

THE MESSENGER

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Do you read the Bible every day? Every week? Once a month? Occasionally, when the mood strikes you? Almost never?

Certainly, the vast majority of Americans are in the latter category, and for the very reason that Swedenborg felt the call to reveal the inner spiritual meaning of the scriptures. In a word, the Bible on the literal level is generally inscrutable to the average modern reader. How often people confide to me that the scriptures are strange and irrelevant to their lives! They wish it were different, for many of them long to reverence the Bible; they wish that there were a book of God's Word that was indisputably just that. But alas! When they venture into the Old Testament they find odd and queer tales that can't compare with modern literature. In the New Testament, they feel they fare only a little better.

Yet, when we look at the core concepts for which the Swedenborg Church has been known, it is Swedenborg's awesome unveiling of the inner sense of the literal scriptures that stands alone as a completely unique contribution to the world of religion. Certainly we have been notable for our steadfast views on immortality, but with the ascendancy of near-death research, a great many Christian and non-Christian movements have a similar understanding. Our teaching on the Oneness of God expressed in the three aspects of God's nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as opposed to the old "Three Persons" understanding of the Trinity, is now widely accepted. Swedenborg's insistence on the unity of faith and good works as the stuff of salvation, at variance with both the Protestant and Catholic churches of his day, are now seen by most leading theologians as obvious theological common sense.

But Swedenborg's central emphasis on inner levels of meaning in the sacred scriptures, by which a much fuller understanding of God is available, is as unknown and isolated to the Swedenborgian Church as it was in 1820. This is surely an irony and a challenge for us! The irony is that Swedenborg's entire liberating theological system emerged from his immersion in the deeper mysteries of the ancient texts. The challenge dwarfs all of the other theological undertakings together: If the powerful revelations Swedenborg found resident in the scriptures were only scratching the surface, as he said more than once, then how much healing and inspiration the world might reap if hundreds of thousands of Christians began to take this possibility seriously?

Increasingly, our western society is producing sophisticated people. The Swedenborgian Church's ability to bridge the seeming gulf between religion and science has always rendered our church attractive to the highly educated. It is also the highly educated in our society who tend to dismiss the scriptures most summarily, but their spiritual needs equal, if not surpass, those who can accept easily the Bible as the Word of God. Let us re-double our efforts to produce a clear and effective approach to a study of the scriptures that will be readily grasped by any well-meaning person open enough to sincerely seek it out. God's Word is eternal: let us do our part to enable it to speak more forcefully to our age.

James F. Lawrence

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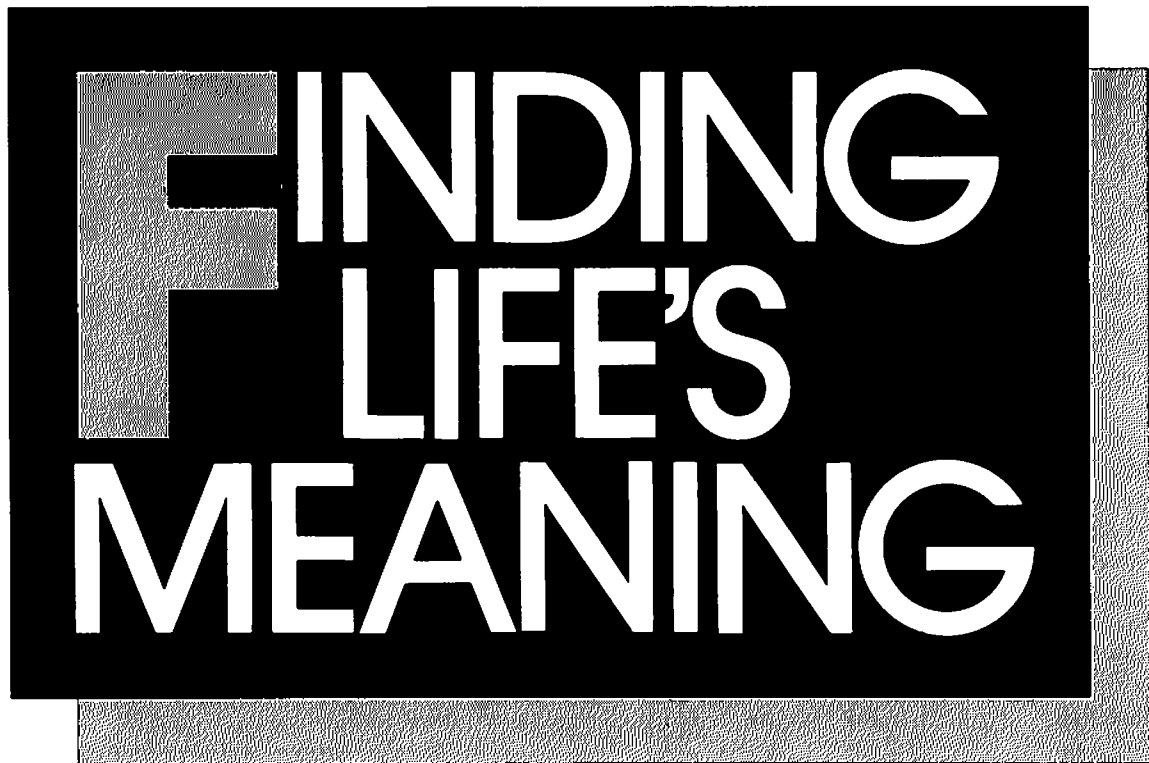
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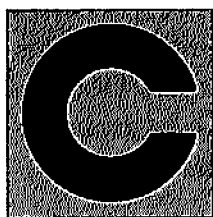
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FINDING LIFE'S MEANING

William Ross Woofenden



Clarence Day, in his book, *This Simian World* said, "It is possible that our race may be an accident in a meaningless universe living its brief life uncared for on this dark, cooling star; but even so—and all the more—what marvelous creatures we are! What fairy tale, what tale from the Arabian Nights of the jinn is a hundredth part as

wonderful as this true fairy story of simians! It is so much more heartening too than the tales we invent. A universe capable of giving birth to many such accidents is—blind or not—a good world to live in, a promising universe."

I don't think it would be possible to find a definition of the purpose of life which would be broad enough and noncommittal enough to be acceptable to all people. For example, if I were to propose that "the attainment of happiness is the purpose of life," I believe the great majority of people in the world would agree—not all, but most. Those who would disagree would do so because they would unconsciously define the terms of this assertion in their own way. Both the advantage and the disadvantage of statements of this sort, by the way, is that they do *not* define their own terms.

There would be some, for instance, who would object to this definition because of a personal religious belief that we are not intended to be happy in this world. But in taking this stand, they would be first of all categorically defining happiness as something that is undesirable on this plane of life, and at the same time be limiting the application of the statement to life in this world as we know it. I feel sure that these same people would quickly agree that life in the *hereafter* is intended to be happy for the *redeemed*.

Others, like Clarence Day—whether seriously or not—would raise a question as to whether there is such a thing as purpose in life. This, of course, neatly eliminates the whole problem. If there is *no* purpose in life, no meaning whatever to our existence, it is obviously a waste of time to try to find out what the purpose might be. But barring these two extremes, I think it is safe to say that the great majority of people in the world would rank the pursuit of happiness high on their scale of human values.

Some who feel that the attainment of happiness is a major purpose of life would be those who subscribe to a belief in a life after death; others would not. The latter would, of necessity, have a quite different idea of happiness than the former. On the other hand, some who profess a belief in eternal life seem to seek so-called worldly pleasures as avidly as the non-believers. Men and women in different walks of have vastly different ideas of the ingredients of happiness. Without taking any particular time to meditate on it, the average person in the street, if asked what he or she conceives the purpose of life to be, might predictably be expected to reply that the whole meaning of life is get pleasure. And if asked to defend this statement, in the course of the argument it is likely that the person would cite as indisputable fact that all human activity is obviously governed by the striving for happiness. Our hypothetical person might even go on to state that this theory of the dominant role of the pleasure principle in the whole of life is one of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis.

It is, on the other hand, heartening to me to discover that an increasing number of psychologists and psychiatrists are taking the stand that the pleasure principle is an artificial creation of psychology. In fact, long ago, the philosopher Immanuel Kant pointed out that pleasure is not the goal of our aspirations, but the

consequence of attaining them.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that there are circumstances in which pleasure may quite deliberately be the goal of an act of the will. It is also true that the chances are that such an act may not be an ethically good deed, but may involve the attainment of pleasure for the seeker at the expense of the pain or degradation of another. But even aside from such special situations,

in one person may stimulate a vicious type of delight in one who tends to gloat over the misfortunes of others, and this type of person apparently experiences definite pleasure in doing so. Pleasure of this kind is clearly immoral.

In reality, life is little concerned with pleasure or unpleasure. If we were to set up pleasure as the whole meaning of life, we would insure that in the final analysis, life would inevitably

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the theory of the pleasure principle overlooks the generally directly purposeful character of much of our thinking.

Pleasure and Joy Distinguished

Generally, people do not want pleasure as such; they simply *want what they want!* If we were to accept hedonism, the pleasure principle, as the overruling principle of life, it would lead to a leveling of all potential human aims. It would be impossible to differentiate any action or the motive of any action from any other, since we know in advance that all would have the same purpose. If we were to define conduct in these terms, we would devalue every genuine moral impulse in man.

For example, a feeling of sympathy—although it probably does not bring pleasure to the sympathizer—is by its nature moral in itself, even before it is embodied in an act. However, the same situation which arouses sympathy

seem meaningless. Pleasure, by its very nature, cannot possibly lend meaning to life. For what is pleasure? A condition.

I think it is necessary that we distinguish clearly in our minds between the *condition* of pleasure, on the one hand, and the *state* of happiness or joy on the other hand. In his discourse about himself as the true vine, Jesus said in part, "I have told you this is so that my joy may be in you and that our joy may be complete." (John 15:11) One thing I believe we may properly conclude from this statement is that joy has a proper place in the Christian way of life.

Joy or happiness, however, may make life meaningful only if the joy itself has intrinsic meaning. Meaning cannot lie within itself. In fact, by definition it must lie outside of itself. (I say this despite my fondness for Ogden and Richards' challenging book, *The Meaning of Meaning*.)

Joy is always directed toward

an object. Joy is a purposeful emotion—in contrast to mere pleasure, which is an emotion based on a present condition. This distinction between pleasure and joy is not something which I have invented, but is in fact so well established that it shows up in our ordinary speech. For example, we may speak of having pleasure “on account of” something (referring to a condition), whereas we rejoice “over” something (indicating that the joy has an object). Or, a person might be from time to time in a conditional state of pleasure (for instance, that feeling we experience following a delicious meal) without reaching out at all in thought or feeling toward the realm of values.

It is only when our emotions involve or are evoked because of values that we can feel pure “happiness” or “joy.” This is why joy can never be goal in itself; joy or happiness, per se, cannot be pursued as a goal. It is only in carrying out purposeful acts involving moral or spiritual values that true happiness can be produced. Søren Kierkegaard expressed this thought well in a maxim; he said that the door to happiness opens outward. Anyone who tries to open this door by pulling it toward himself finds that it will not yield.

The paradox of genuine joy is that the person who is definitely anxious to be happy, by that very anxiety, cuts off or blocks the path to happiness. Thus, in the end, all striving for happiness—as a supposed ultimate goal in human life—proves to be an impossible quest. Let us, then, turn to our earlier thesis that people are not dominated by the will to pleasure, but are dominated by a longing and a striving to find an ultimate meaning in life. This is what Viktor Frankl has significantly called the “will to meaning.”

Search for Meaning

An earlier philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, perhaps foresaw this insight when he said, “If a man has a *why* for his life, he can bear with almost any *how*.”

The novelist Albert Camus also caught this thought where he had one of his characters say, “Here is what frightens me: to lose one’s life is a little thing, and I will have the courage when necessary. But to see the sense of this life dissipated, to see our reasons for existence disappear, that is what is intolerable. A man cannot live without meaning.”

How many of us have experienced from time to time

Joy is a purposeful emotion—in contrast to mere pleasure, which is an emotion based on a present condition.

what has been called “weekend neurosis,” that sense of inner void, that lack of content in our lives once the rush of the busy week is over? But—if we have been so victimized—may we not properly ask, “Where is meaning to be found?” Existentialist philosophers seem fond of talking about borderline or ultimate situations in human life which, unlike other situations in our lives, cannot be eliminated or changed; they can only be acknowledged. What are some of these ultimate situations? I must suffer. I must struggle. I am at the mercy of chance. I am inexorably involved in guilt. I must die.

Putting on the existentialist’s cloak for a moment, may I suggest for your careful consideration that the search for meaning outside of or apart from these ultimate situations is a complete waste of time? Meaning that has any validity must be able to offer answers to the questions of suffering, struggle, fate, sin and death. The ultimate situations of life demand ultimate

answers.

Viktor Frankl, whom I mentioned a moment ago, who endured and survived the horrors of Nazi death camps, wrote that while for most of his fellow inmates the question of meaning hinged on the question of survival, for him the meaning of life had to be affirmed in the context of possibly not surviving. He philosophizes that a life whose meaning stood or fell on whether one escaped with it or not—a life whose meaning depended on such a happenstance—ultimately would not be worth living any way. In a sense, Frankl seems to me to be somewhat like a modern Socrates, for it was Socrates who said, “To philosophize is to learn how to die.” May I suggest that these two men knew where to look for the meaning in life?

William Sloane Coffin Jr. pointed out that many of the students whom he counseled as chaplain at Yale found the experience of higher education rather meaningless. In trying to analyze this reaction he asked, “Why not? How many philosophers today consider death to be the burning business of philosophy? How many educators consider these ultimate situations of human life: death and suffering, fate and sin, worthy of study? The whole trend of higher education,” he continued, “is to educate *not* to make a *life*, but to make a *living*!” He concluded, “Small wonder that higher education, paradoxically, has never enjoyed a level of performance so high, and a level of influence so low—influence on students of a nation which as a whole knows less than its educators where to look for meaning.”

Alternative to Meaninglessness

Is it not time that this generation turned to a higher source for advice and leadership? Either, as Clarence Day suggested, this world is finally meaningless, or, there is a God who has been in control all along, and who did

indeed have a plan when he set about to create a universe. It has to be one or the other: either this world is meaningless, or there is a meaning to be found in what has been traditionally called the Word of the Lord—God's message to his creation.

This Word of the Lord—which we find embedded in the Bible—tells us that the greatest happiness we can find is in becoming conjoined or united with

grief." (1:18) It is, I believe, a fact of human experience that simply to *know* the ingredients of true and lasting happiness does not necessarily bring happiness; it is more likely to bring discontent. And yet it is a healthy discontent, and one which we should be willing to face while we live in this world. For it is only as we do become discontented with our present state—especially as we contrast it with the knowledge we have of our tremendous

work is infinitely varied. And while it is probably true that any one of us—not being infinite—can probably only do justice to one task at a time, is there not an implication that we need also to be alert to the likelihood that part of being human is always to be alert to the opportunities for change? The apothegm *semper paratus*—always ready—contains a wisdom all would do well to heed.

If, for instance, something happens so that our current task will not yield to our efforts, no matter how hard we try, and at the same time something else presents itself to us as having all the appearances of a reasonable alternative, is it not logical to suggest that we might do well to cultivate the flexibility to be able to swing over to another value group—especially if that seems the only logical way to achieve any degree of personal fulfillment?

I realize there is a real danger here of overdoing it! We have little respect for people who change their minds or mores too easily, calling them wishy-washy, or lacking in character, or some such thing. But we also have little respect for those whom we see as stubbornly rigid or unbending. May I suggest that life requires of us what I'll call "spiritual elasticity." It is a trait that must be deliberately sought and developed on our part—a trait that will in time enable us to temper our efforts to the chances that we are offered. It is a high and noble skill.

How often we may hear a person bewail that "life has no meaning," since the activities he or she is forced to engage in are utterly lacking in higher values. This sort of complaint, of course, is quite beside the point. In terms of spiritual value, it is largely a matter of indifference *what* a person's occupation is (provided, of course, it is not out and out dishonest, or something like that). The crucial thing is *how* a person works, whether the person in fact *fills* the place in which he or she happens to have landed.

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How many of us have experienced from time to time what has been called "weekend neurosis," that sense of inner void, that lack of content in our lives once the rush of the busy week is over?

God; that the more nearly we become united to God in spirit and life outlook, the happier we will be. But to become thus united with the infinite seems not only a rather vague and undefinable thing, it also seems to call for a degree of personal perfection or regeneration which would call for a longer period of time than most of us are granted in this world. This realization, however, may help us to see for the first time something of the significance of the Christian teaching of a life after death, seeing it, for one thing, as an opportunity to complete tasks begun here. This factor alone would seem to offer one valid reason for putting stress on an ultimate happiness.

A second reason would seem to be that we are faced with a paradox. Thomas Gray once wrote, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." His thinking was in line with a much earlier work, the book of Ecclesiastes, which says, "With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more

possibilities of further development—that we are likely to get started on the right road.

Life for all of us is made up of tasks—of work. Perhaps to help us feel that this is not unreasonable, we turn again to the words of Jesus. In the gospel of John (5:17) he says, "My Father is always working, and I too must work"—this in response to the charge that he had broken the Sabbath by *healing*, that is by working, on the Sabbath. My purpose in quoting these words is to help us to understand more clearly what is involved in the meaning of life. Each of us, I'm sure, will more readily be able to face day-to-day responsibilities with the proper perspective if we have a better appreciation of the relationship between tasks (or work) and meaning.

Spiritual Elasticity

Our heavenly Father, says Jesus, is *always* working! I think this means that life, meaning, and work are inseparable. I think, too, that we can presume that God's

In the sight of God, the so-called ordinary person who really masters the basic tasks of his or her occupation and family and social life has a life that is far greater than and superior to those, for example, of many so-called "important" people, who—even though they may make decisions that affect the lives of millions—do their work with indifference, or even unscrupulousness and self-serving.

Kept within reasonable limits, a person's moral self-condemnation carries with it the assumption of an ideal of personality.

No one can ever know in advance what life holds in store, or what magnificent hour may be "down the road." Nor is any person ever justified in insisting on having been cursed with personal inadequacy (as though God did not know what he was doing). No matter how discontented any one of us may be with ourself as a person, no matter how much we may torment ourself with brooding over our failings—the very fact that we have such doubts proves that we are not really such a poor creature as we seem to think!

Kept within reasonable limits, a person's moral self-condemnation carries with it the assumption of an ideal of personality. The person who judges self harshly has at least caught sight of some real values and is taking an active part in the world of meaning. The more each person grasps the task-oriented nature of life, the more meaningful life can become for that person. This, I would insist, is true of *everyone*. But then there are those

who go further; who, as it were, experience life in a further dimension.

I refer to those who are able to experience the fact that the task comes from an authority, and thus are enabled to gain an insight into who the authority is that the task comes from. Such people tend to experience their life work as a mission, a mandate. What I am describing, of course, is the essential characteristic of the *religious person*: the person who is conscious of and feels responsible to the *taskmaster* as well as toward his or her life mission.

In Conclusion

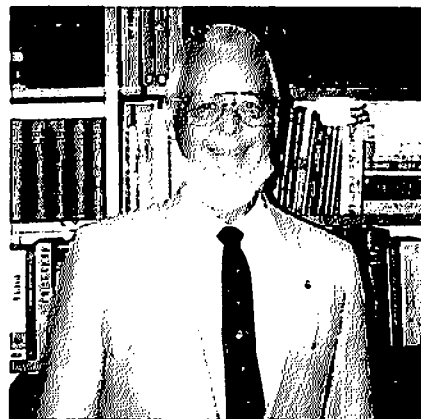
It is the religious person who learns that to ask the meaning of life in general terms is to put the question falsely; because, to do so, refers too vaguely to "life" and not concretely to "each person's own existence." It is this person who is ultimately able to give to the question of the meaning of life an entirely new twist. To wit:

It life is itself that asks the questions of us! In the final analysis it is not up to the individual to ask the questions; rather, *the person* is questioned *by life*, and has to respond—to be responsive to, and responsible to, *life*. And for this person the meaning of life is found in the apparently paradoxical primacy of response as over against question. The same instinct which leads us to fulfill our particular life tasks also guides us in our response to the questions life puts to us.

This thing which I have labeled with the inadequate word "instinct"—maybe it would help to call it the "moral instinct"—is in fact what has traditionally been called "conscience." That something called "conscience" has its "still small voice" which from time to time "speaks" to us is undeniably true. But what we may not realize is that *what* conscience says is, in every case, a response.

The religious person, we have said, is one who experiences not only what is spoken, but the

speaker as well; that is, the religious person's hearing is sharper than that of the non-religious person. In the religious person's dialogue with conscience—in this most intimate of human experiences—it is God who both asks the questions and gives the answers. It is *within this experience* that the door is at length opened to us to find life's meaning. ■



Professor Woofenden in his office.

These thoughts were originally presented as a lecture at the Swedenborg Library in Boston. The Rev. Dr. William Woofenden teaches theology, philosophy and homiletics at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, Mass., and is the editor of the scholarly journal, Studia Swedenborgiana.



A Highway to Christmas

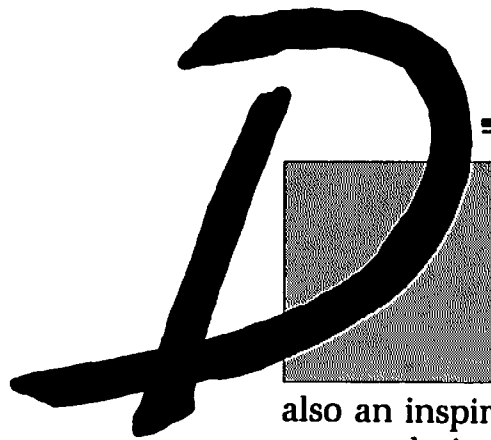
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*The large masses of the snow pull down heavily
the green branches of youthfulness and a frozen innocence
My speechless waiting in the squeezing silence is my chosen deal
The land resounds in a white con sordino
I feel uneasy letting words drop on the way
like merchandise full of faithful dust
I only believe in reason and logic if their power
is invested in a sensitive heart
I'd like to silence and choke all the marches
My steps are muted now and I beg of you
Hear my mitigated sounding oh Love
when rhymes are lost comfortably in the snow
and my melody is seeking the most tremulous pianissimo
in harmony with the simple reality of an uncomplicated presence
I yearn to learn all about me with the help of uninquisitive
non piercing eyes and with the clear tunes of nature
I'd like to know everything that exists outside of me
with the kindness of my inner mind
Let every feeling humanly lived be to me a highway
to all cognitions of all Noels and Passages from Egypt
Now I'm moving forward on an asphalt road
The snow sprinkled by the moist dirt is pushed
to the sides of the white and lazy ditches
The syncopated sliding of my feet ruins the rhythm of my heartbeat
but I'll arrive to you Joy of my Christmas
like a rainbow of the permanently bent verticality
Yes I'll come to you walking tall and with soft steps
After a little while spring will come
two clouds will blend in one
the unwanted footsteps will be washed away by the warm raindrops
the clean grass will burst into the boiling green
. . . With my renewed being I shall see your radiance
poured into the space of my Holidays and all intimate horizons!*

Ivan Franklin-Rusinsky

How to Make Your Church Grow

Eric Allison



uring May of this year, I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend a three-day seminar on church growth presented by the Fuller Institute. Not only was this an enlightening experience, but it was also an inspiring one. I was able to learn numerous new techniques for church growth and was able to see clearly many of the mistakes I have made. This article will share some of what I consider to be the most relevant points.

A Perspective

First, I believe it is necessary to address the issue of why we need to learn techniques for increasing our numerical growth. Some people are very troubled by the listing of techniques which will help a church grow in numbers. "It sounds so mechanical," I have heard some people say. Techniques always sound mechanical. Let us remember our own teachings—it is not so much what we do, but why we do it. Those who are enthusiastic about church growth should be mindful of the fact that you will meet people who do not want to grow. They will talk of spiritual growth as the first priority of the church. They will be right. However, when someone says, "If our church had a certain spiritual quality, our growth in numbers would ensue," they are both wrong and right. A church will not grow unless it has a certain quality within it to attract people, but a church that does not have a very specific goal of growth, will probably not grow. Many churches have a goal, "to become more Christ-like" or "to help the Lord in the building of the New Jerusalem." These are very worthwhile goals, but they are very difficult to measure. We are not only called to take your own regeneration seriously, but we are to share this teaching with the world, and we cannot share our teachings with the world and help the Lord in the building of the New Jerusalem if the world does not know that we exist.

Many say that the main purpose of our church is to grow in our love for the Lord. I believe that this is essential for every church. I also believe that love for the Lord is something which must be shared, *not* kept to ourselves. Love is "something which extends itself for the purpose of our own or someone else's spiritual growth." If our love does not extend outside of our church, then we may someday come to Christ saying, "Lord, Lord," while He turns away and says, "I never knew you." Yes, our church needs to focus on internal growth. It also needs to focus on external or numerical growth, for we know right well that our internals much match our externals, or we are in disorder. Yes, techniques for numerical growth may seem mechanical to some of us, but what is infinitely more important is motive. The Lord gave us the "great commission" to "Go into all the world baptising in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." As Christian people we need to remember that part of being a Christian is to help the Lord in the building of his kingdom in this world. The Lord is certainly capable of bringing the New Jerusalem into the world without the help of our tiny organization, yet we also know that the Lord does his work in the world through people. He is depending upon us.

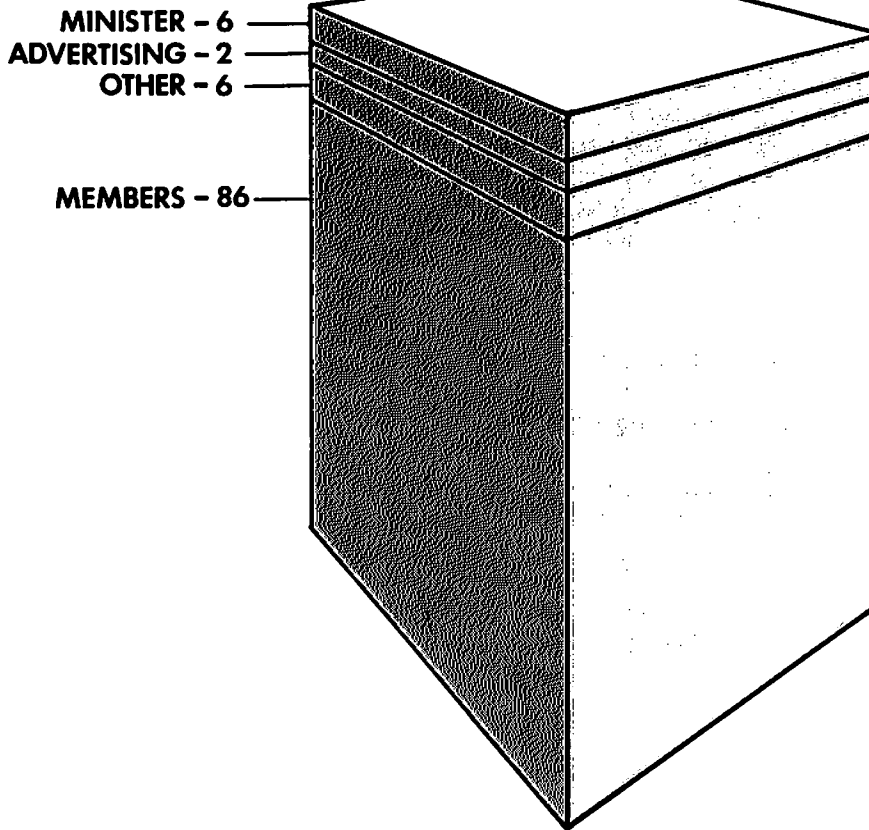
Before launching into my list of techniques for church growth, let me be clear that we are talking about conversion. So, however many people you may think that you bring into your congregation, never forget that it is not you that converts—it is the Lord that does the converting. You are only his instrument.

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Our churches have, for the most part, put very little effort into attracting new people. I have always puzzled over why such a small church as the Swedenborgian Church would do so little to grow. Now, I think I know why. When driving back from the Fuller Institute workshop held in Chicago, I had what I would call a vision. It was not an opening of the clouds, but I do feel certain that the Lord spoke to me. The essence of this

Now, many of the old forms have begun to fade and give way to something new. The arguing, politicking, and back-stabbing that we witnessed in the church a decade ago is, for the most part, a bad memory. Our conventions are positive, uplifting, optimistic, practical, thoughtful, and full of warmth and fellowship. There is now a strong feeling of moving ahead and opening up. What could be more "New Church"?

PERCENT OF PEOPLE BROUGHT INTO THE CHURCH BY...



"road to Kitchener vision" was that our denomination has not grown because it was not intended to do so until it had a spiritual transformation of its own. Our church was in a state of "vastation." It would not grow because it was not finished shrinking. Now, it is done shrinking. The external form of what we have called the "New Church," was really an external representation of the old church. The theology of the church was new, but its external form was old.

The Facts

Eighty-six percent of all people who join churches are brought into the church by members of the congregation. Six percent of those who join the church are brought in by the minister. Less than two percent come into a church from advertising. The remaining six percent come from a variety of other sources.

As pastors of the Kitchener church, both Paul Zacharias and I were perplexed about some of the many people we visited who seemed genuinely interested in the church, but did not come back after we visited them. I began to think that maybe I was very bad at visiting. Fortunately, what I learned was that nearly seventy percent of all people who visit a church will return if they are contacted by a *trained* layperson within the first three days. The seventy percent who would have come back if they had received a visit or contact from a layperson will diminish by nearly fifty percent if they receive a visit from the pastor. You read it right. Chances are fifty percent better that a visitor will return to your church if he is contacted by a layperson rather than by the minister.

It is time we realized that we are all ministers. We have all been called by the Lord in some way to serve him, and we all have unique gifts which can help in the growth of our churches and thus in the building of His kingdom on earth.

Friends, relatives, and associates are generally the people who are brought into a church by

those who are already members. Ask yourself, when was the last time you invited someone to church? If you really want your church to grow, you will invite others to come to it.

What does it mean to have a *trained* layperson to visit the newcomers? I am sure there is much that I have to learn in this area, but I offer the following (those who want more detailed outlines of my training sessions may write to me for copies):

1. Organization: If you have a visitor coming in your front door on a Sunday morning, have someone there to greet them. Have them sign the guest book (legibly) and be sure to get their phone number. This should be done by someone other than the minister or his or her spouse. It is the responsibility of this church member to contact the visitor sometime *that day*. Each day that goes by, research shows that the chances of the visitor coming back for a second time diminishes significantly.

2. Training Sessions: Have at least three training sessions which are to be led by the minister. Sunday is the best day. After church or Sunday evening, have a two-hour session. The content of the session may be as follows: A. Open with a prayer. B. The minister needs to share something about how the church is important to him or her. Not a head trip, but *share* how the Lord is in your life. Share also with your group why the teachings of the church are important to you and why you want the church to grow. *Be very brief. Nothing kills enthusiasm more than a long talk.*

3. Set a number goal: Set a goal of how many people you want to bring into the church by a certain date. Ask each person how many people they think they can bring into the church and ask them to set their own goal. Be aware that there will always be those who will not want to set a number goal and will argue against it. These are not the people you want on your growth

committee. A number goal is *essential*. Make a chart with a line graph on church attendance.

4. Have each person come to the meeting with a **list of the most asked questions** about the church. Be ready to answer them *briefly*. Write up a list of answers to what you consider to be the most often asked questions and the ones which you think *are* the most important ones. Have this as a handout for them.

5. Break up into diads and have the group spend a few moments sharing with their partners how they have experienced the Lord in their lives and why the church is important to them. Have a third person, or yourself, give them feedback on how their sharing would be heard by a visitor. Be careful, this could be touchy. Obviously the most important thing about sharing something like this is that it is from your heart.

6. Do a role play and have one diad acting out a home visit in front of the group. Get feedback from the whole group.

7. Have daily meditation that each person in the growth committee is to follow. This should be brief. Ten minutes is not too much to ask anyone to give to the Lord. You may design this anyway you like. It may have something like: Asking the Lord what to do. It may also have each person just visualizing many people walking in the doors of the church. Most important, is simply to give thanks to the Lord each day for the teachings He has given us. They are precious pearls.

Prayer Fellowship

A tremendous tool for integrating new people and building a strong sense of community is a prayer fellowship. This is a group of seven people that meets only once each month. However, they pray for each other on a rotating basis, so that each member of the group is prayed for by all the other members of the group one day each week. The group meets one day each month for a meal, prayer,

Advertising 279
**is
expensive,
but if it
helps you
bring
people to
the Lord, it
is worth
every
penny.**

280 **One thing
is certain
and this is
that it
works least
when the
minister
does the
calling.
If you have
people on
your
growth
committee
who are
brave
enough,
then go
for it.**

and time to share what is going on in their lives. This is the church at its best. The church would be divided into these groups of seven, putting a new person or couple into each group. Members of the church do not have to be in a prayer fellowship if they do not want to be, but all members of the congregation should be invited. The minister should be a member of a prayer fellowship like everyone else in the congregation. Some prayer

The groups will most certainly fail if they are nothing more than gripe sessions or shooting the breeze. Prayer groups are for prayer and real sharing and emotional support.

Advertising

The "Yellow Pages" is your best bet, dollar for dollar. However, radio and newspaper ads can be effective if you advertise a specific event. You are also wise to put your money into advertising where



The Rev. Eric Allison demonstrates his motto: "The sky's the limit!"

fellowship groups have leaders that are designated and some do not. There are different philosophies on this. I prefer to have a leader who is trained by the minister and having all leaders of the prayer fellowship groups meeting with the minister once each month to exchange ideas and to check out how things are going in the groups.

your audience is. If you want to advertise a lecture on something "New Age," then put it in a "New Age" journal or newspaper rather than the regular newspaper. But remember the best use of advertising is to advertise a specific event, and be ready with plenty of your people to get names, addresses and phone numbers.

Another important factor to consider is that you get a much better response to lecture topics such as "Life After Death," if the lecture is held at a hotel or some other place other than your church. If you are really serious about using advertising to bring people into your church, then you will have to spend money. Advertising is expensive, but if it helps you bring people to the Lord, it is worth every penny.

Door-to-Door Canvassing

The studies on this approach offer conflicting information. Some say that it works and others show minimal response. One thing is certain, and that is that it works least when the minister does the calling. If you have people on your growth committee who are brave enough, then go for it. You might have the people meet at the church who have already gone through your basic training course. Have some sort of brief service and pep talk and then send them out two-by-two into the vineyard. Arm each couple with some literature to hand out. One of these pieces of literature should be something which tells what your church believes, in a nutshell, in plain, everyday language. If you do not have such a simple pamphlet, then it is time for the minister to get busy writing one. It should also outline something about your particular church. When each couple comes to the door, they should say something very simple, i.e., "We are members of the Church of the Good Shepherd. We are Swedenborgians (that should get their attention), and we would like you to read this short pamphlet which tells about our church. We want you to feel welcome to come to the church anytime. Our services are at 11 a.m. every Sunday." If the person does not inquire any more than that, then it is time for you to move on. At the very least you have given them a very positive feeling about what the Swedenborgians are like, and you have given them a statement about your church.

The Sunday Worship Service

I remember how Professor Cal Turley would react to my enthusiasm in theological school when I wanted to bring new people into the church. He would say, "Great, but what are you going to do with them once you get them there?" I never liked hearing that, but he was right. We cannot expect people to come into our church because we have a doctrinal class and a traditional Sunday service. I believe that most of our Sunday worship services have fundamental problems. They do not involve enough people in the participation of the service. They generally do not change very much from week to week. The music needs to be much more contemporary. It is time that a church which calls itself "new" stop speaking with a Shakespearean tongue on Sunday mornings. Sermons should be short and relevant to everyday living in easy-to-understand language. The service should be something you would be proud to take someone to and look forward to yourself. If you find yourself making excuses for the Sunday worship service, then it is time for a change.

Leadership

Historically, conventional churches, as a rule, have not given the minister enough authority. Many people have great problems with really letting the minister run the church, but this is his or her job. Let 'em do it. At the same time, all ministers should be well aware of an old axiom in the literature: "If a church has a problem that it has had for three years and you have been there three years—it's your problem." The churches that grow the fastest have strong leadership from the minister. If a church board has a stranglehold on the minister, you can bet that church will not grow. On the other hand, if the minister has free reign and the church is not growing, then the responsibility lies with the minister. ■

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The churches that grow the fastest have a strong leadership from the minister. If a church board has a stranglehold on the minister, you can bet that church will not grow.



The Compelling Case for the Virgin Birth

Richard H. Tafel

At a very early period in the history of the Church, the title "Son of God" was applied to Jesus Christ. In their Gospels, Matthew and Luke teach that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, not only in the sense that His will was one with God's and that in Him God had become incarnate, but in a physical sense also; that in His case the Holy Spirit took the place of a human father. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth has been asserted, doubted, and denied by men claiming to be loyal followers of Jesus Christ.

The Isaiah Prophecy

The Church has traditionally regarded the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 as evidence of the validity in the Old Testament of the Virgin Birth in the New: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The Hebrew word used is "almah," a term which means a "young woman." Even if the more technical word for "virgin," "bethulah," had been employed, the term might have described the young woman merely at the moment when the prophet spoke. The idea of a virgin birth could have been expressed, without ambiguity, only by a circumlocution. For instance, the women in the harem of Solomon, distinguished as they are from wives and concubines, might or might not be called "virgins." We cannot, therefore, argue from the usage of the word for "virgin," but the whole context in Isaiah 7:14 suggests that the sign intended did not consist in anything miraculous in the birth itself, but in the speedy

coming of the event, and in the symbolical name to be given to the child. The prophet says, By the time young women conceive and bear sons, they will be calling their children "god with us," in token of Judah's deliverance from Syria and Ephraim. "Before the child shall know to reject evil and choose good, the land before whose kings thou fearest shall be depopulated."

The Greek Septuagint probably understood by their word "parthenos," a virgin in the strict sense, understanding that the mother of Immanuel was "at the time" a virgin. But the marginal reading of the Revised Version is probably right in rendering "is with child and beareth." Matthew, quoting from the Septuagint, takes the passage as a direct prophecy of the birth of the Christ from a virgin. Such has been till recent times the practically universal interpretation of the passage by Christians. It has been very naturally disputed by the Jews, from the time of Justin Martyr downwards. To evade the technical sense put on the word by Christians, the three later Greek translators, Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus, adopt the term "neanis." Now there is some evidence that the idea that the Messiah would be born of a virgin was to some extent prevalent in Palestine and Alexandria. This may have been suggested by the somewhat mysterious language of Isaiah, or by the Septuagint's rendering, or by both. In general, it was more the actual life of the Christ that suggested to New Testament passages, than a prevalent method of interpreting the passages. They saw in His life the full religious meaning of the passages, and the question of their original sense or application did not occur to them. As Bleek long ago argued, historical interpreters may have to distinguish between the things which the New Testament writers affirm and corroborate by Old Testament passages, and the proofs or corroborations which they adduce. The things they assert

we take on their authority, but the kind of confirmation by which they support them, however valid they may have seemed to those to whom they were addressed, and however well they served as evidence to them, may not seem of such importance now.

What the Bible Says

Thus for actual historical accounts of the Virgin Birth, we are reduced to the two Gospels,

They saw in His life the full religious meaning of the passages and the question of their original sense of application did not occur to them.

Matthew and Luke. What of real historical value and weight is to be gathered from these two Gospels then? The Virgin Birth is clearly taught in Matthew, and not so clearly in Luke. But apart from the introductions to these Gospels, it is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament. Luke's only reference to it is in the prophecy to Mary of the angel Gabriel in 1:34ff. When Luke comes to describe the actual birth, he seems to make no further reference to anything miraculous in its nature. The so-called "Song of Mary" should, for various reasons that are not quite obvious, be in reality the "Song of Elizabeth." Not only is Joseph called the father of Jesus, but he and Mary are represented as being astonished at the message of Simeon, and failing to understand the saying of Jesus that he must be in his father's house—facts difficult to reconcile with the story of the first chapter. The general impression left by all the Gospels certainly is that during our Lord's life, the secret of His miraculous birth had been

communicated to very few. Thus we read, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" "Is not this Joseph's son?" Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" And it is strange that the genealogy and the Virgin Birth should occur in the same chapter, for many argue that they cancel one another, for if Jesus is descended from David, it must be through Joseph, for this is Joseph's genealogy. In spite of many attempts to prove the contrary, it must be admitted that the descent from David is traced through Joseph and not through Mary. It follows, therefore, that if the claims of Davidic descent are to have any validity, the blood of these ancestors must flow in the veins of Jesus—which was not the case in view of the story!

The Early Church Debate

Within recent years, certain phenomena have come to light in the text of the first chapter of Matthew, which demand consideration here. The peculiarities of the Curetonian Syriac, and some manuscripts of the Old Latin had been known for some time, but in themselves they did not seem of very great importance. A new and somewhat startling element was introduced by the publication of the Sinai-Syriac in 1894. More recently still, a further authority has appeared, which contains the eccentric reading. This is the curious dialogue published under the name of "Timothy and Aquila." It professes to be a public debate between a Christian and a Jew held in the time of Cyril of Alexandria (A.D. 412-444). In the main, it is a string of testimonia commonly adduced in the Jewish controversy.

Matt. 1:16. "And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary from whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ."

(A Greek extant Cod.)

"Jacob begat Joseph, to whom was betrothed the virgin Mary, begat Jesus called the Christ."

(Dial. Tim, & Aq.)

"Jacob also begat Joseph, to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed: and the virgin Mary begat Jesus."

"Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus who was called the Christ. And Joseph begat Jesus called the Christ."
(Dial. Tim. & Aq.)

"Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph, to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed, begat Jesus called the Christ."
(Syr-Sin.)

- 284 The eccentric readings all occur within the range of the so-called Western Text, and there is no doubt that they belong to a very early stage in the history of that text. Two opposite tendencies appear to have been at work, which are most conspicuously represented in ancient forms of the Syriac Version, though the original in each case was probably Greek. On the one hand, there was a tendency to emphasize the virginity of Mary, and to remove expressions which seemed in any way to conflict with this. For the blunt phrase, "Joseph her husband," the Curetonian Syriac, with the oldest Latin authorities, substitutes "Joseph to whom she was espoused,"—not only "Mary," but "the virgin Mary." For "Joseph her husband being a just man," it reads, "Joseph being a just man." In verse 20, for "thy wife," it has some such softened phrase as "he dwelt chastely with her," and for "took his wife," it has "took Mary," and in verse 25 it has simply "brought forth a son," not "her first-born son." In some of these readings, or parts of them, the Sinai-Syriac agrees, but along with them it has others which seem to be of a directly opposite tendency. The most prominent is, of course, "Joseph begat Jesus" in verse 16. We might have thought that this was an accident due to the influence on the mind of the scribe of the repeated "begat" of the previous verses; but in verse 21 the same MSS has "Bear thee a Son," and in verse 25 "she bore him a son"; and in Luke 2:5, there is a counter change to that of the

Curetonian in verse 20 ("with Mary his wife," for "Mary his espoused"); all which readings hang together, and appear to be distinctly anti-ascetic. And now the singular reading in verse 16 has found a coincidence in the conflate text of one of the quotations in the Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila. According to that ancient version (the Syr.-Sinaitic) the purpose of the genealogy was to demonstrate the Davidic descent of Jesus and that

Some have tried to maintain that it was nothing more than a myth that had gradually developed. But if we remember the shortness of the time between the death of the Lord and the composing of the Gospels, there was not sufficient time for such development.

he was born of human parents. Jesus's own indifference to Davidic descent, however, may weigh on the other side.

The genealogy itself is divided artificially into three divisions—Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian Captivity, the Captivity to Joseph, the husband of Mary. Each section has fourteen names, Mary and Joseph being counted as two generations. In order to make this mechanical division of an equal number of names, the names of

many generations have had to be omitted. A large number of names are from the books of Ruth and I Chronicles. It is impossible to reconcile the genealogy of Matthew with that of Luke. Many attempts have been made to do so, but modern scholars tend to the opinion that both tables are incomplete, and that in the absence of fuller knowledge we can do nothing but let them stand as they are. Both genealogies are open to suspicion, both because of their apparent artificial construction, and their contradiction to the story of the Virgin Birth. The old Dr. Immanuel Tafel apparently admitted this, but dismissed it as of little moment, as the value in his eyes lay in the spiritual sense they convey.

Uniqueness of the Virgin Birth Story

Granting all that may be said in disproof of the historical reliability of Matthew and Luke, how can the teaching of the Virgin Birth itself be explained? If the story is not authentic, whence did it arise? Some have tried to maintain that it was nothing more than a myth that had gradually developed. But if we remember the shortness of the time between the death of the Lord and the composing of the Gospels, (and we are steadily pushing back the date of these), there was not sufficient time for such development. Many were still living who knew of the intimate details of the birth. Such a monstrous invention could scarcely be foisted upon men, especially upon the circle who knew and treasured the Life. We quote from the "Virgin Birth" of William F. Wunsch: "As in early Christian days, weight is attached again to the existence of ancient myths of extraordinary births. It was a widespread habit to predicate supernatural birth of an unusual man or of a demi-god. Have we anything else in the Infancy Stories of the Lord? There is not the analogy which one seems to find at first. In the pagan stories, it is sensual passion which is too often

glorified, in contrast with the loftiness and purity of the account of the Gospels. And, noting those stories closely, will one find a Virgin Birth in them at all? In those stories the diety takes human or other form, sexual congress is supposed, and it is therefore not of a Virgin that the offspring is born. Pagan myth offered no analogy to suggest the from of story which we have in Matthew and Luke. To be distinguished from pagan myth, are the stories which grew up of the birth especially of a religious leader from a god and a woman. These can be traced as a legendary growth, growing up at a distance from the religious leader's life." Thus the story of the birth of Christ did not arise on pagan soil, for, as we have seen, it moves on an altogether different plane from the often gross pagan fables of children born of divine fathers and human mothers. Just as surely it did not arise on Jewish soil, for Jews honor marriage and attach no special sanctity to virginity. And as we have already seen, the Jewish exegetes properly understood the prophetic passages in Isaiah 7, and battled for a fair understanding of it. Then when the Gospels came into the hands of the Church proper, they were fixed as to this detail of birth. And so, to be honest with the material, any sincere investigator must admit the validity of the Virgin Birth Stories, no matter how he may understand them. ■

The Rev. Richard H. Tafel, Sr., (1906-1985), was the longtime pastor of the Church of the New Jerusalem in downtown Philadelphia.



New Prince, New Pomp

*Behold, a seely tender babe
In freezing winter night
In homely manger trembling lies—
Alas, a piteous sight!*

*The inns are full, no man will yield
This little pilgrim bed,
But forced he is with seely beasts
In crib to shroud his head.*

*Despise him not for lying there;
First, what he is enquire.
An orient pearl is often found
In depth of dirty mire.*

*Weigh not his crib, his wooden dish,
Nor beasts that by him feed;
Weigh not his mother's poor attire
Nor Joseph's simple weed.*

*This stable is a prince's court,
This crib his chair of state,
The beasts are parcel of his pomp,
The wooden dish his plate.*

*The persons in that poor attire
His royal liveries wear;
The prince himself is come from
heaven—*

This pomp is prized there.

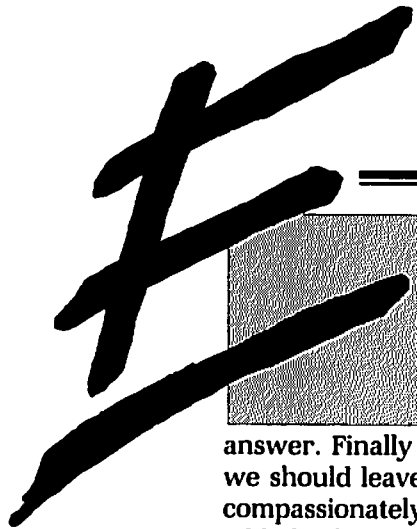
*With joy approach, O Christian
wight;*

*Do homage to thy king;
And highly prize his humble pomp
Which he from heaven doth bring.*

***Robert Southwell
(1561-1595)***

Angelic Reality

Perry S. Martin



Elizabeth Kubler Ross gazed intently at the young woman who had asked, "How can I get in touch with my spirit guide?" There were sixty of us in the room and we had just shared our pain and grief and individual needs for attending this five-day intensive Life, Death and Transition workshop. We waited for the famous doctor to answer. Finally she spoke in her quiet, firm voice. "I have a hunch we should leave the spirits alone." She paused, looking compassionately around the roomful of people. "Besides," she added, "they are here anyway."



Our family has a one-room guest cottage in the Maine woods, where friends sometimes come to stay for a few days. The morning sun, which shines in the bedroom windows in our own house nearby, never reaches the cottage; often it is cold and dark in there until noontime. Some adults, I notice, stay inside all morning because they are finding Maine dismally cool, while I am basking by the lake in my bathing suit after a swim. Which is reality? Is the August morning chilly and dark, or bright, warm, and sunny? Both are real, yet it is impossible to experience these two realities at the same time.



One long-ago Sunday morning, my husband and I had finally piled our six reluctant children into the station wagon. I put on my



high heels and my hat, while Erni donned his ministerial collar. He backed the car out of the driveway to start off to church.

"Your sermon," he heard a voice say, "it is still on your desk."

"No, no," he answered mentally. "It is right here is my brief case."

"No, it's on your desk." Erni stopped the car, went back into the house, and picked up his sermon from the desk. Who had spoken to him? Was it a "real" voice? I did not hear it. Some might say it was his unconscious. Some might say an angel. 287



A Du Pont Company executive suffered two severe retina detachments with resulting debilitating double-vision. Feeling completely unable to cope with his demanding work assignments, which required international travel, he sank into deep depression. On a bleak morning, as he reflected on his life alternatives, all of which appeared negative, he felt a quiet peacefulness come over him. He heard a still voice within say, "Start learning again." Bob Kasey immediately knew that he had heard the answer he needed and committed himself to start on a new path of self-realization through learning. He has retired from his position at "The Company," learned yoga and meditation, and spearheaded an impressive program of spiritual education at his church. What was this voice that spoke the needed message? His inner wisdom? His own unconscious? A spirit guide? A guardian angel?



A woman with six children was divorced by her husband so that he could marry a rich widow. Already supporting the family financially and emotionally, she forged a successful professional career, raised her children as a single parent, and created a new way of life for herself. I asked her how she ever managed? "I never

could have made it," she confided, "without my guardian angels."



What is real? At a time when I had given up my counseling position, my home, and my friends in California to move East, I encountered a male figure in my meditation. I called him my spirit guide and gave him a name. At times when I feel emotionally stuck, I call on him for a new perspective, often a picture image. One of his messages to me was that I must not rely on him to solve my problems, to give me answers, or tell me what to do. Is he "real"?



We have the ancient question whether our "real" life is a dream and our dream a reality. One dream researcher suggests that we can tell "reality" by the operation of such physical laws as gravity. Yet within the last century, flying has become commonplace as we travel on large silver birds which once had been dismissed as imaginary. I look up into the summer sky and see long soft wisps of feathery clouds. My brother tells me these are "really" ice particles.

Many of my friends are believers in reincarnation. They cite numerous cases of hypnotism and "rebirth" experiences when people have "regressed" in time and described themselves as inhabitants of the ancient or medieval worlds. My own spirit guide appears dressed like a medieval monk. I explain these "reincarnation" remembrances as the person identifying with inhabitants of the spiritual dimension who did indeed live on earth in long ago times.

The poet Rilke entreated his demons not be taken away from him lest he lose his angels too. Emanuel Swedenborg, described each person as in equilibrium between angels, or the forces of good, and evil spirits. Psychologically, these forces may be explained as genetic or environmental. The love that we absorbed in our mother's womb as well as in her arms, the gentle care

of a father, and loving precepts all remain with us as we mature. So do the childhood traumas, rejections, family rules, and, as we grow, social pressures to conform, acquire, and manipulate. Even our freedom to choose is limited by the shape our lives have taken. Carl Jung described universal images, which he called archetypes, both good and evil, that affect our choices and our personalities through their unconscious influence.

In the fable of Hansel and Gretel, as the children lay down to sleep in the forest, they comfort each other with the assurance of angels present to guard them through the night. The psalmist, imagining angels to be some super-winged creatures, had faith that the Lord would give his angels charge over him to keep him safe, lifting him up lest he dash his foot against a stone.

Swedenborg was quite sure. He declared, "I have seen, I have felt, I have heard," and went on to explain that we are in touch with angels when we are removed from consciousness of our bodies and the world. These angels are not some peculiar beings, but simply men and women who have lived their lives on earth, choosing love as a way of life, and now living in a non material, spiritual dimension.

There is an increasing acceptance of the practice of meditation which takes us out of our ordinary consciousness of our bodies and surroundings, creating a fertile void where something new can happen. Some religions call this attitude prayer. As I relax my body, calm my feelings, and still my mind, what is it that speaks? My inner wisdom, an archetype of the earth mother or the wise old man, my guardian spirit, my dream, or angels?

Perhaps what matters is not what I call this inner voice, but the meaning that I give to it. Mathematician David Bohm gives us an example of how meaning affects our minds and bodies: you are walking alone at night on a very

dark street and suddenly you see a shadow moving. Your heart pounds with fear; you do not know whether to run or hide in the darkness. Then you hear the cheering voice of a friend. The meaning of the shadow changes, and with it your whole being. Your heart slows down, your mind stops imagining the worst scenario, your fear changes to relief as you embrace your friend thankfully.

So we may experience new meaning in our lives when we make time and space to listen for the still small voice within, tune in to images of love and healing, and feel peaceful energy pervading our senses. There is a saying that when we do a good deed, an angel is created. Maybe we have just invited that angel into our lives. ■



Perry S. Martin is a psychotherapist and human relations consultant, living in West Chester, Pa., whose work is helping people get in touch with their own inner wisdom, creativity, and healing energy. Dr. Martin is also engaged in helping the Swedenborgian Church to found a center for personal growth and development. This article appeared originally in Chrysalis, the Journal of the Swedenborg Foundation.

O Lord Remember

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*not only the men
and women of good
will but also those
of ill will. But do
not only remember
all the suffering
they have inflicted
on us, remember
the fruits we
bought, thanks
to this suffering,
our comradeship,
our loyalty, our
humility, the
courage, the generosity,
the greatness
of heart which has
grown out of all this
and when they
come to judgment,
let all the fruits
that we have borne
be their forgiveness*

This prayer was found on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child in Ravensbruck, Nazi Concentration Camp where 92,000 women and children died.

290 **The Real Spirit
of Christmas:
A Story**

Edward G. Swiger



It was the day before Christmas; Jerry Thompson was having trouble finding the Christmas spirit. His wife had died unexpectedly the previous spring; he had expected her to outlive him since she was younger than he was. His only child, a son, was a career Major in the army; he, his wife, and daughter were stationed on the other side of the world and wouldn't be home for Christmas. He had mailed his gifts to them almost two months earlier, so they would get there on time. He did not want for any material things; his retirement income left him room for a few luxuries.

The morning sun was shining brightly upon the newly fallen

snow, but that didn't seem to lift his spirits any. The road crews had cleared the streets, so Jerry slid behind the wheel of his car and started the engine; he didn't know why; he had nowhere to go. He was driving aimlessly past a shopping center when spotted Sarah Jordan, a former neighbor, standing at a bus stop holding two large bags of groceries. Jerry stopped the car, turned around, and went back to the bus stop. He said, "Hello Sarah; I'm Jerry Thompson; I was your neighbor when you lived over on Orchard Street. I was wondering if I could give you a lift."

Sarah replied, "You sure can; you're a real blessing for tired feet."

She put her groceries on the back seat and got in. She continued, "Joe usually drives me to the store, but the car is broken down and we don't have money to get it fixed. Tom Johnson came over early this morning; Joe and Tom pushed it over to a friend of Tom's who knows something about cars; we hope he can fix it. Joe has been laid off from his carpenter job since August; the construction business just isn't what it was when we moved here ten years ago.

Jerry asked, "How are you managing to live with three children and all?"

Sarah answered, "It's not easy; the food bank gave us a certificate to buy a turkey, so we have enough to eat for now. I work part-time at McDonald's, but it's not enough. I hope I can get a full-time job next fall after Melissa enters first grade, but that won't help us now. We're currently one month behind on the mortgage. Joe's unemployment ran out last month as he only worked three months this year."

"In order to keep them from turning off the gas and electricity, Joe had to sell his cabinetmaker's tools; you know Joe was originally trained to be a cabinetmaker. Joe had tears in his eyes when the man came to get the tools. He seems to have lost all his spirit since then."

"The kids are resigned to having a small Christmas. Doug wanted a home computer, since he is now in the seventh grade; he wants to work with computers when he grows up. Jeff wanted a scale model train set, but he's resigned to something small; I got him a couple of model railroad cars to build. Melissa wanted a doll house, but I was only able to buy her a Barbie doll."

"I've been busy boring you with my troubles and haven't asked how you are; how've you been?"

Jerry then told her about all his troubles. She replied, "I'm very sorry to hear about Ruth dying; she was always so nice to us. Since you're all alone, why don't you join

us for lunch and dinner tomorrow. We don't have anything fancy, but we'd love to have you."

Jerry replied cheerfully, "I'll be there tomorrow morning. I'll bring dessert; I know of a nice little bakery that has very nice things. Also, is it all right if I bring each of the children a present?"

Sarah replied, "That'll be fine. They'll appreciate it."

Jerry dropped Sarah off at her house and hurried off, as he had shopping to do and phone calls to make.

Jerry came the next morning with a large variety of pies, cakes, cookies, and candy; he also had three very large packages gift-wrapped and tagged, one for each of the three children. Sarah protested saying, "You've bought much too expensive presents for the kids."

Jerry silenced her saying, "Nonsense, I have money to spend and no one around to spend it on; I want the children to have these." Doug fairly beamed as he unwrapped a home computer, complete with printer. Jeff happily opened a large model train with two engines and cars for each. Melissa opened her doll house kit. Jerry then added, "First I would like to help Melissa assemble her doll house."

Melissa, seeming less than pleased, said, "No, you help Jeff with his train first."

Jerry then noticed his pocket and said, "Oh! I almost forgot the best part." He reached into his pocket and handed Joe an envelope.

Joe protested saying, "You didn't need to give us money."

Jerry answered, "It's not money in that envelope; open it."

Joe opened it and stared in disbelief saying, "It's a job! It's a letter of recommendation for a job!"

Jerry continued, "Yes, Sven Jorgensen needs a new partner for his business, Creative Cabinets, inc.

Old Thor Guenther is past seventy-two and can't continue with the business anymore. He helped Sven complete the Christmas orders and then retired as of yesterday. Sven has interviewed several persons eager for the job, but he really wants a trained cabinetmaker."

By this time Joe had tears in his eyes and Sarah was sniffing. Joe said, "This is a dream come true. I have always wanted to start a business, but have never had the money. When I had to sell my tools, I thought that I had seen the end of my dream."

Melissa chimed in smiling, "It's okay for you to help me with my doll house now, Mr. Thompson."

Sarah asked, "Why is it okay now when it wasn't a minute ago?"

Melissa answered, "'Cause God answers prayers."

Sarah again asked, "What does that have to do with the doll house?"

Melissa replied asking, "You 'member the silent part of my prayers every night?"

Sarah answered, "Yes."

Melissa continued, "I told God that I would like to have a doll house, but I didn't need a doll house. What I really needed was for my Daddy to have a new job. I prayed that He bring my Daddy a new job instead of bringing me a doll house. I just couldn't play with the doll house when I thought He hadn't answered my prayer."

By that time Jerry had a slight tear in his eye; he found the Christmas spirit many times over that day. ■

Mr. Swiger is a member of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Swedenborgian Society.

ECLECTICA

Mid-Atlantic Association Meets for Annual Meeting, Retreat

Gathering at the stunning Victorian hotel, the Chalfonte, in Cape May, New Jersey, over twenty-five members of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Swedenborgian Churches participated in a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. and Mrs. Richard Baxter and Polly Baxter, entitled "Sea, Sand, and Spirit." From New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Washington D.C., and Wilmington, Swedenborgians enjoyed a splendid combination of inspiration, sharing, and free time for the weekend of September 18-20.

Then on Saturday, October 10, many of the same people gathered with some others at the new retreat facility, Temenos, in West Chester, Pennsylvania. With twenty-six people attending and President Jeffrey Watt, of the Wilmington Church, presiding, the Association heard from delegates of various support units within the new governing structure and from the Rev. Randall Laakko, President of Convention. The new Swedenborg Foundation film on immortality, "The Other Side of Life," was viewed by the entire group. A positive element was the strong showing of young people, and in response to that some crucial funding was voted for programming for the youth league.



The historic Chalfonte Hotel: Retreats can be comfortable, as well as inspirational!

Pacific Coast Association Annual Meeting

The Pacific Coast Association met for its annual meeting at the Center for Spiritual Development, a lovely Catholic retreat center in Orange, California, for the weekend of Oct. 16-18. With church groups ranging from Seattle in the North to San Diego in the South, the meetings were full of fellowship and spiritual nourishment.

A highlight of the business sessions was the acceptance of a new church society in Brookings, Oregon, led by the Rev. John Billings. Mr. Billings was ordained in 1972 and served for a time the El Cerrito, California Swedenborgian church. He and his wife Sharon have built up a dedicated group of Swedenborgians in Brookings, and they have much enthusiasm and high hopes for their future.

The main program on Saturday was "Principles of Church Growth" by the Rev. Eddie Gibbs, an Anglican church growth specialist on faculty at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. His warmth and humor, spiked with pointed challenges, encourages all of us to think hard about the future of our local churches in the Pacific Coast Association. At least

three of the PCA ministers will be taking the now-famous three-day church growth seminar offered by Fuller Seminary—the second largest seminary in the United States—in November.

Phyllis Bosley coordinated and emceed a wonderful talent Show on Saturday night. Both ministers and laity took turns presenting musical, dramatic and comedic offerings to a very appreciative (and "easy," as they say in the business) audience.

Next year's annual meeting will be held in Sonoma, California, approximately one hour north of San Francisco.



The Rev. John Billings with his wife, Sharon, on to his immediate right, his daughter, Renee, at the left of the photo, and a Brookings church member, Mary Carper.

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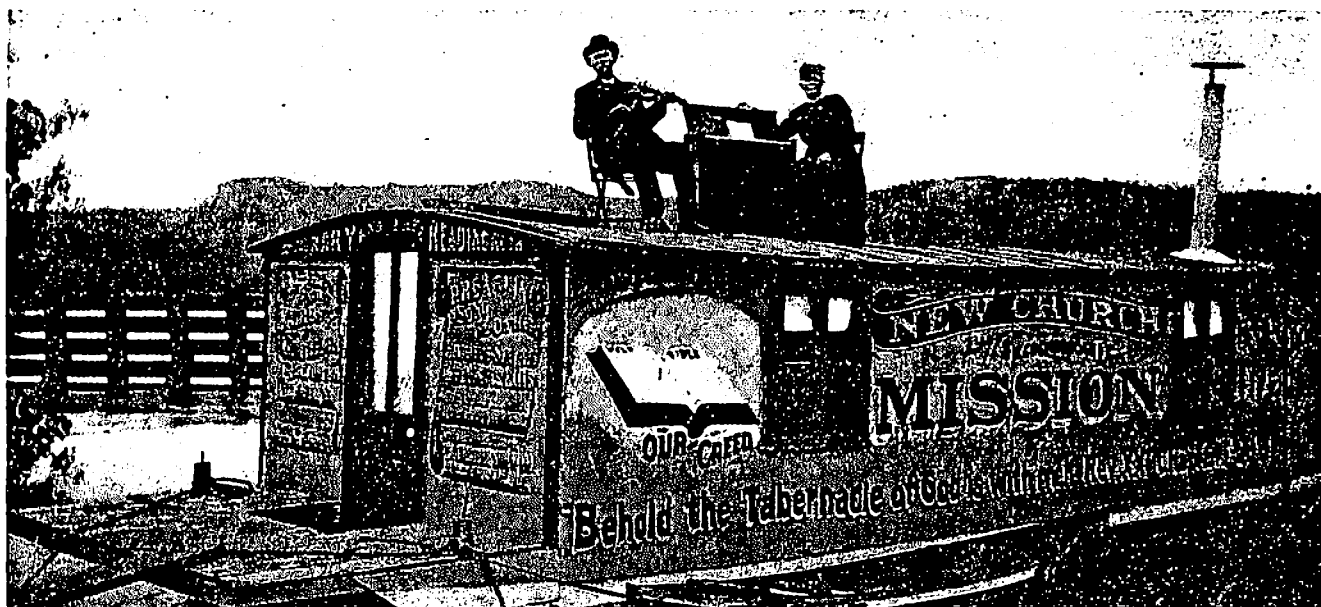
Voice from the Past

Swedenborgians have another colorful missionary to number among their ranks along side of Johnny Appleseed. The accompanying photograph was part of a "find" in the archives at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, Massachusetts. The Rev. Immanuel Tafel, then pastor of the Chicago church, writes on June 10, 1953: "The persons pictured are Rev. and Mrs. Eli Wilkinson Shields, formerly of 318 Church Street, Hot Springs, Arkansas. The Convention Journal of 1909 records that he was ordained on October 7, 1906

and was #93 on the Convention Clergy list. In the same Journal, the Board of Missions report, written by Rev. Willard H. Hinkley, says, 'The work of the Rev. E. W. Shields on his houseboat on the Mississippi River is worthy of mention.' I became Secretary of the Board of Missions in 1909 and thereby inherited Mr. Shields. Correspondence with him was interesting and gave conviction that he was most earnest, though a little eccentric, and a real missionary. As I remember it, the Board of Missions gave him a little, very little, financial support. I remember the picture,

sent to me by Mr. Shields, and believe the houseboat was built entirely at Mr. Shields' own expense."

Do you have an any interesting photographs of church personalities and activities of yesteryear? If so, the editor would be interested in receiving them for possible publication. (As this image is produced from an already printed image—we do not have the original photograph—you may not be able to make out clearly the words on the side of the houseboat, *New Church [Swedenborgian] Mission.*)



Rev. E. W. Shields' gospel boat proclaims the New Evangel.

New Governing Structure Has First Meeting

The new Cabinet and Support Units voted into office in the newly re-structured governing architecture of the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church met in Newton, Massachusetts October 2-4 to begin the functional transition of the work of the church from the former boards and committees to the more "horizontal" schema of the new structure. The general mood seemed to be one of mostly excitement, with a little confusion and much feeling of promise for our church. If you have any proposals, ideas of initiative, send them to Convention President,

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Randy Laakko, 1025 Dettling Rd., Wilmington, DE 19805 to get the ball rolling on your project.

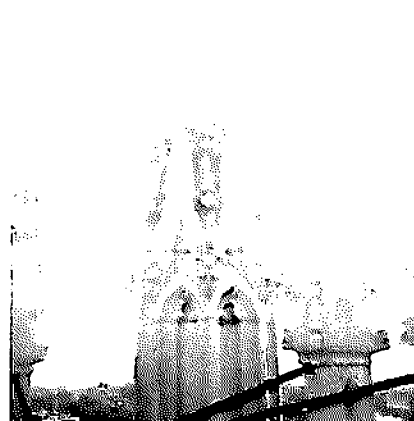
Most of the new delegates gather on the back lawn of the seminary in Boston for a "photo opportunity" during the first meeting of the new governing structure.

Lightning Strikes Church

On August 28, a Friday afternoon, lightning from a summer storm struck the bell tower of the National Swedenborgian Church in Washington, D.C. Several feet of limestone pinnacle broke off and fell into and through the slate roof. Fortunately no visible damage was done to the inner roof, and no one was injured from the limestone and the slate that fell onto the sidewalk below. Insurance is expected to cover most of the cost of repairs.



The tower before being struck.



The damaged pinnacle also damaged the roof when its pieces fell and struck it.

Paulhaven Camp a Wholesome Vacation

Some say Western Canada is the best-kept vacation secret in North America. If you have been thinking about seeing that part of the continent, you may want to combine it with a week at Paulhaven, a Swedenborgian family camp on a lovely lake outside of Athabasca, Alberta. The accommodations are rustic, the fellowship is warm, the spiritual nourishment can't be beat. A well-rounded program for the whole person and for the whole family is offered at Paulhaven. Creative Bible study,

discussion, lots of music, swimming, boating, crafts, games, hiking, and plain 'ol good company are to be found for a very modest price. Singles and couples welcome too! For more information, write to: Gordon Bennett
Box 3034, Athabasca, Alberta, Canada T0G 0B0.

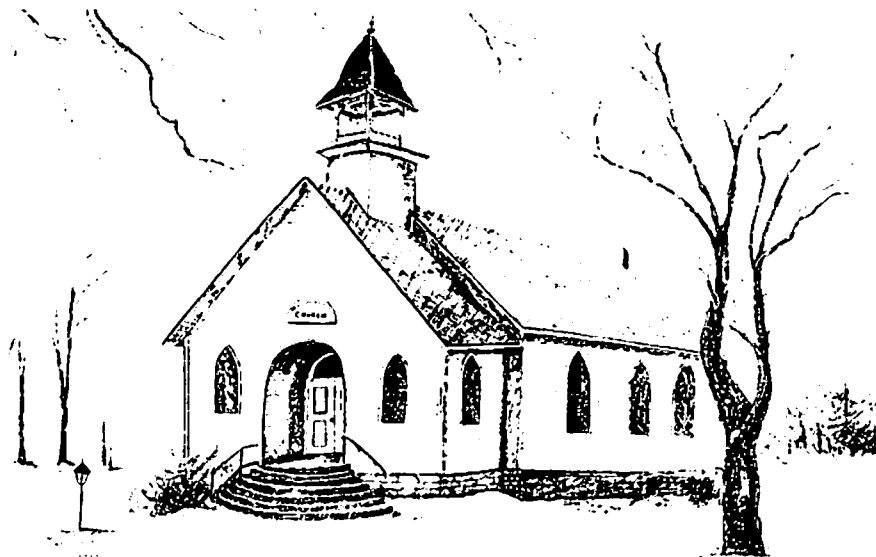
Put the Messenger on your Christmas List!

It is time to again direct your attention to the financial needs of the printed ministry of the Swedenborgian Church. *The Messenger* is sent to all members

free, but we strongly encourage readership financial support. We have cut back on the number of colorful issues by nearly one-half this year, and the verdict seems to be that this is a good way to go. But the cost of this ministry, which goes to libraries, hospitals, seminaries, numerous religious editors, as well as to the homes of our membership worldwide, is still substantial. Please consider a Christmas gift of \$10, \$15, or \$25 to *The Messenger*. The address is 2107 Lyon St., San Francisco, California, 94115.

Pretty Prairie Celebrates Centennial

The Church of the New Jerusalem in Pretty Prairie, Kansas celebrated its 100th birthday on Sunday, November 8, 1987. Ethelwyn Worden, Director of the Central Office, travelled from Boston to lead the music program, and the Rev. Randall Laakko, President of Convention, travelled from Wilmington, Delaware to share in the occasion as guest speaker. Beginning with a worship service at the usual eleven o'clock morning worship hour, festivities followed, including a dinner, lots of good music, and a historical presentation of the church via narrative and pictures.



The Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church, 1887-1987.

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Swedenborg on TV

Among its many ambitious projects, the Swedenborg Foundation, New York City, is at work on a television program to be entitled, "Swedenborg, Scientist." This program is to be another in the prize-winning series produced by the Media Group of Weston, Connecticut ("Images of Knowing" and "The Other Side of Life"). They have enlisted the participation of distinguished scientists prepared to give testimony about Swedenborg's concepts during the early eighteenth century. One of the most intriguing is the proposed construction of models of Swedenborg's "Flying Machine"—to include one to be *actually flown*. Other subjects include electricity and magnetism, cosmology, and anatomy.

New Tricentennial postcard available to Swedenborgian Churches from the Central Office as long as supplies last. Reverse side is blank for church's own return address.

Why Do We Suffer?

Leon C. LeVan

"Why do we suffer?" is one of the oldest questions of human experience. Every person reaching fullness of years asks that question at one time or other. Most people ask it mentally not only once but a hundred or even a thousand times in the course of a full lifetime. If perchance our own hearts are not aching at a given time, we still see the heartaches of members of our families or friends. The Lord Jesus had to suffer. The great Bible heroes had to suffer. Suffering seems to be a central fact of the planet Earth. It is almost as if nature were saying in a thousand tongues: "To be born is to suffer. To grow is to suffer. To die is to suffer." Suffering is the lot of every individual who makes serious efforts to live the life to which the Lord calls him.

When Jacob stole his father's blessing from his brother Esau, and later obtained Esau's birthright by dubious means, he was not in any wise a spiritual man. Even many years afterwards, he still was far from being what he should be. For in the moment of greatest peril (as we read in *Genesis* 32) Jacob was left alone; and "there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day." That night-long wrestling of Jacob with his angelic protagonist was Jacob wrestling with his own soul. In the anguish and suffering of his temptation, Jacob typifies all men and women who go through temptation combats. Only when Jacob proved faithful through that long and bitter night on the plain of Peniel beside the brook Jabbok—only then was his name changed to "Israel" in token of victory. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel," the angel declared; "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

The Israelites believed themselves to be God's chosen people. While national Israel indeed had sinned during earlier centuries, that had been changed by the great Reformation in the reign of Josiah about 625 B.C. But still things went from bad to worse. Jerusalem was

smitten by Babylonian armies; then it was pillaged; then it was destroyed and its king and people carried away into slavery. The walls were demolished, and Solomon's beautiful temple was left a heap of ruins. Surely the twilight of the world had come. Surely, the glory of God had departed from the earth. No sun could ever shine with splendor for Israel again. No faithful Israelite could ever smile again upon this painful earth. "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion." (Ps. 137:1)

Israel wept, not only by the waters of Babylon, but for centuries afterwards. It was during those centuries that the *Book of Job* was put into writing. The argument of the *Book of Job* is this: Job, a righteous man who does not deserve suffering yet has to suffer above all others. So his friends come to tell him the reason for it. The first friend says in effect: "Job, you suffer because you have done evil." Job answers with truth: "no." The second friend declares likewise in effect: "Job, you suffer because you have done evil." Job answers: "No, I done righteous before God." The third friend says: "Job, do you not know that you suffer because you have done evil?" Job is embittered because of those false arguments. He knows that they cannot be true and are not true. But Job's quarrel is not with men. His quarrel (if we may so speak) is with God—the God who had sent the suffering or permitted it to come.

The New Church theory of suffering sees suffering as a form of divine mercy. "Why do we suffer" is a question that we in the New Church ask quite as much as outside of it. The New Church is not stranger to suffering. The New Church explanation of suffering is as follows: Suffering is not punishment inflicted by an angry God. Suffering is not a debt paid to divine justice. Suffering is one way that we are brought nearer to our Lord.

Through suffering we learn

forgiveness. Through suffering we practice patience. Through suffering we become better followers of Christ. Suffering is not just something to be endured. It is God's gracious means for increasing the Kingdom of Heaven in our characters. You have seen people sick, helpless, impoverished, heart-broken, their life hopes dashed, their good names tarnished. All these and a hundred other "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" are but stepping stones toward the Kingdom of God.

The true way of enduring suffering is illustrated by Jacob's wrestling with the angel at Peniel. "And there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day." All night Jacob wrestled with his soul. It is in the night-time of our spirits that we wrestle with the angel of suffering. But with the coming of the morning light the soul wins release. The rising of God's light in the faithful soul brings the struggle to an end. But even when Jacob's struggle was ended, Jacob did not free his hold of his Heavenly antagonist, for he now saw that it was not an enemy but an angel of God. When we see suffering in the morning light of the Lord's truth as an angel, loaned to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, to lift us from grosser to purer spiritual states, we no longer wish to thrust it from us. We clasp it now almost in desperation crying with Jacob: "I will not let thee go until thou bless me!" After your suffering confers its blessing, dear friend, then you may let it go—and not before—for God will then be with you in its place.

Suffering is not an enemy. Suffering is a friend. It is God's gracious means for transforming our characters to ever-more Heavenly states. Suffering is an angel of mercy, loaned to you by the compassionate God, to help you become an angel, and to prepare your soul for the Kingdom of Heaven. ■

The Rev. Leon C. LeVan lives in retirement in St. Petersburg, Florida.

God Coming Near

Edwin G. Capon

God wants to be close to us. He wants to be close to each human being in His creation. He wants to share Himself and the life that is in Him and comes from Him with all who are born in His image and likeness. This is the Christian faith and it is one of the better ways of picturing what God is all about. He is not a pedagogue interested only in the scores His pupils make or a top sargeant seeking perfect performance from a group of new recruits. He is more like the loving parent ever ready to enjoy the fulfilled lives of children who have discovered what they are best fitted to do and are living lives satisfying to themselves and serviceable to society, lives patterned from and inspired by that same loving parent. And this requires continuing closeness, a closeness we are often quick to avoid. But God will never give up trying to be close.

There are many ways of stating why God came on earth in Jesus Christ, explanations which have come after the experience of what He accomplished. One such way is to say that God came on earth in Jesus Christ to get near to us again.

God's Initial Nearness

The garden of Eden story, which we do not take literally but rather as a symbolic account of the beginning of the race, pictures a close relationship between God and man. God can speak to man and man can answer. For Swedenborg this tells of a time when psychologically more primitive human beings were in closer

communication with God than obtained later. Higher values were intuitively grasped and more easily directed the lives of a more child-like man and woman. But this closeness did not last. As most children seem to need to assert their independence from their parents at some stage in their development, so it seems that the human race had to take a similar course. The teenager who decides that he has no more need of his father's wisdom is not unlike the adult who decides he can get along without God.

The Old Testament, that collection of sacred writings which records the religious history which is necessary to an understanding of the coming of Christ, can be seen as an account of man's progressive distancing of himself from God through ethical and moral deterioration and through multiplying misconceptions of God. In Swedenborg's terminology this is the adulteration of good and the falsification of truth. The Bible often speaks of this as forgetting God, which may not mean that ritual observance and cultic practice is forgotten, but that people have forgotten what God is really like and what it is he really wants of them. And because they no longer remember what God is really like and what it is that He desires of them (mercy and not sacrifice, as one prophet puts it) they effectively distance themselves from God. The result is that God in a very important respect is no longer close, not through any choice of His, but through the choice and action of those He loves.

Of course God does not remain passive while all this is happening. Through the prophets, through men of inspired vision and their writings, and through the vicissitudes of history God seeks to bring men close to him once more. Through the words of men of deep religious insight and through tragedies brought on themselves by their ethical and moral neglect God tries to bridge the widening gap men themselves are creating. But

all to no avail. In spite of a small minority of faithful people, symbolized by the shepherds, God and man are far apart and man's chances for fulfilling His divinely-purposed destiny diminish. What can God do?

The answer is very simple. He can cross the distance that separates by coming himself, not relying any longer upon the words of others who may have the words but not the character of God. Anyway a messenger never conveys the same sense of importance as when one comes oneself. And a messenger may have gotten the message mixed up.

God's Nearness Today

So God came in the Christ. God came in a human nature such as you and I share, not simply so that we could hear the message from his own lips. He came to be that message men desperately needed. He came to show us what God is like and at the same time to show us the kind of life a man obedient to God would live, not that we are to pattern our life after his actions, but rather that we are to let our actions be infused and motivated by the same spirit moving Him.

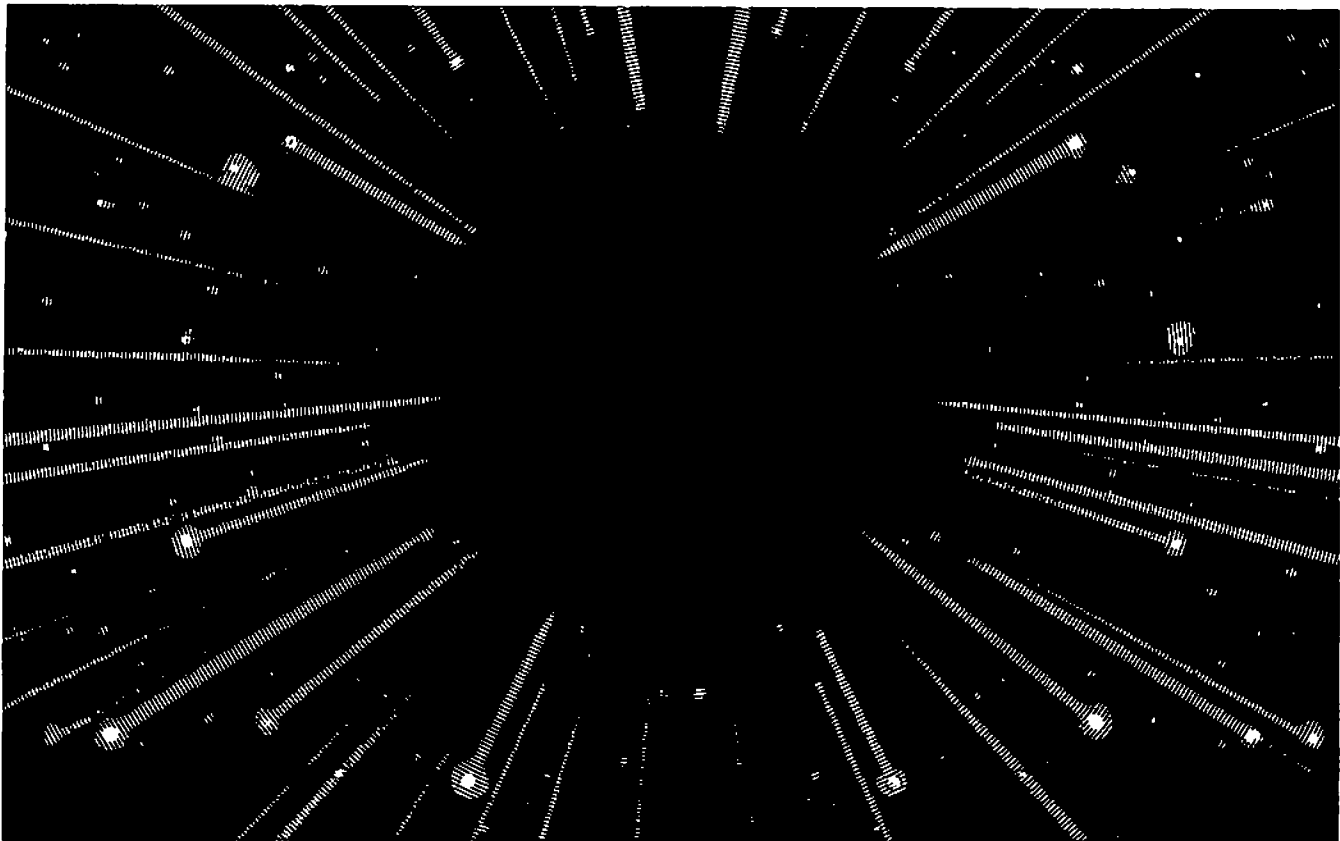
There is an assertion in the writings of Swedenborg that we may have trouble believing at times. In the *Arcana Coelestia* at 1799 Swedenborg writes, "The Lord from Divine love or mercy wants to have all men near Him." By taking on Himself a human nature such as ours and by living a fully human life such as ours with not outward trappings of superior status and no material wealth at all God has come permanently near to us. He has made Himself highly visible. He has done what He can to be close to us. It is now up to us whether we will allow ourselves to be close to Him.

In the *Apocalypse Revealed* Swedenborg writes that "... the Divine love and the Divine wisdom are not in place, but are where they are received and according to conjunction." Human relations are full of examples of people not

willing to let themselves be close to other people. Perhaps they don't trust the other's reasons for desiring closeness. Just as often they may hesitate to be close for fear that the other person may discover what they are really like. Or they may realize that being close would require changes on their part. There would be no point in denying that coming close to God involves letting our purposes become more and more His purposes, our ideas more and more informed by His truth. Real closeness necessitates likeness of heart and mind. But there is testimony from many that it is worth it.

Philosophical speculation about God is not conducive to closeness with God. Prayer to an indefinite something at the heart of the universe is likely to be a bit vague. But the God who can be seen in the face and life of Jesus Christ can become very real and near. As the Gospel of John says, "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him." ■

The Rev. Edwin G. Capon is minister of the Church of the New Jerusalem, San Francisco.



Scientific Proof of Survival After Death?

Michael Roll

"There is one thing stronger than all the armies of the world and that is an idea whose time has come."

—Voltaire

I know the followers of Jesus will be overjoyed to learn that physicists throughout the world are now embracing the most important teachings accredited to Christ especially what he was reported to have said to the person who was dying next to him on the cross: "This day you will be with me in paradise," and also "Seek and you will find." A revolution has taken place in scientific thinking. The nuclear physicists have discovered other dimensions of existence. The great hero of physicists, Pythagoras (6th century BC), was a brilliant philosopher as well as a mathematician. He always said that reality also existed beyond our puny

physical senses. We now know that Pythagoras, Socrates and Jesus were absolutely correct in their conclusions: that *we all* survive the death of our physical bodies and are immediately reunited with our loved ones.

Our short stay on earth is for one purpose only: to learn lessons in this difficult physical dimension, and therefore try to develop our characters. Our physical body is only a space suit, and when it wears out our mind carries on exactly as before, but this time operating in another body that is made up of much finer, faster vibrating, subatomic particles. We automatically graduate to the dimension that we have earned by our behaviour on earth. The supernatural and paranormal are natural and normal after all.

The marvelous moral codes accredited to Jesus, along with many other teachers who have tried to place humanity on the path of righteousness shine like beacons: "As you sow, so you will reap," and "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." These two

vital laws are all that is needed to put humanity on the right course.

Sir William Crookes, OM, FRS and Sir Oliver Lodge, FRS, were two of the greatest physicists England has produced. There were early pioneers of nuclear physics and were adamant to the end of their earthly lives that proof of survival after death would eventually come from within the atom. Sir Oliver Lodge made the following statement in his book *Phantom Walls*, published in 1929 when he was nearly eighty: "We have to be guided by the facts; that if the facts seem incredible as they do, we have first of all to assure ourselves that they are facts, and then conclude that there is a department of knowledge to which we have as yet not got the key."

At this time only the proton and electron had been discovered; the vital neutron was not discovered until 1932. It is these three subatomic particles that are the building blocks of everything in our physical universe, from the sun, to our bodies, to the air we breath. Thanks to recent

revolutionary discoveries within the atom, we have the key in 1987 that Crookes and Lodge lacked. Over 200 subatomic particles have now been discovered, some "out of this world." "I completely agree with these arguments about the reality of the existence of a normally unseen world. I am sure the explanation of these phenomena can be found in Quantum Mechanics which is applied to the subatomic level. Here we will find the key to the unseen world." Michael Scott, BSc, Astrophysics, Edinburg University.

People like Jesus have a highly developed sixth sense, and they are able to bridge the gap between these different dimensions of existence. We now know that Jesus was speaking to people whose surroundings are as solid and as natural as ours are to us. They exist in our space, but as their subatomic particles—building blocks—are moving at such staggering speeds, they are out of range of our five physical senses. A good example is television: BBC 1, BBC 2, ITV and Channel 4 are all operating in the same space, but different frequencies—subatomic vibrations.

The most recent scientists and philosophers will always be the most knowledgeable, simply because they are in possession of all of the accumulated knowledge contained in their predecessors' work, and also have access to contemporary discoveries. More scientific discoveries have been in the last 100 years than in the whole history of humanity put together. Something that seems outrageous to one generation becomes perfectly natural to following generations. All the thoughts and conclusions of our ancestors are only of academic interest to us now. "I myself have been interested in the paranormal for well over 30 years and what with my personal experiences and my study over the years I am convinced now of the reality of such phenomena. The question of the existence of the paranormal is not under

investigation to ascertain its existence—it exists." Professor Archie Roy Dept. of Astronomy, Glasgow University (1983). ■

Michael Roll resides in Bristol, England, and has travelled to the United States for appearances on several radio and television programs.

For Further information, please write to 28, Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol BS16 6AH, England. Michael Roll will send his thesis "The Scientific Proof of Survival After the Death of our Physical Bodies" free of charge to every person who sends a stamped addressed envelope of any size. Everything has been translated into layman's language and the reader will understand every word. (Residents of USA, please send \$2.00 for Air Mail Postage, from England.)

From the Youth League

Kathryn Rienstra

Hello everyone!! I know this is long overdue, but better late than never. As the new president of the NCYL, I am writing to tell you a little bit about the league and our hopes and plans for the upcoming year.

First of all, I would like to say we had a great turn out of leaguers at the 1987 Convention in Tacoma, Washington. If I can remember correctly, there were 17 of us. I hope I can speak for all of us and say we all had a fantastic time too. I know I did!!! Most of us attended the "Beyond War" mini-course and enjoyed it a great deal. We also offered our own mini-course about the NCYL and had a great turnout—the second time. The course turned out to be very beneficial to everyone who attended.

At our final meeting we elected new officers. In our league we now have three regions: West Coast, Central States and Canada, and East Coast. In past years we had Canada as a separate region, but this year we had no representatives from Canada, so we combined that area with the Central States. Now I would like to tell you who the new regional officers are: *West Coast:* Jonathan Pults
Central States and Canada:

Jeff Winston
East Coast: Wendy Little

I would also like to say that Rev. Donna Keane is our Chaplain, and we are very glad to have her. Wendy Little is the *Clear Blue Sky* editor.

Saturday night there was a dance enjoyed by all! It was really fantastic to see everyone dancing both young and old—together!!

Saying good-bye the next day

was hard for everyone. Throughout the week we all became good friends. For the people who have attended conventions before, old friendships became stronger. It is good to know we have the annual Christmas retreat at Almont, Michigan to look forward to! This is where the NCYL's mid-winter meeting is held.

I hope I will see as many leaguers there as possible. The Almont retreat is a great place to meet new friends, see old friends and have a great time, while learning more about our church and life! Last year there were 50 teenagers who attended this retreat held by the Almont Survivors. Maybe this year we can break that record!

I am very pleased to have been elected president this year. I really have high hopes to increase the number of leaguers we have and making our league stronger. I would really like to encourage our churches to try to start their own youth leagues with teens 13 and older. It is not hard to do and can be very fun and educational. Your league does not need to meet every Sunday. It does not need to meet but once a month or as often as is convenient for the majority of the group.

Some ideas for meetings could be gatherings at someone's house or the church and playing a game or doing any activity that would gather interest. For some meetings going out and doing something is fun, the movies or a picnic or *whatever*!! The business part of the meeting needs to be only as long as necessary. It is important that the meeting be opened and/or closed with a prayer, and it is suggested that some sort of devotions be included in the meeting.

I really hope to see the NCYL grow. We are the future of our church. The sooner we get involved the better. It is a great place to meet friends, good friends that you can trust and keep for the rest of your life. It opens many doors to teenagers and places to go for them to learn about our church and life!

If there are churches that do not have any teenagers but would like to help the NCYL out, you can get a hold of me. If there are any teenagers that would like to receive information about the NCYL they can write to me, too.

I have listed my new address below because, as many of you

already know, I have just moved from Fryeburg, Maine, to the BIG and great city of St. Louis!! Thanks, I hope the hear from you!!

Love, Katie Rienstra, NCYL President

Katie Rienstra
11689 Chandellay Drive
St. Louis, MO 63146

COMMENCEMENTS

Baptism

Hammond—Freda Hammond was baptized into the Christian faith and life of the Swedenborgian Church on September 27, 1987 at the Utopia Community Church, Eureka, Kansas, the Rev. Galen Unruh officiating.

Deaths

Barrington—Marjorie Smith Barrington, longtime member of the Washington Society, passed into the spiritual world on May 11 after a brief illness. Born into a Swedenborgian family in Chicago, Marjorie was educated at Urbana College and at Boston University's School of Religious Education and Social Services.

For several years Marjorie served as secretary to Rev. Louis Hoeck at the Cincinnati Church where she also taught Sunday School and was a leader in New Church League activities. In 1931 she was called to the position of secretary to Rev. Paul Sperry at the Washington Church, serving also as Director of Religious Education.

In 1966 Marjorie was elected Secretary of the General Convention (the first woman to hold that position). She served in that capacity for several years. She had attended at least 50 Conventions, always vitally interested in the proceedings and eager to see old friends and to meet new ones.

Marjorie worked as a Technical Editor for the Federal Government for a number of years. She did much of the proof-reading for Brian Kingslake's *Aqueduct Papers*.

In recent years Marjorie served as treasurer and assistant treasurer of the Washington Society. She was the widow of Lewis Barrington of Washington. She is survived by her daughter Amy Jordan, five grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

All who knew Marjorie remember her as an outgoing, loving, generous person, always ready to give of her resources and services to the church, to worthy charities and to friends. Her sense of humor was unfailing. She is remembered too for her courageous outspoken stand on whatever course she considered right, regardless of who disagreed. She continued to attend church regularly even when failing health made it difficult. She is sorely missed.

Clark—Alice L. Clark passed into the spiritual world on June 20, 1987. A longtime member of the Brockton, Massachusetts Swedenborgian Church, memorial services were held for her by her son, Mr. Charles Clark, at her request.

Unruh—Viola Unruh, 92, longtime member of the Pawnee Rock, Kansas Swedenborgian Church, has passed into the spiritual world. Memorial services were held for her at the Pawnee Rock church on October 14, 1987, the Rev. Galen Unruh officiating.

New Address

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The New Heaven and the New Earth and What Is Meant by the New Jerusalem

Bertha Berran

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Swedenborg wrote, "It is certain that a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, will exist because it is foretold in the Book of Revelation."

I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:1,2)

What is meant by the Scriptural terms a new heaven and a new earth? Swedenborg tell us that "By a new heaven and a new earth . . . is meant a New Church in the heavens as well as on earth." The New Church in the heavens was formed of all those who from the Lord's Advent up to the time of the Last Judgment had lived a life of charity and faith; for whoever lives such a life loves another as himself, and by love conjoins him to himself, love in the other world being conjunction." He tells us further that the new heaven was formed from both Christians and Gentiles; however, as to the greatest part, it was formed of all who had, from the time of the Lord, died in childhood, no matter in what part of the world they were born; for all these children were taken up by the Lord, were educated in heaven, and taught by angels, and were then retained, in order that they might, together with those others, constitute the New Heaven.

Before leading our thought to what is meant by the New Church

on earth it should be emphasized that the condition of the Church in the heavens is vital to the health of the Church on earth. There could be no hope of a New Church on earth unless first, order had been established on the spiritual plane. This had been accomplished by the *Last Judgment*.

By a new earth is meant a New Church upon earth, for when the former Church on earth passes away, a new one is then instituted by the Lord, and it may be added that everything of real spiritual value remaining in the former church is incorporated in the new. Swedenborg continues: "For the Lord provides that there shall always be a Church on earth; because through the church there is conjunction of the Lord with mankind and of heaven with the world, and it is in the church that the Lord is known and that the Divine Truth exists, through which man has conjunction.

And now we come to the question, What is meant by the New Jerusalem? At the very beginning of the Book of Revelation, John tells us plainly that what he was about to describe, he saw enacted in the Spiritual World. There is nothing whatever to indicate that a single event took place on this earth, nor is there anything to indicate that it would be in the future. The whole thing was a series of visions enacted before his spiritual sight, in the world of spirits, prophesying great spiritual changes which were to take place; changes which would have their effect in this world, but would not be enacted here, as seen by him.

The climax of the Book of Revelation is that marvelous vision of the descent of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which John saw coming down from God out of heaven. Not even the most ardent literalist would expect to see a great material city, with huge stone walls and foundations, coming down to earth through the stratosphere, and settling on Mount Moriah in Palestine, or any other place. No,

that city represented the descent from Almighty God, through the heavens of a new glorious Religious Dispensation into the hearts and minds of people. A state of justice, and righteousness, and genuine charity, such as the world had never before known. That is the promise of God revealed here in prophecy.

But before that final vision was shown to John, he saw visions of terrible upheavals; great conflicts; tremendous struggles between the forces of good and evil. These prepared the way for the final victorious vision. Now prophecy being of God, we should surely see in these mighty events the overthrow of evil on the plane of man's Spiritual Life rather than battles fought here on earth. Spiritual changes in the world of spirits and in the hearts and minds of people on earth, which must come before the new era of justice and righteousness and genuine charity, pictured by the New Jerusalem can descend fully among humanity. ■

Bertha Berran first presented this material at a Ladies Alliance meeting in San Diego, where she has been a longtime member and worker.



The Work of Christmas

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,*

The work of Christmas begins:

*To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*

Howard Thurham

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ALMONT SURVIVORS' ***Christmas Retreat:***

The Meaning of Life: In Four Days

The Almont teen Christmas retreat is from December 27 to December 30, though some people will be arriving on December 26. It only costs \$40!!! This year's theme is *The Meaning of Life: In Four Days*. We will be talking about families, the future, careers, why we are here and the meaning of life. Teens will be getting their flyers in the mail. If you need one or more information, contact:

Rev. Ron Brugler
Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center
1611 Cameron Road, Almont, MI 48003
Telephone: (313) 798-3575.

Please return all flyers by December 15.

See You There!!