

## 3 Years of “New” at Fryeburg New Church Assembly

BY TREVOR

New things are happening at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA), including new programs, new policies, a new committee, a new cook, and a new camp director!

New FNCA camp director Jason Greenwood instituted many new things, starting with the debut on opening Sunday of his hilarious camp orientation video, starring Alex Dyer as “Officer Alex” going over all the camp rules. Jason simplified posting our daily schedule with new whiteboards in the dining hall and created new cabin and room information packets.

In its first official year, The new Outreach Committee has had a huge effect with the camp Website, Facebook pages, the full-color bulletin, articles in *the Messenger* (like this one),



New FNCA camp director Jason Greenwood with his daughter Serena

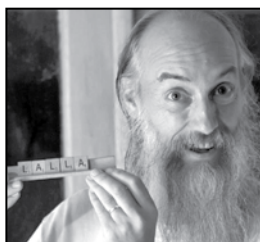


The new FNCA display toured our East Coast churches this year.

and the FNCA display tour, which East Coast readers may have seen at their churches. So far, at least three new campers have attended the FNCA strictly because of the Outreach Committee’s efforts—YAY!

Two new programs in our camp schedule: In its third year, the new opening weekend program has increased first weekend attendance, filled a hole in our programming, and been enjoyed by participants. FNCA religious education coordinator Rev. Susannah Currie is seeking proposals for 2013. And two years ago, we added our new Afternoon Book Club reading and discussion group to the schedule, providing an extra bit of mental and emotional stimulation for attendees.

The passing of life-long FNCA member and Scrabble player extraordinaire Cecilia “Lalla” Searle created our newest annual camp tradition: The Lalla Searle Memorial Scrabble Tournament, in which the word *Lalla* is an acceptable word and a double word score no matter where it’s placed! Ye olde author managed to accomplish this on his final turn. Congratulations to tournament winner Rev. Susannah Currie, who both



Trevor: his best play

opened and closed with bingos, that is, using all seven tiles in a turn to score a fifty-point bonus!

Two new policies with splendid results: To increase the number of young adult campers, three years ago we lowered the fee for tenters, knowing that this age is often willing to “rough it” to save money. Next, we created a new Senior Flames category of campers ages 18–22 to more cohesively include this age group with the *Flames*, the 13–17-year-olds. Decades ago, the *Flames* included both groups, so this new policy actually updates an old one, making it work better in this new century.



Tenting is very popular among young adults.

A small but useful new “policy” is providing a suggested destination for Outing Day. This year’s trip to Scarborough Beach State Park found more than a dozen campers strolling along the beach, basking in the sun, and romping in the ocean waves together.

Our new camp cook is back. He’s easy to work with and consistently creates delicious, nutritious meals with vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and other special diet options. His food efficiency is remarkable, too: there was very little food left when camp closed. New camp director Jason Greenwood says, “Our new cook is FANTASTIC!”

Another new thing over the past three years: high ticket items in our

*Continues on page 116*

## Convention Annual Theme 2012–13

# Welcome *The Year of the Spiritual World!*

At the annual convention this past July, we welcomed in the “Year of the Spiritual World” (2012–13), the second year in our seven-year cycle celebrating the basic teachings of our faith.

Why the spiritual world? Well, as Swedenborgians, we know that there is a lot more to life than just what our five senses are able to detect. The rich diversity of the world we see reflects and expresses the life of the loving Creator Spirit from which it comes. We live in that life at every moment, striving in its power to welcome the good spirits into our hearts and reject the evil ones. In so doing, we walk with the angels, raising up the New Jerusalem in our lives and the lives of others, becoming the angels we are meant to be.

So 2012–13 will be the year for us—in our ministries, our churches, our communities—to bring these truths alive! Here are some themes and ideas for celebrating the true nature of life.

### Theme: Life is spiritual, manifested in many ways.

*Ideas:* proclaim and make manifest, in art, music, and service, the beauty that makes life really worth living; explore what it means to see the earth as holy and live accordingly; learn and

teach a spiritual practice; see and make known the Spirit that shines in and through all of nature.

### Theme: Life is eternal, a deeper unity underlying its rich diversity.

*Ideas:* welcome and serve marginalized individuals; become a “rainbow” (gay-friendly) church; engage in inter-faith dialogue; explore what it means to “live peace”; show how life is sacred by something you do or serve or create.

### Theme: Life is a journey we walk with our angels.

*Ideas:* discern and celebrate where angels are present in your life; consider where angels are needed in your community and what you and your church might do to help; reflect, and help others reflect, on what it means to live as an “angel-in-training”; devise your own angel-in-training program for children or adults.

Remember, the purpose of our celebration is three-fold: to grow in our knowledge of our faith, to engage in actions that are useful for building up

our communities, and to have fun!

And one last thing: each year in our seven-year cycle has a color associated with it, and the color of the Year of the Spiritual World is orange. So feel free to splash a little orange around whatever you do. Orange is the color of the second energy center or chakra in the body and is associated with happiness, resourcefulness, and confidence. So enjoy—celebrate your angels and life in the Spirit this year!

—John Maine, chair  
the Education Support Unit

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## Church Calendar

- October 5–8: SCYL Columbus Day Weekend Retreat • Duxbury, MA
- October 26–28: LaPorte Preteen *SPLAT* Retreat • LaPorte, IN
- October 26–28: Pacific Coast Association Annual Meeting • Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
- November 1–4: General Council Fall Meeting • Temenos Retreat Center, West Chester, PA
- November 9–10: SHS Fall Board Meeting • Berkeley, CA
- November 10–December 30: *In Company with Angels* exhibit • Urbana University • Urbana, OH

## the Messenger

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## Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

I write to you today from 30,000 feet in the air. It is an amazing view of the earth, looking at it from this high up. You can see great expanses of the earth, see the contours of the landscape in a view you can't get from down on the surface in the midst of it all. It is beautiful in its way, but at the same time there is a sense of distance and being removed from the life that is going on down there on the surface.

There is something similar to the view one gets from being president. You see the big picture, you see the contours of Convention's landscape in a way you just don't get when you are on the surface and engaged in the activity of life. But at the same time, the very distance that gives that perspective also creates that sense of being removed from where the action is. It is my hope that as president, I am able to take advantage of the big picture perspective that comes from being at "the top" of our organization, but at the same time it is my hope that I do not get comfortable being "out of the trenches" and do not stay too long removed from where the action is.

So I am flying from visiting our church in Puget Sound, where I had a great visit. I was welcomed by the folks that make up the community there, and contributed to the worship service with a few songs and a talk about my life experience moving out of and back into Swedenborgian spiritual community. We talked and enjoyed a lovely pot-luck smorgasbord, and then I sat in on a portion of the church board meeting. In the next few days I visited with several parishioners and also Revs. Paul Martin and Erni Martin, who are serving as part-time pastors there. And all of this was made possible by the hospitality and generosity of my brother Matt and his wife Mary who put me up and lent me their car.

Today is a day of transition as I move from one of our many small but close-knit spiritual commu-



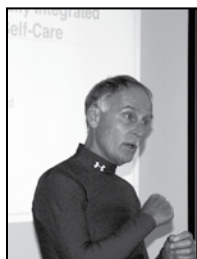
nities to attend the board meeting of the Wayfarer's Chapel, perhaps our largest and most financially successful, and certainly most visible, ministry, located in Rancho Palos Verdes south of Los Angeles. The unique aspect of this spiritual community is that while it has all the aspects of what we call church, there is nothing to join and become a member of! There is a beautiful building and grounds, there is a vibrant wedding ministry, there are Sunday worship services and a growing spectrum of classes and workshops, but there is no society to join. Still, while it continues to be active, there are the ongoing issues of maintaining the physical plant, and the administrative structure, and learning to adapt to the changed economic environment. And as all of our church communities must face from time to time, they are currently undergoing a rather dramatic change in leadership as ministers move on to other callings, including the inevitable voice of father time. In this case, Rev. Jonathan Mitchell has left the Chapel after seven years of service and taken the pastorate of the San Diego Church, and Rev. Harvey Tafel, after over forty years of ministry and leadership at the Chapel, is retiring at the end of this year. The Chapel Board has brought on board a director of development in the person of James Morgan, and Rev. David Brown has stepped up as lead pastor for weddings, classes, and worship services. And I cannot speak of the chapel without mentioning the quality staff that has been developed over the years, and especially the excellent musicians employed to provide the beautiful, creative and moving music that is such an integral part of the weddings and worship that draw so many people over the course of each year and keep a growing number returning on a regular basis.

So with Seattle behind me and the summer's activities—unremarkable in and of themselves—promising potential for major movement in the coming year, I prepare to come down out of the clouds and engage the work on the ground. We are already well into the beginning of a new church year.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

# Spiritually Integrated Self-Care

BY GARD PERRY



*This workshop is for people who care for others—and who care about others, though the focus is on self-care. Why, you may ask, focus on self-care in a workshop for*

*those who care for others? Without attention to self-care, care erodes to self-depletion, empathy fatigue, and burn-out; conversely, self-care without regard for others eventually ends in self-indulgence. Therefore, we will examine both kinds of care and we will explore the dynamic interaction between the two.*

With that introduction, I felt like I had the attention of the twenty-five people who attended the pre-convention workshop, “Spiritually Integrated Self-Care For Those Who Care For and About Others” at the annual Swedenborgian convention on July 5, 2012.

Anyone with experience in a caregiving role knows there are needs that cannot be met by any one person all the time and that there are difficult feelings that come with fatigue and frustration. One’s expectations for oneself can be unrealistic, and, when combined with the difficult situations the caregiver inevitably faces, the downhill slide into self-depletion, empathy fatigue, and burn-out can begin.

Fortunately, there is a solution that is built on the foundation of a functional relationship with the care-receiver. The caregiver works to establish the healthy boundaries that characterize a functional relationship, and can experience immediate success: improved communication, more realistic expectations on the part of the caregiver (and often on the part of the care-receiver), and less frustration.

Interestingly, the step of establishing a functional relationship is the founda-

tion for spiritually integrated self-care: healthy boundaries are a form of self-care. Knowing when to say, “No, I cannot do that,” is good communication, a demonstration of respect for the other, and a sign of the self-respect essential for self-care.

Workshop participants heard that self-care, built on mutual engagement with the care-receiver, deepens to reveal a spiritual dimension: the deeper reaches of the self are accessed when one brings high quality attention to the needs of the other. There one finds the presence of divinity in one’s own core that is something like a “holy presence” that is beyond ego. I was reminded of the phrase in Swedenborg’s writing,

in which he reports that “God alone sees [and listens within our listening] (*Heavenly Secrets* 1954).” Paradoxically, caring for another in this way becomes a profound experience of self-care.

During a discussion at the close of the workshop, a long-time member of Convention said, “I’ve heard a lot about ‘charity toward the neighbor’ over the years, and this process explains how to do that—thanks!” And, thank you to the Convention Planning Committee for asking me to present “Spiritually Integrated Self-Care For Those Who Care For And About Others,” and to the Massachusetts New Church Union for their generous support. ✚

The Rev. Dr. Gard Perry is a spiritual care coordinator and workshop leader in spiritual counseling. He lives in Conway, New Hampshire.

## New at FNCA

*Continued from page 113*

annual sales table auction, including New England Patriots football tickets, Elephant Walk Restaurant gift certificates, refinished and re-caned chairs, art by established artists, and this year, one mother bid \$130 to have her grown son sit and talk with her at breakfast for three days in a row! Now that’s creative fundraising, folks!

The installation of Rev. Sage Currie as pastor of the Fryeburg New Church in town about three years ago has seen a resurgence of participation in FNCA activities by local people thanks to her cheerful and relentless promotion of the Assembly to her congregation. Thank you, Rev. Sage!

Unexpectedly new this year: both weeks of camp had roughly equal attendance. Usually, first week is “slow” and second week jam-packed primarily because the entire Guuu clan usually at-

tends second week. However, this year they came first week because they liked the lecture theme better. (For 2013, we should consult with them first and schedule their favorite first week!)

And finally, there’s been a steady in-



Officer Alex entices Nancy Little to bid on a necklace.

flux of new campers the past three years. Most have been transformed into regular campers by the wonderfulness that is the FNCA. One new camper deserves specific mention: It was

our huge pleasure to welcome the Rev. Eric Allison. Though Eric’s stroke makes communication difficult, that didn’t prevent him from sharing his sunny disposition with young and old, sharing his pottery creations with friends old and new, sharing a blessing at a meal, and in general sharing that same old wonderful Eric-ness that so many know and love. We hope Rev. Allison will also become a new regular at camp.

*Continues next page*



# What's in a Letter?

BY REBECCA KLINE ESTERSON



**O**urs is a religion that believes spiritual things must have their footing in physical, natural things—like a

helium balloon bound to the earth by a string in the hand of a child. Therefore, while we look to the hidden, celestial truths of Scripture rather than a literalist interpretation, we nevertheless find a nurturing groundedness in the stories themselves, and even in the actual letters of the biblical text. As Swedenborg writes, “every letter expresses a meaning” (*De Verbo* 14).

I would like to explore the idea that the individual letters of scripture bring a meaning of their own by looking at the first letter of the Bible. The Hebrew text of Genesis begins with the letter *bet*, which makes the sound “B.” *Bet* is a whole word in one letter, translated into English as “in.” “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” *Be-reshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve’et ha’arets*. In studying Jewish biblical interpretation, I have found a deep

well of meaning in this one letter, which is harmonious with our Swedenborgian understanding.

First, every letter in the Hebrew alphabet has a corresponding number. *Bet* is the second letter of the alphabet, and therefore represents the number two. In one Jewish source, this has great significance for the creation story, for God created two worlds. “The process of creation, too, has taken place on two planes, one above and one below, and for this reason the Torah begins with the letter ‘*Bet*,’ the numerical value of which is two. The lower occurrence corresponds to the higher; one produced the upper world, the other the lower world” (*Zohar*, I, 240b). Swedenborg likewise writes of two corresponding worlds, one spiritual and one natural. We all have a spiritual body and a physical body. There is a spiritual sun and a natural sun, a spiritual Word and a natural Word. As Helen Keller writes in her 1919 address to the General Convention of the New Jerusalem:

We are inhabitants of two worlds, the material and the spiritual. We dwell consciously upon earth, but we are only dimly aware of the spiritual world which surrounds us because this “muddy vesture” of clay obscures our vision. . . . So Heaven lies about us, but we perceive it not. Death draws aside the obscuring veil, and lo, our souls’ eyes see, and our souls’ ears hear!

The relationship between the two worlds of God’s creation is correspondent rather than antagonistic. We no more “transcend” our bodies than we throw out the literal sense of scripture. This is why, for so many of us, contemplation on the beauty of the



natural world is a doorway into spiritual awareness rather than a distraction from it. Again, spiritual things have their foundation in physical things (see *True Christian Religion* 212–213 and *Divine Love and Wisdom* 14–18).

A second interpretation of the letter *bet* as the first letter of the Bible comes from the shape of it. Similar to the letter “C” it is closed on three sides but open at the front (the front being on the left side of the letter in Hebrew, which reads right to left). This has great significance for the rabbis. It is as if the letter forms a containing vessel, holding the entire text of the Bible, or opening itself to the text and closing itself on the other side of it. The text that the *bet* contains represents the world that we can know and understand through our senses. What lies outside the enclosure of the *bet* are the worlds that we do not perceive, but which are no less real. (see *Genesis Rabbah*, I:10, 3:7, 9:2) There are worlds and levels of being that are closed to our awareness, even though we are intimately connected to them. In our day-to-day lives, we live within the *bet*, in the world of “in.” Only at peak moments of insight do we grasp the truth and beauty of what is “out there.” But living within the *bet* is not, our tradition teaches, a fault to be overcome. We believe in the incarnation, the power of connection to our environment, practical engagement in our world, fostering the health of our bodies so that we can serve and love fully. This groundedness, we believe, is what allows our spirits to soar most freely. We are at once the balloon and the child’s hand holding it down. We are instructed to live within the *bet*, to read and live by the words of the text we have inherited. We are also told that this text is only the beginning of truth. By entering into it, we also connect with all that is hidden. ☛

Rebecca Kline Esterson is the SHS scholar-in-training. She studies and teaches at Boston University.

*Continued from preceding page*

So a huge THANK YOU to everyone who has helped uplift the Fryeburg New Church Assembly with newness over the past three years. “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). ☛

Trevor is on the FNCA Board of Directors and serves on the Summer Session Committee as activities director, and is the chair of the Outreach Committee.

Like us on Facebook at “Fryeburg New Church Assembly”.

For extensive info about the FNCA, visit <http://fryeburg.org>.

# Meditation On an Old Joke

BY ROBERT MCCLUSKEY

One of the first things one hears in seminary is that the minister's job can be summed up in three words: "Hatch, match, and dispatch!" That is to say, birth, marriage, and death. It's a pretty good joke, technically speaking. It follows the rule of three, it features a hard consonant, and it rhymes. Moving a bit deeper, the "joke," which is rarely stated explicitly, is that the minister's involvement with his flock is quite limited. They are there at the baptism, the wedding, and the funeral—the font, the altar, and the grave—but seldom seen or heard afterward. It also implies that the minister's role is a mere formality, a perfunctory routine that adds a special "spiritual" quality to these common, universal events of human life but does nothing to promote the substance of the event. (Without going into detail, we note how much more vital the minister's job is in the presence of the dystopian complements of our subject: miscarriage, divorce, and life support!)

As you might imagine, none of this is very encouraging to someone responding to the call to ministry. More discouraging still is the discovery that many in their flock don't think these three words are a joke, but believe that they accurately describe the totality of the minister's work. So let's go still deeper.

There is of course a good reason for lifting up these events as an important focus of the church. They compel us to face the mystery, paradox, and miracle of life that is beyond our reason or control. However, as long as they are understood externally, whether in their biological or social aspects, these "events" are not truly the function of the church. Only when we understand these events internally, as spiritual realities that all people must pass

through, do they become functions of the church.

Yes, the minister is there at or near the physical birth, but not before the doctor (not holy water, but hot water!). Yes, the minister is there at the wedding, but not before the state (no license, no marriage!). Yes, the minister is there at the death, but again, not before the doctor (there's nothing we can do!). Being born, having sex, and dying are all easy and ubiquitous. But being baptized, exchanging vows, and gathering for a funeral—now that's hard, and pretty cosmic to boot! They require a higher level of thinking and a deeper level of feeling, if you will.

Birth and death are so inherently profound (i.e., out of our control) that there's not much anyone can do, and so a space is provided for ministry to take place. Marriage is different, and seems to be open to all sorts of misinterpretation and abuse which crowd out any chance for ministry. It can be very frustrating to observe the amount of time, energy, and money invested in a wedding, while the obligatory "pre-marriage counseling sessions" barely scratch the surface of the profound personal and spiritual dynamics that are in play. Much is said these days of a fifty percent divorce rate, yet no one mentions the underlying cause: the marriage rate remains around one hundred percent! In other words, the job of "matching" is much more difficult than most care to admit.

So much for the joke. And so much for the external forms to which the joke refers. Let us go deeper still and consider the spiritual dynamics of hatching, matching and dispatching. Doctors and court clerks are nowhere to be found when the spiritual dynamics of birth, marriage, or death occur. This is the church's field of expertise. (The outward rituals which correspond

to and reflect the spiritual realities of these events are important as well, but only to the degree that those realities are actually present.) The true focus of the church is on the psychological and personal movement through inner experience represented by the ritual. It's not the outer event, or even the ritual associated with it, but the spiritual processes which the event and ritual represent, pointing us to something within ourselves.

In this way, "hatching, matching, and dispatching" refer not just to birth, marriage and death, but to raising a child, honoring a marriage, and revering the dead. These are not just one-time events to be celebrated or observed so that we might move on. They are relationships that endure throughout our lives—and beyond. They both inspire and require personal growth. They make us real. And if this is true, then it seems the role of the minister is deeper and wider than commonly believed. In each event, the minister's role is to the community of people involved. It certainly isn't to the infant or the corpse, each of whom lack all comprehension, nor is it merely to the couple who marry. It is to the families and friends who now seek to understand and respond to such profound events, for their lives are being inwardly affected as well.

But there is more. The spiritual meaning of these events is ultimately deeply personal. That is to say, on an even deeper level we find that the spiritual meaning of birth is the baptism of repentance, an "event" that occurs at any age, and often. This involves acknowledging and confessing that we are lost and in need of salvation, facing our complicity with sin, and sincerely seeking a new beginning. I am speaking here of the struggle and labor of giving birth to a new self, of waiting for a dawning in our minds of the light of new life.

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## Paulhaven 2012: A Parable



BY DAVID FEKETE

**T**his year at Paulhaven Summer Camp, we studied parables of the New Testament. So it seemed appropriate to write for the closing service the following parable about Paulhaven.

A man fell asleep, and he dreamed a dream. He dreamed of angels playing

soccer and volleyball. He dreamed of a holy place where God was. The angels came down a ladder that reached to heaven. They sang, prayed, played, and ate. Then they went back up the ladder into heaven.

The man told his dream to another man. The other man thought about it and thought about it. He set out on a journey and found a plot of land by a lake. He liked the land and bought it.

*Continued from preceding page*

The spiritual meaning of marriage is that of reformation—reforming ourselves into the image of God and allowing God to regenerate us from within. It means choosing, acting, appropriating, getting our priorities right, and then living according to them. It means forging a unity between our will and understanding through action in the world, bringing high ideals and abstract concepts to bear on the real world of flesh and blood.

And the spiritual meaning of death is regeneration into new life: resurrection, transition, chrysalis—the experience of loss and suffering; dark nights of the soul in which we confront our mortality, our finitude, our inability to control life. It includes those life crises that seem to strip us of our sense of meaning and purpose, which give rise to cynicism, despair, and bad faith—when things are not going our way; that is, when we are invited to go God's way. As we have heard so many times, the death of the old self is in fact the birth of the new.

If the job of ministry is to facilitate spiritual growth, it makes little sense to focus so much time and energy on events which do not need facilitation—babies are born, couples consummate, and people die without any help from the clergy. But when individuals face

the tasks of repentance, reformation, and regeneration, when they are struggling with new possibilities and risks or moral dilemmas, or facing suffering, loss and death—then the role of the clergy is patently clear.

It is a call as well to the priesthood of all believers, a way for each of us to be spiritually present to others at all times. Everyone's already been born, and most people aren't going to get married or die tomorrow. But everyone we know is, in their own way, moving through the process of regeneration, and everyone who is moving through the process of regeneration needs help. Such people (like you and me) struggle with the burden of guilt and the hope of forgiveness, they long to begin again; they struggle with inner tensions as they seek to be faithful and charitable, to grow into the image of God; and they are all experiencing loss to some degree, and will be for as long as you know them—anticipating newness, facing challenges, mourning losses. And of course, through all these events, both natural and spiritual, they are called to rejoice in and celebrate God's presence and know the beauty and delight of union with the divine.

Hatch, match, and dispatch. Not so funny anymore, is it? Or is it? ☩

Robert McCluskey is a former Swedenborgian minister living in Los Angeles.

He told his friends about it, and his friends told their friends, and they told their friends. They all went up to see this Holy Land.

When they got there they saw something wonderful. The whole land was filled with a golden mist. They wandered into the mist, and as they breathed it, in their hearts grew warm.

Strangers became friends. Old friends embraced. Young children held hands with teenagers. Everyone treated everyone else with kindness. Everyone felt like one family.

Their love for each other poured out into joyous play. They played games together—soccer, volleyball, circle games, dodge ball.

Tired and hungry from their play, they all sat down to eat. Angels had come down the ladder and prepared a rich feast. They sang a song of thanks to God and ate.

Then someone said, "Let us go and worship God, who has given us this day." They entered a plain wooden chapel. They sang; they prayed; and they heard a lesson about God and His kingdom. Then they all joined hands and sang a parting blessing.

Night came and they built a fire. They sat around it singing and laughing side by side.

They grew sleepy, hugged one another and went to sleep. They woke the next morning and ate the food the angels had prepared for them.

Then they left the place—all filled with wonder at this holy land.

A girl came to the man who dreamed the dream of the angels playing soccer and volleyball—the dream of a holy place where God was—and told the man, "That was no dream. I have been there." And she was right—for a short time, too short a time, angels played in a holy place where God was. ☩

The Rev. Dr. David Fekete is pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta, and director of Paulhaven Camp in Alberta.

# The Big Bang and I

This lecture was delivered by George Dole as a mini-course at the 2012 Annual Convention.



As I trust the title of this talk suggests, my focus is on the big, big picture, a picture that stretches from the big bang to me standing right here right now. I should warn you that the longer I worked on it, the more thoughts came to mind, and if it leaves you with more questions than answers, you're right with me. Just remind yourselves from time to time that I'm talking longer than I want to.

Where to begin?

Well, for all the progress that has been made in understanding the big bang, there seems to have been little progress toward answering the really big question, so we might as well start there. Physicist Stephen Hawking put it quite clearly: "Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?"

This is the question that creationists tend to answer with complete confidence, but too simplistically to convince anyone who has taken science seriously. It is the question, though, that apparently baffles brilliant people who have so much invested in the study of matter that they cannot give credence to the thought that anything other than matter actually exists. Where do the laws of physics come from? What power enforces them? There is a quest for a single theory that will answer this.

Stephen Hawking is involved in this quest, and has high standards for what that "one unified theory" should explain. "Most sets of values," he says,

"would give rise to universes that, although they might be very beautiful, would contain no one able to wonder at that beauty." Whatever explains the big bang, then, should also explain us; and he added one more very significant requirement: "If we do discover a complete theory, it should be in time understandable in broad principle by everyone. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of why we and the universe exist." It should apparently, then, be reasonably simple, so the instinct of the creationists may not be as indefensible as it seems.

**"Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?"**

Two words in Hawking's last sentence do worry me, though. I'll table the first for a bit, and start with the second, the word, "Then." It sounds as though the scientists are the "we" who are going to discover the theory first, all by themselves, and "then" expect the philosophers and ordinary people to accept it. I'm afraid that is exactly what he means. Speaking of questions of meaning, he says, "Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. (I'll have a snide remark about that shortly.) Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge." If this theory is to explain "us," though, surely it would make sense to engage some of the highly ca-

pable people who have given as much time and brilliance to studying "us" as highly capable physicists have given to studying matter—perhaps (perish the thought) even one or two of the mystics who have explored the depths of "wonder at that beauty." No one should pretend to expertise in all the fields concerned.

I believe we can engage with this question constructively rather than competitively if we must first come to grips with a fundamental problem that we all have in common. It is a problem that is easily and widely ignored, a problem that both secular and religious education often seem to aggravate rather than alleviate. Turning first to the religious version, it is concisely stated in *True Christianity* 39: "The human mind itself, even the most highly analytical and elevated mind, is finite; it cannot be rid of its own limitations. It will never have the capacity to see the infinity of God as it truly is or God as God truly is." Let's face it, and let's not forget it: when we talk about God, we don't really know what we're talking about. When Swedenborg writes about "the Lord," he is writing about "the visible God in whom is the invisible One" (*True Christianity* 339, emphasis mine). Again, to put it as crudely as possible, "the Lord," or "the Lord Jesus Christ," is the incomprehensibly infinite One dumbed down to our dim level of comprehension—and even in that "accommodated" form, stretching our comprehension to the limit. We can study theology to the point that we really impress ourselves with the perfection of our understanding, but we're kidding ourselves if we do.

In their recent book, *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow point to a parallel situation in regard to physics—less dramatic, perhaps, but equally rigorous. Investigation of quantum mechanics demonstrates very convincingly that

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observing a phenomenon has an effect on the phenomenon that is being observed. “To deal with such paradoxes,” they write, “we shall adopt an approach that we call model-dependent realism.” They continue,

It is based on the idea that our brains interpret the input from our sensory organs by making a model of the world. When such a model is successful at explaining events, we tend to attribute to it, and to the elements and concepts that constitute it, the quality of reality or absolute truth. . . . If two such physical theories or models accurately predict the same events, one cannot be said to be more real than the other; rather, we are free to use whichever model is most convenient.

The purely philosophical ground of this approach, incidentally, can be found in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. This was published in 1781—it seems that after 230 years, physics may finally have caught up with Kant.

The “if” in that last sentence of Hawking’s is a very big “if.” Take the last half of the sentence out of its context, and it says one model is as good as another, just use whichever you find most convenient. That, to me, is the folly of extreme postmodernism and political spin doctors. A model of reality in which global warming is not happening is apparently convenient for a good many people. The accuracy of a model can be tested, however, and in science it must be tested. The criterion is repeatability—that is, experimental demonstration that the model can consistently predict events. By this criterion, it would seem that the model of evolution by random causation fails miserably. To say, “It’s all a matter of chance” is to say and in fact to insist that it is unpredictable. Here, incidentally, I have the support of the resolute Darwinian Edward O. Wilson, who says quite explicitly, “evolution by

natural selection cannot predict the future,” but I suspect that this is a simplistic assertion, and wouldn’t rest too much weight on it.

When we translate “model-dependent realism” into Swedenborgian terms, it becomes the principle that “. . . neither with man, nor indeed with an angel, are any truths ever pure, that is, devoid of appearances; for all both in general and in particular are appearances of truth. Pure truths belong to the Lord alone because they are divine” (*Secrets of Heaven* 3207). The “visible God”—the Lord Jesus Christ—is an appearance of truth. The true God is invisible—does not “appear.” The statement that models are to be evaluated by their ability to predict trans-

**We would all do well to keep reminding ourselves that like it or not, our minds are finite. This grand and glorious one unified theory will be no more than our own mental model.**

lates as the statement that “nevertheless they [the appearances] are accepted by the Lord as truths, provided good is in them” (*ibid.*)—that is, provided they work. To translate this back into more scientific language, our minds can use the input from experience and revelation to construct models of Deity, and if a model guides us well (and I’ll have something to say about “well” by the time I’m through), it can be regarded as functionally true—true, that is, in the sense of *Secrets of Heaven* 3451:3: “if we are convinced on doctrinal grounds that charity comes from faith [rather than the other way around] and live in charity toward the neighbor, then even though we are not in truth as to doctrine, we are in truth as to life; so we are in the church, in the Lord’s kingdom.”

As Hawking and Mlodinow said, when we are convinced of some expla-

nation, “we tend to attribute to it, and to the elements and concepts that constitute it, the quality of reality or absolute truth,” which brings us to the second word that worries me, the word “discover”—“If we do discover a complete theory . . .” To speak of “discovering” something implies that the something is there independent of our perception of it. Surely, “model-dependent realism” itself demands that the word should be “formulate” or “devise.” Physicists, like theologians, can become overly impressed with their brilliance. This can be simply naïve and relatively harmless, but it has a sneaky tendency to close the mind to the possibility that it might be wrong. We would all do well, then, to keep reminding ourselves that like it or not, our minds are finite. This grand and glorious one unified theory will be no more than our own mental model.

So much for background. A recent book by a resolute atheist named Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing*, argues at length that the universe was caused by the laws of physics. He calls attention to the fact that “beautiful and miraculous objects” like snowflakes keep appearing, and regards it as incredible that “each and every such object is lovingly and painstakingly and, most importantly, purposefully created by a divine intelligence,” a statement I find intriguing in view of the ease with which he assumes that the laws of physics miraculously apply to each and every such object. He simply notes how “scientists revel in our ability to explain how snowflakes . . . can spontaneously appear, based on simple, elegant laws of physics.” When it comes to the question, “Where do the laws of physics come from?” though, he simply calls attention to the phenomenon of infinite regression. At one point he in fact says that “we may never have enough empirical information to answer this question unambiguously,”

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but then adds that “the fact that a universe from nothing is even plausible is certainly significant, at least for me.” “Plausible” falls somewhat short of “possible” and well short of “probable,” and I find the notion of laws arising from nothing as implausible as a universe arising from nothing. I’m familiar with a lot of laws, and they seem to be the products of human minds. Basically, he has simply chosen this particular place to stop asking questions. As far as I’m concerned, he is perfectly entitled to do so; but it might help if he could simply say, “I don’t know.” He does not seem to deal with Hawking’s more serious question, “What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?” He simply assumes that the laws themselves have the power to create *ex nihilo*. See John Hitchcock’s book, *Atoms, Snowflakes, and God*.

There is also a very practical problem with an atheistic view of the universe. In a recent book entitled *Religion for Atheists*, a Swiss philosopher named Alain de Botton writes, “One can be left cold by the doctrines of the Christian Trinity . . . and yet at the same time be interested in the ways in which religions deliver sermons, promote morality, engender a spirit of community, make use of art and architecture, inspire travels, train minds and encourage gratitude at the beauty of spring.” Here’s that spirit of “wonder” again, the whole question of human nature. According to a recent book by Derek Bok, the six factors that account for most of the variation in people’s well-being are “marriage, social relationships, employment, perceived health, religion, and the quality of government.” The atheistic, impersonal, materialistic, purposeless view of creation does little if anything to explain what has happened or predict what will happen in the areas that apparently mean

the most to us.

In his remarkable book, *Proving God*, Ed Silvia puts the problem very concisely: “Science deals with facts and religion deals with values. . . . Religion is weak on the how of creation, and science is weak on the why.” To piggyback on a sign from Einstein’s office, science deals with things it can count; religion deals with what counts. Silvia then proceeds to offer a detailed and explicitly Swedenborgian model that deals with both the how and the why; and much to his credit, he closes all but the last of his chapters with a testable prediction.

What I should like to do is then in a sense to invite scientists, philosophers, theologians, and ordinary people to meet on a level playing field, the solid, shared ground of ultimate ignorance. In the last analysis, none of us really knows. We have some very plausible and useful opinions, some impressive partial models, and we can tell them from some pretty absurd and useless ones; but whether we call them “appearances of truth” or “model-dependent realism,” none is absolute truth. None is a flawless description of reality. We can compare them in terms of their range and their usefulness. To the extent that scientific models deal with facts and theological models deal with values, each must be regarded as partial, as incomplete, but the possibility is surely open that they may complement rather than contradict each other. After all, day after day, we are dealing with both facts and values, and somehow or other we seem to manage. The single unified theory, again, needs input from both fact-people and value-people, things-people and people-people.

I want to pause at this point to say that for me, this proposed dialogue is not just a matter of abstract academic significance. I want scientists, who wield significant influence on our world-views, to participate construc-

tively in the framing of a coherent model that includes both matter and what matters, a world-view that orients us in the confusion in which the global community now finds itself, a world-view that transcends the mutual demonization of sectarian and partisan ideologies. I believe that the usual understanding of the principle of “survival of the fittest” has tended to legitimize a culture of violence, and suspect that an unspoken awareness of this can be seen in de Botton’s search for “a religion of atheism.” Closer to home, I want theologians to recognize the disastrous effects of dogmatism, to come down from their high horses and follow the Golden Rule by modeling the kind of open-minded listening that they want to receive. *Secrets of Heaven* 842:3 tells us that when the Lord is rearranging things, “it is quite normal” for there to be a period of chaos. If things seem to be coming apart these days, it is because they have “fit together badly”; and the chaos is a priceless opportunity to “arrange them in order.”

Let’s start, then, with the model of the big bang. Surely scientists and theists can agree to the assumption that an immense amount of power must underlie the universe as we know it. How much? Listen to physicist David Bohm:

If one computes the amount of energy that would be in one cubic centimetre of space . . . it turns out to be very far beyond the total energy of all the matter in the known universe.

What is implied in this proposal is that what we call empty space contains an immense background of energy, and that matter as we know it is a small, “quantized” wave-like excitation on top of this background, rather like a tiny ripple on a vast sea.

Keep this ratio in mind. There are a lot of cubic centimeters in the uni-

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verse—a real lot. If every single one contains far more energy than all the energy in all the matter of the universe, then the energy that erupted in the big bang is incredible. Keep in mind also, though, that this is the way it looks to us. Compelling as it may seem, it is still “an appearance of truth.” After all, when it comes to the size of the universe all we can say is that it certainly is big in comparison to us.

Science models that unseen, undetected energy as impersonal, and as far as I am aware, doesn’t really talk about it all that much; while religion models it as personal, calls it “omnipotence,” and isn’t quite sure what to do with it. Einstein seems to have been on the fence in this regard. While he emphatically rejected traditional notions of a personal God as childish, he stated unequivocally, “I am not an atheist.” He wrote,

The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.

“Intelligence” as we know it is a characteristic of persons. The laws of physics presumably apply to every snowflake in the world, to every atom in the universe. If they not only describe but also design and create every snowflake, let alone every atom, that is already an intelligence of unimaginable detail, range, and power. In fact, we insult it by calling it by the name of our own infinitesimal intelligence. This sounds suspiciously like Bohm’s description of “a tiny ripple on a vast sea.”

Einstein is also reported to have said that the single most important question in the world is, “Is the universe a friendly place?” That again would be framing the question in personal terms,

which means thinking of a friendliness of such superiority that, compared with it, all the friendliness of human beings is an “utterly insignificant reflection.” Is there a way we can at least model such friendliness? Let’s try. It might get us closer to a theory that explains both the universe and us.

In their recent book, *Journey of the Universe*, Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Ellen Tucker begin the story with the big bang. They describe quarks and leptons combining to form protons and neutrons in a kind of gluey plasma, with more structures emerging even in the first few minutes, and with the universe moving inexorably toward more detailed differentiation on the one hand and increasingly com-

**We can model this mentally as a creative tension between an inconceivably powerful tendency to differentiate and an equally powerful tendency to integrate . . .**

plex assemblages on the other. “Even from the first moments,” they write, “our universe moved toward creating relationships.”

They don’t stop there. They speak of the tendency of the universe to expand and the tendency of gravity to contract, and go on to say, “One of the most spectacular features of the observable universe is the elegance of its expansion. If the rate of expansion had been slower, even slightly slower, even one millionth of one percent slower, the universe would have recollapsed. . . . Conversely, if the universe had expanded a little more quickly, even one millionth of one percent more quickly, the universe would have expanded too quickly for structures to form.”

We can model this mentally as a creative tension between an inconceivably powerful tendency to differentiate and an equally powerful tendency to inte-

grate, both operating with incredible precision. At this level of generalization, I find myself very close to a couple of statements in Swedenborg’s *Divine Providence*. First, “A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united,” (§4.4). Second, “It is the intent of divine providence that everything created, collectively and in detail, should be this kind of whole, and that if it is not, that it should become one” (§7).

For “in detail,” we can now read “right down to the quarks and leptons.” Physicists are continuing to find examples of “fine-tuning” of astonishing precision. There is a beryllium isotope with the minuscule half life of one quadrillionth of a second (that’s fifteen zeros between decimal point and the 1) that “must find and absorb a helium nucleus in that split of time before decaying. This occurs only because of a totally unexpected, exquisitely precise, energy match between the two nuclei. If this did not occur there would be none of the heavier elements. No carbon, no nitrogen, no life.” Talk about whirlwind courtships! As far as I’m concerned, a quadrillionth of a second meets the definition of “an instant” with room to spare, so we can say that on this submicroscopic scale, relationships are formed instantaneously.

Our vastly bigger brains form relationships much, much more slowly, though—at least a quadrillion times more slowly, I suspect—so in the interests of time as we know it, I need to jump straight to the arrival of life, skipping over a process of complexification that can be modeled as progressing through protons and neutrons to atoms to molecules to macromolecules to virus-like bodies to unquestionably living cells. To do so I turn to the delightful essays of the late “biology watcher” Lewis Thomas. One of his recurrent themes is that nature’s great

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law for all living things is the survival of the fittest by the principle of co-operation, suggesting that plants and animals survive not by defeating their neighbors in the competition for food and light but by learning to live with their neighbors in such a way that everyone prospers. He writes,

... the one thing we do know for sure about our bacterial ancestors is that they learned, very early on, to live in communities. . . live colonies resembling the ancient fossil forms . . . living off the sun and producing oxygen. . . very little is known about their metabolic functions or nutritional requirements, beyond the conspicuous fact that they live together and cannot live apart.

It is not at all difficult to see this as a further, more sophisticated manifestation of the process of creation, with constant pressure toward differentiation interacting with an equally constant pressure toward integration. Isolation is essentially self-destructive, and so, obviously, is loss of identity. Evolution then takes place within boundaries of that millionth of a percent space between expansion and contraction.

Thomas points to a whole new level of complexity in termites, and in stunning fashion traces the story back to bacteria. He writes,

The termite nest is a model of co-operative behavior, seen close up. The hundreds of thousands of separate insects behave rather like the individual cells of a huge organism, almost like a brain on countless legs. Each of the individuals appears to carry a genetic blueprint for the intricate architecture of the termitarium, made of columns and arches at its base, chambers specially designed for the queens, and the entire construction air-conditioned and humidity-controlled. But then, each individual termite is itself an assemblage, a sort of functional chimera. The insect lives on wood, but does

not possess its own digestive system for converting cellulose to carbohydrate. This is the function of the motile protozoans, single-celled eukaryotes which inhabit its intestine and are passed on from one generation to the next by feeding. The protozoans are, in certain species, unable to move about by themselves to ingest the fragments of wood eaten by the termite. They accomplish their movement thanks to the spirochetes attached to their surfaces. And there is more to come. Inside each protozoan, embedded in neat layers just beneath the creature's surface, are numerous bacteria; these are the ultimate symbionts, contributing the enzymes needed for digesting the wood eaten by the termite, located in the spirochete, swallowed by the protozoans, and now awaiting conversion to sugar by the bacteria. It is as eminently successful a committee as can be found anywhere in biology.

Let me leap from this point to the personal—straight from the termite to me, here and now. It is not a long leap at all, since this view of the creative tension between differentiation and coherence bears a striking resemblance to the model of human development offered by object relations theory. In his classic *The Evolving Self*, Robert Kegan writes,

Of the multitude of hopes and yearnings we experience . . . two seem to subsume the others. One of these might be called the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied. The other might be called the yearning to be independent or autonomous, to experience one's distinctness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity. . . what is most striking about these two great human yearnings is that they seem to be in conflict, and it is in fact, their relation—this tension—that is of more interest to me at the moment than either yearning by itself. I be-

lieve it is a lifelong tension. Our experience of this fundamental ambivalence may be our experience of the unitary, restless, creative motion of life itself."

*Divine Providence* 42 carries this to the ultimate level, telling us that "The more closely we are united to the Lord, the more clearly we seem to have our own identity, and yet the more obvious it is to us that we belong to the Lord"—the same Lord who, we are told, is "life itself."

"Life itself." In his best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins spends about five pages talking about the origin of life. He describes that origin as a "chemical event, or series of events, whereby the vital conditions for natural selection first came about."

He does not pause to define "life." He says that "the origin of life was a chemical event, or series of events," but "the origin of life" is obviously not "life itself." He says that "once the vital ingredient—some kind genetic molecule—is in place, true Darwinian selection can follow, and complex life emerges as the eventual consequence." The pivotal word, obviously, is "emerges." What does that word mean?

Merriam-Webster gives four definitions. "1: To become manifest 2: to rise from or as if from an enveloping fluid: come out into view 3: to rise from an obscure or inferior position or condition 4: to come into being through evolution." Number four tells us nothing, really. If something "comes into being," where was it before? In "non-being"? If something does not exist, can we say that it does something, that it comes, or goes, or turns handsprings?

Teilhard de Chardin took this problem seriously. In his magnum opus, *The Phenomenon of Man*, he insisted that there must be an "inside" to absolutely everything. "In the world," he wrote, "nothing could ever burst forth as final across the different thresholds succes-

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sively traversed by evolution (however critical they be) which has not already existed in an obscure and primordial way. If the organic had not existed on earth from the first moment at which it was possible, it would never have begun later." That is, the "inside" of every atom must be some minute fragment of life and consciousness if some massive aggregate of atoms is to have what we recognize as life and consciousness. Something that he calls "pre-life" must be right there in the big bang. There must have been some minute, instantaneous flick of life in the beryllium and helium.

We are by no means out of the woods, though. I mentioned earlier that Dawkins did not pause to define "life," and I think he is in good company in this regard. It certainly seems one of those things that counts but that cannot be counted, cannot be quantified. Merriam-Webster offers no less than twenty definitions, the first being the one most relevant to our present concerns. "1a: the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body b: a principle or force that is considered to underlie the distinctive quality of animate beings—compare VITALISM 1c: an organismic state characterized by capacity for metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction." Webster defines it as "that property or quality of plants and animals that distinguishes them from inorganic matter of dead organisms; specf., the cellular biochemical activity or processes of an organism, characterized by the ingestion of nutrients, the storage and use of energy, the excretion of wastes, growth, reproduction, etc."

This strikes me as hopelessly muddled. With apologies to Gertrude Stein, a "quality" is not a "principle" is not a "force" is not a "state" is not a "property" is not an "activity" is not "processes." This muddle is intrigu-

ing. We are constantly encountering life, and for the most part it is not all that hard to tell a living body from a dead one. There really is a lot of life around. We seem to think it is pretty important. You'd think that sooner or later, someone would have figured out what it is. Obviously, no one has figured out a way to measure it. It would seem to be the quintessential example of something that counts, but that cannot be counted. If it causes such activities as the ingestion of nutrients, the storage and use of energy, the excretion of wastes, growth, reproduction, etc., modeling it as a force is surely worth a try.

Turning back to the big bang, then,

**There really is a lot of life around. We seem to think it is pretty important. You'd think that sooner or later, someone would have figured out what it is.**

Swimme and Tucker present a picture of incredible energy, incredible power, channeling itself along a course a millionth of a percent wide, in the direction of constantly creating relationships. In other words, the precision of this power seems to be matched by what we could call its restlessness. There is a manifest instability to the relationships to which it gives rise. It keeps happening over and over again, on increasingly large scales, requiring increasing spans of time. The balance between differentiation and integration appears to be dynamic, not static. One of my favorite images of this is the posture of sprinters as they leave the starting blocks. They are leaning forward at about a forty-five degree angle; and they are precisely balanced because they are accelerating. If you want to run for the two-plus hours of a marathon, your posture will be far closer to vertical.

This dynamic balance is maintained

by the most ingenious mechanism of bipedal locomotion, otherwise known as alternating feet. This is just one of the many useful functions of bilateral or "left-right" symmetry. A statement in Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man* leads me to suspect that this may have a molecular basis. "Biologists have noted," he writes, "that according to the chemical group to which they belong, the molecules incorporated into living matter are all asymmetrical in the same way, that is to say if a pencil of light is passed through them, they all turn the plane of the beam in the same direction—either they are all right-rotating or all left-rotating according to the group taken." Could bilateral symmetry be another feature that could never have burst forth unless it had "already existed in an obscure and primordial way?"

I don't know; but I am moderately familiar with the bilateral symmetry of the human brain, and find it striking that the left hemisphere seems to specialize in differentiation and the right hemisphere in integration. I am aware also that gender differentiation and sexual reproduction are regarded as essential to genetic variation, making bipedal locomotion a kind of parable for evolution itself. The whole question of gender difference and similarity is presently in ferment, which is potentially a very good thing.

From a Swedenborgian point of view, this is a huge subject. According to *Marriage Love*, the love of marriage is "the fundamental love of all heavenly and spiritual loves and therefore of all earthly loves" (§57). We're talking, after all, about the marriage of divine love and divine wisdom. This is the heart of the matter, what "the journey of the universe" is all about. If the ultimate purpose of creation is "a heaven from the human race" (*Divine Providence* 323), a heaven where "there is a sharing by everyone with each individ-

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ual and by each individual with everyone" (*Heaven and Hell* 399) and where (*Divine Providence* 42), then we could expect that "love of marriage" to have showed itself "in an obscure and primordial way" right from the get-go.

It seems to me that evolutionist Edward Wilson found himself driven in this direction. In *The Social Conquest of Earth*, he constantly relies on the traditional principle of competition as the driving force of evolution, but from time to time he recognizes the survival value of cooperation. He winds up advocating what he calls "inclusive fitness" as the kind of "fitness" necessary for "the survival of the fittest," and comes out with a couple of rather remarkable sentences. "First, group-level traits, including cooperativeness, empathy, and patterns of networking, have been found to be heritable in humans—that is, they vary genetically in some degree from one person to the next. And second, cooperation and unity manifestly affect the survival of groups that are competing."

I find this encouraging, but cannot explain why at this point he makes no mention of the possibility of groups cooperating with each other rather than competing. I am with him in his fulminations against religious dogmatism, but when he writes, "No Protestant missionary ever advises his flock to consider Roman Catholicism or Islam as a possibly superior alternative. He must by implication declare them inferior," he is simply, ignorantly, wrong. He is openly alarmed by climate warming, industrial pollution, and habitat destruction, but apparently blind to the extent to which these are rooted in the illusion that science will enable us to conquer our entire environment. He actually has one whole paragraph about the good things that religion has done over the millennia, but that apparently does not weigh in

his scales of overall evaluation.

Only at the very end of the book does he suggest that some hypothetical extraterrestrials might have been wiser than we, having found out "that the immense problems of their evolving civilizations could not be solved by competition among religious faiths, or ideologies, or warrior nations. They discovered that great problems demand great solutions, rationally achieved by cooperation among whatever factions divided them."

Given this indeterminacy, the usefulness of modeling the whole as goal-oriented gets becomes more and more appealing; and it certainly is a concept "understandable in broad principle by

**... the goal on our own infinitesimal scale is a world in which individuals, communities, and nations find their unique gifts in ways that relate them supportively to the unique gifts of others.**

everyone." The big bang can be seen as aimed very precisely at each one of us singly and all of us together, and we are constrained to be or become our distinctive selves and to form relationships with each other in ways that help others be and become their own distinctive, interrelated selves. Can we then model it as purposeful?

Only if we think of a purposefulness of such superiority that, compared with it, all the purposefulness of human beings is an "utterly insignificant reflection." This requires a recognition that on the global scale, the predictive power of a model will be difficult to test, perhaps impossible. In that case, we should not expect the model of evolution by natural selection to predict the future in a way that any of us can check.

To summarize, then, I believe that a plausible "unified theory" or mod-

el could be constructed on the premise that the source of the universe is "life itself," provided we keep reminding ourselves that we don't really know what life is, and that we never will for the simple reason that we can't see it from the outside. We can model it as powerful. We may find it useful to model it as goal oriented, and that goal can be modeled as maintaining a very precise, constructive tension between differentiation and integration, an omnipresent focus equally visible at the inorganic, the biological, the ecological, and the interpersonal levels—and, very importantly, at the international level as well. There is then no need to assume that, as Dawkins seems to assume, the rules changed with the advent of life, that this was when for the first time "the vital conditions for natural selection first came about." Differentiation and integration seem to be characteristic on all scales of inorganic and organic forms alike; and the goal on our own infinitesimal scale is a world in which individuals, communities, and nations find their unique gifts in ways that relate them supportively to the unique gifts of others.

This model does stand squarely with creationists in that it involves a flat reversal of radical materialism. That is, while materialism regards life as an epiphenomenon of matter, it proposes that we regard matter as an epiphenomenon of life. As long as this is a matter of dogma versus dogma, we can expect nothing but argument. Only if we can think and speak in terms of appearances of truth or model-dependent realism can we hope for mutual appreciation and constructive comparison.

Lastly, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow find their "model-dependent realism" demanded by the "paradoxes" posed by quantum physics. We Swedenborgians would do well to face up to a paradox of our very own, the theological version of the

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## Passages

### New Members

Rev. David C. Brown welcomed **Donnie Lynn Haigh, Gregory Vachon Grant, Laurie Ann Pelayo, Maire Preciosa Wakayama, Vanessa Latrice Harrill, Bettina Ogletree Arnold, Karen Thompson, and Gabriel Santiago Estrada** as at-large members of the Pacific Coast Association on August 1, 2012.

### Deaths



**A m a r a  
G l o r i o -  
s o B r o w n**  
transitioned peacefully into the spiritual world on August 7, 2012, at age 41. She is

survived by her loving husband Rev. David Brown, their two children Mikayla and Kai, and her extended family. Thank you for all your prayers and support over the past several months.

Amara's celebration of life service was held in Wayfarers Chapel on August 17, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell presiding. It was a beautiful day, filled with love, great music, and even hula dancers to celebrate the life of Amara.

Amara means Brilliant Star—and many other things in various languages throughout the world. In 1999, this brilliant star crossed my path at the International Youth Hostel of Waikiki on the island of Oahu. We had both decided to take a tour of the rainforest hosted by the hostel. And it was on this journey through the rainforest and to Paradise Falls that a spark ignited. As I reflect on these moments, it is all surreal—like a dream. It was the first time I had experienced love at first sight and so deeply. More accurately, there was a

specific moment that it happened for both of us. It was on the lanai of the hostel that night, when we sat down to talk that I had the feeling of stepping into a vortex of pure love. Gazing into each other's eyes, we knew something rare was happening. But alas, she had to return to her home in San Francisco, and I was about to begin my Master of Science in Information Systems program on the island. We worked out the details of being together and ended up at Pacific School of Religion and the Swedenborgian House of Studies in Berkeley by the following autumn.

At the time, she was working as a therapist at a group home for severely emotionally disturbed inner-city youth in San Francisco. I was amazed by her ability to work with this extremely challenging group and was in awe of her devotion to the children. No matter how hard some of these kids looked and acted, she was always able to see through that exterior to the divine spark of goodness within that just wanted to be loved unconditionally. I fell in love with this part of her too.

In 2006, after my ordination, we moved to Redondo Beach, as I became a minister at Wayfarers Chapel. Life became busier with the arrival of Mikayla in 2007 and then Kai in 2010.

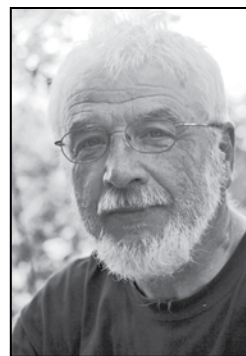
Amara continues watch over the children from the spiritual world. We as a family talk openly about this reality, and it does bring some comfort to the children; but it is still an incredibly difficult time for all of us. We miss Amara dearly.

In lieu of flowers, a fund was set up for the children: <https://sites.google.com/site/amarascontinuinglegacy/>

—David Brown

**Richard (Rick) F. Phinney** (69) was released into the spiritual world after a lengthy illness on August 12, 2012, in Wareham, Massachusetts. He leaves behind his four children, Dawn Crowe, Sean Phinney, Rebekah Greenwood,

and Benjamin Phinney and six grandchildren: Phoebe, Brendan, Caileigh, and Owen Crowe; Caroline Phinney; and Serena Greenwood, with a seventh expected in the fall.



He loved the beauty of nature and caring for animals; he was awestruck by the stars. Rick continued that love in his college education, majoring in Wildlife Management at the University of Maine in Orono. He then served as a captain in the Air Force for four years. However, his love for New England drew him home, where he worked as a foreman for thirty-four years at Beaton's Cranberry Growers Service before retiring in 2008.

He loved music and musicals and spent any free time expressing his creativity making model ships and rockets, building fishing rods, and creating fishing flies and lures; his work was precise and beautiful. He was an avid fresh water fisherman, and spent all year looking forward to his family vacations in Maine. He spent what added up to years on Lakes Kezar and Androscoggin, as well as on the Saco River at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly.

Rick was an active member of the Bridgewater New Church, serving many years on the Church Committee as well as serving on the Blairhaven Committee and multiple terms on the Nominating Committee for the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. He grew to deeply love his church family.

A memorial service was held at the Bridgewater New Church on September 1, the Rev. Susannah Currie officiating, with many family and friends in attendance to celebrate Rick's life and entrance into the spiritual world. ☩

### 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 questionings 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.

Swedenborg shared in his theological writings 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.

### The Big Bang and I

*Continued from page 126*

philosophical paradox of determinism and free will, most bluntly stated in *Divine Providence* 191: "Our own prudence is nothing—it only seems to be something, as it should. Rather, divine providence is universal because it extends to the smallest details." We are to live with this paradox daily, to turn our backs on evils "as if of ourselves," but with an acknowledgment that in reality, the Lord is doing everything. If we do so faithfully, long enough, we will find ourselves in that blessed state where "we believe the way things really are, that everything good comes from God and everything evil from hell," and no longer "take credit for the good within us or blame for the evil" (*Heaven and Hell* 302), and where "the more closely we are united to the Lord, the more clearly we seem to have our own identity, and yet the more obvious it is to us that we belong to the Lord."

This leaves a great many questions unanswered, which I believe is a Very Good Thing. I hope that it is in some measure "understandable in broad principle by everyone," and that the questions it raises are constructive ones. I would hope especially that this model, this "appearance of truth," would function as truth "because there is good in it": and on both counts I cannot do better than John Titus, who experienced it as "clarity of mind, and a deep feeling of interconnectedness." The mind's clarity separates, the heart's feeling of interconnectedness unites. It is a dynamic, quintessentially creative paradox, one that takes us all the way back to square one, when in the words of Swimme and Tucker, "Even from the first moments, our universe moved toward creating relationships." ☩

The Rev. Dr. George Dole is pastor of the Bath (Maine) New Church and a professor at the Swedenborgian House of Studies.

### Angels Coming to Urbana University

***In Company with Angels* exhibit November 10–December 30, 2012**

On November 10, 2012, Rev. Susannah Currie, pastor of the Bridgewater (Massachusetts) New Jerusalem Church will present ***In Company with Angels: Seven Rediscovered Tiffany Windows***, a program on the history of the restored windows at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio. On November 11, Rev. Ken Turley will discuss "Angel Music," which he and his wife Laurie composed and recorded to accompany the exhibit,

For information contact Julie McDaniel at 937-484-1337 or [jmcdaniel@urbana.edu](mailto:jmcdaniel@urbana.edu).