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# The Messenger

April 1993



*“Risen Christ”*

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*Our Cover: "Risen Christ." Life-size figure by New Mexico sculptor Oliver McRae. "The hand gestures," states the artist, "symbolize the two prophetic aspects of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah: the right hand . . . is open and offering . . . the left hand, extending and commanding, symbolizes the reigning King of Kings. Two points in time, past and future, with us the viewer in the middle."*

## The Messenger

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Six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

## Moving Toward the Light

### The Sacred Within and Without

*Guest Editorial by Ernest Martin*

At Easter, Christians celebrate resurrection and newness of life, and the birth of the Christian Church. Our hearts and minds go back to the holy land, and the sacred sites in Jerusalem, where Jesus spent his last days on earth, was crucified, and rose triumphantly on Easter morning.

Eric Allison and Cathy visited these sites on their way to Mauritius, and were disappointed that they did not feel a deep spiritual connection with those sacred places. Eric's conclusion was that they were tourists rather than pilgrims.

In this *Messenger*, Eric Allison, Wilson Van Dusen, and James Lawrence each emphasize the importance of the religious experience. Allison writes: "Our real uniqueness lies not only in our theology but in the mysticism that is an intrinsic part of our distinctiveness." Van Dusen cautions us against reverencing the "raft," the vehicles of our spiritual journey, and challenges us to embrace the larger vision that Swedenborg called "the universal church." In his Easter message, Lawrence focuses on the personal religious experiences of Mary and John. After her name is called, Mary's spiritual eyes were opened and her soul awakened. When John entered the tomb on Easter morn, he saw and believed.

The resurrection experiences of the women and the disciples of Jesus were transforming. The huddled band of desperate followers initiated a movement that turned the world upside down. Kenneth Ring and Raymond Moody, prominent near-death-experience researchers, point to thousands of people whose lives were transformed when the concept of eternal life was experienced and became a living reality for them.

We are proud of our Swedenborgian heritage, and enjoy telling people about Swedenborg's personal religious experiences. The danger is that we become tourists rather than pilgrims. If our faith is to be vital and transforming, we must be engaged in a personal pilgrimage, a spiritual quest, a self-conscious journey. Swedenborg said, "I have seen, I have heard, I have felt." His reflections on his experiences can be guidelines for us, but we must embark on our own journeys to find our own ways of encountering the divine, experiencing the transcendent.

Peter Russell, the British poet, wrote: "Sacred sites are sacred because our response to them is sacred. There is a resonance between the sacred within and the sacred without . . . the sacred within our hearts. It is ours whenever and wherever we are."

*The Rev. Ernest Martin is the director of Temenos Conference and Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania.*



# The Secret Key to Easter

James Lawrence



Imagine that children are on an Easter egg hunt in a public garden. The parents of one young girl are desperately poor. It happens that lying only partially hidden in that public garden is a box with ten million dollars in it, put there by an eccentric billionaire, and it is lying very close to an egg that the young girl is about to discover.

She walks beyond a little hedge into a shrouded section that contains within it both a bright Easter egg and the money box holding her family's salvation. She begins peering about. Her eyes rove here and there, and they actually pass over the box several times without managing to discern its shape as a human-made item. Suddenly, she spies the egg, gives a little squeal of delight, places it carefully into her basket, and hops out of the enclosed area to search for eggs elsewhere.

Isn't this experience typical of what takes place for most of us on Easter? In a general way, we are happy that it is Easter. It is good to celebrate the rites of spring—new life. To bring out the lilies, to hear the strains of joyous music, perhaps to try and listen with a new ear to a familiar story. Our eyes roam over the general territory; we pay some attention to the Bible verses, and our thoughts make a few theological connections during the hymns and prayers. Several bright and pleasant moments occur on this morning of annual ritual. We put these in our experiential basket, and finally look at our watches and decide that it's time to go get some lunch. Out we

bound from this enclosure behind the hedge called Easter Sunday. And I'm afraid that left unnoticed will be this box whose contents, if only discovered and opened, would have changed our lives inside out.

There's a secret key to finding that box. Part of our challenge is the very familiarity with the story. What does it mean: "*Jesus Christ is risen from death*"? These words tend to hit us with all the impact of, "Details on the eleven o'clock news. Join us." We must work extra hard to get to a new level of encounter with the ringing, world-changing, life-transforming truth of this ancient story.

John's gospel gives us two fine clues on how one's life can suddenly become so exciting and full of meaning that you feel as if you are going to burst at the seams. The clues are in John's and Mary's inner experiences at the tomb.

## Mary's Doubletake and John's Belief

Let's take Mary first. There's what appears to be a glitch in John's account of Mary at the tomb. Mary had turned to face this gardener/Christ when he first spoke to her. Now as Jesus calls her by name, verse 16 explicitly states that Mary again "turned and said to him. . ." So how could she turn toward him after she had already turned toward him? A minor detail, but a bothersome one when you're reading the account as serious truth. Three possibilities could explain this textual variant. First, we might assume that Mary, during the words she was speaking in

verse 15, had turned back toward the tomb, and John simply omits that fact. Secondly, it could be a scribal error in transcription. In fact, in the Syro-Sinaitic palimpsest text, it matter-of-factly "corrects" this text to read that Mary "recognized him," instead of "turned toward him," which is the clearly correct translation. But the third explanation for this extra "turning" was articulated fifteen hundred years ago by Augustine. Augustine proposes that when Mary turns toward her Lord *after her name is called*, her spiritual eyes are opened and her soul is awakened. Thus it is her mind and heart that turn toward Christ, not her physical self. Mary embodies the words of the old Quaker tune, "Simple Gifts," when by "turning, turning," she "comes round right."

The same dynamic occurs for John. One of the endearing aspects of this gospel is that when the writer frequently refers to "the one whom Jesus loved," he was referring to himself. He couldn't speak for others, but he knew Jesus loved him. So it is John himself who runs with Peter to the tomb, and it is John who has all the bells go off while he was there. And what was the key? Verse 8 gives it: "*He saw and believed.*" John uses the Greek word for *believe* and *belief* 98 times. It is the key concept in his gospel. What happened within him that so completely transformed him that he wrote what not a few regard as the most exquisite spiritual book ever penned? He saw and believed that Jesus Christ

(Continued on page 52)

## *The Secret Key to Easter*

(From page 51)

was risen from death. It takes him a few more days before he understands the true import of this singular fact, but the key of deep soulful belief was already turning.

What is the character of this belief, this believing embrace? It is certainly more than being pretty sure something happened. It is assuredly more galvanizing than figuring that "whatever it was, I guess I'll find out someday." Perhaps we need some kind of modern-day complement to bring us freshly to the powerful message of Easter.

### **The Near-Death Experience and Modern-Day Easter**

Having founded the first scientific and academic journal ten years ago on the near-death experience, Dr. Kenneth Ring of the University of Connecticut, the world's foremost scholar on near-death experiences, announced that he is retiring from active research in the field. In the spring 1992 issue of *Journal of Near-Death Studies* appear his final article and farewell words.

The much-studied near-death experience is that numinous, thrilling and deeply spiritual experience that many, many thousands of people have had while coming within an eyelash of physical death. It is usually brought on by a physical trauma or illness so severe that the body's vital signs actually approach and frequently achieve zero. Often the person is even pronounced dead by attending physicians. But rather than lapsing into a black unconsciousness, these people from all backgrounds and religious faiths and even of no faith and anti-faith have instead reported mystical experiences of such power and clarity that they, like John, *believe*, and like Mary, they *see and understand*.

What Dr. Ring wants to leave with us, after years of promoting research and publishing the work of several dozen scholars' university-level biomedical, psychological, and sociological research into these incredible experiences, is this: *seeing and believing the transcendental*

*truth and reality of these experiences is life-transforming.* That's it. That's what he feels it all means. Transforming, as in a chronically suicidal person losing all desire to end her life and instead finding a profound contentment for the next 30 years. Transforming, as in a TV-aholic couch potato who was living life generally on the sidelines becoming an enthusiastic person involved in so many projects and causes that his main frustration ten years later is that there are only 24 hours in a day. Transforming, as in a cynical and wholly negative individual becoming an articulate and popular motivational speaker, encouraging people to see the light and to live with hope and faith. Why are these people transformed? Because the concept of eternal life became a reality for them. They saw past the Easter eggs and found the box.

### **Beverly's Story**

The story of Beverly Brodsky is typical. Raised in an uptight, non-religious, non-spiritual home in a claustrophobic ethnic neighborhood in Philadelphia, she was bookish, shy, and overly serious. She began brooding about the Holocaust at age eight, and slipped into a constant low-grade depression throughout her adolescent and teen years. Though a straight-A student, she was so inwardly desperate by the time she graduated from high school that she couldn't face college. Then months after graduation, her father died suddenly and unexpectedly. He was the only one in her family she felt close to.

She bolted for California, and on her second day there she accepted an offer to ride on a motorcycle—her first time ever. They were struck by a truck and were not wearing helmets. Her head was so badly mangled that when a police officer arrived on the scene, he immediately started to book the driver of the truck on manslaughter charges.

She survived, but had a near-death experience that she reports was clearer than so-called "real life." Even twenty years later, complete retrieval has been as effortless as recalling events from the day before. Her account of what she experienced

runs far too long to fully recount here, but she has no doubt that in a supra-conscious state she experienced life-changing insights in the presence of a radiant Being of light, whom she instinctively believed to be an angel. In an extraordinary journey through many dimensions of light and glory, she was finally brought into another Presence, an exquisite Light that was completely alive with intelligence and love. Deep within her came an instant and wondrous recognition: God. Though she had been brought into an awareness through her near-death journey up to that point that all is God, now she felt face-to-face, so to speak, with a total presence of God.

Immediately she lashed out at Him with all the questions she had ever wondered about: all the injustices and suffering that she had seen in the physical world. She says she experienced God knowing her thoughts immediately and responding without words deep into her heart and mind. All her questions received answers that she understood instantly, and she recalls thinking internally, "Of course, of course," each time.

Much more happened in Beverly Brodsky's near-death experience, but it did need to end. She returned to an incredibly broken body, yet she was filled with love and joy. Enthralled, in fact, by a boundless delight, she was oblivious to what should have been excruciating pain in the first two months of her recovery. Everything was made new; she saw wondrous meanings everywhere—all was alive and full of enormous meaning. She energetically started college, graduated Phi Beta Kappa, became married, had children, pursued a career, and reports that she has sipped deeply from the cup of life's blessings in a way unimaginable during those dark years before her near-death experience of seeing Reality. She sums up her story with these words:

*Although it's been twenty years since my heavenly voyage, I have never forgotten it. Nor have I, in the face of ridicule and disbelief, ever doubted its reality. Nothing that intense and life-changing could possibly have been a dream or hallucination. To the contrary, I con-*

*sider the rest of my life to be a passing fantasy, a brief dream that will end when I again awaken in the permanent presence of that giver of life and bliss. For those who grieve or fear, I assure you of this: there is not death, nor does love ever end. And remember also that we are aspects of the one perfect whole, and as such are part of God and of each other.*

People like Beverly Brodsky, perhaps no less than Peter, John, and Mary, have walked into a tomb expecting death and instead have found eternal life—an experience so real and electrifying that it transformed their lives. We who have not had such an experience must work harder to see and believe, if we want our days to be full of bursting life, of a beauty that brings tears to our eyes frequently, of love and connection with others that guides us into a profound contentment with life.

We can find faith, if we see—*truly* see; if we believe—*truly* believe.

*The Rev. Dr. James F. Lawrence is co-minister of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church.*

## **SPECIAL OFFER to Isolated or Any Swedenborgians**

Receive a Swedenborgian sermon every week and a newsletter every month from the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church. Keep up with current topics and gain a sense of fellowship with an historic Swedenborgian congregation thriving in the heart of America's most romantic city. We are hosting convention in 1995, which will be our centennial year, and you can stay abreast of these developments as well.

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# **Report of the Nominating Committee of the Swedenborgian Church**

## ***Nominees***

- Vice President: Betsy Young (California)—1-year term
- Recording Secretary: Gloria Toot (Ohio)—1-year term
- Treasurer: John Perry (Maine)—1-year term
- General Council: 3-year term  
Rev. Randall Laakko (Delaware)  
Sharon Reddekopp Slough (Alberta, Canada)  
Lawrence Young, Sr. (Massachusetts)
- Communications Support Unit (COMSU):  
Rev. Ernest Martin (Pennsylvania)—1-year unexpired term  
Ethelwyn Worden (Maine)—3-year term
- Education Support Unit: (EdSU):  
Nancy McBride (B.C., Canada)—3-year term
- Financial & Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU):  
Polly Baxter (Washington, D.C.)—3-year term
- Growth & Outreach Support Unit (GOSU):  
Rev. Steve Pults (Michigan)—3-year term
- Information Management Support Unit (IMSU):  
Fred Hille (Minnesota)—3-year term
- Pastoral Ministries Support Unit (PMSU):  
Rev. Ron Brugler (Ont., Canada)—3-year term
- Committee on Admission into the Ministry (CAM):  
1-year term  
Rev. Marlene K. Laughlin (Massachusetts):  
Marilyn Turley (Washington)
- Board of Trustees, Swedenborg School of Religion (SSR):  
Karen Laakko Feil (Illinois)—2-year unexpired term  
Rev. Horand Gutfeldt (California)—3-year term  
Rev. Jerome Poole (Delaware)—3-year term
- Nominating Committee: 5-year term  
2 nominees—1 to be elected Karen Nielsen Conger (California)  
George Chapin (Massachusetts)

## ***Nominating Committee:***

Muriel Bennett, Chair, *Kansas '93*  
Polly Baxter, *Mid-Atlantic '94*  
Rev. Skuli Thorhallsson, *S.E. '95*  
Sharon Reddekopp Slough, *WC '96*  
Duane Beougher, *Illinois '97*

*Editor's Note: Brief biographies and statements of candidates will appear in the May Messenger.*

# To Be of the Universal Church

Wilson Van Dusen

The Church (of the Lord) is spread through the whole world, and yet it is one; for when life constitutes the church, and not doctrine separate from life, then the Church is one; but when doctrine constitutes the Church, then there are several (*Arcana Coelestia*, Paragraph no. 8152). The Church of the Lord consists of all those, whosoever they are, who are in truths derived from good (*Apocalypse Explained*, no. 20). The Church of the Lord is spread over the globe, and thus is universal; and all those are in it who have lived in the good of charity according to their religious belief (*Heaven and Hell*, no. 328). What is religion unless it be that a man live well, so as to come into heaven, and also to know how he must live? To know this is called doctrine: and to believe according thereto is called religion (*Apocalypse Explained*, no. 805).

In these few quotes Swedenborg's position on the universal Church is summarized. Basically he says if you look to doctrinal differences, then the churches are many. But if you look towards the spiritual good then there is only one universal church. He goes so far as to say a church doesn't actually exist until there is an effort to bring the good of doctrine into life (*Apocalypse Revealed*, no. 923). So doctrine itself doesn't make a church but the good derived from it does. If we look only to good we can begin to see the one universal church scattered throughout the world, which, in the sight of the Lord, is as a single human being (*Heaven and Hell*, no. 308).

One of the difficulties for followers of Swedenborg is his use of the Word. We Christians often take this to mean the Bible. So a statement such as *a church exists where people follow the Word* seems to eliminate all those churches that don't use the Christian Bible. If you look closely, Swedenborg uses *Word* in two senses. One is certainly the Bible.

The other is that "the Word" is the Divine passing through all the heavens (*Arcana Coelestia*, no. 10127). So where the Divine is present, and known, and understood, there too is the Word.

I can most easily flesh out the further implications of what it is like to be in the universal church by referring to my own experience, since I am of that church. In this way I can give more human aspects to the basic ideas Swedenborg deals with. My hope is that others will also sense that they, too, are of the universal church. This may not be so rare a condition as most would think.

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## *Members of the universal church attempt to aid any seeker on any path. They are peacemakers.*

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The idea that I am a man of the universal church, more than I am a member of any specific church, only gradually dawned on me. It first occurred in speaking to Swedenborgian groups. I wanted to be totally open with them, so I said I am in both General Church and General Convention because I simply don't believe in the split, and I would like to bridge the differences. The audiences could accept that. It was when I said I am also in the Eastern Orthodox Church and I am a Buddhist that they were shocked. Some wondered if I had trouble making up my mind. Not in the least. I see the same good in all of these churches. I believe this is one of the marks of a member of the universal church. We do not come to blows over doctrinal differences. Rather we enjoy finding the same good in all. The famous Hindu saint Ramakrishna literally joined very different faiths and came to enlightenment (the experience of

God) in all of them. He too was a member of the universal church.

I feel somewhat like an anthropologist of religions. Show me a new, exotic religion and I am immediately intrigued to try to penetrate its forms, to discover how its religious life functions. In this there is definitely an attempt to find the good in differences. I feel that various groups all over the world have sought God through their circumstances and their own traditions. I believe God responds to each depending upon the quality of their effort. In this way I am not put off by differences. The various religions are like a procession of people, each showing off their different native costumes. Those from a cold climate wear much and those from a hot climate wear little. None are right or wrong, just different.

Yet in the midst of this parade of diversity of religions, I still have my own preferences. These arise out of my own nature and experience. I also expect others to be different from me. In religions I easily enjoy and understand the mystical, the simple and direct. So Sufism, Zen Buddhism, and Swedenborg come to mind. For a simple and crystal clear work on Buddhism I commend *Being Peace* by Thich Nhat Hanh. In contrast I have great difficulty with the complex and abstruse (i.e., the Kabbalah). I have a friend who tried to introduce me to occult paganism. Whereas he swims joyously in masses of vague references, multiple gods and astrological signs, I soon find myself struggling for breath. His conduct is exemplary, so each to their own.

It also occurs to me at the mature age of seventy that I have always been in the universal Church. I had a variety of direct experiences of the

*(Continued on next page)*

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Divine from an early age, which I partly detailed elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. If I study my experiences there were only a few passing allusions to specific churches, and these included both Eastern and Western churches. In fact, I still recall how difficult it was for me to connect my experiences of the divine with any specific church. I could easily understand the great mystical writings of any faith, but it was difficult for me to relate to the external forms of any church. It appears to me that the experiences given me pointed me toward the universal church rather than to any specific church. In stark contrast to me is a friend of mine, raised in a (nameless) church. Though her church has systematically murdered and persecuted mystics and would never ordain women, she feels bound into a lifelong hopeless fight with her church. I see myself as having been blessed with immense freedom, whereas she appears bound to a church that almost cannot serve her needs.

There is a rather different spirit that divides those of a church specific and those of the church universal. Those of a church specific have found a way that is right for them. It functions. Why look further? But they may easily feel other churches look strange, even heretical or dangerous, and alien. At best they may be patient with outsiders. At worst they may feel free to kill them. They may believe wild rumors about other churches—like the Romans who took the eucharistic ceremony as cannibalism. There is very much a feeling of “in-group / out-group” in those wedded to a specific church.

In contrast, as a member of the church universal I find all the varied ways to God attractive and interesting. I look for the good they attempt to foster. The more I can find this the less alien they seem. I have an expectation that “all who act by the good they know” will be saved. I like the Hindu image of many different ways to climb the Great Mountain. One person literally needs a steep rocky way. Another needs a gentle slope to the trail. Many ways to the One. But while I am pleased

and intrigued by the many ways, still I can have ones I am accustomed to and prefer, and you can have yours.

I like the Buddhist image germane to this. It is as though we are placed on one shore and the problem of life is to reach the opposite shore. The other shore is not so distant. We can see it. We each build a raft to cross over. But having reached the other shore it is inappropriate to reverence the raft. It was an instrument which served the purpose. The raft is one's religion. Moreover, materials are available for all sorts of craft, even reed boats. In a real sense we each have to make our own vessel, but we can freely copy the form traditional to our people. We should not mistake the finger pointing to the moon for the moon. Religion is a finger pointing.

In the universal church we have this sense that there are many ways. It is all right to choose and prefer one way as long as one can see the good in and respect other ways. Members of the universal church attempt to aid any seeker on any path. Where there is conflict they attempt to bridge the differences. They are peacemakers.

I suspect some will be offended by the Buddhist reference to reverencing the raft because they have come to that position. I say only they are then of a church specific. They have not yet seen the church universal. There are religions which tend in their very nature to be universal. Buddhism and Bahai come to mind. There are also churches which almost demand one be of a church specific. They are Islam, Judaism, and much of Christianity. I find Swedenborg partaking of both qualities. His *True Christian Religion* is subtitled *The Universal Theology of the New Church*. This really seems to be a universal theology of Christianity. I agree with some scholars who see this as a late-life defense of his work. The universal church aspect is much clearer in Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* and the works derived from it. But in some respects one must be in the universal to see it clearly in his work. I say the *Arcana* is of the universal church because it is dealing with the processes central to all religions in which the individual seeks

union with God. These same processes are also detailed in Hinduism and Buddhism.

If you look at world events you can see the church universal becoming apparent. Our media brings the struggles of others to our TV sets. Europe is attempting to unite nations. Major economic agreements are being hammered out. We are becoming one world. The sense of one universal church fits in this. Differences in skin color, language, custom and religious preferences seem almost incidental. We are drifting toward becoming one family, clearly dependent on each other, in our sharing of spaceship earth.

Of course, we cannot now choose a clergy and set up the church universal for it would then become another church specific. The church universal is closer to a spiritual perception of the unity of good in all human efforts to be with God. Its exact opposite are disputes over religious differences. There is a real sense of something occurring universally through all life in the church universal.

#### Reference

1. Van Dusen, Wilson. "A Mystic Looks at Swedenborg." In Robin Larsen, et al., *Emanuel Swedenborg; A Continuing Vision*. New York, Swedenborg Foundation, 1988. 558 pp.

*Dr. Wilson Van Dusen is a psychologist, author and lecturer on spirituality from a Swedenborgian perspective. His many published works include The Presence of Other Worlds and extensive commentary to Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams. Dr. Van Dusen lives in Ukiah, California.*

## Show Your Colors!

As convention-goers gather in various locations, year by year, one of the ways we help the space become an expression of who we are is by bringing colorful banners from our churches. The banners enhance our ceremonial opening procession and brighten our meeting space during our sessions. So please bring your banners old and new.



# Temenos Spring Workshops

## PLEASE UNDERSTAND!

### Couples Communicating

Perry S. Martin

*Saturday, March 27*

*9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

*Church of the Holy City*

*Wilmington, Delaware*

*Cost: \$45.*

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## PROPRIOCEPTIVE WRITING RETREAT

Mary Bok

*Friday, April 2, 7:00 p.m.*

*to Sunday, April 4, noon*

*Cost \$126, includes lunch and dinner on Saturday.*

*A limited number of overnight accommodations are available*

*for a total of \$35 per person for two nights,*

*double occupancy, including make-your-own breakfast.*

•

## RECONSTRUCTING YOUR FAMILY:

See the Past with New Eyes

Lorraine Sando

*Friday, April 16, 7:00 to 10:00 p.m.*

*Saturday, April 17, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.*

*Cost: \$85.*

*Overnight accommodations are available for a total of \$30 per person double occupancy. Includes make-your-own breakfast.*

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## RITUAL FOR HEALING GRIEF

Kathleen Gajdos

*Sunday, April 18, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.*

*Cost: \$10.*

•

## A FIRE IN THE MIND:

The Life of Joseph Campbell

A Slide Lecture with Stephen and Robin Larsen

*Friday, April 23, 7:30 p.m.*

*Church of the Holy City*

*Wilmington, Delaware*

*Cost: \$10.*

•

## THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Stephen and Robin Larsen

*Saturday, April 24, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

*Cost: \$45.*

•

## MAY FESTIVAL

Dances of Universal Peace

Jeanne Ayesha Lauenborg

*Sunday, May 2*

*2:00 p.m.*

*Cost: \$7.50. Children free.*

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## ATOMS, SNOWFLAKES AND GOD

The Convergence of Science and Spirituality

John Hitchcock

*Friday, May 7*

*7:30 p.m.*

*Church of the Holy City*

*Wilmington, Delaware*

*Cost: \$10.*

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## THE WEB OF THE UNIVERSE:

Jung, the New Physics and Human Spirituality

John Hitchcock

*Saturday, May 8*

*9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

*Cost: \$45.*

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## NEW MAPS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Ralph Blum

*Saturday, May 15*

*9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

*Cost: \$45.*

•

## THE HEALING POWER OF THE BREATH

Laurie Weaver

*Saturday, June 12*

*9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.*

*Cost: \$100 early registration.*

*\$120 after June 1.*

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*In addition to the workshops listed, ongoing offerings include a Ministering to Ministers program, an evening women's group, and private retreats and therapy by appointment. For further information and a full brochure, write or call Erni and Perry Martin, Temenos at Broad Run, 685 Broad Run Road, West Chester, PA 19382. (215) 696-8145. Unless otherwise specified, workshops are held at Temenos.*



# A Pilgrim's Progress

Eric Allison

Last summer my wife Cathy Gregory and I followed the path of millions of pilgrims and tourists. We visited what are often thought of as some of the greatest ancient spiritual landmarks. We visited Coventry Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in England and Notre Dame and Sacre Coeur in Paris. We saw the ancient temples of Egypt along the Nile and toured the sacred sites of Israel and Old Jerusalem.

Our pilgrimage began when we saw the roofless shell of Coventry Cathedral, a victim of Nazi bombs. A crude cross made from the charred remains of two wooden beams hangs above the original altar. On the altar are carved in stone the words "Father Forgive Them." Next to the old cathedral is a new one of contemporary design with clear and powerful symbolism. However, if there is a New Church, in the Swedenborgian sense, arising spiritually out of the ashes of the old cathedral, it is not noticeable. The impressive new structure has its "old church" doctrine and style of presentation intact. Could this be the modern equivalent of whitewashing the tombs?

When visiting Westminster Abbey, we were swept along with all the other tourists reading the well-known names on the graves in the floor and walls. I was told that in nearly all of these old cathedrals, the number of dead in them is far larger than the number of living members who show up for worship.

In Paris, Notre Dame and Sacre Coeur were teeming with tourists so that they seemed little more than architectural landmarks. Signs in seven languages say "silence" but one could find a more respectful crowd in Disneyland. The steps of Sacre Coeur are crowded with hawkers selling everything from balloons and jewelry to cold drinks. It is so noisy it is impossible to pray in either Notre Dame or Sacre Coeur unless you are deaf.

The highlight of our cruise down the Nile was the many awe-inspiring temples. What I found incredible is that these beautiful and massive temples had not been accessible to the common people. The peasants were never even inside the temples, let alone there for regular worship. Some temples took hundreds of years to build, and were as large as sixty acres in size, but were used only a few times each year by a handful of priests. That prescription would kill any religion. It did.

## What was missing?

By the time we reached Israel I admit that I was pretty jaded. It is a matter of record that Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, traveled about Israel in the fourth century and officially designated the sites that from that time on have been accepted by most people as the actual locations of well-known New Testament events. Her dreams supposedly revealed to her the whereabouts of each site. On the locations she saw in her dreams, churches were built. Today, these mark the places where Jesus was born or died or served the last supper. Being good tourists, we went to every place where Jesus supposedly did anything.

We stood, sat, or knelt reflectively on the actual sites (or nearly actual sites) where Jesus was born, lived, performed miracles, was crucified and resurrected. We went swimming in the Sea of Galilee, waded in the Jordan, prayed at the wailing wall, walked the Via Dela Rosa and wandered the narrow stone streets of old Jerusalem. What my journey lacked was any deep experiential spiritual connection with the places around me. I admit that my eyes got moist when I stood at the foot of the cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. There were some special moments—hearing the Moslem call to

prayer, or the church bells echoing through the ancient alleys—and seeing people in a wide variety of religious garb gave Jerusalem an ambience I have never known.

So, there were a few times when I was absolutely thrilled, but even the highlights never felt like part of a pilgrimage to me. Something was lacking. I reminded myself, "This is not a spiritual Disneyland, this is the real thing. I should feel some major degree of awe here. What is wrong? What is missing?"

I considered several possibilities. Yes, the tourist atmosphere sometimes compromised the experience. But the nattering (despite the 'silence' signs) and the videos and the flashbulbs were not always present. Moments of prayerful solitude were possible at many of Israel's sacred sites. The ever-present and fully-armed Israeli soldiers were a possible distraction. There was always the threat of violence looming in such a turbulent land. Every few days the news reported the killing of a soldier or a terrorist. But that wasn't it. Was it the commercial aspect? I couldn't figure out what my problem was.

## He was a pilgrim.

## I was a tourist.

While staying at the YHA hostel in the Old City of Jerusalem I found the answer. I struck up a conversation with a man who was close to my age. Thomas Morton, from Irving, Kansas, is a bearded white man of very mellow demeanor and I instinctively liked him. He had come to Jerusalem to be there when the world came to an end. He has been working on the staff of the Old City Youth Hostel for the last eight years. His living quarters are in a stairway closet, just large enough for his cot and a small table with a radio on

*(Continued on page 60)*

**A Pilgrim's Progress** (from page 59) top of a pile of newspapers. He has a well-used Bible and a few reference books.

Thomas has come to Jerusalem to "live the Word of God as best I can interpret it, and be here when the world comes to an end." I suddenly realized what was missing. He was a pilgrim. I was a tourist. I was pretending to be a pilgrim. He really was a pilgrim.

Thomas and I had a long talk one evening. I explained the concept of the internal sense of the Word while he listened patiently. He said, "Now, you've got something there." I listened while he explained in his deep gentle voice a complicated series of additions and subtractions of dates and reigns based on historical events in and outside the Bible. He had logically determined that the date for the end of the world would be 1996. Theologically Thomas and I were miles apart. So what! He was a man of his convictions, a pilgrim. I was a tourist.

What came out of this for me was a spiritual lightning-bolt. I hesitate to say it was a vision of Biblical proportions but I saw something in myself I didn't like. I also saw the Swedenborgian Church and the Christian Church in general in another light.

Our church has basically been a tourist. We have been more a reflection of our culture than our doctrine. We have taken upon ourselves the trappings of other churches and done as much as possible to fit in and not make waves. We have had no persecutions. No sacrifices or demands are requested of our members.

Seeing all the stone buildings that are tourist attractions honoring dead or dying religions makes me wonder if our own church will some day soon just be part of a tour. The churches and temples we visited were all made of stone. Stone is cold and lifeless. It corresponds to a very basic kind of truth or faith such as belief of knowledge of God. Religions come and go because too much of what they believe has been carved in stone. Despite what was a new theology two hundred years ago, our church has rarely looked like anything but the Old Church. Virtually all of our stone buildings around the globe imitate

the Old Church in style and so does our worship and lifestyle. It's almost as if our unique doctrine does not make a difference that anyone can notice. How can you tell who the Swedenborgian is? He or she is the one who acts like everyone else but thinks he or she is different.

### **The religion did not change. The people did.**

I am not saying that architectural design will a church make. While walking through all those stone Egyptian temples of tremendous beauty, it struck me that there is not even one person who follows that religion today. The religion did not change. The people did. Comparing those ancient temples to the more modern, but centuries-older cathedrals, brings to mind the eerie statistic that as few as six percent of the population in much of Europe still attend church. Many sociologists are referring to this present era as a post-Christian era!

Is what Swedenborg called the "Old Church" coming to an end? Are the buildings already antiquated? Will they some day be just part of the tour of religions, just as dead as the worship of Isis that is marked today only by the ancient Egyptian temples, which have stood empty for two millenium. Will our buildings become places only for tourists like the ancient temples of Egypt because our current members are not on a spiritual pilgrimage but are basically banal tourists taking snaps of life but never plumbing the depths?

Are some of the new religions we see taking hold today part of the New Church or even more a part of it than we are? Does the New Church include non-Christian religions? How do we fit in? *I am convinced that Christianity is dying and its death is part of the formation of the New Church.* This is what Swedenborg predicted. The problem is that we are acting so much like the old church that we will die along with or before the Old Church. The New Church will be formed by others (pilgrims) who are not doing what everyone else is doing (tourists). It would be a terrible irony that a church called "The New Church" died because it imitated the church it came into ex-

istence to rebel against.

Swedenborg has written that before a New Church can grow large in numbers a new heaven must be formed. It has been two hundred years and that new heaven must have increased in population by now. He also said that first the New Church will be small in number and then grow larger (*Apocalypse Revealed*, Paragraph no. 547). He also said that the church would first take hold with the Africans (*Spiritual Diary*, no. 5518). It is true that the only place our church has had consistent long-term growth is in Black South Africa. Maybe it is time we take lessons from our African members. Our organization has officially changed its name from the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem to The Swedenborgian Church. Does this disassociate us from our own identity? Is it symbolic of a refusal to accept that our real uniqueness lies not only in our theology but in the mysticism that is an intrinsic part of our distinctiveness?

Swedenborg was a mystic! A visionary! But it seems as if we are waiting for a time when mysticism is politically correct. Social action has also been an area where our potential has also been dormant. Despite our potentially fatal weaknesses, the process of self evaluation has helped us to begin planning for the future. We have made some positive changes and I believe that we can become a greater part of the New Church. This can only be done by making substantive first-order changes. In other words, we need to discover the pilgrimages we are called to make toward something that is totally and completely New Church. I believe in the teachings of our church and want it to grow because I know that the teachings are a valuable contribution to the world. Our haunting uneasiness often expressed about church growth may not just be simple resistance to change. It may also be that we have not wanted to attract tourists, but real pilgrims, and have not felt equipped for our own pilgrimage, let alone for leading others on a pilgrimage we have yet to begin.

*The Rev. Eric Allison has been ministering to the Swedenborgian community on the island of Mauritius since September 1992 (see the February 1993 Messenger). He plans to return in June 1993 to resume his work as our pastoral ministries' church growth consultant.*

## *Creativity and You*

# SCYL Winter Retreat

Winter Retreat was another huge success this year, thanks to the combined efforts of all involved. This year's theme was *Creativity and You*, and we learned that yes, there really is something creative in all of us. By the time we cleared out, Almont's large dumpster was astonishingly full of broken crayons, colored paper scraps and empty glue bottles. Among other things, those of us of the negative persuasion learned that there is a difference between criticizing and constructive criticism.

Among other things, the annual Euchre tournament went without a hitch, Bill Baxter & Co. gave us another spectacular WRAG (Winter Retreat Actor's Guild) performance, and the Four Guys (who are actually five or six, and in themselves a form of annual entertainment) once again provided music for the party on Tuesday night.

More than all of this, we spent hours wrapped in stimulating conversation on an incredible range of subjects. This is one of the most important activities in which the League can engage. After exchanging views and ideas, I think that we all left with a better idea of who we are personally, who others are, and how the world actually functions.

This year's Retreat was one of the League's most successful in years. We all went home with old questions answered and new ones posed, which, deep down, is what it's all about.

Reuben Bell, III  
President  
Swedenborgian Church Youth League



*Leaguers at Winter Retreat, Almont, Michigan.*

## *General Council and Cabinet Mid-winter Meeting Summary Report*

Cabinet and General Council met together and separately at the United Church of Christ Conference Center in Framingham, Massachusetts, January 21 through January 25, 1993.

### **Summary of business conducted:**

It was voted to enter into an agreement with the California Open Spaces Commission, who want an option to purchase the church's Santa Cruz property.

Erni Martin was voted to fill the vacancy on Communications Support Unit, Nancy McBride was voted to fill the vacancy on Education Support Unit, and Karen Feil was voted to fill the vacancy on the Swedenborg School of Religion (SSR) Board of Trustees.

It was voted to dissolve the joint fund-drive effort with SSR and to appoint a committee to develop a plan to continue the church's fund raising and stewardship efforts.

The budget was adopted, containing at least two new items: Support for an HIV ministry, headed by Rev. Sue Turley-Moore under the auspices of the Growth and Outreach Support Unit, and support for study of a plan for a Swedenborgian Youth Ministry to be done by the Education Support Unit.

After much discussion and input from many sources, it was decided to form a new Ad Hoc Committee to further review the structure of the denomination, and to delay any decisions on a possible merger until further work has been done.

### **Workshop Sessions**

The Council and Cabinet also attended two workshop sessions, meeting jointly with the SSR Board of Trustees, provided by funds from the Lilly Grant. The first workshop was led by Dr. Frederica Harris Thompsett, Academic Dean and Professor of Church History at the Episcopal Divinity School. She spoke on "Theological Education Today," after which we broke into small groups to discuss the relationship and interdependence of our church and theological school. The second workshop was led by a faculty panel from SSR: Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven, Rev. Dr. Ted Klein, Dr. Mary Kay Klein, Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, and Rev. Dr. George Dole, each of whom spoke to the topic "Swedenborg on the Nature of Church." After the panel presentation we again broke into small groups for discussion.

—Gloria Toot, Secretary

## Opinion

*In this section of the Messenger we are pleased to present the varied views of our readers. Letters published here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, the Communications Support Unit or the General Council of the Swedenborgian Church. Published letters may be edited for brevity and clarity.*

*When you see an opinion with which you disagree please send your own views to the Editor so that The Messenger can be a forum for individual viewpoints. We welcome letters on all pertinent topics.*

### Bowen Farewell

Letter to *Messenger* Readers—

To allay the rumors that often accompany changes, I wanted to make as public as possible an explanation for my leaving the Swedenborg School of Religion at this time and *The Messenger* seemed the best format for that.

I have decided to return to full-time participation in my own denomination which I have been missing more and more during my time at SSR, even though I have greatly enjoyed my teaching responsibilities there, and the faculty collegiality, as well as the acquaintances I have made through working with many of you in the Swedenborgian Church.

The SSR Board has been kind enough to grant me a leave of absence to give me time to effect this transition in my life. I want to thank them and you for the welcome and many kindnesses I received during my association with SSR and wish all of you well for the future.

*Dr. Patricia Bowen  
Natick, Massachusetts*

### Church Growth

To the Editor,

I am writing in response to a letter from Paul Zacharias concerning church growth (December 1992 *Messenger*). In the apparent absence of Paul's own thoughts on these ideas, I run the risk of second-guessing and perhaps misinterpreting his intentions in writing his letter; i.e., what does he suggest we learn from these ideas? My concerns are actually quite serious, and can only be partly stated here; hopefully, my remarks will help to continue the conversation.

I disagree strongly with Paul's (Sawatsky's?) comment that E churches exhibit little interest in

social issues. A look at the religious events during the last few years will reveal the depth, and more importantly, the nature of their political involvement; cf. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Donald Wildmon, Terry Randall of "Operation Rescue" and many others. Evangelical (E) churches are invariably aligned with the political right, have little regard for the separation of (their) church and state, and define spiritual mission largely in terms of public policy formation. Their growth seems to stem largely from frustrated conservatives who feel threatened by the increasing diversity of American cultural life.

For this reason, I have been concerned that our church has invested so much time and money into church growth programs based on the "E" model. So little of this perspective seems applicable to our theology, which emphasizes a variety of understandings, individual freedom, and rationality. We have a theology that not only allows, but encourages us, to lay aside the old "natural" dichotomies which divide people (such as conservative and liberal, personal and social, etc.), and to adopt inclusive, loving models which unite us as God's children.

It may be true that many people want "simplistic" answers, but these are precisely the things that Swedenborgians are enjoined to cautiously eschew! It could be said also that while E churches offer simplistic answers, Mainline (M) churches tend to sidestep the questions. Ironical here is the fact that Swedenborgians possess an understanding of the spiritual which its members can believe in 100% *without* needing to have "the whole world" believe it; it is neither dictatorial nor lukewarm. We are, in fact, neither M nor E; we are not even some kind of combination of the two, which is not really possible to begin with: we are a *new* church. All too often, though, we continue to miss the truly revolutionary, "both/and" nature of the "new" church, and feel we must pick and choose from contemporary models.

Finally, the word "tradition" is employed ambiguously. In one instance, it is noted that M churches are declining because they "are far more traditional"; but E churches are

growing precisely because they promote traditional values and forms, for both church and society. And at the end of his letter, Paul suggests we might move back to our "mystical, spiritual traditions." Does this mean that M churches should get back to their traditional roots because they are far too traditional? What are these traditions? As I have said before, Swedenborgians need to critically assess the question: not, "Are traditions good or bad?" but, "What do we mean by 'tradition,' and what role should it play in our life together?"

Finally, I would suggest the following two books for anyone interested in exploring these ideas further: *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, by Dean M. Kelley, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1972 (reprinted 1986); and *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, by James Davison Hunter, Harper Collins: Basic Books, 1991.

*Robert McCluskey  
New York City*

*Editor's Note: Paul Zacharias responds to this letter in the upcoming May Messenger.*

### Translation Questions

Dear Editor,

George Dole's review (February 1993 *Messenger*) of David Gladish's translation of *Love in Marriage* raises a few questions for me.

Mr. Dole seems to think this is a good and readable translation. Dr. Dole has his doubts. But should we be translating for Mr. Dole or Dr. Dole?

While Dr. Dole and Dr. Gladish could conceivably argue about the fine points forever, this seems to me to be like fiddling while Rome burns.

We have a crying need for readable, current translations of Swedenborg. We do not need to please the academics of the world, they can wait until we have the luxury to translate specifically for them. We need to translate for the normal folks who could use the truth in their lives if they could just get past the language barrier. I think Dr. Gladish has done well at this. Why don't we stop the nit-picking and support him and the Swedenborg Foundation in their efforts?

*Ian Woofenden  
Guemes Island, Washington*

## Commencements

### Birth

**Pettersen-Paige**—Michael Thomas Pettersen-Paige, son of Wanda Pettersen and Thomas Paige, members of the Portland, Maine Swedenborgian Church, was born December 16, 1992, in Portland.

### Baptisms

**Beckham**—Alexander Beckham, son of Nancy and Don Beckham, was baptized into the Christian faith August 2, 1992, at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence officiating.

**Duffy**—Ted Duffy was baptized into the Christian faith and confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church January 3, 1993, at the Church of the Holy City, Edmonton, Canada, the Rev. Henry Korsten officiating. Ted was welcomed into membership of the Edmonton Swedenborgian Church.

**Lederer**—Charles Russell Lederer and Everett Joseph Lederer, infant twin sons of Lorene and Joseph Lederer, born December 26, 1992, were baptized into the Christian faith February 28, 1993, at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence and the Rev. Rachel Rivers officiating.

**Uhrmann**—Barbara Allison Anne Uhrmann, daughter of Robert and Sandy Uhrmann, granddaughter of Ken and Anna Hodgson of Saskatoon, Sask., was baptized into the Christian faith January 17, 1993, at the Church of the Holy City, Edmonton, Canada, the Rev. Henry Korsten officiating.

### Confirmations

**Chilgren, Dawdy, Gaul, Engdahl, Granucci, Foster, Holding**—Ed and Kim Chilgren, Cynthia Dawdy, John Gaul, Lee and Mayona Engdahl, Tony Granucci, David and Theresa Foster, Carol Holding were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church November 15, 1992, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence officiating.

**Stiteler**—Maria de los Angeles Stiteler was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church January 24, 1993, in Portland, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating.

### Marriage

**Stanley and Chilgren**—Kim Stanley and Ed Chilgren were united in marriage December 12, 1992, at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence officiating.

### Deaths

**Briggs**—Margaret W. Briggs, 91, entered the spiritual world January 27, 1993, in North Conway, New Hampshire. A memorial service was conducted January 31, 1993, at the Fryeburg, Maine Swedenborgian Church, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Krehbiel**—Lucile Krehbiel, 83, long-time member of the Swedenborgian Church in Pretty Prairie, Kansas, entered the spiritual world December 29, 1992. Lucile taught piano and was church organist for many years. She was also active in the Service Guild, as a Sunday School teacher and as a contributor to the *Plains Banner*.

**Newcomb**—Sandra Newcomb, 70, long-time member and former secretary of the Bridgewater, Massachusetts, Swedenborgian Church, entered the spiritual world January 20, 1993. A memorial service was conducted at the Bridgewater church January 23, 1993, the Rev. Dr. Donna Keane officiating.

**Shaw**—Owen Shaw, 74, member of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, entered the spiritual world January 16, 1993, following a stroke. A memorial service was conducted January 30, 1993, the Rev. F. Robert Tafel officiating.

**Toombs**—Bernhard A. Toombs, 76, a long-time member of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, entered the spiritual world January 28, 1993. A memorial service was conducted February 2, 1993, at the Swedenborg Chapel, the Rev. F. Robert Tafel and Rafael M.J. Guiu officiating.

### Church Family News

The Rev. Henry Korsten, pastor of the Edmonton, Alberta, Canada Swedenborgian Church, has come along very well since his surgery in October and is back in full swing with the dream and study groups meeting again. And yes, he really has quit smoking!

# Wake, Harvey & Dole Fill Temporary Gap at SSR

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is teaching Counseling and Psychotherapy at the Swedenborg School of Religion on a part-time basis during the spring semester. Wilma brings to this position experience both as a minister and educator, and as a working therapist and certified chemical dependence counselor.

In addition to teaching a course in Eastern Religions and Swedenborg's Spirituality, the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey is now serving as Director of Field Education at SSR. Dorothea has had experience supervising student interns at Urbana University, where she is a faculty member emerita. She brings many gifts as minister, teacher, and scholar.

The Rev. Dr. George Dole has graciously agreed to teach Pastoral Care during the spring semester, in addition to his other teaching and scholarly responsibilities.

SSR is extremely blessed to have Wilma, Dorothea, and George filling the gap left by the resignation of the Rev. Dr. Patricia Bowen. We wish Pat well in her desire to pursue full-time ministry in the Unitarian Universalist Association. (See Bowen Farewell letter, *Opinion*). We are conducting a search for a full-time faculty member in the area of Practical Theology, and hope to be able to fill this position for the fall 1993 semester. □

*Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London 15 years after his death. This 1787 organization eventually spawned the present Swedenborgian Church.*

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

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

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