



## A Summer of Virtual Reality

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

When we think of summertime and what we typically participate in together, we never could have imagined what we would be doing the Summer of 2020. It was a unique experience put together by many creative talents across our denomination who were able to think outside of the box and reimagine new ways for people across the country and the world to experience spiritual community together. Many of our ministries have found ways to continue their weekly services remotely, some on Zoom, some pre-recorded and aired on a variety of social media, and some streamed live. The same level of care was given to making annual events accessible and enjoyable. The pandemic lemon that was given to everyone was turned into sweet lemonade for our summer consumption.

The first virtual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church took place the final weekend of June, fittingly titled *Spiritual Vision 2020: Transcending Time and Space*. When so many in our Swedenborgian community would normally have been physically together, we found a different way of gathering in community. For three days, we were able to participate in online

programs: worship services, mini-courses, and other presentations with hundreds of comments and interactions throughout. Some of the most magical things that have been happening over the past few months are when the unexpected things turn out to be the most successful. The virtual parade of ministries that aired on the

Throughout the weekend, participants were treated to a range of programming to highlight the very best parts of a typical convention. Rev. Dr. George Dole provided us with an insightful keynote presentation sharing with us his wise insights on how the pandemic may help us in the long run. “Someday we may look back on

this pandemic and say, ‘Thanks, Lord, we needed that.’”<sup>1</sup>

Viewers from across the globe were able to enjoy a variety of worship services, mini-courses from the professors at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and respected clergy from across the denomination, and participate in a powerful presentation called *Black Lives Matter*:



Participants in *Black Lives Matter: A Call to Reflection, Prayer, and Action* hold a powerful candle light period of silence for eight minutes and forty-seven seconds.

first night of the virtual convention was so uplifting and brought everyone who was watching joy. One of the special things about being part of this beautiful, small community, is how we all know of most of our ministries, but most of us have never seen them. We were able to show our greater community our beloved spaces and we reveled in seeing them! It was even suggested in the comments that we should do video updates every year—an amazing way to show off what makes each of our ministries special.

*a Call to Reflection, Prayer, and Action*. Even though business meetings and elections were postponed until next year, the Council of Ministers and the General Council held their meetings virtually and conducted much of their business as usual. Positive and grateful feedback continues to be received,

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<sup>1</sup> A full transcript of Rev. Dr. Dole's Keynote address may be found in the July/August 2020 issue of *the Messenger*. Complete videos of all the virtual convention events may be watched on The Swedenborgian Church of North America Facebook Page or The Swedenborgian Church YouTube Channel.

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## the Messenger

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Greenwood

Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith, Brittany  
Price, Herb Ziegler & Trevor

Standing Committee for Communication and  
Information: Holly Bauer, Kevin Baxter & Val  
Brugler

Printing: Classic GraphX, Cambridge MA

Email: [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org)

Editorial, Business and Subscription Address:  
*The Messenger*, Central Office  
50 Quincy Street  
Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org)

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## Editor's Corner



### Living in a Virtual World: The Quest for the Golden Watering Can

It was a crazy summer. I can only speak for myself, but I am

pretty sure we all experienced a summer that we did not expect to—certainly not one we were used to. I typically spend my summers planning and attending large church events—which I also did this year but in a new way. Some of the stress that comes with planning virtual events is trying to establish how to execute them in a way that is successful for as many people as possible. Any of us who have served in a leadership role of any sort know that it is impossible to please everyone. You simply cannot. One does one's best to please as many as possible—and I truly believe that people of service do indeed do this. Virtual events can truly fill the void of in-person gatherings. They really can. But they cannot replace them. Our family absolutely lives for our two-week vacation in August to Fryeburg New Church Assembly. It is the only vacation we take as a family, and we look forward to it all year long. We obviously didn't get that in 2020—it was, and still is, hard on us. So, we've ventured into another way of escaping.

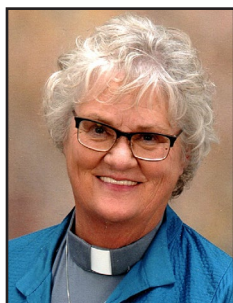
One of the things we love to do as a family is play games. Not just board and card games, but video games as well. I love video games; my husband loves videos games; both our kids love video games. And we have relied on those video games as an escapist tool throughout the COVID-19 quarantine. A variety of games over the past several months have gotten us

through—*Animal Crossing: New Horizons* on the Nintendo Switch has taken us to a new level of escapism. It is a delightful, non-violent, world building game. Players begin with their own wild island. It's covered in weeds, sticks, and rocks. You have to clean it up and build tools with the materials you've collected. You collect different types of fish and insects and learn about them as you go. There's even art history as you are presented with different pieces of classical art and have to decipher which are real or fake. Players take out loans to expand their homes, and even buy and sell turnips as a form of *stalk* market. There's a lot of hidden life lessons for kids to absorb while playing this fun game—and they don't even realize it's happening. All four of us really love playing this game, both individually and as a family. We can travel to each other's islands and play together, as well as islands of other friends and family members who play. It has been a great way to virtually spend time together in an era where that just isn't possible.

There are many things that I appreciate about it—money management, virtual playdates, secret education, wishing on shooting stars—but the goal of creating your own five-star island resonates the most with me right now. We are all trapped in our own life "islands" and we need to take care of them. As you clean, update and decorate your island, you're given ratings; the more stars it receives, the happier your island residents are (they're animals of course). When you reach the elusive five stars, you receive the recipe to make the Golden Watering Can. Watering cans are needed throughout the game to help your flowers grow. However, when you travel to a friend's island and water your neighbor's flowers, they flourish and produce more new colors. Once you've received that Golden Watering Can, and you water

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## Letter from the President



### *The Year of the Spiritual World: 2020–21*

*Dear Friends,*

*It is hard to know what to write as I think of you all and the difficulties of coping and making decisions and enduring this long, overwhelming journey.*

I have had three funerals in the midst of this pandemic—one just yesterday. Two were cemeteries with some masks and social distancing, and one was in a funeral home with mandatory masks and social spacing. It is so hard. We cannot hug the bereaved. We are not even supposed to get close enough to speak consolingly and privately with them. The grief of our whole world layers on the personal grief of the family and friends.

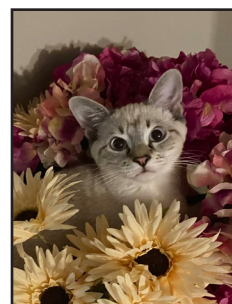
There is a heaviness everywhere we go. It amplifies the sorrow. It causes anger to erupt quickly. It makes the small things we normally deal with feel insurmountable. When has the whole world, every continent, country, community, and person been individually and collectively threatened by a potential killer and devastator we cannot even see or know how to eradicate? And we might have COVID-19 and not even know we are spreading this dreadful disease.

In the midst of our uncontrollable world, we are to make life-affecting decisions. Is it safe to send our kids back to school? Do I go back to work, or to the grocery store, or even to the doctor? Do we open our churches? Do we sing together? Should I visit my mother?

*Oh Lord, may we feel your guidance and strength. Console and comfort us. Help us be patient, knowing that your Divine Providence is focusing on what is infinite and eternal. Give us your peace to calm us in the storm. Open our eyes to see your love working in our world. Open our hearts to share the pain with one another. And open our hands to emerge awakened to our own responsibility in this world you created for us.*

I have found helpful advice to remember to be kind to ourselves and those around us. Give everyone that irritates you, “the benefit of the doubt”; remember everyone is fighting this battle and suffering different losses; everything is “more than.” We must admit we are all grieving. The experts tell us, grief takes energy, it colors our world gray, it clouds our thinking and decision making. It affects everything. The first step is to acknowledge our own personal losses and our grief and then to realize the pain the rest of the world is feeling.

We also need to try to stay in the moment. Our minds take us to the worst-case scenario so quickly and then we mix anticipatory grief with everything else. We have to get the dire and negative pictures out of our minds. This moment is enough to deal with. What is the current reality? We must experience the *now* and not try to control what we cannot control in the future. I have read we need to find something we can control, like trying a new recipe, painting a room, going for a drive—I have a new kitten, although he controls me more than I can him.



*Rev. Jane's kitten, Sunny*

Look for moments to encourage others. What good can we bring into this hurting world?

Eventually we will emerge. We will find meaning. We will look back and say, “Do you remember the world before the pandemic?” Our choice, as

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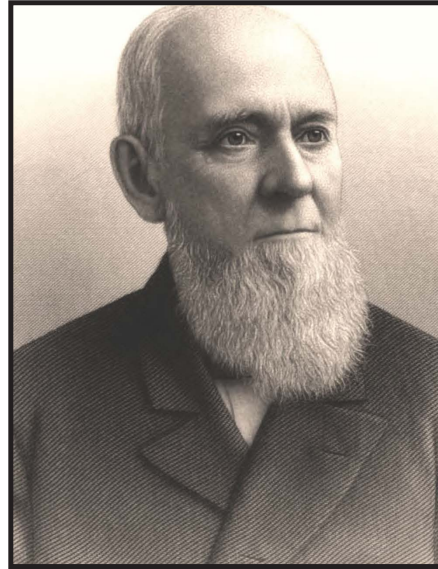
## Rev. Benjamin Fiske Barrett preaches on Black Lives Matter

*Fighting Racial Discrimination in Philadelphia, 1862–1866*

BY GAIL R. MCCORMICK

On the evening of Saturday, November 15, 1862, a rainy, disagreeable night, fifty-eight-year old Rev. Richard Robinson, the respected pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in the northeast Philadelphia neighborhood of Frankford, was riding home from the city on a horse-drawn streetcar, compelled, solely on the basis of his race, to stand on the front platform rather than to ride inside the car. The weather likely hampered the driver's vision, as along the way he was forced to stop suddenly to avoid a hay wagon on the track, resulting in the elderly clergyman being struck by a flying wheel, severely fracturing his arm and shoulder that caused internal injuries that proved fatal.

At his funeral the following week, dignitaries from Philadelphia's famed Mother Bethel AME congregation arrived at their sister church in Frankford to find "the church-yard and street full of friends, white and colored." The short funeral procession from the church to Rev. Robinson's home moved among a large crowd to Bowser Street, an important thoroughfare in the village's historic free black neighborhood. Frankford's New Jerusalem Society had built its small "temple" on that block nearly fifty years earlier, when they were still a Free-Will Baptist congregation, likely welcomed by the black community because of the energetic, unorthodox preaching of their first minister, Thomas Boyle. The AME newspaper *The Christian Recorder*, published in Philadelphia at the time, expressed the outrage of the African American community at the racism behind the tragedy, calling it "a burning shame to an enlightened



Rev. Benjamin Fiske Barrett

people, in a Christian land."<sup>1</sup> Yet, as with similar outrages in the 21st century, when compassionate people think, "Surely this is the last straw," streetcar discrimination persisted.

Within the next year, the Emancipation Proclamation, the declaration of the right of free black men and liberated slaves to organize Union military units, and Lincoln's powerful Gettysburg message that "all men are created equal" contributed to bringing the concept of *equality*, not just abolition, into the forefront of the national conversation. New Church minister Rev. Benjamin Fiske Barrett, a staunch Union supporter, was serving a small society in Orange, New Jersey, at this time, having been removed from the official roster of General Convention ministers in 1856 as a result of

a long-running personal controversy with another Convention clergyman. A native of Maine and an 1838 graduate of Harvard Divinity School as a Unitarian minister, Barrett later credited Ralph Waldo Emerson with recommending that he read Swedenborg while in Cambridge. He preached briefly for Unitarian congregations but soon left the Unitarians and joined the Boston New Jerusalem Society. There, he studied Swedenborg with many of its prominent members, including its pastor, Rev. Thomas Worcester, with whom he would have many differences during Worcester's long tenure as president of the General Convention. Despite his missteps, Barrett was well-regarded in the Philadelphia area's oldest societies, having worked with Frankford minister and Pennsylvania Association founder Rev. James Seddon on several creative ideas, from the well-received plan to encourage lay persons to prepare lectures for Convention meetings, to the roundly rejected notion that Christmas day should be observed as a "religious festival" in the New Church. Their belief that such a day might "be made an occasion of promoting peace, harmony, and union among brethren" was a recurring theme in their ministries, despite the controversies that plagued both of them.<sup>2</sup>

1 *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia): November 15 and 22, 1862. For the Frankford Society's origins, see Gail Rodgers McCormick, "Sharing Swedenborg's 'Sweets in Secret': The United Free-Will Baptist Church, ca. 1810–23," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 138 (October 2014): 359–93.

2 *Benjamin Fiske Barrett: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Publishing Association, [1890-1892]); Barrett, *A Plain Letter to Thomas Worcester, D.D. in Which are Recited a Few Facts Touching the Author's Intercourse with the President of the General Convention, and his Connection with, and Excision from, that Body* (New York: Mason Bros, 1864); Committee on Lectures, *Conv. Jour.*, 1843, 409, 423; Committee on Christmas, *Conv. Jour.*, 1846, 408, 412; 1847, 442-46 (quote, 444); and 1848, 337-40.

## Welcome Brittany Price

*The Executive Committee of the General Council is pleased to introduce you to our new Central Office Operations Manager*

Brittany Price was born in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, and spent most of her childhood there as a part of the General Church of the New Jerusalem community. She attended the Bryn Athyn Church School and graduated from the Academy of the New Church in 2000. After spending a couple of years at Bryn Athyn College, she transferred to Tulane University, in New Orleans, where she got her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Anthropology. Since graduating, she has had a diverse work history that includes conducting archaeological surveys, teaching *Kindermusik*, working in the archives at the Lord's New Church in Huntingdon Valley, and most recently working for the Vinalhaven (Maine) Chamber of Commerce. She has recently relocated back to Bryn Athyn with her four young daughters and husband. She is excited to work for The Swedenborgian Church of North America and is looking forward to building relationships and fellowship with all of its members.

Our thanks to Gina Peracchi for



Brittany (lower right) and the Price family from left: Luke, Calliope (11), Viola (9), Fiona (6), and Thea (4)

answering the calls and forwarding emails during the Operations Manager interim in July. Brittany's office hours are 12 pm – 4 pm, Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. The Executive Committee is working with her for a solid orientation to the position; there is a lot to take in, as the job covers a

wide range of responsibilities throughout the denomination. She will be working remotely from her home.

Brittany has a good work history in administration, teaching, and planning, and a strong Swedenborgian background. Please join us in welcoming Brittany. 🙌

### Editor's Corner

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your friends' black roses, golden roses start to bloom.

Just like so many other things, *Animal Crossing* is another metaphor to learn from. We all need a level of self-care during this pandemic time to continue to work on our own islands. We need to continue the quest for our own five-star rating—in our lives and homes. Love yourself; love your neighbor; treat everyone and everything with respect and kindness. Once you achieve your own Golden Watering



Sanctuary built inside Animal Crossing

Can, share it with your friends and neighbors, nourish their black flowers and watch the golden ones bloom.

—Beki Greenwood

[Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org)

### President's Report

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Swedenborg always reminds us, is how we choose to make it through this and what we choose to learn.

We are led and taught by the Lord alone through and from the angelic heaven. (DP 162)

For He shall give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. (Psalm 91:11)

*Thank you, Lord, that we are not alone on this journey.*

With care, shared grief, and assurance,  
—Rev. Jane Siebert



# One and Done: Swedenborg's Controversial Trinity

*Given as a Lecture for the Virtual Fryeburg New Church Assembly 2020*

BY JIM LAWRENCE

For several decades, confirmands in General Convention were asked, “Do you believe in the divinity of the Lord?” This first of the three essentials of the New Church goes to the heart of Swedenborgian spirituality—at least in the understanding of the founding theologian from whom our tradition takes its name and vision. The divinity of the Lord, Swedenborgian-style, also happens to be one of the most controversial aspects of Swedenborgianism due to the way it lines up against the “orthodox” belief about the Trinity, established in the fourth century as the Nicene Creed and now held by a very large majority of confessional Christians living today.

Swedenborg's unrelenting critique of the dominant view of the Christian Trinity earned him and his followers a reputation as “anti-Trinitarian.” The Swedish visionary landed on the infamous index of condemned writers in Roman Catholicism for a host of reasons, but high on the list is his advocacy of a Trinitarian theology that looks a lot like a “heresy” called Monarchian Modalism. Our British cousins, the General Conference of the New Jerusalem in England and Scotland, have been denied membership in the British Council of Churches (BCC) for one reason only: Swedenborgians are insufficiently Trinitarian to be considered Christian. And you can tell Swedenborgians aren't Christian because they never end their public prayers with the phrase, “in Jesus's name we pray”—a ubiquitous sign-off in the major branches.

Swedenborgians shake their heads at this perception because Swedenborg both promotes a high Christology and a Triune view of the Divine that is the

Wankel engine driving everything. The incarnate one *is* the creator God, the visible manifestation of the creator God in a form to which we can relate directly person to person; and the Holy Spirit *is* the presence and power of God in action everywhere. This Triune understanding of God isn't to be comprehended as three beings or discrete entities in any degree, however, but as one dynamic unity—a unity that intimately includes us. We, in fact, are similarly designed with a Triune nature.

**The divinity of the Lord, Swedenborgian-style, also happens to be one of the most controversial aspects of Swedenborgianism**

Swedenborg believed orthodox teachings about the Trinity led too easily in peoples' inner lives to a picture of three divine beings, which subtly undermines developing a vigorous personal relationship with the Lord, and so he anathematizes the major branches of Christianity right back for promoting a problematic picture for how the divine operates. What's going on in this historical contestation, and how does it pertain to our spiritual journey these days?

## Early Church Wrangle over Triune vs. Trinitarian

What is Monarchian Modalism, why is it a grave heresy in the view of the major branches, and had anything like Swedenborg's Triune God been shaped by others before? Oneness theories in general are called Monarchian theologies. Monarch means one ruler (from the Greek for “one” and “ruler”). And Modalism was the most effective and sophisticated of the Monarchian

approaches. It frames the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as simply three modes of expression of one being. Many analogies can illustrate the basic concept: a mother, a daughter, and a sister are all one person in different kinds of relationship to others; a dancer can do ballet, swing, and hip-hop yet remain one dancer; a government levies taxes, provides education, and delivers protection, all as one entity.

Monarchian Modalism arose in the early church as it faced accusations of polytheism because believers appeared to worship three gods (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In the late-second and early-third centuries figures such as Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius developed a triune framing of the Godhead—not a trinitarian one—in answer to the polytheistic charge. The difference between triune and trinitarian centers on how the three-ness is conceived. Triune emphasizes a oneness that contains an internal complexity of three aspects, whereas Trinitarianism establishes clear distinctions and separations among the threefold composition of the One.

The three-ness of God in the Nicene Creed was shaped a century after Monarchian Modalism had been denounced effectively and essentially driven out of existence. No extant writings of Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius survive. What they promoted must be inferred from their victorious opponents whose writings do survive. The Christological crisis that led to Nicaea, however, involved a different tempest over Trinitarian thought in the early 320s, one that coincided with the new Roman emperor Constantine shockingly converting to the marginalized faith called Christianity.

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## One and Done

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Having the emperor sign up for a little five percent exotic sect can do wonders for membership. It wouldn't be long before the emperor's new religion zoomed from five percent of the population to about eighty percent. Social power made for a seductively attractive faith!



*Council of Nicaea, depicted in a Byzantine fresco in the Basilica of St. Nicholas in modern Demre, Turkey*

## What Happened at Nicaea?

A great military champion, Constantine believed in discipline and order, and he was appalled at the theological disputes raging in the church over such a basic question as who Jesus Christ is in relation to the creator God. His first major executive order as emperor was to call a religion-wide conference that we know today as the Council of Nicaea—the first church-wide council in the history of Christianity. (Twenty more church-wide councils in Roman Catholicism have convened since then, the most recent one being the legendary Vatican Two in the early 1960s.) A power group of about 250 bishops and synod leaders throughout the empire met in session for two and half months to hammer out the Christology confusions and to unify church practices.

The Christology kerfuffle at that time involved a newly fashionable branding message that dropped the Son down in rank so as not to be equal to the Father, a thought movement spearheaded by a winsome preacher

named Arius. His demotion of Jesus Christ got people out of the uncomfortable jam of explaining how a human being, no matter what happened with them in their transformative spiritual life, could be understood as having attained equality in all ways with God the creator. Arius was cooking an older Christological framing called subordinationism that reasons thusly: the Father is underived; the Son is derived from the Father; therefore, they cannot be exactly the same or entirely equal.

Furious at the rising popularity of Arius's movement, powerful traditionalists mounted a campaign claiming zero difference between the Father and the Son in any way. The cacophony in the Church over this matter had been enjoying a sustained news cycle when Constantine came to power, and he meant to put an end to it. Though Arius had a lot of supporters when the council began, along the way nearly all of them crossed over, and he ended up with no more than one percent of the votes. The disputation itself took weeks, and the victors reached beyond scripture to Greek philosophy to find vocabulary that jelled a big majority; *homoousios*. It means the same in being, same in essence, same in substance. Same. Completely the same. Ironically, a century earlier this word *homoousios* made traditionalists squirm because the Monarchian Modalists had used that very word in arguing for the sameness!

These are the two key sentences on this matter in the Nicene Creed, recited many millions of times since it was first framed to settle the matter,

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten,

not made, one in Being with the Father.

## Swedenborg's Critique of the Nicene Creed

Swedenborg inveighed against Nicene Trinitarianism with greater intensity as his writing progressed, and at the end of the day in terms of flawed ideas that had become prominent in Christianity, only "faith alone" rivals Tri-personalism in the Trinity as problematic. He introduces his first major critique in an inter-chapter article at the tail end of the *Arcana* that recounts a dialog with beings from a planet far outside our solar system. Here's a short excerpt from a discussion that goes on for nearly five pages, with thanks to Lisa Hyatt Cooper for sharing her current draft translation of §10736–10737 New Century Edition vol. 15 of *Secrets of Heaven* (still forthcoming and under review):

After noticing that in spirit I was in outer space, far beyond our solar system (which I could tell from the changes in my state and from the resulting appearance that I was moving for almost ten hours straight), I finally heard some spirits talking near a planet that eventually came into view. I approached them, and after a certain amount of conversation they said, 'Periodically we have visitors from somewhere else who talk with us about God and confuse us.' They pointed out the route these spirits take, which told me they were spirits from our planet.

'How do they confuse you?' I asked.

'By saying we must believe in a Deity divided into three persons,' they said. 'But they still refer to the three as one God. And when we examine the image in their minds, it presents itself as a threesome that is not merged but rather divided, and in some of the spirits, as three persons talking together, one to another. And although they call each person God and have a different

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concept of each, they still call them one God.

‘This,’ they complained bitterly, ‘is how they confuse us: by thinking three and saying one, when what is actually called for is to think the way you speak and speak the way you think.’

Next I asked them what their notion of God was. ‘We have no concept of an invisible God,’ they answered, ‘only of a visible God in human form.’ This we know not only by inner perception but also because he has appeared to us as a person.

‘If we conceived of God as invisible, as certain visitors do,’ they went on, ‘we’d be incapable of thinking about God at all, because nothing invisible falls within the range of thought.’ The reason for this, I sensed, was that the invisible seemed to them to lack form and therefore quality, and a mental image that lacks form and quality either evaporates or is brought down to the level of what is visible in the natural creation.

From that point forward in his writings, Swedenborg builds a critique of orthodox Trinitarian theology for shaping a split personality for the Godhead despite a valiant lawyerly effort to save a high Christology that Swedenborg supports. They would have done better to follow the vision of earlier Monarchian Modalists who accomplished a Triune Divine in a way Swedenborg would have appreciated.

### The Triune Theologians

Swedenborg sees the triune structure as deeply inherent in how things work: purpose, cause, effect; heart, head, hands; good, truth, power; love, wisdom, operation; creation, redemption, regeneration; God the Creator, God the Redeemer, God the Holy Spirit. The twenty thousand pages in his hand, collected after his death

and now at the Academy of Sciences in Stockholm do not indicate he was reading historical theologies summarizing what minor early church writers whose works were lost to history might have actually said. If he had known about them, he would not have had to struggle with the Athanasian Creed—which he admits is tripersonalist—as a possible alternative to the Nicene Creed. If he had known the thinking of Praxeas, Sabellius, and especially Noetus, he would have pointed to those shapers of a triune Godhead as a better model than not only the Nicene Creed but the Athanasian Creed, as well.

Like these Triune Oneness thinkers, Swedenborg favors the Gospel of John as a blueprint for the personhood of the Divine Human: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And like these triune Oneness thinkers, Swedenborg reveals that God the Father *personally* took on the human nature of Christ to provide a visible Divine Human as straight channel for interacting directly with God.

### Do You Believe in the Divinity of the Lord?

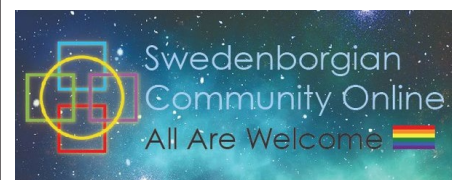
As a spirituality practice, believing in the divinity of the Lord opens a door for relating to this personal presence and power of the Divine human to human, so to speak, through a model of the Godhead that illustrates how power flows through an interrelated system: purpose, cause, effect; heart, head, hands; good, truth, power; love, wisdom, operation; creation, redemption, regeneration. The Divine Human is another oft-used image by Swedenborg to underscore how we are created in the image of God. To believe in the divinity of the Lord means to move into an active relationship between our heart, head, and hands with the divine power source that works

exactly in the same human design of divine heart, head, and hands, thus effecting a direct inflowing of spiritual power as we do our part in the cooperation between the Lord’s glorification work and our regeneration work.

Mistakes happen in human history and in the history of religions—often. Swedenborg argues the early Christian church didn’t get it right when the still marginalized faith became an empire church and decreed a Godhead of three Divine Persons. Though his own Triune Oneness of God is controversial for many traditional Christians, it is the orthodox traditionalists creating a big controversy—at least in regions far beyond our solar system where the whole matter got a lot clearer. ☸



Swedenborgian theology is one of the subjects Dean Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence teaches at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.



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# Getting Our Priorities Right

*Reflections on Who Is the Neighbor and Social Justice Ministry in Convention*

BY DRU JOHNSON

While we've been cooped up during the current pandemic, I've been discovering the remarkable comedy show "The Good Place" about a group of people who find themselves needing to improve their life priorities so that they can go to "The Good Place" in their afterlife. One of the main characters, Chidi, is a professor in moral philosophy, which in my opinion puts the character squarely in dialog with Swedenborg's writings. To my mind Chidi (and Swedenborg) raise the question from the divine design point of view, "What is our priority in life?" Wouldn't almost everyone want an answer to this vital question so they could spend their life wisely making the most of it? Given a clear statement of life's priority, being good to one another: wouldn't almost everyone want to participate in what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized as "The Beloved Community" and what Swedenborg calls "The New Jerusalem?"

What if we took seriously that we already have a sort of divine memo from the real "Good Place" that underscores being good to one another as life's highest priority? Swedenborg treated the words of Rabbi Yeshua (i.e., Jesus) as a divine memo. Rabbi Yeshua lays out the priority plainly for us.

'Rabbi, which of the *mitzvot* [commandments] in the Torah is the most important?' [Rabbi Yeshua] told him, 'You are to love Adonai your [G-d] with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, 'You are to love your neighbor as yourself.' All of the Torah and the Prophets are dependent on these two *mitzvot*.

(Matthew 22:36–40 from *Complete Jewish Bible*)

There we have it—a succinct answer to the question WWJD? What Would Jesus/Yeshua/Chidi/Swedenborg Do? We are commanded to love the Divine One with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. But hold on here. Are those two commandments mutually exclusive? After all, if we are applying all our heart, soul and strength to loving the Lord, how is there anything left over to love our neighbor as ourselves? The answer is that they are commanding the same thing. As Swedenborg wrote: Charity, or love toward the neighbor, is also love to the Lord." We act out our love for the Divine One (whom we have never actually seen except as our neighbor, as 1 John 4:20 points out) by our care and concern for others around us—and not just in our immediate vicinity but all the way from the next-door neighbor up the various levels of community to all of creation and the Divine One.

**Swedenborg wrote that being a good neighbor involves doing good on multiple levels of community simultaneously.**

Okay, but Rabbi Yeshua was asked a question perhaps meant as argumentative: "Who is my neighbor?" (parable of The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37). Swedenborg has a marvelously expansive understanding of our neighbor. Swedenborg wrote that being a good neighbor involves doing good on multiple levels of community simultaneously. So, in essence, our life priority is learning to be good to

one another, and this process of regeneration is a liberation movement that operates on all levels of social interaction at once.

Swedenborg describes it like this:

However, it is not just people as individuals who are one's neighbor but people in the plural. That is, it is any smaller or larger community, our country, the church, the Lord's kingdom, and above all the Lord.... These are "our neighbor" to whom we should do good out of love. These are also ascending levels of neighbor. A community of many is a neighbor on a higher level than one individual. On a level still higher is our country, on a level still higher is the church, and on a level still higher is the Lord's kingdom; but on the highest level, our neighbor is the Lord. These ascending levels are like the rungs of a ladder with the Lord at the top (*New Jerusalem*, §91 trans. George Dole).

Swedenborg adds the powerful analogy that each ascending neighbor / community level of this "ladder" is actually *closer* to the Divine One than previous one. Rabbi Yeshua said, "No one has greater love than a person who lays down [their] life for [their] friends." (John 15:13, *Complete Jewish Bible*). He also made the point that it's not enough to be good just to our friends but like the Divine One, we are to be good to friend and foe alike—to everyone (Matthew 5:45). In the current cliffhanger at the end of season three of "The Good Place," the character we might call the "savior figure," Chidi, makes an incredible self-sacrifice to save the entirety of humankind on all these levels—the friends he has fought for the last three seasons but not

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## New Online Learning Initiative at The Center for Swedenborgian Studies

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) in Berkeley, California, is pleased to announce a new online learning initiative, starting immediately this fall. Our Virtual Education Offerings for the Planet is an online outreach aimed at bringing scholarly and educational resources about Swedenborg and Swedenborgian theology to our broader, global, and increasingly interconnected communities. Our new Virtual Education Modules are *free* to take and participate in, although pre-registration is required for access to webinar and course materials. Virtual Education Offerings at CSS are non-credit bearing, and do not typically count towards accredited degree programs at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) or elsewhere. Prospective students interested in using a Virtual Education Module on a longer learning journey—say, towards CSS's Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies—should contact the instructor for more information.

Our first Virtual Educational Offering this Fall will be "Swedenborg and Pandemic Theologies," taught by Dr.

Devin Zuber, Associate Professor at CSS. The description is as follows:

### Swedenborg and Pandemic Theologies

Classes will be Thursdays at 3:00pm Pacific Time for an hour and a half, seven sessions from September 17 to October 29.

Dr. Devin Zuber,  
Associate Professor for  
American Studies,  
Religion,  
Literature, and  
George F. Dole



Professor of Swedenborgian Studies:

[dzuber@gtu.edu](mailto:dzuber@gtu.edu)

Global pandemics. Devastating Wildfires. Climate Change. Racial Injustice. How can we reconcile such contemporary planetary suffering with belief in the perfection of a loving Creator? The 18<sup>th</sup> century that gave shape to Swedenborg's writings was a golden age for the "theodicy": a theological genre that attempted to account for the problem of evil in the world, and to "justify the ways of God to man," as John Milton famously puts in *Paradise*

*Lost*. This class explores the contemporary reinvocations of the theodicy under the pressures of COVID-19 (and climate change), while casting a backward glance towards Swedenborg. At the center of our conversations will be a slow, sustained engagement with Swedenborg's *Divine Providence* (1764), translating his theodicy forward into our own moment's entanglement with planetary crisis and suffering. We will also discuss Leibniz, Voltaire, and some more recent reflections from the contemporary eco-theologian Catherine Keller, among others. Special guest speakers—scholars from philosophy, religious studies, and history—will enliven our discussions in some sessions. Although the class features weekly suggested readings, which are to be made available electronically, they are not necessary for participation in the online sessions (in other words, "homework" is not mandatory for learning, participating, and having some fun). ☒

Interested participants can register by contacting the CSS office assistant, Alex Sicular: [asicular@gtu.edu](mailto:asicular@gtu.edu)

### Priorities

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just them—everyone.

These levels do not compete with each other (except in terms of time and resources spent on activities focused on a particular level) but rather they could be understood as harmonics. Just as in the physics of sound a tone has a series of overtones starting with its fundamental as the lowest and at each octave higher another tone is added, producing a rich, vibrant, pleasing sound until a full-throated ambiance is achieved with abundant beautiful sonorous

tones. In a similar analogy, the brightest light includes the whole palette of colors, the full spectrum. Likewise, ultimate divine love is to love along the entire spectrum of love in full abundance on every level of neighbor and community.

By the logic of Rabbi Yeshua, "The Good Place," and Swedenborg, it is a falsity, therefore, to claim that our involvement in social improvement is somehow in competition with, or ruled out within the community of faith, or that faith is exclusively about one's isolated direct relationship with the Divine. Contrary to this common

misconception, our caring on a social level is an even higher priority.

A community is a neighbor to a greater extent than an individual is because it is made up of many individuals. We are to practice caring about it just the way we do with respect to individuals... We love a community when we are concerned for its welfare because of our love of what is good (*New Jerusalem* §92).

For Rabbi Yeshua, "The Good Place," and in Swedenborg's view, we are very far from being let off the hook from caring for our widening circles of

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## Rev. Benjamin Barrett

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Barrett's continued appeals to end sectarianism, which he defined as "the foe to Christian peace and spiritual progress," were controversial within the Swedenborgian community, but proved a positive message in wartime. In his 1863 book *Catholicity of the New Church*, he argued,

Men are accepted or rejected of Christ, not on account of the doctrines they believe, or the ritual they observe, but on account of the motives from which they act, the good or evil which they do, and the kind of life which is thereby developed and formed within them.<sup>3</sup>

In November that year, Barrett's lecture at the First Philadelphia Society, on Broad Street, illuminated Swedenborg's understanding of one aspect of this spiritual transformation. Speaking on "Our Invisible Associates; their Influence upon us, and how to Determine their True Character," Barrett made a literal appeal to heed one's "better angels."<sup>4</sup> In June 1864, soon after assuming the pastorate of the non-Convention First Philadelphia Society, Barrett gave one of his most influential sermons of the war—"Love Toward Enemies and the Way to Manifest It"—in which he described the Swedenborgian interpretation of the spiritual war that was raging in tandem with the physical one. Regarding the South's "peculiar institution," he stated bluntly, "Striking the quickest, hardest, and most stunning blows is now

the truest charity."<sup>5</sup>

After the war, issues of racial equality in Philadelphia became increasingly divisive. Public interest in resolving discrimination on city streetcars had languished with a disastrous "poll" of passengers in early 1865, but the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in December that year made equal rights a powerful political issue. In March 1866, Radical Republicans in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives managed successfully to attach a rider to a bill regulating passenger railways that prohibited discrimination on the basis of "color or nationality." However, in early April, just days before the U.S. Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills over President Johnson's vetoes, the Pennsylvania Senate voted to strike out the anti-discrimination proviso.<sup>6</sup> During the contentious political campaign in the fall of 1866, an anonymous pamphlet, *Why Colored People in Philadelphia are Excluded from the Streetcars*, criticized the city's newspapers for being "editorially silent on the subject"; local military officers for rejecting the participation of colored troops in celebratory parades; and state-supported orphanages and homes for disabled soldiers for the disparity in access and treatment of white and colored children and veterans. The pamphlet also harshly condemned the city's clergy, who had orchestrated large meetings to discuss their opposition to Sunday rail travel, but ignored the subject of streetcar discrimination. Acknowledging the courage required of a clergyman to risk offending his people and losing his livelihood, the author argued,

"there are cases in which clergymen are called on to make a direct attack on a social abuse." He further contended that "only three of the white clergy of this city have spoken, either from pulpit or platform, in reprobation of this gross wrong." Several months later, in her annual report to the Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society, abolitionist Mary Grew would criticize Philadelphia's clergy for the same reason, naming the three clergymen "of three different ecclesiastical sects" who "had made their pulpits places of rebuke of popular sins and the advocacy of unpopular righteousness": First Unitarian's William H. Furness, Church of the Trinity's Phillips Brooks, and the First New Jerusalem Society's Benjamin Barrett.<sup>7</sup>

Barrett preached what *The Christian Recorder* called his "Great Sermon" against streetcar discrimination on Sunday, September 23, 1866. Advertised with the ambiguous title, "Our Philadelphia Type of Christianity, and Who Chiefly are Responsible for It," the sermon was published in full in *The Press* on September 27, under the transparent headline "The Unreasonable Prejudices Against People of Color in Philadelphia and the Outrages Perpetrated Against them, a Disgrace to the Community." The following week, *The Christian Recorder* also published the entire sermon, praising it for its "matchless purity" and "Christian heroism," and asserting, "It is a matter of rejoicing that there are always some men found who love Jesus Christ and true principle more than the approbation of their fellow men." In his sermon, Barrett cited specific examples of racial injustice that had been described in the "able pamphlet, on 'Why

<sup>3</sup> *Catholicity of the New Church; and Uncatholicity of New-Churchmen* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1863), [4], 153. This theme pervaded his short-lived publication *The Swedenborgian* (1858-1860), which was "Devoted to the Advocacy of Spiritual Christianity, and Religious Liberty," as well as *The New-Church Monthly* (1867-1869), the journal of the New Church Congregational Union, of which the Frankford New Jerusalem Society was a member.

<sup>4</sup> "Swedenborgian [Lecture]," *Inquirer*, November 28, 1863, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Love Towards Enemies and the Way to Manifest It: A Sermon Delivered in the New Church Temple, Corner of Broad and Brandywine Streets, Sunday, June 12th, 1864* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1864), 18-23.

<sup>6</sup> For a chronological overview and analysis of this issue, see Philip S. Foner, "The Battle to End Discrimination against Negroes on Philadelphia Streetcars," Parts 1 (July 1973): 260-90; and 2 (Oct 1973): 354-79.

<sup>7</sup> [B.P. Hunt,], *Why Colored People in Philadelphia are Excluded from the Street Cars* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Son, printers, 1866); *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, February 1867* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Son, Printers, 1867).



## Rev. Benjamin Barrett

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colored people in Philadelphia are excluded from the streetcars,” which had been provided to him just “a few days” before. The identity of the pamphlet’s author has been debated, but evidence suggests that he was abolitionist Benjamin P. Hunt, a member of the city’s 1865 committee on streetcar desegregation who had embraced Swedenborg’s theology in 1854, through the influence of New York journalist and statesman John Bigelow.<sup>8</sup>

Barrett’s anti-discrimination sermon echoes the tone of Hunt’s pamphlet, reciting a litany of discriminatory behaviors and arguing that such injustices were by nature “unchristian,” as “justice is a fundamental of Christianity.” Rhetorically imagining the public outcry if similar actions were taken against white persons, he declared, “But the Gospel, I tell you, goes deeper than the skin. It knows no color—certainly none other than the color of the heart.” Rejecting the common rationalization that racial discrimination was primarily the fault of streetcar conductors and managers, Barrett placed the blame squarely on “the people of Philadelphia,” where the “popular sentiment” supported the “base acts” carried out by the railways. Barrett’s harsh condemnation of the people of Philadelphia for “having no sense of justice, where colored people’s rights are concerned,” extended to their Christian leaders, who were responsible for shaping the “prevailing popular sentiment on this subject.” He bluntly defined the “Philadelphia type of Christianity” as “a wretched counterfeit,” for denouncing Sunday rail

travel as a “profane institution” while allowing “colored people” regularly to be excluded or “forcibly ejected” from the city’s passenger railway cars. In Barrett’s view, this “meager and eviscerated kind of Christianity” was exacerbated by the clergy’s sins of omission: silence, indifference, neutrality, “worldly prudence,” and “timidly withholding remonstrance and warning, and counsel and reproof on this subject, with which they should have pricked the consciences of their people.” Barrett closed his sermon with a timeless Biblical charge, “that both ministers and people may see and practically acknowledge that *to do justly,*

**“But the Gospel, I tell you,  
goes deeper than the skin.  
It knows no color—certainly  
none other than the color of  
the heart.”**

and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God, is the chief requirement of the Being we worship and the religion we profess.”<sup>9</sup>

The controversy over equal rights on the city’s streetcars persisted after the election. The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, at their annual meeting in Philadelphia, November 22–23, 1866, passed a resolution admonishing the city’s churches for not using their “moral power” to open the streetcars to colored persons. Yet, there was little optimism. Henry Peterson of the *Saturday Evening Post* bluntly opined that “Even an army of occupation” could not desegregate the streetcars. Reinforcing that negativism, on December 22, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice James Thompson ruled against “colored citizens” Addison and Annie Foster in their suit against the Philadelphia and Gray’s Ferry passenger railway for having forcibly ejected Mrs. Foster and a female friend from

their railway car the previous August. *The Press* expressed outrage and surprise that Thompson had refused to “rebuke such miserable bigotry and persecution.” Alluding to the rights of colored passengers to ride on streetcars in “Baltimore and Washington, former cities of slavery,” *The Press* found it “deplorable that Philadelphia is constantly made an exception by these acts of injustice and tolerance.”<sup>10</sup>

Justice Thompson’s controversial decision in this case inspired Benjamin Barrett to preach another strong anti-discrimination sermon the following day. The full text was first published in *The Press* and then in *The Christian Recorder*, which asserted the power of Barrett’s “telling lesson”: “Any white man or woman holding prejudice in his or her heart, after reading this, cannot fail to yield it.” Barrett argued that Justice Thompson’s judgment “was in the interests of injustice, oppression and wrong,” and questioned what the nation had learned in the late war. “Will it deal justly with the colored race? It has declared them free! Will it make them equal with the rest of us?—equal before the law in their political rights and privileges?” He equated Thompson’s decision with that of the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney “in the Dred Scott case, wherein it was boldly and insultingly declared that ‘negroes have no rights which a white man is bound to respect.’” Barrett warned that “this very pious city of Philadelphia” would ultimately pay the penalty of “Eternal Justice” for its “practical atheism,” a term the author of the streetcar pamphlet also had used to describe the subjugation of God’s justice to “our injustice.”<sup>11</sup> More than one hundred years later, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would speak to similar injustice, defining “practical

<sup>8</sup> *The Christian Recorder and The Press* (Philadelphia), various, September 23 – October 6, 1866. John Bigelow describes his own introduction to Swedenborg and that of his friend Hunt in *The Bible That Was Dead and Is Alive Again; That Was Lost and Is Found; or How I Came to Know and Reverence Emanuel Swedenborg* ([New York]: “Privately printed,” [1893]).

<sup>9</sup> Barrett, “The Unreasonable Prejudices Against People of Color,” *Press*, September 27, 1866, 2.

<sup>10</sup> “Rights of Colored Citizens,” *Press*, December 24, 1866, 4.

<sup>11</sup> “Despising the Little Ones: A Sermon by Rev. B.F. Barrett,” *Press*, December 31, 1866, 2.

## Virtual Reality

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most enjoying the ability to watch events over again or enjoy them when time allows.

Convention was just the beginning of virtual events anyone could participate in this summer. Two of our camps—Almont Summer School and Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA)—offered a week of virtual programs during when they normally would have held regular, in person, jam-packed, fun-filled sessions. Both offered programming, live and prerecorded, on multiple platforms at a variety of times, hoping to offer something for everyone.

Virtual Almont<sup>2</sup> took place at the end of July with the theme Community. Every morning started with the traditional flag raising singing “Fling to the Breeze Our Glorious Banner,” and “A Taste of Almont” was offered throughout the rest of the day. Optional daily lessons for children were posted every morning; insightful, heartfelt lectures and discussions on the topic of community—ranging from heavenly to hellish—were offered each day. Fun cooking and crafting videos and nightly bedtime stories were just a few things that made the days entertaining. Zoom social hours in the evening reinforced the feeling of community as long-time friends enjoyed time together while welcoming newcomers and old friends, some even returning after being away for twenty-five years or more.

Sticking with tradition, virtual Fryeburg<sup>3</sup> planned a similar-to-normal daily schedule, though it began later in the day, encouraging participants in other time zones. Chapel services and sing-alongs started off each day, followed by lectures on Facebook

and discussion groups on Zoom, involving participants from several states and countries. Enticing programming brought back campers who had been away for decades but also provided a means for new campers to give it a try. Afternoons alternated between book club and craft sessions with a variety of social hours and game nights offered to simply spend time with friends in their spiritual community. One of the most fun (and also unexpected) successes was a virtual family dinner, suggested by one of the children. With almost thirty people singing blessings and enjoying a meal together—the virtual space allowed for one of the most special things a camp experience offers.

Along with the FNCA, *The Dole Three Miler* also was able to go virtual this year. Since 2014, the Rev. Dr. George Dole’s friends at the FNCA celebrate his passion and achievements in running by hosting a three-mile race in his honor on Fryeburg’s Rail Trail. Runners were given the option to register for the race and run in their own neighborhoods this year—registration had nearly as many racers as usual.

All the successful virtual experiences offered this summer show us that there is a desire for other types of experiences within our greater spiritual community. They have sparked discussions about what we can do once the pandemic has passed to keep our far-flung community connected. We will have to stay tuned as ideas become reality, and our virtual reality continues to strengthen our connections. (See pg. 114 on how CSS will be offering virtual education.)

We can safely say that *church* as we know it has changed. For almost everyone, the pandemic that we have found ourselves in has pushed us to be creative and look for new ways to continue doing the things we love to do—to spend time with our various communities, spiritual or otherwise. *Church* is so much more than going to a building

every Sunday for an hour. This summer proved that we can push the boundaries and shake off the stigma of doing things a certain way because it’s how they’ve always been done. We need our buildings and sacred spaces—they hold our history, memories, and pieces of our hearts. But look what we can accomplish when we push our boundaries and seek the spiritual needs of our community when we can’t go to those places. We reach people who maybe simply haven’t been able to travel in twenty-five years or didn’t live in an area with a Swedenborgian church within driving range, or simply didn’t have the time for a Sunday service. This is just the beginning of what the future holds and where technology will take us. ☦

Beki Greenwood serves on the General Council and is a member of the Bridgewater Church in Massachusetts. She enjoys working from home with her three cats as co-workers.

## Priorities

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neighbors and communities if we strive to be faithful. We love life, which is the same as loving the Divine One, through our efforts to care for our neighbor and communities’ welfare on all levels. This understanding underscores the place for social justice concerns in our ministries. Life’s priority should be building the Beloved Community, making “The Good Place,” manifesting the New Jerusalem. Beginning in the here and now. ☦



Dru Johnson is a Swedenborgian-affiliated student at Pacific School of Religion and a member of the Swedenborgian Community Church at Hillside. He has been involved this past semester in a study on

social justice ministry in General Convention’s history. He wishes to acknowledge his partner Deborah Stinson in writing this reflection.

<sup>2</sup> Virtual Almont videos can be found on the Almont Facebook Group Page.

<sup>3</sup> Virtual FNCA videos can be viewed at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly Facebook Page or the FryeburgNCA YouTube Channel.

## Passages

### Deaths

#### Rev. Dr. J. Theodore “Ted” Klein,

entered into the fullness of the spiritual world in Boston, Massachusetts, on August 8, 2020, at the age of 76.

Born in Abington, Pennsylvania, he was the cherished son of the late Harald Immanuel and Ruth Powell Klein. Ted graduated from the Academy of the New Church College (BA), Temple University (MEd in Education), and Boston University (MA and PhD in Philosophy). He was ordained by the Swedenborgian Church in 1984 and faithfully lived



a life committed to that ministry for thirty-six years. Rev. Klein served as faculty at the Swedenborg School of Religion, presented lectures and talks at churches and conventions, and served on several committees, including being secretary of the Council of Ministers. The doctrine of usefulness and social justice were integral to Ted's ministry, which is displayed well in his book published by J. Appleseed Press, *The Power of Service*. He also authored *Why Is This Happening To Me* and the *Learning Compassion* workbook. He served the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem (Church on the Hill, Boston) for fifteen years, the last four as its Senior Pastor. Throughout all of the difficulties at the Boston Church, Ted remained a loving and stalwart presence of Swedenborgian thought, doing all in his power to maintain the

church's historic identity.

In addition to his church ministry, Ted had a passion for educating minds. He started his academic career teaching philosophy at Urbana University, moved on to the Swedenborg School of Religion and then UMass Boston, he had just retired at the end of the most recent spring semester.

Ted was an artist and a lover of nature, music, and dancing. But most importantly, he was a dedicated husband and father. Knowing that he was going to pass, he was at peace and was ready for the transition, but his thoughts were not in his own life but of the difficulty his loved ones would face. Ted was a kind and gentle man with a shining soul. He approached life with great insight and joyful humor. Well done good and faithful servant. ☩

#### Rev. Benjamin Barrett

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atheism” as “not so much denying God’s existence with our lips as denying God’s existence with our lives.”<sup>12</sup>

In early February 1867, the Pennsylvania Equal Rights League, led by prominent African-American reformers in the state, built a successful political coalition that resulted in the passage of a bill in late March that required railway companies to carry all passengers without discrimination. Benjamin Barrett’s New Church connection and his influence in this debate largely have been ignored, perhaps because of his misidentification in early research on the streetcar issue. Barrett’s condemnation of white ministers was so strong, and perhaps the

nature of his “New Jerusalem Church” so obscure, that historian Philip S. Foner included an excerpt of Barrett’s September 1866 sermon in his anthology *The Voice of Black America: Major Speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1971*.<sup>13</sup> Despite Barrett’s controversial presence within the General Convention, he found passions similar to his own in the Philadelphia-area societies that had seceded from the Pennsylvania Association over Academy influence—First, Second (Southwark), Frankford, and Edenfield (Delaware County). The preamble to the 1866 constitution of their short-lived New Church Congregational Union affirmed its members’ Swedenborgian

beliefs, particularly in the doctrine of “usefulness” and their understanding of it: “Believing that man was created to be a form of use in the kingdom of God, and that he really comes into that kingdom only in the degree that he comes into a true state of neighborly love.” About two decades later, these same societies would form the nucleus of a resurrected Pennsylvania Association, reunite with the General Convention, and embark on a new journey of “usefulness.”<sup>14</sup> ☩



Gail R. McCormick, is currently writing a history of the New Jerusalem Society of Frankford, ca. 1819-1971. Gail and her husband Mike reside in New Jersey.

12 Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Religion of Doing,” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 4 July 1954, Montgomery, Ala., in Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Volume 6: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 171 (quote).

13 Philip S. Foner, *The Voice of Black America: Major Speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1971* (New York: Simon & Schuster, c1972), 339-40. Foner may not have drawn the relationship between Barrett’s “New Jerusalem Church” on Broad and Brandywine Streets and the First New Jerusalem Society’s elegant Gothic building constructed on Chestnut Street in 1882, under the pastorate of Rev. Chauncey Giles. That building is on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, although it is no longer a house of worship.

14 “Preamble” of the New Church Congregational Union, *New-Church Monthly* 1 (January 1867): 37. (This sentiment is similar to Barrett’s on the subject in his 1855 book *The Golden Reed: Or, The True Measure of a True Church*, 260.) The Pennsylvania Association was reorganized in 1889. Benjamin Barrett was involved in the organizational meeting, but did not return to membership in the Association or Convention.

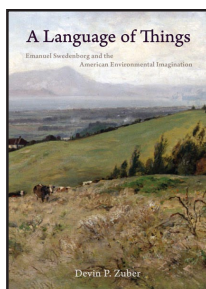


## What's Happening

### Swedenborgian Book Club

*Anyone is welcome to join, whether you've completed the book or not.*

Wednesday, September 16, at 8:00 pm EDT



#### ***A Language of Things: Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination*, By Dr. Devin Zuber**

By tracing the ways that Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, and Sarah Orne Jewett, among others, variously responded to Swedenborg, Zuber illuminates the complex dynamic that came to unfold between the religious, the literary, and the ecological. Dr. Zuber will be joining our discussion.

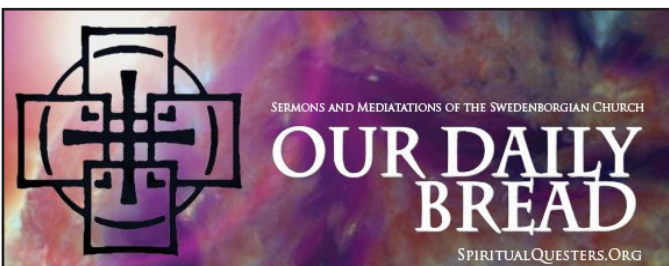
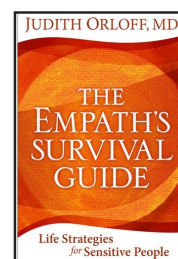
If you would like to join us via Zoom contact:

Robbin Ferriman at [RobbinCats@gmail.com](mailto:RobbinCats@gmail.com) or Beki Greenwood at [Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org).

### Empath's Support Group Starting this Fall!

*There is nothing wrong with being sensitive—you are about to discover what's most right about yourself.* All are welcome to join a monthly support group. *The Empath's Survival Guide: Life Strategies for Sensitive People* is a resource for kindred sensitive souls to find understanding and acceptance in a world that is often coarse, heartless, and disdainful of sensitivity. It challenges the *status quo* and creates a new normal for how to view sensitivity.

Please contact Rev. Susannah Currie by September 15 with your availability if you would like to participate: [Revscurrie@gmail.com](mailto:Revscurrie@gmail.com)

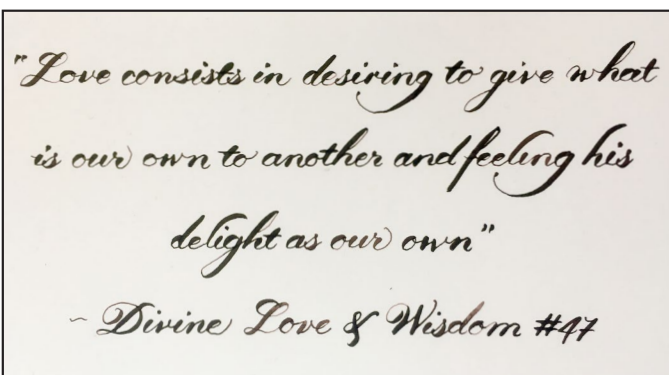


Our Daily Bread at [SpiritualQuesters.org](http://SpiritualQuesters.org) is your resource for recent sermons, meditations reflections, lessons, interviews, and original content from within and beyond the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

**Do you write poetry, make puzzles or games, or have pieces of art you would like to share?**

**We'd love to see them!**

**Send it along to [Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org).**



Calligraphy Quotes by Myrrh Brooks  
[@myrrhbrooks](https://www.instagram.com/myrrhbrooks) on Instagram

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G I T L E  
T U T R O  
N R U A T D  
R A N O D P

George: "Want some advice?"

Me: "Of course,

\_\_\_\_\_!

Jumble by Jason Greenwood  
Answers will be printed in the next issue.

#### **Answers to the July/August Jumble:**

Nylon, Crept, Launch, Advise  
Where Newman and Simon go to unwind: "Paulhaven"

### 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.

## Walking the Labyrinth in the Woods on a Fall Day

BY JESSE ANN WHITE

God is  
infinite,  
detailed,  
soft,  
rough,  
tall  
and tiny,  
light  
and dark,  
heavy  
and strong,  
light as a fall leaf.  
You know my path, Lord,  
but there are many roads  
You guide me,  
yet I choose.  
I may walk  
the same path  
again,  
or find a new one.  
If I stray,  
I know my way back.  
All paths lead to  
the center,  
yet out into the world.  
Where are you?  
You are everywhere.  
In my footsteps

and the gentle rain drops  
and the swaying  
of the trees,  
the breeze  
and the rocks.  
You are at the tops  
of the trees  
and in the moss  
on the broken stumps.  
You are old  
and new  
and growing  
and dying.  
You follow me  
on my path  
and all I have to do  
is look  
and I find  
you here. ☦

Jesse Ann White  
serves as the  
secretary for  
the Fryeburg  
New Church  
Assembly's Board  
of Directors.  
She resides in  
North Thetford,  
Vermont, with her  
dog, Bernie.

