flow through us and, as if from ourselves. As Judaism puts it, *Tikkun Olam* (repair the world). Pursue love and wisdom and be of use.

—Herb Ziegler

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Church Calendar

- **December 27–30:** SCYL Winter Retreat, Almont Retreat Center, Allenton, MI
- **January 29, 2019:** Emanuel Swedenborg's birthday

the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America
 Published monthly except July and August by the Standing Committee for Communication and Information of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America), Rev. Jane Siebert, president.

November 2018
 Volume 240, No. 9, Whole Number 5434
 Editor, design and production: Herbert Ziegler
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Subscriptions: free online subscription at <http://swedenborg.org>. Printed and mailed to US address, \$20/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$35/year; single copies, \$2.00. Libraries & prisoners, free. Send check made out to "Swedenborgian Church" with "Messenger" on the memo line. Other requests, write or call Central Office.

Deadline for submissions is three weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

The opinions and views expressed are those of the authors, not of *the Messenger*, the Communication Support Unit, or the Swedenborgian Church.

Letter from the President



The Year of the Lord: 2018–19 —*The Primacy of Spirit*

“Those who do what is good for the sake of the neighbor or the Lord are in heaven.” Emanuel Swedenborg, Secrets of Heaven 9210:3

Dear Friends,

There are so many heart wrenching things happening in our world. It is overwhelming, and I find myself wanting to pull away, to stop following the news, to insulate myself from the sadness, the pain, the feelings of not being able to make any difference. We must not do this.

Rev. Betsy Coffman sent this message today and it spoke to me and I hope to you:

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief.

Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.

—*Interpretive translation of Talmudic texts*

As a denomination we ask, “But what can we do?” I am fortunate to hear from many of you about what we are doing.

The San Pedro Garden Church had 2100 people through the “Garden for Day of the Dead” to

help gatherers honor their loved ones in the other world.

The Washington DC New Church lit Menorah candles during their prayer service to reach out in love and solidarity with our Jewish comrades.

The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church offers bimonthly meditation with Daoism, connecting our Swedenborgian tradition to deepen understanding of The Dao.

Many of the members of the **Kitchener Church of the Good Shepherd** in Canada participate with the local Inshallah Choir to sing peace.

The New Church of the Southwest Desert opened their new location as a coffee house and gathering space for the whole Silver City, New Mexico, community.

The Cambridge Church of the New Jerusalem is building a labyrinth to offer the Harvard community and those that pass by a place of solitude and reflection.

I’m sure there are many more connections being made to other religions and community neighbors, reaching out to understand one another and to serve and love. We know that is really what our tradition is all about, to live our life of religion and to do good.

Helen Keller puts it so succinctly: “I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

This Thanksgiving season, I wish to thank you all for the work you do in our ministries, our communities, our world. It does make a difference.

May all be well,

—*With care and a look to the future,*
Rev. Jane Siebert

Reflections: Looking back on FNCA 2018

BY TREVOR

Camper favorites this year at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly family camp included returning “blast-from-the-past” campers, this year’s Rev. Everett K. Bray Visiting Lecturer, several memorable outings, some work crew workings, and quiet moments here and there, among other things.

But first, a few words about the first-week Sparks (one to twelve-year-olds) and the second-week Flames (thirteen to twenty-year-olds): there were a *lot* of



Kendall, Myra, and Ada pondering their cards

them. There were sixteen Sparks during Week 1, with some townies stopping in regularly for class and Sparks Games. And there were eighteen Flames during Week 2, mostly due to the large influx of Midwest teens. Both groups added a lot to camp and were very much appreciated.

One returning blast-from-the-past camper was Florian Mania, who came all the way from Germany with his young family and returned to camp on Final Weekend after an absence of thirty-eight years! It was an emotional return, not



Florian Mania



The circle of friendship

only for him, but for his father, Rev. Christian Mania, back home in Germany. Both were brought to tears more than once during Florian’s brief visit.

Another blast from the past was Rev. Paul Martin. We heard he was going to be in the area during camp (his extended family has a vacation cabin nearby), and we were thrilled when he accepted an invitation to join us and give a lecture during Week 2, which was very well-received, by the way. Paul himself was welcomed back by many, all of whom enjoyed catching up together with old friends during his visit. So, Paul, we would very much like this to become a regular thing!



Rev. Paul Martin

Speaking of people, we were absolutely delighted to have Dr. Soni Werner, both as this year Rev. Everett K. Bray Visiting Lecturer as well as leading our Opening Weekend Program. Dr. Werner’s specialties include developmental psychology, organizational psychology, forensic psychology, and conflict management. She has recently authored several books, including *The Growth of the Female Mind*, *The Search for Mary Magdalene*, and *Altruism: Many Kinds of Kindness*. Our 1st Week

lecture theme, Altruism and Kindness, was specifically chosen with her in mind. Her two lectures were titled “Altruism for the Spiritually Hungry, Thirsty, and Estranged” and “Altruism for the Spiritually Naked, Sick, and Imprisoned” and were truly nourishment for the soul.



Dr. Soni Werner

Dr. Werner’s Opening Weekend Program on “Conflict Resolution Skills Learned from Psychologists and Angels” was very well-attended and discussed many times throughout the first week.

Memorable outings this year included the following:

- A group Outing Day trip by about a third of the camp to the ocean at Crescent Beach State Park in Cape Elizabeth, Maine (Several of the Midwest teens had never seen the ocean before.)
- An Outing Day canoe trip by the Flames down the Saco River to Swan’s Falls
- An afternoon trip by the Flames to Diana’s Baths and Cathedral Ledge in nearby North Conway, New Hampshire

As for work crew workings, several people mentioned how much they enjoyed watching Troy Grams and crew’s efficient work both putting in and removing our heavy dock down at the waterfront. It is a *big* project and they have it down pat. A big thank you to Troy and crew for doing this year after year.

We also were amazed and amused to see another crew hard at work down at the waterfront: Ken Woofenden, Martin Vojtko, Troy Grams, and Dan

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Reflections: FNCA 2018

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Dyer, plus Ian Woofenden when he arrived later. They removed a large tree that had fallen across our swim-



The tree across the Saco River

ming area over the winter. This project took most of five days during Week 1. First, they lopped off and removed the branches. Then, they cut the trunk off in several large pieces. It then took a few more days to remove the final, thickest part of the trunk that was still attached to the bank. A *big* thank you to this crew, also, for a difficult job done well.

So what's the "amused" part mentioned above? Ian Woofenden, a professional tree worker in his former career, was seen bouncing up and down on that final section of trunk while it was still attached to the bank (we have the video), as well as doing some real lumberjack log rolling once they finally got it loose!

Quiet moments enjoyed by campers are always many. A few mentioned this year include the following:

- Amy Blackman's delightful cardholder craft project
- Deane Currie's occasional creative and gentle announcements at meals
- Watching Colgate Searle "put some finishing touches" on his architectural wonder: that on-going camp project of his that we call Colgateville



The sawmill at Colgateville

- Five-year-old Margaret Woofenden participating in the Dole 3 Miler race
- Rest Hour (*yes!*)
- The surprise Polar Bear painting by Nancy S. Hinson, which now hangs above the Polar Bear Quotient chalkboard in the Dining Hall
- Quiet early mornings at the fireplace before the Rising Bell
- Adults and kids watching the Flames bonfire for the Corn Boil down on the beach from up on the edge of the front lawn



The Afternoon Book Club



The new waterfront ramp

A Few Final Experiences to Share

First, a big shout out to thirteen-year-old Zed McNaughton for his performance in the Dole 3 Miler this year. In 2015, he finished in 16th place. In 2016 and 2017, he was in 9th place. This year, Zed finished in seventh place, shaving nearly half a minute off his last year's time. And, for the fourth time since he was nine years old, he was the first FNCA person to cross the finish line. Go, go, Zed!

Second, the Flames did a fine Morning Chapel presentation of the Good Samaritan, which they had been studying in class, complete with a well done skit of the story during the Bible reading.

Third, the return of the Afternoon Book Club this year, studying Rev. Dr. George Dole's new book *The Universe*

and *I: Where Science and Spirituality Meet*. They read the book though from cover to cover, gathering three or four times each week.

Fourth, the terrific new waterfront ramp that Colgate built for us. He took measurements during Work Weekend in May and then built part of it at

home. He arrived at camp a little early (like he often does) and finished it up on the front porch in time to install it at the Waterfront when the crew put the dock in at the beginning of camp. Thanks, Colgate!



Trevor and Serena

And last, the camaraderie at camp this year was simply wonderful. So many people who love each other all gathered together in the same place. It was truly one big happy family. (We invite you to join us next summer.)



And that's what it's all about. ☪

Trevor is the chair of the FNCA Outreach Committee as well as the FNCA Webmaster, among other things. He has attended the FNCA nearly every year of his life.

A Swedenborgian at NCCC

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this Greek Orthodox priest, all related to liturgy. He said that when he encounters a new Bible passage, his first thought is, “How do you use this liturgically?” In fact, nearly all the Bible he knows is through liturgy. He said also, that “they” only let passages into the New testament which were used in Christian liturgy. When he said, “they” kept only those Bible passages used in liturgies, he meant the early Christian Church, which is “his” by direct descent. I told him that when I read a new Bible passage, I ask myself, “How can this make me a better person?” He said that he couldn’t comprehend thinking that way. A Catholic friend who was conversing with us agreed with me. He said, “When I read a new Bible passage, I, too, ask myself how can it make you a better person!” It’s conversations like this in the halls of NCCC gatherings, or over dinner, or lunch, that helps us understand better our Christian sisters and brothers—and Christianity itself—and they us.

The remaining days of the Christian Unity Gathering surrounded racism. The theme was *ACT to End Racism*—Awaken, Confront, Transform. The worship leaders and lecturers were African-American men and women. I noticed that the Faith and Order Convening Table was predominantly white, but when all four Tables came together, about half the participants were African-American.

While I wasn’t exposed to many new facts, I found it enlightening to be brought into the world of African-American experience. One speaker said that, probably, every African-American in the audience at one time or another, probably several times, was told to be careful in how they act and respond to white authority figures in public. One participant who worked at a high-profile financial institution shared an

experience in which he was pulled over by police on his way home from work. He was pulled over for no other reason than the fact that his skin was black. His race mattered more than his high standing in the financial institution. We learned that eighty percent of police are white. I recalled a story of one African-American man who told us he always has to keep his hands in plain sight whenever he enters a convenience store, so the proprietor can see he isn’t carrying a weapon.

White people like me don’t often hear stories like these. And I think that it is fair to say that many, if not most, Swedenborgians do not actively promote racial injustice. But we are part of a socio-economic structure in which racism is imbedded. Statistics could be produced about income disparity, job disparities, incarceration rates, and silence in educational institutions about racial atrocities like the 1919 Red Summer in Elaine, Arkansas, or the 1921 massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I took away from a dinner speech one important action I can apply in my own life to mitigate institutional racism. The speaker talked about the silence of white people in the presence of racism. I thought about a racial slur a man sitting next to me in an Edmonton blues club made about another patron down the bar from us. I said nothing. I thought about the many disparaging remarks a new acquaintance made about First Nations people at a dinner party. In order to ingratiate myself further in this new friendship, I said nothing. While we may not actively promote racial inequities, by silence in the face of racism we are complicit in the structural inequities of Western society. Awaken, Confront, Transform.

Truth-telling was a sub-theme of the conference. In one seminar, I asked about the difficulties surrounding truth-telling in current American society. I asked, “How can one tell truths in the present American

society?” I was thinking about accusations of “fake news,” about the documented thousands of lies or misleading statements told by the US President¹, about attempts to attack truth itself, saying people only believe what they want to, and the substitution of opinion for fact. I thought, too, about the polarization that competing versions of truth are engendering. I received a sage answer. Truth telling can be done in relationships, in conversations and dialogue in relationship, in the Beloved Community, a term popularized by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The National Council of Churches of Christ, USA is doing important work in American society, in fact, in the world. From climate care to confronting racism, to calling for change in mass incarceration, to truth-telling, to calling for society to become the Beloved Community, our country, our world, and our church need the NCCC. And it needs us. ☩

Rev. David Fekete, Ph.D. is pastor of the Church of the New Jerusalem in Alberta, Canada.

1 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2018/08/01/president-trump-has-made-4229-false-or-misleading-claims-in-558-days/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1d18346a3ed2

Is Climate Care Religious?

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- 3) Does the view of science conflict with a creationist view of nature?
- 4) How intimately does spirit connect with matter? Does God fill all Creation? Do these questions suggest pantheism? ☩

For Further Exploration

David Young, Grant Ingram, Lise Swartz. *Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1991.

Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.

Fiction

Would You Say that Climate Care Is Religious?

BY DAVID J. FEKETE

I met Harold years ago, when we were both divinity students in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Now, I am a professor of world religions at a mid-western college, and Harold is the pastor of a Swedenborgian church in Massachusetts.

Last fall, I went out to Boston for an academic conference and met up with Harold again. We decided to tour the countryside around Concord as we caught up with each other's lives over the past few years. That day, we explored the roots of American culture. We visited the Old North Bridge, where the "shot heard around the world" was fired; saw the Monroe Tavern, visited by George Washington; toured Hawthorne's Old Manse. But mostly, we were enjoying the autumn leaves, which were in the height of their colors. When we came to the Ralph Waldo Emerson House, I said to Harold, "This should interest you as a Swedenborgian pastor. Wasn't Emerson connected with Swedenborgian thought, somehow?"

"Yes, we like to make a big deal of it," Harold responded. "Did you know that Emerson wrote a whole essay on Swedenborg, 'Swedenborg; or The Mystic?' What attracted Emerson was Swedenborg's treatment of Nature as a symbol for the soul, and, in fact, 'a theatre for the Divine.'"

"Looking at the vivid colors of these fall leaves here, I can well see why Nature was considered divine," I reflected, "Sights like this reinforce my belief that all people of faith should respect Nature, and care about climate."

"I consider myself a person of faith, but I never thought climate was a religious issue," Harold observed.

"It's Biblical," I replied.

"Biblical!? The Bible talks about ecology?" Harold exclaimed.

"Randy Haluza-Delay spoke at the conference I'm attending here," I said, "and he gave us quite a few Bible passages. I saved them in my phone's notebook. Here's a powerful quote from Isaiah. It pretty much states that pollution is caused because humanity breaks our covenant with God—that pollution is the result of our broken relationship with God."

The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the earth.

The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their
guilt; (Isaiah 24:4–6)

"Strong language, and I've never noticed that passage," Harold replied. "But that's from the Old Testament. Are there passages in the New Law?"

"Yes, there, too," I said, "And you might be surprised to find one right after John 3:16—it isn't just the faithful Jesus saves, it's the whole created universe,

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world (*kosmon*) to condemn the world (*kosmon*), but in order that the world (*kosmos*) might be saved through him."

"I know that passage! But I thought it was about my salvation." Harold said. "But when you look at the Greek word *kosmos*, the incarnation is to redeem the whole created order! That means nature! Wow!"

"But wait, there's more!" I replied,

"Consider Colossians 1:15–23. It's mystical, and deep: a passage that I think would appeal to a Swedenborgian.

All things whether on earth or in heaven—not just humans—are reconciled through Jesus, and Christ holds the whole created order together in Himself:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Harold reflected for a moment, "Again, it looks like that passage is about saving humans. But there you have it. The wording is that Jesus reconciled 'all things, whether on earth or in heaven'—not just people. And further, if all things hold together in

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Is Climate Care Religious?

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Him—that’s what it says, isn’t it? . . . Then, what we do to the created order we do to Him, wouldn’t you think? On another point, aren’t there Christians who are all for the pollution of the earth, because it is a sign that the Second Coming is near?”

“Yes,” I replied, “But I think that Jesus came to save all creation, not just humans, with the incarnation. So the polluted world is like alienated humanity: both the world and humans are saved by the incarnation, now—not in the future with the End Times. That is how I read Romans 8:22–23: ‘We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, . . .’”

“Humans and creation are released from their labor pains by the coming of Jesus,” I said. “And one final consideration,” I added, “the *Shalom*, the peace that happens when humanity is in right relation with God, extends to the whole created world. And we find those beautiful passages in which the trees clap their hands with joy.”

For you shall go out in joy,
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap
their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

. . . a spirit is poured upon us from on
high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful
field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a
forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful
field.

The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness,
quietness and trust forever (Isaiah
32:15–18).

“I’ll have to think about those Bible

passages. The way you showed them to me, it appears that they are about climate care. I wouldn’t have thought it,” Harold mused.

“There’s a moral issue relating to climate care, too. What if I were to tell you that polluting is actually sin?” I said.

“That would interest me very much!” Harold exclaimed. “As a Swedenborgian, repentance matters a great deal, as does beginning a new life. It’s called regeneration. One of the cardinal sins in the Swedenborgian religion is unbridled greed. Another is excessive selfishness. If you could frame climate care in terms of these sins, I’d really be interested.”

“I believe that pollution is the result of excessive consumption and production,” I began. “The western drive for bigger, better, more, and more exclusive and prestigious, more, better, and greater material possessions can be seen in the light of the seven deadly sins. I believe that western patterns of excessive consumption and production stem from vanity, pride, and greed. We are overproducing because our society craves material things for the sake of merely having. And having more and more prestigious things makes some people, maybe a lot of people, feel superior to their neighbor. I think that society needs to repent of sins like this, and turn to the virtues of moderation and frugality, as James A. Nash suggests.”

“There’s another moral argument, that puts climate care in terms of sin,” I continued.

“I’m listening,” Harold said.

“It’s about love for the neighbor,” I added. “Pollution harms others. We do violence to near or distant neighbors by polluting the environment. Making air unfit to breathe or water unfit to drink or food inedible is doing violence to the neighbor.”

“Pollution is violence?” Harold exclaimed.

“We are all interconnected, so when we harm the environment, we harm other people. And further, Creation is God’s work, so in a way, Nature is an image of God. Can we look at polluting Nature as doing violence to God’s work, even doing violence to God?” I inquired.

“I don’t know,” Harold mused. “I think you have something about harming other people by making their air toxic, but how can you say that polluting is doing violence to God? I agree that God made nature, but if you say nature is God, you’re pantheistic.”

“No, nature isn’t God. But it is from God. And something’s got to keep all this going in the complex harmony that Nature is.” I suggested.

“I can agree with that,” Harold replied. “In fact, Swedenborg writes about a real, intimate connection between spirit and matter.”

“I know that in Chinese religions, there is a living power flowing through the whole created order called *ch’i*,” I added, “and First Nations peoples speak of Nature as alive, intimately connected with the spirit world, and deserving our reverence.”

“Interesting! That sounds like Swedenborg, who talks about ideas like that as a Christian,” Harold reflected. “It seems to me that a lot of Christians do see Nature as a symbol of God’s glory—Emerson, too, saw Nature as a symbol for the soul—but Swedenborg says that Nature is more than a symbol, there is an actual connection, there is communication between spirit and matter. Like you are talking about in Chinese religions and First Nations’ religions,”

“Swedenborg says ‘The whole natural world is responsive to the spiritual world . . . the natural world arises from and is sustained in being by the spiritual world, exactly the way an effect relates to its efficient cause. [*Heaven and Hell*, section §89]”

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“God is the origin of every created thing: spirit and matter,” Harold continued, “and God’s creative power flows from God’s through the spiritual world, culminating in Nature: ‘There is a continual influx from the spiritual world into the natural world . . . It is something spiritual, something which takes its origin from the sun where the Lord is and descends to the outmost elements of nature, . . .’ [Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, §340].”

“I’d say God’s fingerprint is in Nature because God’s life flows into Nature.”

“I think science has taken much of that away,” I said. “It preaches that matter is chemicals, and atoms, and compounds—but certainly not something moved by Spirit. And most certainly not something held together by Christ, like that Colossians quote, ‘In Him all things hold together’ (1:17), or the kind of connection you find in Swedenborg. Seeing Nature as something that is held together in Christ is much different than what I hear from science. I can’t revere a chemical, but I can revere something alive with spirit, something that is the body of Christ.”

“It changes the way I treat Nature, too.” Now I was preaching to the preacher. “I can do what I want to a lifeless chemical compound. And if the earth is just chemical compounds, I can do what I want to it. But I care about my brothers and sisters and I revere something that contains a divine spark. If the earth holds a divine spark, I need to treat it as I do the source of all life.”

“Well these New England colors sure seem to be painted with a divine brush,” Harold said. “I can see why Emerson was attracted to Swedenborg, a theology that gives us a reason for our awe for nature. But, here on earth, now, it’s beginning to get dark. Would you

Our Theological School Needs Your Support!

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), is marking a fascinating a milestone in 2018—our 130th anniversary since purchasing the land in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that became our first campus as a theological school. After more than a century on two campuses in the Boston area, we moved to Berkeley, California, in 2001.

In 1888, the school boasted a student body of eight men and five part-time faculty. On the West Coast, we have graduated forty-six alumni (thirty-two women and fourteen men), with fifteen students continuing this year, studying with four Swedenborgian faculty and extensive faculties of partnering institutions.

Today we are affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union, which offers us unprecedented visibility in the world and the opportunity to engage hundreds of religious professionals training in many spiritual traditions and to learn from abundant academic resources. Women and men are now equal in numbers training for spiritual leadership, and CSS now

has an all-Ph.D. faculty, who not only support ministerial training for the Swedenborgian tradition but also reach broadly into the world through speaking and writing.

Things have changed. Progress has been made. Money has been vital.

CSS is now beautifully placed to continue providing Swedenborgian scholarship to support a growing interest around the globe; to nurture and shape spiritual leaders for our many faithful congregations who desire it; to ensure that both the essential truths we rely on daily, and our loving communities, remain intact and accessible.

To honor our 130-year heritage, we are seeking 130 supporters to donate \$130 each over the course of a year.

You can join our campaign to donate this, r any amount, to: Center for Swedenborgian Studies, 1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709. Or go to our website, <https://css.gtu.edu/> and look for the *Donate* button at the bottom of the home page.

—*With Warmest Regards, Jenny*

Rev. Jenny Caughman,
chairperson of the Board of Trustees

say it’s time to head back to Boston?”

“I guess so,” I replied. “You know, I like getting out of the pent-up city into Nature. It opens the soul; it’s calming. I think getting out of man-made concrete and steel buildings into God’s creation has a kind of salvific grace to it. I really enjoy getting together with you, Harold, and talking about theology with someone who lives it. But there’s one very practical observation I have as we return to town from this walk in Nature. The very city we’re heading into has pretty clean air. That is the result of deliberate action to clean up the city. Remember the Charles River when we were in school?! I heard that Mass General Hospital had a special

unit devoted to people who fell in the Charles.”

“I’m glad that a big city like Boston, so close to Concord, cleaned up, and is relatively clean, now” Harold said. “I would sure miss the autumn leaves if acid rain or water pollution from the Charles withered the Concord leaves.”

“It would be a loss for humanity,” I reflected. “I’d say we all have a sacred charge to care for Nature, as we revere Nature’s Source.”

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Is nature holy? Is it true that how we treat nature is how we treat nature’s creator?
- 2) Does the Bible apply to climate care?

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Zeppelin. Here is a song that tackles heaven and materialism, and questions the longing of the soul as seen in the lyrics, “There’s a feeling I get when I look to the west, and my spirit is crying for leaving. Ooh, it makes me wonder!”

Then we jumped to the nineties song by Joan Osborne, “One of Us,” where we pondered the nature of God and the controversial consideration of God being a “slob like one of us, tryin’ to make his way home.”

Finally, we listened to the contemporary song “Hand of God” by Jon Bellion. This song deals with the struggles and difficulties we often face and tells us to trust in our faith and God’s plan as illustrated in the lyrics, “Angry at all the things, angry at all the things I can’t change. When you’re lost in the universe, lost in the universe, don’t lose faith. My mother says, ‘Your whole life’s in the hand of God.’”

Rev. Kevin Baxter visited us on Saturday afternoon to lead his interesting session. His presentation was about truth and reality. Kevin’s session was really fun, as he showed us many different optical illusions and compared

our perception of what might be true to actually understanding truth. From *Divine Love and Wisdom* §404, “For the perception of truth is never lacking in a man of sound reason, provided he has the affection for understanding truth. Affection for knowing is one thing, affection for understanding another, and affection for seeing truth another.”

I led our Saturday evening session. In it, we turned to popular secular

how the teens brought up their own movies with messianic characters such as *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*.

On Sunday morning, I facilitated a session titled Brand You. At this meeting, we discussed popular brand names and how companies use brand logos and images to promote messages about their products. From here, we considered each teenager’s own personal brand. The teens were given a choice of either selecting three descriptive



Onesie time with Scout, Nathan, and Miranda



Kristofer does the dishes.

movies where we looked at main characters playing “Jesus” in a savior or redeemer role. We reviewed twenty ways in which secular movies establish a Christ-like archetype character, such as having a dual identity or alter ego (e.g., Clark Kent/Superman); death, sacrifice and resurrection (e.g., Neo in *The Matrix*); and characters with the initials J.C. (e.g., John Coffey in *The Green Mile* and John Conner in *The Terminator*). I loved

words that best described themselves or writing fun “bumper sticker” slogans (eight words or less) about themselves, which could include what they stand for or what their unique gift to the world might be. For instance, teen Molly wrote an acrostic poem bumper

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Panoramic of the group at the closing communion worship service

SCYL October Retreat

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sticker using her name, “Making Our Lives Less Yucky!”

On Sunday afternoon, Rev. Kit Billings led a session on video gaming, sports, and spirituality. Gaming is tremendously popular today, especially among youth. Kit explained the pros and cons of gaming and how this sport can both enhance spiritual growth and development but also lead to addiction problems when individuals are not careful about setting gaming limits and personal boundaries.

In addition to all of these wonderful sessions led by these fantastic presenters, the teens worked together preparing all of the meals at the retreat. Holly Bauer did an amazing job overseeing the kitchen crew’s cooking, setting up, and cleaning up.

With all of this activity, you might think that there was little time for play. However, surprisingly, the teens did such great work during session times and in the kitchen that they found plenty of time for recreation and just hanging out. Cedar Hill Retreat Center is such a beautiful location. The teens got a chance to go out to Kingston Bay at low tide on both Saturday and Sunday. They explored the beach and tide pools and found live clams,



Molly prepares the garlic bread.

snails, and mollusks as well as tons of colorful shells.

On Saturday night, the group went to Alley Kat Lanes for our annual “rock n’ bowl” outing. Alley Kat has a large, bright, new arcade area that, after an hour of bowling, the teens enjoyed tremendously. On Sunday afternoon, Trevor (TREVOR “The Games Man”) drove over with his wife, Nancy Little, to lead “Flames Games” with the teens. Several of the teens from the Midwest had never met Trevor and knew nothing about the games he leads with teenagers. It was wonderful to see that Trevor and the teens really enjoyed playing the games together.

On Sunday night, we had our traditional movie night “s’mores party.” (We roasted marshmallows in the

fireplace!) The teens selected two great, popular movies to watch, *Napoleon Dynamite* and *Black Panther*.

The closing communion worship service, led by Kit, was beautiful, as always, especially with the golden brown homemade communion bread skillfully baked by teen Vex Donley.

Special thanks to Penny and Kit Billings for driving the teens all the way from the Midwest, and Holly Bauer, who came up from New York City to help supervise the teen group and clean up at the end of the retreat.

We all departed Monday morning feeling thankful for our time together and a little better informed about how to uncover spiritual themes and discover useful soul-nurturing content in our often superficial and materialistic pop culture environment. ☪

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church. He welcomes all teens to SCYL retreats.

Manifold Angels: Invitation to Join the Discussion

A group is convening to discuss and draft a standing resolution on the topic of discrimination and the interpretation of scripture for consideration at the 2019 Annual Convention. You are invited to join the online discussion, called *Manifold Angels*. There are two ways to join the list.

The first way is to go to <https://groups.io/g/manifoldangels>, which is the group’s home page. Near the bottom of the page is a button that says, “Apply for membership in this group.” When you click there, a new page will open with a box to enter your email address. You will receive an email to confirm.

The second way is to email the current moderator, Birrell Walsh: birrell@well.com. When you reply “yes” to his return email, you will be in the discussion group. ☪



TREVOR “The Games Man” playing with the teens

About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death. American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questioning and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

SCYL Teens Find the Spirit of Pop Culture at the October Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

A new record number of teenagers (seventeen total, yay!) traveled in vans, cars, and planes from five states to attend the October Duxbury Retreat at Cedar Hill Retreat Center in Massachusetts. The retreat theme was "The Spirit of Pop Culture." We explored religion and spirituality in popular culture as seen through music, movies, brand names, social media, and sports.

Rev. Susannah Currie started things on Saturday morning. She had us listen to, consider, and talk about popular music from the decades. She explained how music reflected the spirit of the times, and some songs included how people thought about spirituality, God, and the afterlife. We began by going back

to the early sixties with the song "Last Kiss," popularized by J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers. This heart-wrenching song tells the tragic tale of a woman who dies in the arms of her lover after



Relaxing on Cedar Hill porch. Josh, Gil, Nathan, Kristofer, Joey, and Jack

a car crash. The chilling lyrics beg the question and response of, "Oh, where oh where can my baby be? The Lord took her away from me. She's gone to heaven so I got to be good. So I can see my baby when I leave this world."

Next came the iconic seventies rock ballad "Stairway to Heaven," by Led

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