

THE MESSENGER

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October 1994

Do We Want to be the People of the Book?



Jim Lawrence

Last year when our friend Dick Baxter stirred us with his deeply moving sermon, he intended it, I believe, to be a vision, rather than a description of who we are today—at least, that is what I have inferred from one colleague who spoke with Dick after last year's convention. Being the People of the Book was a plea to *reclaim* a position that was once rather more true of our denomination than it is today. It was a rallying cry to get down to what is truly vital and central, and it was given with the sense of urgency from one who had come to appreciate very keenly the preciousness of our opportunities while here in the natural world. In his own search for final bedrock in his adopted faith, Dick discovered his conviction that no one idea, concept or topic could match in power or possibility the singular potency of the Source of all heavenly doctrine in the Holy City New Jerusalem—that liberating nexus, that specially developed and protected fount perennially preserved by the Lord in this world, that primary means by which heaven and earth meet: the Word. So Dick left us with a challenge and a call to be the People of the Book truly, authen-

*Part 2 of a 3-part panel presentation
on the theme of Convention '94
delivered at Marymount University,
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tically, actually by creative scholarship and consciously applied resources and not just by slogan—to recover a passion for the Word and to move extraordinarily into a transformed relationship with it.

It is a challenge indeed, one that I am not sure that we are up to, and the brunt of my offering to this panel is an honest appraisal of the situation as I discern it in the church as a whole. For I believe that we should not respond with superficial emotionalism to this challenge, to say in effect, "Of course we are the People of the Book, that is our calling card, that is our history, that is our revelation, that is the very basis and beginning of the Lord's Second Coming, which we uniquely herald." No, I have been around this church long enough to be not much impressed by a merely emotional response to Dick's challenge. The question of the hour and of this generation is: Do we really want to continue to be The People of the Book?

You can see quite a consistent decline in the attempts by our church to base its ministries and its spiritual messages on direct explications of the Word by way of the inner sense. The very first publishing was done by John Clowes in the late 1780s and 1790s. His entire publishing effort was to bring out the

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modern people.

inner sense of the Word by printing scripture in two columns on each page: the left-hand column giving the literal text and the right-hand column giving the inner sense. The rich publishing heritage of the nineteenth century features virtually all of the rest of the collateral works that provide either a verse-by-verse explication of the inner sense of a Bible book or a paraphrasing. I may get called on this, but I cannot recall even one such publishing endeavor in this century by a minister or layperson in our denomination. We

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Moving Toward the Light

October Potpourri from the Editor

I am pondering anew the many "coincidences" that take place in our lives which are no coincidences, according to the first *Insight* in *The Celestine Prophecy* (see review, p. 120). After reading Ann Westermann's review, I was intrigued and made a mental note to read the book at some point. Then I realized that I needed to get hold of the book for the cover art, which is nice to present with a review. Of course, you can't lay hands immediately on a bestseller unless you buy it or borrow it from a friend, and Ann had lent her copy, so I broke down and bought it. At that point I also became ill with stomach flu or food poisoning—whatever it was, I was sicker for several days than I'd been in many years, and in between bouts, I read the book: because, of course, I was supposed to be reading it right then, not later, so that I could, as it turned out, work with the ideas presented and the special energy generated that would allow this cleansing time—referred to as "down" time in a practical sense—to be a spiritually rewarding experience. (If none of this makes a lick of sense, you may blame it on my lingering malaise, or read *The Celestine Prophecy*. I highly recommend it).

While we're on books and quiet time, I want to mention a resource that I sent for several months ago. It is the *U.S. and World Wide Guide to Retreat Center Guest Houses*. Listed in this book are over 225 retreat center guest houses in the United States, Canada and overseas with addresses, telephone numbers, names of contact persons, price, guest provisions, food service, on-site and nearby attractions, plus other information that might make one's stay more enjoyable. In addition to being far less expensive than the usual hotels, motels, and even some bed and breakfast establishments, most of the retreats listed include two or three simple wholesome meals in the price. I had planned a few months ago to spend a night in one listed in Palm Desert, since it is close by. Although my plans changed and I didn't personally experience this retreat center, the phone conversations I had with the contact person were helpful and very friendly, and I plan to visit there before long. I also had occasion to contact a center in northern California, and received the same impression of wonderful folks going out of their way to be of service.

On the back cover of the *Guide*, under an inviting photo of a serene abbey-type building fronting a river, it says, "this book is for travelers who want to escape the rushed pace of everyday life and arrive at an oasis of unhurried comfort, reflection and spiritual renewal . . . gracious hospitality offered to individuals and groups." If you're planning a trip, or just want a few days of respite and renewal that won't break the budget, you may want to check this out. The book is \$14.95 (add \$1.55 for first class mail), and may be obtained by writing to: CTS Publications, P.O. Box 8355, Newport Beach, CA 92660.

On a practical note: We know that many of you who took the time and effort to fill out the survey in March have been eagerly awaiting a report of the results, which was presented at convention in July by Karen Feil, president of the Chicago church. Karen has been working long and diligently on a comprehensive summary of the report, but it is lengthy, and was finished too late to be included in this issue. The summary will be published in the November *Messenger*.

—Patte LeVan

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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 agree or 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.

Sexist Problems Due to Finite View?

In the September "Opinion" section of *The Messenger*, Esther Fyk raises an issue that certainly needs to be addressed, and I think she has performed a courageous and useful service in placing herself on record in this matter. I believe that God, as infinite and un-created, is not divided into sexual halves, but is truly One; and I further believe that human sexuality resulted as part of the process of creating a finite universe containing finite human beings. The problems arise in connection with the picture of God as presented in the Word, and in particular with the human form which God assumed for the Incarnation. This issue seems to me to be of paramount importance, since some people today are even proposing

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Do We Want to be the People of the Book? *(from front page)*

have had two fine overviews: the Sower Notes by William Worcester, completed before WWI and the Bible Study Notes by Anita Dole.

Among the living, no one under sixty has any real scholarly biblical training, and while we have some preachers trying to do biblical work, there can be little doubt that the Bible as a central creative focus is disappearing from our general denominational focus.

A complex matrix of forces have influenced choices we have made along the way. If we look at the dominant messages coming out of our churches and centers today, we find two prevailing styles. In most places, we have adopted a topical approach to the spiritual teachings that Swedenborg brought forth from the inner sense (life after death, conjugality, new angel stories, the oneness of the divine), but there is not a great deal of actual training to help people understand that these single blossoms grow from a tree that has branches and a trunk and a root system, which is the inner sense. Our second predominant trend is a turning to other spiritual traditions for their blossoms to present to people. The point is not whether or not we should explore, experience, share and dialog. Of course we should. Our real dilemma, one that we have not faced, is what to do about the fact that our spiritual teachings, which we know are attractive to a great many people in their straightforward explication, are drawn systematically from a rather esoteric approach to the world's best-known book.

Now we get to the nub. This book, that we may or may not want to be known as the people of, presents some real hurdles for those who are on the front line every week trying to connect with that segment of the modern culture that is most apt to come in and give us a shot. To speak meaningfully to the typical person in our potential new audience and at the same time to do this by featuring a special approach to the Bible, not only must we overcome immediately a considerable amount of negative baggage from 2,000 years of not-always-enlightened portrayals of the Bible, but we must come to grips with the hard fact that the Bible is increasingly remote from the natural frame of reference of modern people. As the technological aspects of our exploding New Age increasingly create radically new environments and life-references that are more and more remote from the world of the Bible, we have to work harder just to keep the message communicating. In the space of the past three generations, I suspect that the *cultural* distance

traveled displaces us from the life-references in biblical language more than the previous fifty generations put together.

Ironically, this seems even more true for the highly educated than for the lesser educated. But for reasons largely beyond our choosing, Swedenborg's way of conceptualizing both reality and the regeneration process have tended to appeal more to the educated, and these days our General Convention more than the General Church has drawn a leadership core that appeals more to what religion sociologist Tex Sample calls the cultural left. These mostly baby boomer folks of my generation are precisely the ones who are most at sea with scripture. They are amazingly ignorant of the so-called best-known book in the world. They usually dropped out of church in adolescence, never took a college-level course on the Bible, have never made any kind of serious attempt to understand it, and their mental world is far more responsive to anything hi-tech than ancient Judean context. The most rudimentary building blocks of the biblical narrative are unfamiliar to the college-educated masses of my generation, so that when one attempts a sermon that will demonstrate the lovely majesty of the inner sense via the correspondences of a story or passage, it takes about all of the mental energy that one would normally require for a typical sermon just to set the biblical material in an understandable frame of reference. Hence, the big temptation to simply present topics or positions.

The most obvious answer to our church's dilemma, which is to get serious about educating these people about the Bible, is a deceptively simplistic response to this culture-wide biblical incompetence. Such a project needs a remarkable and sustained interest, as well as a considerable literary facility for grasping patterns, forms and content in an often obtuse tome of 3,000 pages. Indeed, as one who frequently tries to use scripture as the seedbed from which to draw profound spiritual wisdom, it sometimes would seem easier to pass a shaggy beast through a needle's eye than to make relevant to the average yuppie detailed altar rituals of 4,000 years antiquity—not to mention monotonous chronicling of monarchs or dietary instructions that could wear down an FDA bureaucrat.

But an alien frame of reference is just the beginning of the challenges presented by the crusty ol' natural Word as the proffered vehicle for enlightenment to the politically correct, cultural-left boomer generation of spiritual seekers. One must constantly detonate patriarchal
(continued on page 127)

Our
culture is
pulling
swiftly
away
from our
richest
resource.

Ah! . . . Swedenborg!

Swedenborgians in this country are now celebrating the 145th year of publishing by the Swedenborg Foundation. All of us can take comfort and satisfaction from the resolute ongoingness of this small organization, for its persistence in furnishing virtually a century-and-a-half's worth of Swedenborg's works and their collaterals. Many of us have become members or pressed shoulders to the wheel in other ways and can be grateful for the existence of the Foundation which has offered us varied opportunities in which to serve its great purpose. This has also been true for many of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Speaking genetically and spiritually, we can thank our forefathers for building the Foundation's strong financial base which permits us to offer Swedenborg's writings to the world.

Why Not Millions?

But from my own personal, lifetime experience, and speaking as chair of the Swedenborg Foundation's outreach/marketing program, I feel that I must ask a searching question: *Have we really done what our forefathers expected of us?* The answer, I'm afraid, is *No*. Not really. At least we have not done enough in America. When the Foundation exhibits in Washington, D.C. at the annual meeting of the Common Boundary Association, this is what happens: Common Boundary meetings are attended by over 2000 of the Who's Who among thousands of contemporary intellectuals and professionals who are seeking paths to spiritual transformation. At this wonderful meeting, we see Europeans come toward the Foundation's exhibit to look at our books exclaiming "Ah! . . . Swedenborg!" Educated Europeans recognize and appreciate Swedenborg. They are ready and eager to look at the books we exhibit because they know and respect the name of Swedenborg.

When Americans come by the Foundation's exhibit, a few have heard of Swedenborg; they are curious and want to learn more. But, most attendees do not even know Swedenborg's name: they are afraid to come near the exhibit until they discover that we are booksellers and not evangelists.

My question is *why*—in the 145 years of Foundation publishing in this nation—*have Americans not learned greater respect and recognition for Swedenborg?* All my life, I have had to explain who Swedenborg is. I am sick and tired of being among groups of educated people who ought to know about Swedenborg and hav-

ing to explain to them. Swedenborg is as important to nineteenth-century American culture as Emerson, William James, Henry James Senior and Junior, and should be equally well known. After 145 years of our careful, persistent publishing, why has this not happened? Why have we served only thousands of readers in almost a century-and-a-half? Why are we not serving millions?

The answer to the question is that *we have not been creating enough introductory books or enough sales materials and deliberate campaigns to market Swedenborgian publications*. However, the scene has been set for us now to succeed in reaching millions of potential readers rather than thousands. In 1989 and 1990, the Foundation instituted a marketing program, which began with identifying the Foundation's target audiences and instituting the Foundation's powerful, outreaching mission statement which is "... to foster an affirmative, adventurous, and increasingly broad engagement with the theological thought of Emanuel Swedenborg, especially among persons desiring to apply spiritual principles to life." The Foundation has introductory materials at hand: the 1980s motion pictures, which reached thousands of viewers; *Chrysalis*, introductory Swedenborgian journal of universal appeal, which so far has reached more than 11,000 readers, at least seventy-five percent of them new to Swedenborg; the stunning 1988 colorful pictorial biography of Swedenborg with compendium of Swedenborg's influence; a traveling exhibit for science and air museums, which opened at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, the Bryn Athyn Library, the Bostonview Church, and is now available for future bookings throughout the U.S. and Canada; a new generation of Foundation collateral works designed deliberately to appeal to nonsectarian readers and seekers of spiritual information. In 1988 we held the Swedenborg Tricentennial Symposium, which introduced Swedenborg and the Foundation to many of the contemporary intellectuals and professionals seeking understanding of spiritual transformation, as well as gaining for us many new friends.

Drive for Additional Titles

Besides re-designed reprints for out-of-print volumes of the Standard Edition and new, contemporary translations for a Library Edition of Swedenborg's works, Dave Eller, our new executive director, is initiating a drive for



additional titles which should result in a veritable wave of new introductory materials.

Since September, Joanna Hill, our energetic marketing manager, has been writing, designing, and printing the sales materials we badly need to publicize these new books. Examples are: A new Foundation brochure that presents a brief introduction to Swedenborg and the mission of the Foundation; a leaflet describing the John R. Seekamp Library Fund; special mailings to librarians and scholars; a library flyer and mailing underwritten by the denomination's Iungerich Fund, sent to 3400 acquisitions librarians, offering *A Continuing Vision* with purchase of three or more titles; the American Booksellers Association magazine, distributed to thousands of booksellers, carried an announcement of *Heaven and Hell* as well as the new Foundation titles to be available this fall; a new *Chrysalis* flyer, sent to 40,000 readers of similar journals, generating about 20 new subscriptions a day; a 1994 Foundation catalog for customers, members, congregations, *Chrysalis* readers, acquisition librarians, and metaphysical bookstores, as well as for meetings.

Full Participation Needed for Better Outreach

All the while that the Foundation has been moving toward a program to better reach out to America, America has been setting the stage for nationwide recognition of Swedenborg! Thousands of people are searching today for new approaches to spirituality. Thus, the

time is ripe to market Swedenborg far more fruitfully than we have done in our first 145 years. Let us reach out with more and more introductory books with broad appeal—with *Chrysalis*, videotapes, lectures, and our traveling museum exhibit—to build recognition for Swedenborg and understanding for his ideas.

To make a go of these new marketing efforts the Foundation needs the full participation of all New-Church people. Not only do we want you to:

- ◆ send us your outreach and marketing ideas,
- ◆ energize us by becoming members and sending dollars,
- ◆ guide us in choices for books you want to see published,
- ◆ help your church build a non-sectarian marriage between your local science or air museum and the Foundation's exhibit on Swedenborg as scientist, and
- ◆ ask for Foundation book titles at your local library and bookstore.

But, also—if, in our own generation, you want Americans to know about Swedenborg and to know that his ideas can make a difference in lives—you need to *demand* from the Foundation the effective marketing programs that will eventually build the New Church and accomplish much, much more than we have done in the past 145 years. Let us see Americans, coming over to look wherever our books are exhibited, saying—with appreciative pleasure: “Ah! . . . Swedenborg!” ◇

Carol Skinner Lawson is editor of Chrysalis and chair of the Swedenborg Foundation's outreach/marketing program.

Healing from Prenatal Loss

Reading Ann Westermann's article "Release from Vows of Marriage" in the June Messenger, as well as Patte LeVan's editorial which raised questions about the role of the spiritual community in responding to "modern-day" traumas, has prompted me to write about how the Swedenborgian Church helped me and my husband David heal from a recent loss.

A few months ago in a Denver cemetery, a garden bench was placed on a plot of land that will never hold graves. It is dedicated to "all those babies who were taken home in their parents' hearts but not in their arms." But in January of 1993, that memorial did not yet exist, and I awoke most mornings crying; desperately wanting and needing to memorialize the child I had just lost, and not knowing how to do it.

To compound my sadness, we were new to Colorado, far from relatives and friends. David's employer had recently offered him a job transfer here from San Francisco, and as expectant parents, we'd jumped at the opportunity. Here we could afford what was beyond our reach in the Bay Area—a family-size house and good schools. But just two weeks after our move, my doctor called with news that threw our plans, and my faith, into turmoil.

I had not planned to have amniocentesis because I couldn't imagine having an abortion. But when it became apparent that the fetus was not developing properly and there might be genetic abnormalities, I anxiously underwent the test. With the results came my first lesson from this experience: I do not know what I'll do in any given situation until I'm in that situation.

The possibilities we faced were heartbreaking. If I continued my pregnancy, there was a chance our baby would be stillborn in the next few weeks. There was also a chance the pregnancy would go full term, and the baby would live a short time, struggling with severe mental and physical handicaps. There was *no* chance we would bring a normal, healthy child into the world.

I decided to end my pregnancy, but that is not to say I was immediately at peace with the decision. I pondered the notion that this was God's plan and I had no right to take control. I even wondered if our child's soul chose to take on such a limited physical body in order to work out some karma. I finally went to the clinic at peace with only this: I might never know, in this life, if what I was doing was right or wrong in

God's eyes. But this was the *only* thing I could do—to take the action that would result in the least amount of suffering for all of us.

Every door and window of the clinic was guarded with alarms and bullet-proof glass. Along with instruction sheets on medication, David and I were given procedures for gaining access should the site be besieged by protesters. The need for these security measures—as if we were doing something covert, illegal—just added to the trauma. Inside, however, a gentle, motherly counselor named Morgan soothed some of our anxiety; she stayed by my side through the next three days.

In her final session with David and me, Morgan told us that our baby had been a girl, and that it would be good for us to name her, and find a way to bring closure to our loss of her with some sort of ritual. She also said that it would be important, *and sometimes difficult* for us to be kind to each other in the months ahead. This we didn't understand at the time.

We named our daughter Hope, and in the weeks that followed, I did most of the things that grieving people are supposed to do. Yet, there was an elusive quality to my mourning. I'd already developed a relationship with my child. In my mind, I'd taken her on a hundred outings, from the neighborhood pool to the Grand Canyon. I'd taught her to tie her shoes and sent her off to college. Yet now, I had nothing tangible to show that she was anything more than imagination. I kept telling David, "I need a grave. I need a place where I can bring flowers."

David had his own way of coping, which often seemed like avoidance to me. I understood that he was overwhelmed with his new job, but when he came home from work with a cheery smile and question about whether I'd called the insurance broker or the landscaper, I felt we were worlds apart. Morgan's advice was beginning to make sense, and when we heard of a prenatal loss support group, we joined it.

The other couples in our group had all lost their babies through miscarriage, but like us, they were grappling with feelings of self-doubt, anger, disillusionment, and most important—*isolation*. Pregnancy loss, it seems, is something much of our society would prefer not to discuss. While we avoided people who disapproved of abortion, the other couples avoided many more who were all too eager to tell them that their loss was "for the best" and steer the conversation to another topic.

I'd carried my child 20 weeks; some of these women had carried theirs only eight or ten. But I learned that the pain has little to do with the age of the fetus, and everything to do with a woman's openness to motherhood. As for the men, what we wives mistook for indifference was eventually revealed for what it was: a fear that if they let themselves grieve the way we did, they would not be able to hold their jobs, or us, together.

In April, David learned that he had an upcoming meeting in San Francisco. I'd often wished we were still living there, where we had a wonderful circle of friends, several of them through our three-year association with the Swedenborgian Church. The Revs. Rachel Rivers and Jim Lawrence and several church members had been in contact with us since January, giving what Rachel called "hugs by phone." I'd once envisioned bringing our baby back to the church for baptism, and now, with this trip occurring just two weeks before what would have been Hope's birth date, I knew it was time to finally take that step towards closure.

Neither Rachel nor Jim had ever performed a memorial rite for an unborn child, but they were eager to help us. Rachel and I planned a simple service. First, I would finally get to bring those flowers. David and I would present a rhododendron in Hope's memory for planting in the church garden. Then we would offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the many ways that family, friends, and strangers had shown God's love to us in the midst of our trauma. Then Rachel would talk about Hope. A tall order, I thought, eulogizing a little being that had never taken a breath on this earth. But the words she spoke have brought us ongoing peace.

"According to the teachings of this church, (your daughter) is not like a bud broken from a stem, never to bloom . . . Our physical bodies are the containers of our soul . . . through which we are able to live a life on earth . . . Instead of growing up on earth, it is my understanding that Hope is growing up in Heaven, in a spiritual body which is whole and complete. Our church teaches that once a soul exists, it can never die, and those who die in infancy or childhood wake up in Heaven and are cared for there by wise and loving angels who have a special love for children.

There in Heaven they learn and grow much as they would here, laughing and playing with other children, studying and learning, moving through childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Swedenborg writes that children who grow up in Heaven always retain a certain innocence because they are not subject to the same trials and

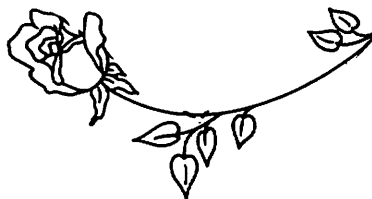
temptations as those who grow up on Earth."

I told only a handful of people about the planned service. The idea of inviting folks to something akin to a funeral felt awkward. I did tell Jim and Rachel that they could announce it in church the Sunday before, however, and when we came to the sanctuary to symbolically lay our child to rest, it was filled with our church friends. That, in the end, has provided the greatest comfort. Sharing our tears that night, they acknowledged that our child was very real to us. By their presence, they affirmed that we had acted out of love.

The following Sunday we were still in the city and attended church. It was Mother's Day, and a potluck dinner was planned after the service. "Can you handle it?" A couple of concerned friends asked. I replied with new-found awareness that I wouldn't know until I got there. Being surrounded by gurgling babies and beaming parents, I indeed felt the loss of my child. I always will. But what I didn't feel was *isolation*.

Returning to Denver, we shared the prayers and Rachel's eulogy with the other couples in our support group. Our counselor knew of just one minister (Methodist) in the Denver area who was conducting prenatal loss memorial services, and both of the support groups here are sponsored by hospitals without religious affiliation. The new cemetery bench, initiated by a hospital chaplain, may be a sign that the religious community is becoming more aware of bereaved couples' needs. We felt tremendously fortunate to be affiliated with a church community that respected the very difficult choice we made, and responded so lovingly to our call for help in our healing.

Penelope Pietras and her husband David Goldstein reside in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Penny is a writer who has just started on her second novel, about a couple who do not fare quite so well in the aftermath of prenatal loss.



" . . .
Once
a soul
exists, it
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who die
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and are
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love for
children."

The Book of the People

Digest of 1994 Convention Mini-course

One of my concerns is that our doctrine of Sacred Scripture, so central to our worship and life, seems so at odds with approaches to the Bible prevalent in the culture around us. Scholarship focuses on the human authors and tries by empirical means to determine what can reasonably be believed. Evangelical and fundamentalist approaches focus on divine authorship and see God as a literalist. They would agree, it seems, that God does not talk in riddles, and the notion that there is within Scripture a spiritual meaning which writers themselves did not intend or know suggests a distinctly manipulative God.

Swedenborg, though, presents a principle of "accommodation" that I believe bears directly on this issue. Since our minds are incapable of grasping divine truth as it is in itself, revelation always involves adaptation to our capacities. In one image, the truth can be visualized as flowing into a vessel that has a particular shape and can hold only so much. For another image, Swedenborg turns to the story of the Ten Commandments in Exodus. The first set, entirely the work of God, never made it down to ground level. For the second set, Moses had to carve out the tablets—the outward form—on which God wrote the message—the inner meaning. We are told in *Arcana Coelestia* 10453 that this means "that the literal meaning would have been different if the Word had been written among a different people or if that people's character had not been what it was."

Let us look at the process of composition in this light. Obviously, the Bible tells us only a minute fraction of "what actually happened." A fully detailed narrative of the life of just one individual for one day only would take thirty volumes all by itself. What we are offered is *an understanding* of what happened, an understanding shaped by assumptions about cause and effect and priorities, shaped by sensitivity to recurrent patterns and to events or individuals that seem to embody larger meanings, much as George Washington embodies the best of America's founding principles.

If the author of a large section of Scripture were a single individual, then, that section would reflect the biases and limited perspective of that individual. The truth of revelation would necessarily have to be fitted into the forms provided by that single mind. If, though, we recognize that we are dealing with a semi-literate culture in which oral tradition was prevalent and powerful, then there is a real sense in which the ongoing community becomes "the author," handing on from generation to generation the stories that embody its essential values.

Oral tradition has a strong conservative tendency simply because it is hard to change a story that everyone knows. "Goldilocks and the Four Bears?"

No way! Oral tradition also has a strong creative tendency, selecting and subtly shaping the stories to convey as vividly as possible the messages that are felt to be vital to the community's sense of identity, character, and purpose.

The models the community has for selecting and shaping, though, will inevitably be drawn from individual life experience. Individual lives are short enough to be observable, close enough to be important, consistent enough to be persuasive, and varied enough to be inclusive. It is in individual lives that we see most clearly patterns of growth from small beginnings, learning from victory and defeat, the intrusion of the unexpected, the nature and effects of commitment, and above all the nature and effects of righteousness and unrighteousness. It is in individual lives that we see most clearly the need to transform earthly goals to heavenly ones, to shift our focus from "the kingdom of Israel" of the Old Testament to "the kingdom of heaven" of the New.

Swedenborg does refer to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and to David as the author of the Psalms, but he does not argue these attributions as points of doctrine. I doubt that they are anything more than reflections of what all Christians of his century assumed as a matter of course. And in *Arcana Coelestia* 10453, as cited above, he states clearly that the role of Moses in the biblical narrative represents that of the whole people. If we take this seriously, it suggests that the narrative, the outer meaning, reflects the character of that people, that it corresponds to their own inner processes and that we can therefore see in it the laws that governed their spiritual journeys. It is a truism in contemporary thought to say that any observation embodies something of the observer. Any composition reflects not only the individual composer but also the composer's time and place. The Bible, coming from the one spot on earth where three continents meet, coming from the span of centuries, surely has unique possibilities of universal relevance.

The role of the Divine in this process is as critical as ever, but its modality is distinctive. God is not the arbitrary dictator or the devious manipulator. God is the gentle guide, constantly stimulating within the most sensitive members of the community awareness of the values that lead toward heaven. We need not resist the findings of scholarship which, so to speak, see Israel as the ultimate author of the Old Testament and the early Christian church as the author of the New, since these larger, lasting communities provide vessels for the reception of divine truth which are far more capacious than could be provided by any simple succession of individual minds.

The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole is professor of Bible, Language and Theology at the Swedenborg School of Religion.

Our Swedenborgian Heritage — Fifteenth in a series

AKA UNCLE JOHN

Louise Woofenden

A recent crossword puzzle had the definition "frequent letters on a Post Office poster." The answer, AKA, "also known as," describes the dilemma of a detective trying to track down a criminal who is hiding under an alias. The archivist faces a similar problem. Pen names abound in letters, documents and articles. The identities of the bashful authors (we assume that criminality was not the motive for the aliases) is sometimes revealed by chance during other research. For instance, the long sought identity of "A Bible Student" was recently discovered to be the Rev. John Hyde of Manchester, England. But many cleverly elude identification. One of these is "Uncle John," who wrote the article in the January 7, 1874, *New Jerusalem Messenger* from which the following is adapted.

Hints to One in Trouble

Dear Friend,

Your lot is not a common one. Your trials seem too severe for a mortal to bear. But suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were here upon the earth, known and loved only as he was by the family at Bethany and by other friends and followers. Suppose that he should picture to you, with a company of other women, just the lot or life you are now living in every particular, telling you how your love would seem to you to be thrown away, your kindness unnoticed or unknown, your warm love met by icy coldness, or what is worse, by perfect indifference. Suppose the picture to be perfectly drawn and then that Jesus should say, "I want a woman to take and fill this place as well as she can." Would not many spring forward to take the mission? Would not you?

There might be, among those who came forward, some who knew only that Jesus was a great prophet and good man, and they might accept the mission as a grand opportunity to do something uncommon; some might be urged on by a longing they would do anything to satisfy, but which they could not in the least comprehend. But among those who know who Jesus was and is, you would see calm, quiet, happy faces, eager to take, and thankful to receive the work under the Lord's direction and with his support, not only for others' good, but also for their

own. Do we ever think that the *Lord* is asking us to do the work before us? And that he has placed the work there for us to do? If you use your highest and best faculties, and act from the Lord, then rest assured that what comes of it is the best that a wise, loving Father can give His child.

The Lord tells us, and experience shows us, that we can bear all the burdens that the Lord permits us or others to put upon us. "He knoweth our frame,"—our strength to bear up—"and remembereth that we are dust,"—that we are of the earth, in the world, and inclined to our own comforts and pleasures.

And we can think of more troubles in five minutes than will ever come to us in five hours or days. Bringing back what may happen tomorrow or next week and placing it upon the burdens of today, is strictly forbidden us by the Lord. This is borrowing trouble of tomorrow, and using it or suffering from it today, and the Lord has provided that one day's troubles shall alone trouble us. Are we trying to do His will when we are *not* trying to let tomorrow alone, and *are* trying to get all the suffering we can today? Are we afraid the Lord's power, wisdom and love will give out tomorrow?

Because our burden is peculiarly our own, we think no other could be so heavy and hard to bear, and we forget that others may have a burden which we never see, which worries and wearies them as cruelly as our trials do us. Even when we have everything we could ask for, and external suffering is kept from us, there may be a desire for something better, and a state of contempt for the life we are living, quite as hard to bear as any of the afflictions that come more directly to our senses.

In this world ye *shall* have tribulation. This is said to disciples, true followers of the Lord; so please remember that you are only one of a great army of men and women journeying towards heaven, each bearing his or her own load.

Louise Woofenden is a writer and retired SSR library archivist.

[Editor's Note: If anyone reading this can solve the mystery of who "Uncle John" was, please let us hear from you!]

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Film Review

Shadowlands

Reviewed by Susanne Lorraine

(Available in video)

C. S. Lewis refers to our existence on this earth as "*shadowlands*," further remarking that "*real life*" hasn't begun yet. The movie of this same name is the story of a part of the life of C.S. Lewis, a part in which he explores the depths of his own "*shadowland*." The most recent version of this film stars Debra Winger and Anthony Hopkins. A previous release produced by the BBC starred Claire Bloom and Joss Ackland. I viewed both recently and found it an interesting comparison.

Clive Staple Lewis was a popular novelist and Christian speaker when he began his correspondence and friendship with Joy Gresham, a Christian-Jewish American poet. She touched him with her understanding of his inner life, and her arrival in London deepened their bonds. To his friends, he seemed full of inconsistencies; a children's writer with no children, a speaker on Christian married love with no spouse. To Joy, he seemed quite clear. They became close platonic friends and both understood where they stood. "Jack," as Lewis was called, offered Joy citizenship in England after her divorce by agreeing to marry her in a civil ceremony. She and her sons (only one son is featured in the latest release) became a part of the "family" with Jack and his brother.

When Joy is diagnosed with cancer and begins to fail rapidly, Jack realizes how much she means to him and asks her to marry him before God. His past intellectualizing about marriage love is put to the test of experience with a real spouse. Joy brings Jack alive to the feelings of both hurt and joy in love. She teaches him that the happiness and the pain in their love each contain the other. In his lectures, Lewis had used the image that we are like rock being chiseled by God until we reach perfection. Joy helps him to expand that realization to include that we are also, joyously, the "statue" even during the

process of sculpting. They have some good times together when she experiences a remission and is released from the hospital.

At Joy's death, Jack's faith is seriously tested. In the BBC version of the film, he mentions that he became a Christian like learning to dive, he didn't *do* anything, just let himself go. During his grief, he tries to *do* whatever he can to avoid the pain. He tries anger, fear, isolation and questioning God about why Joy had to die. His grief has bolted his heart shut from the inside, away from God and others in pain, such as Joy's son Douglas. The man who had lectured that pain and suffering are what drive us out of the nursery and make us grow up, didn't want to "*grow up*." His longing and love for Joy and his surety that she exists still in the realm of "*real life*" finally open a door for him where he can walk through his grief. He sees that the only bolt on the door was the one he put there, that God was always there waiting for him to enter willingly.

The climactic message in the BBC version was that the "dive" into faith can be made again and again throughout our lives, whenever we come through the "valley of the shadow of death." The message in the recent version focused on the love relationship and the "deal" that you get pain and hurt as well as happiness and joy whenever you take the risk to deeply love another. Both messages have profound truth and use in our lives that hopefully we will see before we leave these "*shadowlands*" ourselves.

Susanne Lorraine is a member of the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian church and a part-time student at the Swedenborg School of Religion.



Have you seen a worthwhile film or video that you would like to review or see reviewed in *The Messenger*? Please let us hear from you. Coming in November: Susanne Lorraine reviews video pick, "What About Bob?"

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In his
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Lewis
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Catalog of Literature

Currently available at the

Central Office of the Swedenborgian Church
48 Sargent Street, Newton, Massachusetts 02158
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Note of Interest—

*The following have been published
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The Celestine Prophecy

Reviewed by Ann Graber Westermann

The Celestine Prophecy, a new book by James Redfield
New York: Warner, 1994.

My curiosity was piqued when I learned recently that 81 people had signed up at a neighboring "New Age" church for a five-week program on the book, *The Celestine Prophecy*. What does this book have to offer that evokes such a response, which neither a Bible study nor a discussion group on doctrinal materials can elicit?

This overtly spiritual novel, with a million-and-a-half copies sold in its eleventh printing, has long since left the shelves of metaphysical book stores, has entered the mainstream through every book store chain, and is available at my local supermarket where I bought this copy I'm reviewing.

As a novel it is hardly a literary masterpiece. New Age Journal calls it . . . "a mediocre adventure novel, an Indiana Jones knockoff . . . combined with Jonathan Livingston Seagull." In spite of its lack of literary polish and stereotypical characters, it is capturing a vast reading audience with what its author terms, "emerging spiritual common sense."

The book is a narration of an adventure. The adventurer presumably is the author himself. The cast of characters consists of "good guys" and "bad guys." They can be identified by attitudes of openness to new possibilities or of fear and repression, respectively. Characters are seen to change their allegiance as the book unfolds.

The action consists of a

treasure hunt mostly in Peruvian jungles. The chase is on. For what? The treasure! The "treasure" consists of spiritual wisdom purportedly contained in an ancient manuscript—written in Aramaic—and hidden in the jungles and the Celestine ruins. It is sought after by both sides, the "good guys" and the "bad guys," for purposes of their own. The "bad guys"—who fear it will undermine their power based on traditional religious beliefs and practices—want to get their hands on it first in order to suppress it. The "good guys" see it as a blueprint for a new order—based on spiritual awareness—that humanity is destined to reach.

The entire manuscript consists of nine sections dealing with *Insights*. Each *Insight*—a key to life itself—explains one major concept. Elements of mystical religion, modern physics, interpersonal psychology, and ecology are synthesized into a "common sense" spirituality that is offered as a possible new paradigm.

A battle ensues as each of the nine *Insights* is uncovered. The action involves the Peruvian government, the Catholic Church, scientists, our narrator, and a bevy of protagonists and antagonists. The hero who finally succeeds in getting to the ninth *Insight* is the one who grasps what these keys to living are about and implements the spiritual wisdom the nine *Insights* contain.

Do good Swedenborgians need to run out and get a copy? Only if they don't want to wade through 23 volumes of *Arcana Coelestia* and other tomes. This line from "Our Statement of Faith" kept going through my mind as I was reading this book: "We believe that the Risen Lord is . . . undertaking His Second Coming through a general enlightenment of this New

Age."

The Celestine Prophecy does a great job of contributing to "general enlightenment" by popularizing important ideas concerning development of perceptive abilities; interaction with others and with nature as seen from an energy perspective; evolutionary transformation through interpersonal ethic; following intuitive guidance to do what is ours to do. The book is easy to read, suspensefully written, and hard to put down. It comes with the open invitation to try these precepts; you might like living this way! Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross, M.D. put it this way, "A fabulous book about experiencing life. . ."

Paul Zacharias asked the question, "Are We Missing the Boat Again?" in the June *Messenger*. That was even before *The Celestine Prophecy* made publishing history. He was primarily referring to the *Life after Death* subject, and the more recent interest in *Angels*. The popularity of these topics implies an eagerness to know about spiritual matters and a cultural receptivity to them. The writings of Swedenborg contain such jewels on spiritual topics. Is there a way of mining this spiritual gold by presenting it in a way where people have a direct experience of the "inner sense"?

James Redfield may have found the right venue with *The Celestine Prophecy* to create enthusiasm in large numbers of people to look beyond tangible reality and experience the internal real world of spirit for themselves. Why can't we?

Ann Graber Westermann is an ordained, ecumenical minister, a diplomate of the Institute of Logotherapy, and a member of the Swedenborgian Church in St. Louis, Missouri.

Open Letter Appeal

Dear Friends:

Wendy and Ed Schnurr need your help. Wendy is in a fight for her life. She grew up in the Philadelphia church. Ed grew up in the Bridge-water church, and they met at Fryeburg in 1972 and were married in the Wilmington church in 1978. This is the first year they have missed attending the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, where Ed is a trustee. But they need to stay very close to the University of California San Diego Medical Center, so that Ed can drive Wendy to the hospital quickly, should a compatible lung become available to replace hers, which is filled with blood clots that cannot be removed.

Ed's health insurance will partially cover some of the medical costs, but Wendy and Ed are incurring many additional non-covered expenses that could reach \$100,000. These include the high cost of housing, transportation, testing evaluations, and pulmonary rehabilitation. After transplant, Wendy must remain on immunosuppressive drug therapy, which is only partially covered by insurance, for the rest of her life.

Ed and Wendy find it extremely difficult to ask for your help, but they have already sold their home in Sharon, Mass., and find their funds are rapidly running out, even as Wendy moves up on the waiting list. After a year of waiting, she has made it to the top, and it would be a shame if they had to leave due to lack of funds, when she is so close

to success.

If you can help, please send your donations to:

THE WENDY SCHNURR
TRUST FUND
c/o Farmers & Merchants Bank
31873 Del Obispo Street
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
Attn: Teresa Belinski
(714) 496-8601

Thank you for your caring concern.

Eldon and Annella Smith
The Swedenborgian Church of San Diego

Opinion (continued from page 114)

that the Word ought to be rewritten so that all mention of God under any name should be made non-sexist. The idea seems to be that since the infinite nature of God embraces all things of both sexes, the prevalent obvious male imagery in the Word was a mistake.

In his convention sermon in Washington, D.C., on July 10, Rev. Dr. George Dole called attention to the constitutions and bylaws of our church organizations, which govern the affairs of church life, as books which we amend from time to time in the hope of keeping our proceedings in line with the Book of Life. Dr. Dole emphasized that for us the Book of Life is the Word—a book, he noted, “which we did not write and cannot amend.”

Swedenborg points out (see *Arcana Coelestia* 6212 and *Apocalypse Revealed* 959) that the Lord is in every sense the Author of the Word. The human beings who penned it did not choose the words, but wrote what the Lord dictated to them. Isaiah 40, which begins with the beautiful “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God,” continues with a questioning about who is the real authority in the universe, stressing the folly of making idols—of thinking that we can make God into whatever form best pleases us. Micah 6:8 puts it all in a nutshell: God requires three things of you—“to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

I believe that the Word is truly the Word of the Lord. If there is something in it that I have

a problem with, I figure there must be something I have missed, and I had better work very humbly on my imperfect understanding and not assume that God made a mistake. God, for me, doesn't make mistakes. In AC 4005/2 Swedenborg has this to say: “In the Word an accurate distinction is made between males and females . . . By ‘a male,’ in general, is signified truth; and by ‘a female,’ good.” When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you a king, then?” (John 18:37), Jesus replied, “To this end I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.”

In AC 3336 the following is also helpful in dealing with the letter of the Word: “In order that the signification in the internal sense of the things which are said . . . may be apprehended, the thought must be entirely removed from the historicals, thus from the persons . . . and in their place must be substituted the things which they represent . . .” As I see it, the male human form which the Lord took on through Mary was essential to his mission of bearing witness to the truth; and was gradually put off until the Divine Human was fully one with the Divine itself. In my experience, the sexist problems disappear when we substitute for the historicals—the appearances—in the Word the things which they represent. I will be glad to supply additional references to anyone wishing to pursue any of these points.

Rev. Gertrude Tremblay
Box 2448, St. Paul, AB
Canada TOA 3A0

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American New Church Sunday School Association Report

122nd Annual Meeting
Arlington, Virginia, July 9, 1994

Two years ago the annual meeting strongly recommended a restructuring of the Association, and during the past two years this has been a priority of the executive board. Last year new bylaws were adopted, and this year an amended constitution was adopted as well as two important adjustments to the bylaws. One or two small adjustments to the bylaws remain to be worked out, but we are now free to turn our attention to other issues. My thanks to all who have contributed to this process.

The revision of the bylaws resulted in setting up three new standing committees: Teacher Training, Outreach, and Publications. These committees have done an excellent job of organizing their work, resulting in a very productive year for the Association. The Teacher Training Committee developed and offered three mini-courses, and produced a list of materials available in the Swedenborg School of Religion library.

The Outreach Committee ran several advertisements in *The Messenger*, successfully invited the Riverside Society to sponsor an essay contest (see Eric Allison's report of winners) and sponsored a banner project which resulted in many banners made by the Sunday school children who were led down the aisle on Sunday morning by our vice president, Eric Hoffman. A prize for each banner was given out by random selection during the meeting. Eric Allison took charge of our exhibit table, which included items he had made. The T-shirts with our new logo and a quotation from Swedenborg were a great success. They were sold out, and more of the same, plus T-shirts with a new quotation are planned for next year.

The Publications Committee made an exhaustive inventory of the Dole *Bible Study Notes* resulting in an inventory figure in the treasurer's report for the first time, and leading to the facilitation by the Publications chair, Jim Lawrence, of the program following the business meeting on curriculum development. Enough interest was generated by the discussion to encourage the executive board to make curriculum development a priority for the coming year.

The following new members were elected and welcomed into membership: Joong Kun Park, Nancy Perry, Marjorie Whaley Tuzik, Edmund Swiger, Betty Wiberg, Stella Podmore, Sharon Billings, Hartmut Lipski, and Lorrie Lipski.

The minutes of the annual meeting, the new constitution, and the amended bylaws, together with the reports of officers and committees, are published in the 1994 *Journal of the American New Church Sunday School Association*, which all members should have received by the end of August.

Election Results

President.....Rev. Gertrude Tremblay
Vice President.....Rev. Eric Hoffman
Secretary.....Susanne Lorraine
Treasurer.....Patricia Brewer
Chair, Teaching Aids.....Joyce Fekete
Chair, Teacher Training Committee...Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake
Chair, Publications Committee.....Rev. Dr. James Lawrence
Chair, Outreach Committee.....Rev. Eric Allison
Member, Nominating Committee
for 3-year term expiring 1997.....Lorrie Lipski

Rev. Gertrude Tremblay
President, SSA

The Winners Are...

Many thanks to all who sent in their stories to the Sunday School Association **Writers' Contest**. It was not easy to select a final three because there were so many good stories. We narrowed the field down to six and then read the stories to children who made the final selection. The first place winner (\$250) was Tracy Morris, Massachusetts. Second place (\$150) went to Pearl McCallum, California. Third place winner (\$100) was Crystal Bartlick of Edmonton. Our thanks to the Riverside Fund for granting the prize money which made possible our 1994 contest. The Outreach Committee of the Sunday School Association is putting together an anthology of the best stories submitted this year. We plan to have this available by the next convention. Details about next year's contest will be in the November *Messenger*.

Family Prayers Needed!

- Do you have a favorite grace to say before meals?
- Do you know a bedtime prayer that you love to say?

The wealth of these family rituals is *only* preserved by telling them to our children and sharing them with each other.

Please contribute your "Family Graces and Bedtime Prayers" for inclusion in a proposed booklet to be compiled by the Sunday School Association to enrich us all!

Please submit by 12/1/94 to: Susanne Lorraine, 387 Gorham Road, Scarborough, ME 04074. (Thanks!)

Do We Want to be . . . (from page 115)

and militaristic images, as if they were hair-trigger explosives, and then quickly serve up the new wisdom with such panache that their erstwhile explosive potential becomes instead the fireworks for a New Age imagination.

Our culture is pulling swiftly away from our richest resource. It is as if we were a band with a terrific repertoire of Big Band, only to find ourselves working a town full of a new breed whose music tastes run in a different direction. This analogy may have flaws, but I have been voicing my concern about this central dilemma since my first year in the seminary, and I have been grappling with confirmations of its essential contention throughout my entire ministry. There was a time when I thought my own preferences might carry me into other directions. But a funny thing has happened over the years with the writings and the way they so often use those crazy old scripture stories to carry me deep into contemplative states. When I read, as one of but a thousand such passages, that the Lord still comes as He came before: to bring not peace, but a sword, and that by sword we are to understand truth discriminating, especially between things natural and spiritual, I feel my commitment renew yet again.

I don't have the answer for the whole church, but my question, "Do we really want to continue being the People of the Book?" is not a rhetorical question. Its answer seems far from a given to me. Even if the answer to the question is affirmative, I suspect we will not reach that answer now collectively as a church, so much as individuals within the church, who may, if their efforts be heroically creative, discover a new foundation for the future of the Word in our church.

The Rev. Dr. James F. Lawrence is co-minister of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church and manager of J. Appleseed & Co., a small-press publisher of books and pamphlets promoting contemporary expressions of Swedenborgian spirituality.

Passages

Baptism

Maring—Jared Daniel Maring was baptized into the Christian faith June 26, 1994, at the Swedenborgian Church of the Open Word in St. Louis, Missouri, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

Marriages

Lundblad and Burnell—Kristin A. Lundblad and Russell G. Burnell were united in marriage July 30, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Reddekopp and Craig—Lisa Elizabeth Reddekopp, daughter of Wayne and Elizabeth Reddekopp of Ferndale, Michigan, and Donald S. Craig, son of George and Ruth Craig, were united in marriage June 18, 1994, at Almont New Church Assembly, Michigan. The Rev. Erwin D. Reddekopp, grandfather of the bride, officiated.

Reed and Kaiser—Lida Reed and Stuart Kaiser were united in marriage July 2, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Deaths

Doi—Mrs. Fujie Doi, widow of the late Rev. Yonezo Doi, entered the spiritual world August 21, 1994. The vigil was held at Tokyo New Church August 22, with a resurrection service conducted August 23 by the Lutheran Church minister.

Snow—Richard R. Snow, age 68, entered the spiritual world July 28, 1994, in Fryeburg, Maine. Resurrection service was conducted July 31, 1994, at the Congregational Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Jennifer Russell officiating.

Young—Roger Young, son of Lawrence and Dorothy deB. Young, entered the spiritual world August 18, 1994. The Rev. Steve Ellis held a brief service August 23 at the Copeland Funeral Home in North Easton, Mass. A memorial service was conducted at the Boston church September 25.

Grape Boycott Update

Robert McCluskey, chair of the Swedenborgian delegation to the NCC, asks that we continue to support the farm-workers by refraining from purchasing table grapes until the pesticides (listed in the resolution entitled "Wrath of Grapes," adopted by NCC in 1987) are no longer used in the fields, farm workers are granted free and fair elections, and good faith contracts are entered into by the owners and growers. He says none of these criteria have been met thus far.

The resolution was overwhelmingly endorsed at the Seattle Convention session in 1987. In addition to individual observance of the boycott, those of you involved in buying food for church-related/sponsored events are reminded to please remember to request that no grapes be served. You are invited to voice your feelings about the boycott and the resolution (copy sent on request) by writing to:

*Robert McCluskey
112 East 35th Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 532-5742*

SSR News

- The Swedenborg School of Religion has accepted Ellen Smith of Wichita as an ordination track student for this fall. Ellen, Rob, and their two children moved to the Boston area in the summer.

- Third-year SSR student Renee Morris, in addition to receiving an M.A. in Swedenborgian studies, was also the recipient of the Richard Tafel Award for Excellence in Theology, which we neglected to mention in the September *Messenger*.

- **And Did you Know . . . ?** George Dole ran in the race in which Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile. George was invited to England for the 40th anniversary celebration, which he attended and enjoyed very much.

Important Church Calendar Dates

Sept. 29–Oct. 2
Sept. 30–Oct. 3
November 4–6
November 4–6
November 5
November 6–8
November 17–19
November 19–21
January 20–21

SSR Board of Trustees at Marist Center—Framingham, Mass.
EDSU—LaPorte, Indiana
Transitions—Almont, Michigan
PMSU—Kitchener, Ontario
Investment Committee—Newton, Mass.
Retirement Committee at Central Office—Newton
Council of Ministers ExCom at Central Office—Newton
General Council/Cabinet at Central Office—Newton
Temenos Board of Managers—West Chester, Pennsylvania

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 General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches. 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.

PROGRESS REPORT

Rebuilding of the Bridgewater Church

Approximately three weeks after the July 13 fire that partially destroyed the Bridgewater church, the church sent out a special bulletin detailing progress and expressing their gratitude to all the individuals and organizations who have donated their time and money to cleanup and rebuilding efforts and demonstrated in many other ways their support and concern.

The estimator who was hired has stated that rebuilding is financially possible. Insurance funds combined with the fund-raising efforts will provide a new roof for the sanctuary and also take care of the water damage, including the replacement of the electrical service and wiring for the entire building.

A construction company in West Bridgewater has donated a 45' trailer in which to store the church pews until they can be refinished.

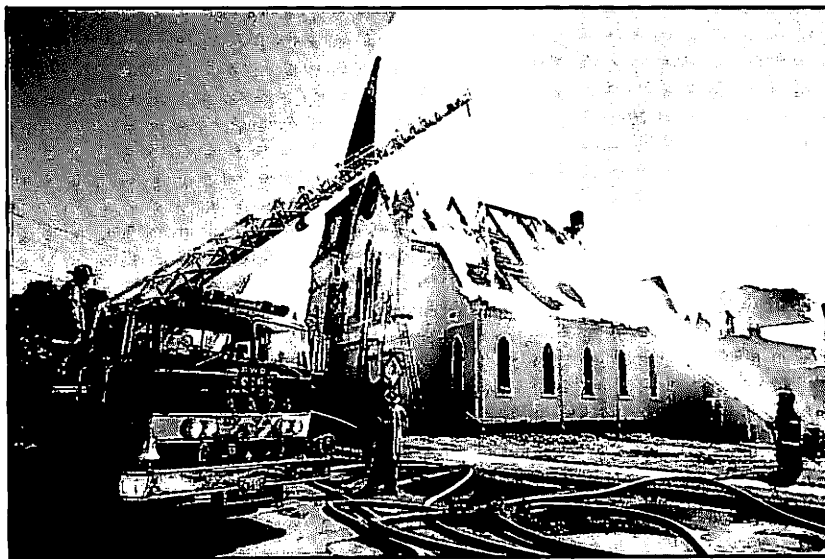
Banks, stores, churches, restaurants and other businesses in the Bridgewater community have volunteered to help raise funds to benefit the church rebuilding. Among the many innovative fund-raisers: Ray Guiu's brother, Jose Mellis, has

donated his time and talent to perform a concert; the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church is presenting an organ concert to benefit repairs to the organ, and David Lemee instituted the sale of broken slates from the roof for \$1.00 each, raising a substantial amount to date.

At this writing, it was still hoped that services could be resumed September 11 in the Sunday School room. All those in the community who had given so generously of their support were invited to the services.

Periodic updates will be reported in subsequent issues of *The Messenger*.

Contributions toward the rebuilding and repair of the church may be sent to the Bridgewater Society Building Fund, c/o Gus Newcomb, 669 South St., Bridgewater, MA 02324.



*Photo by Craig Murray,
courtesy of
The Enterprise, Brockton, Mass.*

Bridgewater church fire, July 13.

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