



## Superhero SPLATz at Manna House Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

Frigid single-digit January temperatures in LaPorte, Indiana, over the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend could not thwart eighteen Super Powered Lovable Almost Teens (SPLATz) from descending on Manna House for a fun-filled Superhero retreat. Warm friendships, lovingly prepared food, heartfelt discussions, laughter, and numerous hugs proved able to melt even the coldest villain.

We began our sessions talking about superpowers and how they relate to individual special gifts and talents. We explored how the intersection of our passion, our talent and what the world needs lead to the blissful state of life purpose, contentment, and meaning. Then we considered the question, “What are superheroes?” We defined them as individ-



SPLATz as superheros.

uals with superior power *and* superior character. We compared the power aspect of the superhero with wisdom and the character aspect with love (as opposed to a super villain, someone with power but lacking character).

Next, we discussed masks and disguises. We talked about why superheroes have them, and how we too need masks in this world to protect our spiritual wellbeing. We discussed how our masks disappear in the next life and how our true inner nature becomes our outward appearance. Then the SPLATz made masks and bracers decorated to highlight individual loves and talents.

This was followed by a discussion of

shields and how we can develop spiritual shields by surrounding ourselves with things that make us happy and loving people that protect us and care for us. Spiritual shields serve as a defense against falsity that we experience (both inner and outer). The SPLATz then created colorful metallic shields for their superhero costumes.

At this point we turned to the Bible for inspiration and had sessions on the Old and New Testaments. We explored some famous powerful people from the Bible with superpowers, like Noah (animal control and longevity), Joseph (dream interpretation), Moses (miracle worker, lawgiver), and Samson

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The “Blob” was a force to be reckoned with in CatchPhrase (clockwise from left: Christa, Bella, Jolene, Julia)

**The Editor's Desk**



**Enlightenment**

It may seem strange that religion has achieved such prominence in American politics, given that the Constitution was approved by Founding Fathers who agreed on language written by the deists among them. As deists, they felt that religion occupied a separate sphere from government, and by implication, politics. Deists believed in the existence of a supreme being but rejected the notion that the supreme being intervenes in or interacts with human affairs. Their statement to this effect was to forbid the establishment of religion by the government. Theists, in contrast, believe that God intervenes in human affairs and has a personal relationship with individuals and groups.

This separation of church and state was a hallmark of Enlightenment thinking, embedded to varying degrees in all Western nation-states. The Enlightenment was, in part, a movement to liberate mankind from the yoke of the church-state, the unholy union of religious and royal authority that required allegiance and conformity to aligned church and state. Rational beings could not pursue demo-

cratic government without first eliminating the sanctioning of government by God through His putative earthly representatives.

Although enlightened thinkers shaped the Constitution, it is incorrect to assume that most Americans were deists. The majority of Americans, then as now, either participated in organized religion or professed identity with organized religion or the doctrines of organized religion.

The Enlightenment was the intellectual basis of Western culture, but it does not figure in modern American culture or politics. The non-theistic population consists not of deists but rather of the non-affiliated (with organized religion) who say they are "spiritual but not religious" and non-believers who are atheists or agnostic.

The tension between the "theists" and the "deists" has helped shape American political divisions throughout its history. The alignment of these two types with liberalism or conservatism in political parties has varied over the years, dependent on many factors, prominently including economic conditions, the volume of immigration, and the response to perceived threats from without and within.

What is the place of religious belief in a democracy? How do "theists" recon-

cile conflicts between their religious beliefs and their governing principles and laws? How do they reconcile conflicts between their religious identities and their political identities? The abolitionists broke laws supporting slavery because they were Christians who believed slavery was a grave sin. But the extreme of letting one's religious convictions trump their allegiance to law is a theocracy such as Iran, where laws are overridden by the supreme holy man and court decisions are governed by religious, not secular, law. Clearly, a theocracy, or the precedence of religious law over secular law, is not what the Founding Fathers had in mind.

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **April 1:** Association membership lists due
- **April 15:** Annual reports due
- **April 16:** General Council Conference-Call meeting
- **April 22–23:** CSS Board meeting • Berkeley, California
- **June 29–July 3:** Annual Convention • Urbana University, Urbana, Ohio

the Messenger

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## Letter from the President



*2015–16: The Year of Spiritual Uses:  
The Call to Be a Blessing*

Dear Friends,

Here it is the middle of January, and with our first snow I finally feel like it is really winter. Not a week ago we had a whole series of days that were in the fifties. There were people walking around in shorts and sandals in January! It was a bit disconcerting. But now we have a blanket of eight inches of fresh snow, and while the sun is out, the thermometer is just barely above zero. I'm here in front of the warm and cheery wood stove, and things are back to normal.

In a few short days I will be leaving for the San Francisco Bay Area to participate in the CAM (Committee on Admission to the Ministry) meetings with our seminary students and to attend the CSS (Center for Swedenborgian Studies, recently SHS, once SSR) week-long intensive course, Swedenborgian Biblical Spirituality. This will be an opportunity for our distance students to explore Swedenborgian concepts face-to-face with our seminary faculty—an exciting opportunity on many different levels.

Annual Convention 2016 will be held in Urbana, Ohio, June 29 through July 3 at Urbana University (UU). Urbana has had a close relationship with the Swedenborgian Church since its inception, and throughout the many stages of its existence this relationship has continued to evolve. Much work and many improvements have been completed on the campus.

The new leadership at UU has expressed an enthusiastic wish to continue and grow its relationship with the Swedenborgian Church. The approach to

education and personal growth that was put forth by Alice Archer Sewell (the subject of the book *Stay By Me Roses*), which was at the time (mid-1800s) quite radical, now resonates quite strongly with the approach being developed at UU. In short, the education process is intended to develop the whole person, not just cram in information on the specific subject of a student's major. Rather, the specific focus of the major is complemented and supported by a breadth of study complemented by many opportunities to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, while the terminology might not be used, the educational process at UU is intended to further each student's regeneration as a spiritual being living in and becoming a useful contributor to the heavenly aspects of life here on earth, this material arena created by God for that very purpose.

We have a great debt of gratitude for the wonderfully effective and persistent work of Rev. Betsy Coffman over the past twenty years serving as pastoral presence at the Urbana Church and as chaplain for UU. It is my sincere hope that this longstanding relationship between our two institutions will continue to grow deeper and more vital to the reciprocal benefit of both organizations and the many and diverse people that are their living force.

It is also around this time that we begin making preparations for our Annual Convention session at Urbana University. Through a series of circumstances too complicated and multi-layered to describe here, it has fallen to the Executive Committee of General Council to serve as the hosts of this year's Convention. I welcome the opportunity to contribute even more fully to what will be my last convention as president. And, to be consistent with my approach to the role of president over the past six years, I welcome any input, suggestions, or requests anyone may have that will make our annual gathering a more useful and enjoyable experience for all. But I must hold this caveat: I cannot promise to incorporate every suggestion exactly as received, and if I do

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# San Francisco: the Secret World of Joseph Worcester

BY CAROL LAWSON & ROBERT F. LAWSON

*This excerpt from Enterprising Angels: Impacts of the Swedenborgian Movement in Nineteenth-Century America, to be published by the Swedenborg Foundation, is taken from the chapter on San Francisco. All sources will be available in the publication.*

*Rev. Joseph Worcester was a Swedenborgian minister who arrived in San Francisco in 1863. He had considered becoming an architect, and maintained a strong interest in architecture for the rest of his life. After the 1890s, he became spiritual leader to many young artists and professionals. He was a strong influence on architects of the late nineteenth century, including Earnest Coxhead, Willis Polk, A. Page Brown, Bernard Maybeck, and Albert Schweinfurth.*

When his end came in his beloved California, this modest man who had devoted his life to others—and had disenfranchised himself from his family’s monopoly of New England Swedenborgian polity, jump-started American Arts & Crafts architecture on the West Coast that spread eastward, established a model half-way house for San Quentin ex-convicts, guarded the welfare of orphaned boys, and was the acknowledged leader within the San Franciscan inner circle of artists and architects—this man left life as he had lived it, quietly and with dignity.

A devout Swedenborgian, having grown up in his Reverend father’s Boston home on Beacon Hill, Joseph understood the close proximity of the spiritual world. It was simply a matter of one’s receptivity to the divine, recognizing not only that earthly and spiritual planes overlap and coexist, but also their lively points of connectivity.

Highly refined and sensitive, once the art teacher at a Swedenborgian prep school in Massachusetts, Joseph believed one could connect with divinity through nature and arts. Thoreau, Emerson, and the Transcendental practitioners of this dictum, were an accustomed element of Joseph’s boyhood. So too, was the idea that angels were ever-present. Thus, it would have been disappointing when on his deathbed if they had not come for him: two guardian angels, that is.

Joseph’s nephew, Dr. Alfred Worcester, came to San Francisco in late 1912 to take care of his “nearest and dearest” uncle. Joseph, going on 77, whose health had never been good, was suffering from anemia and constant diarrhea. Sensing his time was near and believing self-praise a sin, Joseph was intent on vanishing, leaving no earthly trace behind. To achieve this, he made Alfred his confidant, asking him to monitor the constant flow of visitors, take final

messages and directives to various recipients, and to burn packets of letters and other personal papers. So much personal history was consigned to oblivion in this manner that



Courtesy of Ted Bosely

*The only known photograph of Joseph Worcester as an adult shows him shepherding orphan boys outside his cottage “aerie” on Russian Hill. It has been suggested the date is May 6, 1908, on the special occasion for watching Admiral Dewey’s Great White Fleet steam into San Francisco Bay. This may explain the care with which all the boys are dressed.*

the two men were alarmed at times by the blaze and feared they would set the chimney on fire. Sitting at his uncle’s desk, Alfred would ask about dispatching this document or that. Joseph’s humility and modesty were real. Except for a few sermons to help his successor at his San Francisco Swedenborgian



William Worcester Briggs

*Thomas Worcester family (1847),  
Eleven-year-old Joseph seated at left*

church, and some photographic and architecture scrapbooks—everything else was consumed. A careful review of the local papers from this period, personal correspondence from Joseph that escaped burning, and his nephew Alfred’s memoir of his uncle reveal a private life of which Joseph’s closest

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## Perfection

As I went for my morning prayer I smelled the coffee and took a cup outside to savor while I looked at the colors of the sky. The aroma steaming from the cup supplied me with a familiar comfort.

Then, the fresh scent of the air after the rain pulled me away from the coffee and took me deeper.

The birds sang softly.

I could not drink the coffee.

The moment demanded that I sit.

I didn’t mind the damp soaking through my robe onto my skin. Perfection had caught me.

I surrendered.

—Eric Allison

*Continued from page 16*

friends would have never guessed.

In a dream near the end, Joseph found himself walking along a beautiful road. He was a little boy again and had in his bundle a jackknife, something that he had longed for but could not have at that time in his life. He was so happy and carefree, he was whistling out of pure joy. As he came to a turn in the road, Joseph was suddenly standing next to a young man seated at his easel, painting. Watching him at his work, Joseph was reminded of his good friend, the painter William Keith, who had passed on a few years earlier. The young man was rendering the landscape more beautifully than Joseph had ever seen Keith execute. Shyly, Joseph told the young man that he used to watch a friend of his paint pictures. “Why,” said the painter, “I used to have a friend sit by me while I painted, and you remind me of him.” With that profound meeting, the dying Joseph awoke.

At one point in his vigil, Alfred was writing home, saying that his uncle seemed to be holding his own and might last for several more weeks. Then the second angel appeared—a visit from Joseph’s father, the Rev. Thomas Worcester, dead more than thirty-five years. Joseph started to rise from his couch, his face radiant, saying, “Why, Alfred, here is your grandfather.” Alfred, not seeing anyone, did not know what to say, so Joseph asked anxiously, “Did you not see him; why, I recognized his footfall even before he came in?” After Alfred admitted that he had seen nothing, Joseph became quite earnest, saying, “That was no vision. I was never more widely awake.” After this incident, Alfred was convinced his uncle’s end was near at hand.



Courtesy of Ted Boseley

One of the earliest known photographs of the interior of Joseph Worcester’s church at the time it was dedicated in 1895, equipped with its fabled rush-bottomed, hand-made Mission chairs. William Keith’s paintings of the four seasons have not yet been hung. Supported by madrone logs with the bark on and decorated with leaves and branches from nature because Worcester believed, as did Swedenborg, that the ancients worshiped in forest groves.

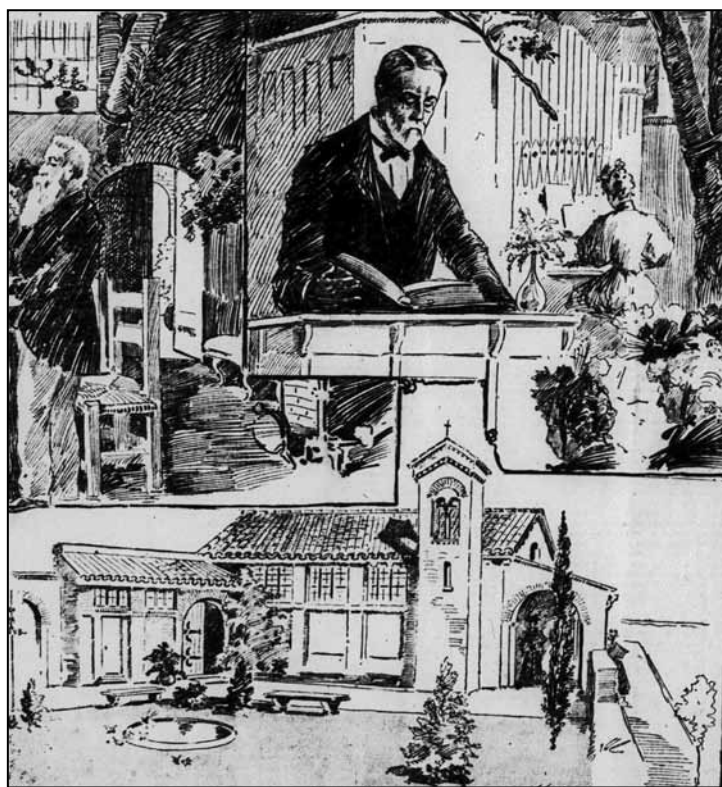
Joseph’s father, a powerful proponent for the Swedenborgian movement, had intended that Joseph follow his two brothers as an ordained pastor, leading one of the Massachusetts Swedenborgian churches. He opposed his youngest son’s departure in 1863 for the wild West. Ten years later, at what would be their final parting, Thomas scolded Joseph, saying he hoped his

son “would never have to bear the suffering he now was causing.” For many years, Joseph suffered from his father’s sting. Now, following his father’s visit, Joseph could see from his father’s shining face that all had been forgiven.

And so it was William Keith and Joseph’s father—two spirits at polar opposites—who were ready to greet Joseph as he entered the spirit world. Thomas Worcester, rooted in a New England conservative past, and William Keith, painting the new Western landscape, showed up for the quiet, yet broadly influential, leader. ☩

Carol Lawson was managing editor for *American Journal of Pathology*; a publications officer, U.S. Public Health Service; public information and press officer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; then, executive publisher for the American Birding Association’s magazine. She edited *Chrysalis* for the Swedenborg Foundation, of which she is a director emerita. She holds an MFA in Literature from Bennington College.

Rob Lawson lives in Rockport, Maine. After working for Simon & Schuster as an editor he worked for Maine Public Broadcasting as a fundraiser. He continues to write, edit, and raise funds for worthy organizations.



*This image (which appeared in the San Francisco Examiner Monday, September 30, 1895) is composed of two drawings by Harry Nappenbach, staff artist for the newspaper, whose signature was usually NAP. Both William Keith and Nappenbach were members of San Francisco’s elite Bohemian Club. Under its headline, “A HOUSE THAT TEACHES. HONEST, BECAUSE IT HAS NO PAINT, NOR PLASTER, NOR LATHS,” went on to say, “The building itself is a lesson—it teaches truth and honesty, this little church at the corner of Lyon and Washington Streets, in which a gentle and venerable minister teaches that the sacred Scriptures are the true word of God, accommodated to the understanding of man—the perpetual medium between heaven and earth...”*

## 2015 SCYL Almont Winter Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

Nineteen teenagers, including six first-timers, braved the cold and forged icy roads to attend the late December Swedenborgian Church Youth League Winter Retreat at Almont. Our topic was aligned with the Swedenborgian Annual Convention theme of Spiritual Use. Rev. Catherine Lauber, Rev. Jennifer Tafel, and I led sessions on discovering our gifts, purpose, vocation, and mission. We discussed the struggles and hardships we face as we strive to find meaning and value in our lives and talked about the rewards of satisfaction, contentment, and peace that you achieve when you live your love and bring your gifts out into the world. Following discussion, the teens meditated on finding their uses and participated in a creative visioning workshop.

In the course of the evening session, I was touched and astounded by the specific dreams and aspirations the teens at this retreat expressed. From Freya's seaside bakery where a portion of the profits are donated to the study and protection of marine life, to Scout's therapeutic horse ranch, to Bryce's restaurant that caters to people with special physical and emotional needs, I was in awe of the maturity, care, and concern the teens expressed in both understanding the needs of the world and discerning the ways that their individual passion and talent could be applied to critical world issues.

The retreat closed with the ceremonial Exodus to Independence Walk for our eighteen-year-olds, followed by the traditional Yule log communion service, so movingly and beautifully led by Rev. Jennifer Tafel. I extend a spe-



Winter retreat group

cial thank you to the fantastic support from staff members Lori Gayheart, Heather Oelker, Heather Jerrett-Guzik, and Lori Patana and young adults Kristina Madjerac, Nina Sasser, and Holly and Charlie Bauer. Without gifted ministers like Jenn and Catherine and the talented volunteers, these retreats would not happen and the teens would not have this incredible

experience. I am so grateful that volunteering at youth retreats is an important spiritual use for so many amazing people. The adult volunteers who worked and the teenagers who attended this retreat are truly living examples of how love in action can bring warmth and goodness into the world. ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.

### A Good Retreat

This year at the 2015 Almont Winter Retreat we learned about spiritual uses and how to apply the lessons in our lives. Although the retreat started off a little bit heavy, everyone lightened up and was very accepting and giving of opinions, facts, and ideas.

We learned that spiritual use is important because it gives you your meaning in this world and helps you to become a better person. That will benefit you and everyone around you.

Although the weather was a little bit rough, we had no power outages and none of the activities were interrupted because of it. We had a lot of fun, just like every other retreat, but personally I feel like this one was very light, restful, and informative. Everyone had a blast!

To sum things up, we learned about spiritual uses, what they mean, and how to incorporate them in our lives. We had a great time, just as usual.

—Bryce

SCYL Clear Blue Sky Editor

# 2016 SCYL Officer Elections

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2016 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) officer and chaplain elections

took place at the Almont Winter Retreat this past December. The results are:

- President: Rebekka Lange
- East Coast and Activities Officer: Freya Montesanto
- Midwest and Public Relations Officer: Riley Tishma
- Canada and Service Officer: Open
- West Coast and Fundraising & Finance Officer: Tony Kalinowski
- Editor, *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) and Communication Officer: Bryce Baker
- League Chaplain: Rev. Kit Billings

Our new team of officers remains nearly the same as last year. Four of the five officers, Bekka Lange, Riley Tishma, Freya Montesanto, and Tony Kalinowski all return for another year of service. We say goodbye to CBS editor Savannah Ellsworth and thank her for her year

of service. We also say farewell to our Canadian officer, Xavier Mercier, and thank him for his two years of service representing Canada.

A few returning officers changed



2016 SCYL Officers: Freya, Tony, Bekka, Riley and Bryce in back

position for this year.

Bekka continues in her third and final year as the very capable and organized League president. The SCYL has not had a president serve for three consecutive years since the early 1980s! We know that Bekka will continue to provide thoughtful and inspiring leadership as she prepares for her college years.



Rev. Kit Billings

Riley moves from CBS editor to Midwest officer and is our new public relations representative.

Tony slides over to West Coast rep-

resentative this year and continues as our finance officer.

Freya is now our activities officer along with continuing to represent the Eastern states.

Our Canadian officer slot is open this year. We hope to welcome a new SCYL Canadian officer soon.

We welcome Bryce Baker as our new *Clear Blue Sky* and Communication officer. Bryce is an active member of the LaPorte New Church youth group, LPNCYLS, and regularly attends teen retreats as well as Almont summer camp. Bryce has lots of great and fun ideas for the CBS Facebook page, and we

are all excited to see him put his vision into action.

We welcome Rev. Kit Billings to his first year as league chaplain, and we say goodbye to his sister, Rev. Renée Machiniak, concluding three years of service as SCYL chaplain. Renée has been wonderfully kind and inspiring working with the teens, and we know that she will continue to join us at retreats whenever possible. Kit serves the SCYL at its annual October retreat in Duxbury, Massachusetts; we look forward to his exciting year as league chaplain. Kit leads wonderful sessions with the teens, and we know he will be a great mentor, friend, and spiritual guide to for them.

Please join me in congratulating all of our 2016 SCYL officers and our league chaplain. We have an experienced, talented and caring team of teens leading the League this year. Their care for our church and for each other will help the SCYL continue to grow and thrive. I am blessed to be working with this group, and I hope that you get a chance to get to know all of them. ☺



Joey, Liv, Riley, Will and Tony in a hug train at the SCYL Winter Retreat

# Representing Our Church

## NCCC Faith and Order Convening Table



BY DAVID FEKETE

**W**hat does it mean to represent our church at a National Council of Christian Churches (NCCC) meet-

ing? It means dining with your colleagues; it means walking back to the hotel together, chatting on the way; it means sharing stories about where you live, what you do, and how your journey took you there; it means reading and writing learned papers; it means letting people meet a real Swedenborgian. While many of these activities may not seem profound, they are very important.

Surprisingly, many Christians have heard of the Swedenborgian Church and many have preconceived prejudices about and, indeed, against Swedenborgians. This without having met any. There is some interest in our doctrines, church polity, and liturgy. But what I think really matters is for our fellow Christians to meet a real Swedenborgian person. When they do so, and find him or her to be an OK, in fact, normal person; they are relieved and welcome the Swedenborgian into their world. So, seemingly trivial activities may well be the convincing media through which our church is evaluated—not so much our stance on the Trinity.

The National Council of Churches is divided into four “convening tables.” Convening tables are groups that are organized according to the task they undertake. The four convening tables are: as follows:

1) Education and Leadership Formation

2) Faith and Order

3) Interfaith Relations

4) Joint Advocacy and Justice

I represent our church in the Faith and Order Convening Table. Our task is to explore the various issues that the NCCC brings up according to faith and doctrines, and church order.

I don't mean to give the impression that all we do is socialize at Faith and Order meetings. We put in long hours working on academic and doctrinal papers and books. Faith and Order is divided into four study groups. Mine is on the Bible as it relates to the issues brought up by the governing board of the NCCC. The study groups met for twelve hours, in three four-hour sessions over two days. My first night at the NCCC Faith and Order Convening Table, I was given four twenty-page papers to read through for discussion the next day. My group criticized the four papers, giving each paper two hours of comments and analysis. By the end of the day-and-a-half of meetings, I was exhausted.

I volunteered to write a similar kind of paper. We are looking at what the Bible and our tradition have to say about mass incarceration. I was drawn to write about the prophet Amos.

There are deep-seated structural problems with our society, as with the society of Amos. In our society, there are whole neighborhoods that generate children who seem fated to jail. There are schools with metal detectors at their entrances. There are children who walk through gang territory to get to and home from school. There are students without computers, which renders them unemployable in today's world. These and many more details led to the formation of an organization called “The Cradle to Prison Pipe-

line” which seeks to educate and intervene in issues of this kind. Almost all the problems above are due to poverty and race. They are indicators of our society ailing, failing, showing signs of sickness. Were Amos alive today, his message might be much the same. The prophet saw similar abuses in his society:

... because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth . . . (Amos 2:6–7)

Therefore because you trample upon the poor . . . (Amos 5:11)

O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth! (Amos 5:7)

... you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. (Amos 5:12)

I'm not sure that my study group is completely sold on my ideas about Amos. I think that a good part of my paper will be its own sales pitch. If I am successful in conveying my vision of the relevance of Amos to American society, my paper—or parts of it—will be included in a book to be published by the NCCC by Paulist Press.

I attended the very first meeting of the Faith and Order Convening Table a year and a half ago. As might be expected, things were disorganized and inchoate. At that time I didn't see the value of my continued participation, given the way things looked then. Now, our convening table seems better organized with a clearer idea about what its purpose is, and how to achieve that purpose. I now see considerable value in continuing to work with the National Council of Churches in the Faith and Order Convening Table. We will meet again in May, when it will be

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## SPLATz

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(strongman). And of course, we spent an entire morning talking about Jesus as a superhero, with his miracles, healings, and teachings. We learned how Jesus came into the world with the message of love and discovered how love has the power to conquer all evil and falsity. The SPLATz made capes after this session to complete their superhero costumes.

Rev. Jennifer Tafel led a Sunday afternoon session on the superhero Shaman and information about shamanism and medicine. Jenn gave each youth a quartz crystal to keep. Following Jenn's session the SPLATz created felt-laced medicine pouches to safely hold their crystals and any other treasures they may find along their way.



Rev. Jenn & Heather serve up some "super juice"

We closed the sessions on Sunday night by reviewing ten lessons we can learn from the superheroes. Then we took some time to share personal joys and concerns and bask in the loving advice and friend-

ship of this special gathering. The SPLATz departed with their own custom-made superhero costumes as a reminder of the gifts, talents, and abilities to heal that can help others and combat evil.

I would like to thank the LaPorte New Church for welcoming us in with so much love and generosity. I would also like to thank Lori Gayheart, Rev.



Who is that masked man? (Oliver!)

Jennifer Tafel, and Heather Oelker for volunteering their valuable time, gifts, and talents to this fantastic retreat and these amazing children. These volunteers are true superheroes! ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.

## Ten Lessons from the Superheroes

- If you get knocked down, get up. *You will get knocked down and beat up in life, but you don't have to stay down. You can rise again, as many times as you need to.*
- Don't attack someone unless you or someone or something you love dearly is threatened. Bullying, picking on someone, teasing, and fighting only lead to more trouble. *Be careful and select your battles wisely with reserve and good reason.*
- Outfits should be functional and snazzy. *Gadgets and accessories are fun and helpful. It is good to look good and have fun, useful toys. Be proud of who you are.*
- Test your powers to the limit, but know where that limit is. *We all have special powers. Know yours and use them as much as you can. They will get stronger that way. But all powers have limitations. Know what you simply cannot do with yours.*
- Stay away from things that take your power away, and know your weaknesses. *Do not surround yourself with negative influences, people, or things. It will only bring you down.*
- Choose your allies wisely and carefully. *Where would Batman be without Alfred or Robin? Make good friends with those who are good and trustworthy.*
- Protect your secret identity and your public image. *Protect the things about yourself that really matter to your heart. Only reveal them when safe and appropriate so you don't hurt yourself unnecessarily. Show your best side to others and let them see your beauty and power.*
- Take action to make things better. *You have a gift. Use it to better the world.*
- Be ready at anytime to be called into action. *You never know when you will be needed to help.*
- "With great power, comes great responsibility. (Uncle Ben, *Spider Man*)"



Sierra & Christa model their masks while learning about their spiritual meaning

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my turn to present a paper and to field comments and criticisms of my work.

I think it is important for Swedenborgians to continue to participate and contribute to the ongoing work of the National Council of Churches if for no other reason than that the National Council of Churches needs to meet real Swedenborgians. ☩

Rev. David Fekete is pastor of the Edmonton, Alberta, Church of the Holy City.

## Reflection

## Haunted by Spirits

### Searching for Old Books by Dead Philosophers

The late Eugene Taylor was an active member of the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem and a lifelong William James scholar. The following article is a bittersweet essay prompted by a visit to the sale of the books from his vast collection. For many years, Taylor gave an annual lecture at Cambridge Chapel on subjects related to William James, psychology and psychiatry, and Swedenborgian thought. This article first appeared in the November 23, 2015 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education. Thanks to Nancy Little for bringing it to the attention of the Messenger.

BY JOHN KAAG

I have a passion for libraries. Not the big public ones or the swanky Ivy League ones, but the little personal ones that are still scattered through the Northeast. Boston is full of them. The grungier the better. Fungus, dirt, scat, words—it's a delicious mix, a reminder that ideas can still be handled and felt. Most libraries don't satisfy that desire for physical contact at all. But one did. And I fell in love with it.

It didn't even look like a library. It used to be the Hathaway Bakery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, wedged between Richdale Avenue and the train tracks that lead to Porter Square. A long brick snake of a building that a century ago was the home of one of the biggest bread factories in New England. Now it housed a discreet, tight-knit community of creatives: architects, writers, and entrepreneurs who had been renting offices and storage space for forty years.

But you would never know that from the building's exterior. When I arrived on a February afternoon a couple of years ago, it seemed vacant. Its glazed windows and solid steel doors looked like they hadn't been opened for ages. As I parked my Subaru, I checked the directions. Maybe I'd misheard. But no, this was it: 33 Richdale.

Victor Kestenbaum is a kindred spirit: He likes to grub around old

places, searching for valuable things that other people have discarded as worthless. Over the past forty years or so, Vic has become very good at it. An emeritus professor of philosophy at Boston University, he spent his career writing about classical American philosophy, arguing that the insights of thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James had been discarded prematurely. We initially bonded over that conviction and discovered that we had a common love for all things dilapidated.

**Taylor didn't just study James. He became him, down to the full beard, penetrating eyes, and turn-of-the-century tweed. He completed the reincarnation in 1979 by giving James's reconstructed lectures at the Swedenborg Chapel . . . .**

Vic had called the night before: "They're selling Eugene Taylor's literary estate. Did you know him?"

Barely. We'd met once, at a philosophy conference. I was a freshly christened graduate student; he was on the verge of retirement. But I knew his work. He had arrived in Boston from Texas in 1977, as a graduate student in psychology, and wound up becoming a renowned scholar on the life and works of William James.



Eugene Taylor

As it happens, William James Hall—a fifteen-story Modernist monstrosity erected in 1963—is the home of Harvard's psych department, where Taylor began his doctoral research. Massive and imposing, it's the perfect place for a department that embraced James's hard-nosed, scientific brand of psychology in the second half of the twentieth century. Many people still take James, who published *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890, to be the founder of this approach to the mind. And they're not entirely wrong: He was a scientist with deep empirical commitments. But for Taylor, that was only part of James's story.

In his first year at Harvard, Taylor discovered an unpublished set of notes for the lectures that James gave at the Lowell Institute in 1896: "On Exceptional Mental States." Very "exceptional"—telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic writing, the experience of phantom limbs, the occasional and uncanny sense of the unconscious.

Needless to say, this stuff is no longer studied in William James Hall. But Taylor, who would soon be appointed Harvard Divinity School's William James lecturer, became fixated. He pored over James's notes and dedicated the next two years of his life to reconstructing the lectures.

Taylor didn't just study James. He became him, down to the full beard, penetrating eyes, and turn-of-the-century tweed. He completed the reincarnation in 1979 by giving James's reconstructed lectures at the Swedenborg Chapel, an idiosyncratic, Goth-

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ic-looking thing at the edge of Harvard's campus. The Lowell lectures were equal parts philosophy, historical tribute, and mediumship, and presented James in a new light. He'd been a scientist, but also a séance sitter, a time traveler, a ghost hunter.

Lily Taylor, Gene Taylor's daughter, popped her head out of the warehouse doorway, waved me inside, and, leading me through a maze of concrete and brick, explained the fate of her father's library. After the Hathaway Bakery relocated, it had rented out parts of the Richdale warehouse for storage, artist studios, and for Taylor's ever-growing collection of books. He'd moved parts of his collection many times over the years, from apartments to storage units to basements all over New England, finally creating a library and workspace in two of the warehouse's giant granary storerooms: about 8,000 books packed into 2,000 square feet.

Taylor died in 2013 with no plan in place for his books, and the building was sold to developers a year later. The books had to go. By the end of February. So Ms. Taylor and her brother were selling the collection—for \$2 a book. Goodwill was coming at the end of the week to take the leftovers. She gestured to the rows of gray metal bookshelves: "Look around," she said. "Take what you want."

For a moment—but only a moment—I felt as if I would be stealing. Taylor had spent his life, and much of his money, buying up the literary foundations of modern psychology and classical American philosophy, as well as the earliest studies of what at the end of the nineteenth century was called "psychical research."

**For James, something important was lost: The sense that a human being is more than just a bundle of perceptions and nervous reactions, and more than just a body.**

The American Society for Psychological Research was founded in Boston in 1885. Its mission was to investigate all things supernatural. This was not some nut-job organization, but it was not altogether normal, either. One of its founders, G. Stanley Hall, had come to Harvard to do doctoral work with James in the late 1870s and

was awarded the first psychology degree in the United States. With James's support, Hall organized a group of researchers to explore the possibility of things like spirit contact, divining rods, and telepathy. By 1890, Hall had resigned from the organization, concluding that parapsychology amounted to pseudoscience. But others, like James and his close friend, the physician Henry P. Bowditch, marshaled on into the turn of the century. In 1909, James reflected on twenty-five years of ghostbusting:

At times I have been tempted to believe that the Creator has eternally intended this department of nature to remain baffling, to prompt our curiosities and hopes and suspicions, all in equal measure, so that although ghosts and clairvoyances and raps and messages from spirits are always seeming to exist and can never be fully explained away, they also can never be susceptible of full corroboration.

Despite the bafflement—or perhaps because of it—James and his fellow researchers attended the séances and mind experiments that were conducted regularly through the 1880s and 1890s. Unlike most psychics of the time, however, the members of the psychical-research society documented and published their findings. None of those were anywhere near conclusive,

but they did help to push the boundaries of science, to explore an area that science couldn't quite explain. This record became the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, for members and close associates, and the *Proceedings*, intended for the general public. Today faithful paranormalists pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to get their hands on these volumes.

And there they were: tucked into a bottom shelf of Taylor's library, lined up like so many tombstones, bound in red leather—the first run of the *Journal* and the *Proceedings*, from 1885 to 1900. These would not be going to Goodwill.

I gingerly pried out the first volume and flipped to the frontispiece: "Henry Bowditch," penned in a tight script.

Bowditch was one of the founding members of the society and also a leading physiologist at Harvard. There was no such thing as modern experimental biology in the United States before Bowditch. He set up the first proper lab for Harvard Medical School: two rooms in a rundown building on North Grove Street, right across from what now is the Liberty Hotel. (During Bowditch's time, the Liberty was the Charles Street Jail, which might explain where Bowditch got the cadavers he needed.) Bowditch was William James's senior. In fact, he'd invited the young James to join the lab and teach a class on general anatomy. James obliged, grateful for the chance to have a bit of paying work and to temporarily escape the depression he fought for most of his life.

But James was not satisfied for long. Only months after joining Bowditch, he complained that the anatomist's factual, objective approach missed something crucial in its understanding of human nature. A "fact," James wrote, "too often plays the part of a sop for the mind in studying these sciences. A man may take very short views, registering

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one fact after another as one walks on stepping stones, and never lose the conceit of his scientific function.”

For James, something important was lost: The sense that a human being is more than just a bundle of perceptions and nervous reactions, and more than just a body. He hoped that there was something ethereal, transcendent—something even ghostly—that was free from the constraints of our physical lives. This led James to experiment with nitrous oxide in the early 1880s, in the belief that psychotropics might open portals to other realms of experience.

In fact, James would come to have a personal and more serious stake in the spiritualism of the late-Victorian era. In July 1885, his eighteen-month-old son, Herman, contracted whooping cough and died. James wanted to believe that the boy was not fully gone. In September, James visited Leonora Piper, a medium who had become a Boston sensation for supposedly channeling spirits. He had his doubts about Piper but concluded that the woman might have what he called “supernormal powers.”

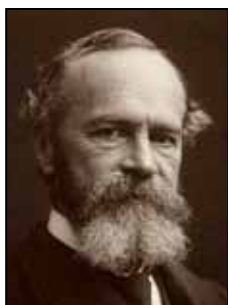
I worked my way around the room, a meticulously curated exhibit of William James’s obsession with the supernatural. Piling the *Journals* and *Proceedings* into a corner, I glanced at Ms. Taylor, who had settled into an overstuffed chair.

“Two dollars a book?”

She smiled and nodded: “That’s the deal I gave to the other buyers.”

Other buyers? My heart sank. She informed me that a few had already made the rounds, which was to say that I was getting the dregs. Some serious

cherry-picking had already occurred. There were telling gaps in the shelves, places where first editions of Emerson, James, and Freud should have been. I’d have to take drastic measures. Going on hands and knees, I army-crawled around the bottom shelves and was eventually rewarded. The spine was badly discolored, which had allowed the cherry-pickers to overlook it: a first edition of Freud’s *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*). It was the only book that rivaled James’s *Principles* as the most famous in modern psychology.



William James

James had met Freud exactly once, in 1909, at a series of lectures Freud gave at Clark University at the invitation of G. Stanley Hall. At the time, James reportedly conceded the discipline to Freud: “The future of psychology belongs to your work,” James had admitted. There was at least an ostensible similarity between the two. Both believed in the force of the unconscious—but that was the extent of their agreement.

Freud developed a complex theory of dreams and a systematic analysis of unconscious urges. Like a dutiful scientist, he tried to make the baffling wholly understandable. And that didn’t sit well with James. For starters, it just wasn’t honest.

According to James, on the rare occasions that the unconscious surfaces, it does so in a moment. Something indiscernible bubbles up and then takes over. To say that this surfacing has a general form or is the manifestation of some universal sexual urge, for example, was, at least for James, a weird just-so story about our inner lives. At best, experiences of the subconscious or paranormal could open us to other worlds—as they did in the writings of Proust or Poe or Wilde—but they were highly irregular occurrences that defied purely rational explanation.

As late as 1901, James remarked that “I seriously believe that the general problem of the subliminal . . . promises to be one of the great problems, possibly even the greatest problem, of psychology.” Freud fancied himself as solving this problem once and for all. James, on the other hand, suggested that it had hardly been articulated.

Ms. Taylor sidled over and, looking over my shoulder, read my mind: “My father always said Freud was a bit of a jerk. Just an arrogant scientist. Jung was the real genius.” Then she shuffled back to her armchair.

She was right. Jung, the other titan of European psychotherapy, had accompanied Freud to his lectures at Clark in 1909 and reflected on their meeting with James. Jung had gathered from G. Stanley Hall that “James was not taken quite seriously on account of his interest in Mrs. Piper and her extra-sensory perceptions,” an interest that James had rekindled at the end of his life.

That was Jung’s opening: “I was also interested in parapsychology,” he later reflected, “and my discussions with William James were chiefly about this subject and about the psychology of religious experience.” It seems that Freud and Hall steered clear of those discussions. This was probably for the best. Jung described Hall as a “clear-headed man, but decidedly of an academic brand”—in other words, one who was not inclined to commune with apparitions. And Freud was even more averse. He thought the spiritual realm was “illusory,” the figment of sick men’s dreams.

In 1908, Freud had chastised Jung for his stubborn refusal to explain away the existence of a poltergeist. Together, the two doctors had spent years listening to the ravings of schizophrenics and neurotics, but a serious falling out was about to occur. When Freud listened to the ravings of a lunatic, he

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heard the sounds of symptoms to be diagnosed and understood. But Jung sometimes heard something else: the beckoning of a supernatural world.

To Freud this was madness. But, as Ms. Taylor reminded me, Jung believed in spirits. He claimed to have met them. After his meeting with James at Clark in 1909, Jung returned to his home on the shores of Lake Zurich. There, in 1914, he underwent what for Jungians has become a legendary and controversial journey into the unconscious. He heard voices, experienced visions, claimed to have met ghosts and ghouls and gods. He supposedly communed with what he later called “the collective unconscious,” a sea of eternal energy beyond rational thought. Jung’s experience in Zurich suggested to him that spirit contact was possible and that spirits infiltrate our lives and continue to exist long after our bodies die. A hundred years later, on the floor of a makeshift library that felt haunted, the idea terrified me.

It was getting late, and I really wanted to go home. But I just had to check the upstairs of the library one last time. Then I’d make a run for it with my boxes of two-dollar books. I scanned the bottom shelves and then, for some reason, paused for a minute.

The bookshelves were jacked up a few inches off the cement, just high enough to shove a few slim volumes underneath. Sticking my hand under there was just asking to get bitten.

I groped under those shelves as if my life depended on it. Contact: I felt a smooth spine covered in rubber that felt like a snake. I grabbed it and yanked. It came loose and slid out on the floor in front of me. I was hopping for Jung’s *Red Book*, documenting his remarkable years in Zurich. I got something better.

What had felt like a snake was actu-

ally black electrical tape, a Rube Goldberg binding for a book that should have been under lock and key at an archive. *A Treatise of Human Nature. Book II. “Of the Passions.”* Written by David Hume. Published in London in 1739. This was a first edition. The original cover was a mess—desiccated, chipped, falling apart; the tape was the only thing holding it together. I ran downstairs to show Vic, who had arrived earlier in the afternoon. I was sure it was worth a fortune.

I turned to Ms. Taylor to see what she might want for this one—certainly more than \$2—but I never managed to get the question out. Instead a flow of words congealed in the pit of my gut, suddenly erupted, and spewed from my mouth:

“What-do-you-want-for-the-whole-collection?”

I thought she looked happy. She told me that she’d part with the entire library for \$1,500. This was almost as insane as the idea of me carting 8,000 books to our tiny apartment, where I could spend the next three years keeping my toddler from eating, or puking on, the Hume. It seemed like a brilliant idea.

If there were a thinker who could’ve given a rational explanation of my irrational behavior, it was Hume. He was the first to explore the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious forces that he called “the passions,” what today we call emotions, desires, and feelings. Book II of *A Treatise of Human Nature* was his first attempt to get an empirical grasp on what was usually regarded as ungraspable, the most amorphous, but also the most powerful, forces of our mental lives.

In the 1700s, Hume argued that human action is driven by “the direct passions”—desire, aversion, hope, fear, grief, joy—which are reflections of our physical responses to pleasure and pain. This makes good intuitive

sense, save for the fact that most of us would like to think that our lives are shaped by our conscious and reasonable judgments. Rubbish, Hume responds: “Reason is and ought only to be a slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.” Our minds are merely instruments to use in the pursuit of objects of desire. Passion, not reason, sets the goals and purposes of our daily lives.

All of this might seem deeply romantic, but for Hume it wasn’t. His were the findings of a strict scientist who wanted to discover what made humans tick. James knew that there was much to recommend Hume’s view. He admired Hume’s empirical approach to human nature, one that anticipated James’s own work in *The Principles of Psychology*. And James, like Hume, wanted to place the passions at the center of his account of personhood and agency.

But James was concerned about the implications of Hume’s hard-nosed empiricism. In the words of James’s colleague and neighbor, Josiah Royce, one could follow Hume and try to get a scientific hold of one’s inner life, but “it will seem to shrivel to nothing under your hands.” Hume analyzed the passions to death. By the time he was done, there was nothing genuinely passionate left—just the sense that our lives were controlled by disparate, impersonal powers.

Hume was a causal determinist: one who believes that every event is caused by another (or series) of events in a strict, law-like fashion. There was pitifully little room for freedom in Hume’s model, and even less for unexplained spirits. That suited Freud—who shared Hume’s skepticism and materialism—but it didn’t agree with James and Jung, who thought a world reduced to causal forces was far scarier than one haunted by ghosts.

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## Our Achilles “Heals”

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constellation of evils and falsities.

We face temptations when we are in situations where we are challenged to be led not by what is good or true but instead by that which protects or strengthens our false perspective. For example, when we are scared and so we choose not to be kind or generous but instead look after ourselves and try to blame others or exercise excessive control, or when our reputation or integrity feels challenged and so we seek to blindly, adamantly show how we are right instead of being open to the truth.

It appears, sadly, to be human nature to want to believe that we are always right, strong, and good instead of acknowledging how we are, at times, weak, mistaken, selfish, and needy. And yet in insisting that we are *always* right, strong, and good, we are living an illusion—just as we are if we assume we are always wrong or unworthy—and in so doing we are denying the truth; we are often being motivated by a love of self. If we are to grow spiritually, we instead need to seek to be open to the truth and to be governed not solely by our earthly self and loves, but instead by spiritual loves, which means being grounded in a love of God and neighbor.

The paradox is that in recognizing and admitting when we are wrong, we are then in the truth. When we admit of our weakness, we gain strength. It is in acknowledging and voicing our needs that they are more likely to be met. The truth is, sometimes we have to go down to go up.

Perhaps the bigger question is what can help us to do this? Or what enables us to be willing to admit and expose our vulnerabilities? Most of us are quite familiar with Swedenborgian theology, but very few of us, if we're honest, would describe our lives as

simply a stream of loving good works. How can we grow during our times of temptation? I identify two key steps.

The first is to know yourself—know what kinds of interactions or situations push your buttons. If we respond to a situation with a great deal of energy or anger, if we lash out at a person or group, if we keep running through an encounter in our minds, we may very likely be facing a temptation. At such times it can be helpful to ask ourselves how or why is this situation challenging? What is it that we are we feeling the urge to defend and when else have we felt this way? All this can help us to better know ourselves, a critical piece in the process of regeneration.

And the second step is, when we are tempted to lash out in anger and blame, when we are on the brink of either behaving in an unloving way or somehow distorting the truth, we must stop and turn toward God to ask for help. Two prayers that I use at such times are “Come Holy Spirit, Come” (I know, not particularly Swedenborgian, but I do serve a United Methodist Congregation and went to a Quaker seminary!) and a prayer, that comes from Psalm 6: “Depart from me, all you workers of evil. For the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication. The Lord accepts my prayer.” In consciously turning toward God we are resisting evil, which is a critical component of purification.

Times of temptation, while never comfortable or easy, offer us an opportunity to see ourselves as we truly are, not as we want to be, or like to think we are. It is only by acknowledging and admitting our weaknesses that we can grow.

When I wrote about this in my journal, I wrote how the hells, temptations, go for our Achilles *Heals*. Only when I reread what I'd written did I see that I had misspelled *heel*. But then I realized that actually my mistake was express-

ing a deeper truth. It is in acknowledging our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities, in perhaps admitting that we have behaved like a real heel, that we grow and are healed.

Thanks be to God! ☩

Rev. Jenny Caughman is visitation minister at her local United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and occasionally preaches at the New Church of Montgomery in Cincinnati. She is a sixth-generation Swedenborgian.

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## Letter from the President

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not receive your suggestions relatively soon, time becomes a limiting factor on what can be incorporated. So if you have any thoughts, please email them to me soon at [revken@swedenborg.org](mailto:revken@swedenborg.org).

I have one other request: if you are a singer or instrumentalists and would like to contribute to the music-making in any of the wide variety of musical aspects of the annual convention, please communicate your information to myself or Rev. Kit Billings ([revkit123@gmail.com](mailto:revkit123@gmail.com)). Kit is serving as our worship and music coordinator, and along with the other worship leaders, we hope to work together to provide a truly moving and uplifting spiritual experience in worship and throughout the activities that make up the week that is annual convention.

Wishing everyone all the love and happiness associated with Valentine's Day and all of the political integrity, astuteness, and accomplishments associated with Presidents Day. These two very different days remind me of another pairing of essential contrasts: love and wisdom—very different, yet both essential, and ultimately intended to work together for the benefit of heaven and earth. To paraphrase Swedenborg, a life honoring love and wisdom is true worship. May you have much of both and may they be in harmony in your life.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

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I was still afraid of ghosts, but I was more frightened of losing the library and resigning myself to its seemingly inevitable destruction. So I stayed into the early evening and let the spirits do their work. I called my partner, Carol, and laid out my plan to save the books. We could use the money from our daughter's college fund. We'd borrow a little more to hire a U-Haul and beg a few friends to help make the move. We could temporarily store the books in our living room and second bathroom (and perhaps our daughter's bedroom), and then slowly move them to our offices at the philosophy department, where we both worked. The plan was perfect.

Except Carol wanted no part of it. To her it seemed ill-advised, exhausting, fanatical. I argued with her like someone possessed. These books were priceless (at least to me). Taylor had spent his life creating a library of the transcendent, the eternal, and now it was going to be scattered to the winds? Such cosmic unfairness was unacceptable.

Carol, a philosopher who is more committed to reason than I am, told me that I was free to do whatever I wanted, but that what I wanted—to rent a U-Haul and move 8,000 books to our apartment of 986 square feet—was psychotic. I hung up and considered the possibility of renting another storage unit. I could pick up a truck, finish the job in the early hours of the morning, and Carol would eventually forgive me.

Where did those ideas come from? I have no idea. But at the time, they seemed to emanate from the dusty stacks of books that were slowly growing in the back of my Subaru. Taylor wanted me to have them. So did his daughter. So did James and Jung and Bowditch and Royce. And I had to re-

## Passages

### Baptisms

**Cory Bradford-Watts** was baptized into the Christian faith and life on January 22, 2016, at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley, California, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence officiating.

spect their desires. I told Ms. Taylor as much, and that I would call later that night to set up a time to pick up the collection.

She seemed relieved. Her father had given his life to these books. It would've been sad to see his sacrifice go to waste. At least the books would be safe with me. And she made a prediction: that I would care for them exactly as her father had.

Today, psychic prediction is regarded as a crazy way to manage your future. But it wasn't always so; seers were the grand advisers of the ancient world. Herodotus tells us that in the sixth century BC, the Lydian king Croesus consulted the oracle at Delphi before invading Persia. The oracle advised the king: "If you cross the river, a powerful empire will be destroyed." Croesus took this to mean the Persian empire. So he crossed the river. Of course, he'd got the message all wrong. The powerful empire that was on the brink of destruction was his own.

Over the course of the afternoon, I'd learned something about Eugene Taylor. He had a passion for books, with the gall to work on the margins of a discipline for half a century and a fervent desire to explore forbidden questions. It was an inspiring story. But I'd learned other things. Taylor was a recluse; his best friends were his books; his academic work had often edged out his family; his academic salary had been spent on the library's preservation; his daughter both loved and re-

### Confirmations

The Urbana Swedenborgian Church in Urbana, Ohio, joyfully welcomed new members, **Anna Clem** and **Becky Buchanan** on December 27, 2015. They were confirmed into the life of the church by Rev. Betsy Coffman. ☩

sented him and his books.

In 1983 Taylor published his reconstruction of James's Lowell lectures, "On Exceptional Mental States." That same year, Taylor's daughter turned one. She told me that her father had taken her aside on her birthday to pose for a photograph. With his book. They were his children. And it was unclear which one was Taylor's favorite.

I never got that U-Haul. Goodwill came and went, and the books were scattered far and wide. James would have been happy to know that the Hume was worth next to nothing. Thanks to its moldy pages, it could have been ground up and sold on the street as a hallucinogen. But that was about it. It resides in our living room, next to my daughter's Winnie-the-Pooh.

At some point, I will die, and most of my books also will end up at Goodwill. That's not as tragic as I used to think. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James suggests that mystical experience is defined by a temporary but deep-seated sense of connection with something beyond the ken of our normal lives. This sense is fleeting but very real—so real that it reverberates through the rest of our lives. In some people, this mystical experience leads to a sort of belief. Not the dogmatic sort, but what James calls pervasive "zest" for life. Zest: the feeling of a keen passion. The word's origin is unknown. ☩

John Kaag is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He is the author most recently of *American Philosophy—A Love Story*.

### 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.

## Our Achilles "Heals"

BY JENNY CAUGHMAN

Living in Tennessee, one doesn't often get the chance to go snow skiing. For most Tennesseans this requires a somewhat lengthy drive to a mountain. Our family did this several times, and to avoid

the traffic of the main route we took the back roads. Driving up to the mountain we would come to a fork where we had to run counter to intuition—we would take the road that led down rather than up. To help us remember the correct route we would repeat "Sometimes you have to go down to go up." This is one of the paradoxes of faith, for it is certainly true that when it comes to the path of regeneration or spiritual growth, sometimes you do have to go down to go up.

At some point in life, we all have to come to terms with the reality of pain and suffering and find some livable explanation as to why our all-loving, all-powerful God allows pain and suffering in the world. I don't pretend to know the details of just why God created the world as it is, and I often, even from my place of great privilege, struggle with how unfair life is and just how painful it can be. In his *Teachings for the New Jerusalem on*



*Faith*, Swedenborg talks about the dangers of being devoted to a faith divorced from caring and how the path of regeneration requires that we purify ourselves from evils. Evils are embraced and expressed when we are not governed by love of God or neighbor but instead by love of self. The challenge

of regeneration is to recognize and admit when this is happening, for it happens more often than most of us care to admit. Pain and suffering, especially emotional pain and suffering, can help us in this process of purification.

Swedenborg speaks of the importance of temptations, since it is during the time of temptation that we can truly purify ourselves. We see this in Jesus' life and how Christ's glorification (becoming fully divine or one with God) was completed only after he overcame the final temptation of the cross.

We have an opportunity to purify ourselves from evils during these times of temptation, when we come face to face with those evils that have power over us. These evils can take many forms (such as being hurtful, cold, selfish, arrogant, blaming, overly controlling), and each one of us is prone to a different

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