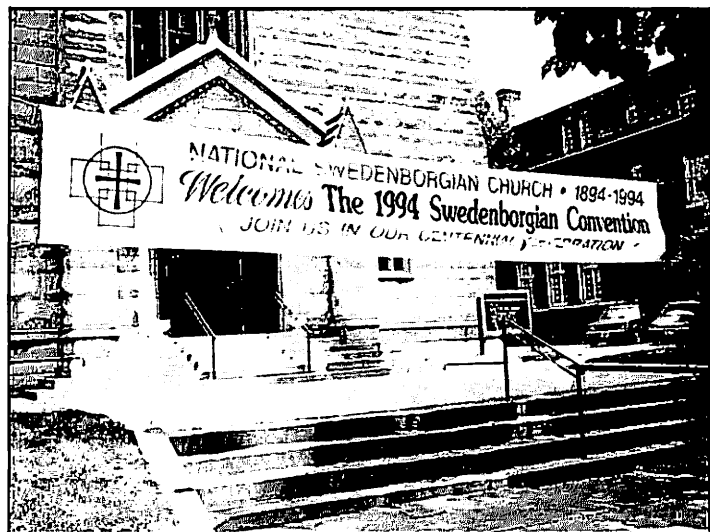


THE MESSENGER

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September 1994



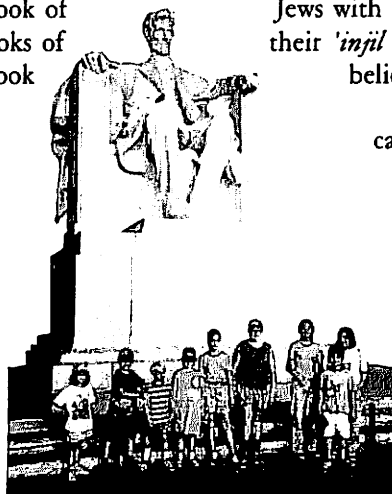
Our Foursquare Gospel

Convention Sermon 1994

George Dole

On a legal, organizational level, we are "people of a book" that we ourselves have written. We call it the *Journal of the Swedenborgian Church* and it records not only how we should behave—Charter, Constitution, and Bylaws—but in some measure how we have behaved—reports and minutes. The Book of Revelation tells of a judgment in which the books of people's lives are opened and compared to a book of life. For some part of our church's life, we bind the two books in one.

Clearly, though, this is not what is intended by our convention theme. In referring to ourselves as "people of the book," we refer to our Biblical basis, to a charter which we did not write and cannot amend. We may suspect that we are not so faithful to this book as we are to the *Journal*, but the Bible is so multifarious that clean, crisp judgments are hard to come by. We might go so far as to wonder why the two books, the Swedenborgian *Journal* and



the Bible, are so very different, or at least how they fit together.

The phrase, "the people of the book," carries a rich historical freight. We find it in the Qur'an in the Arabic phrase *'ahlu 'lkitabi*. Muhammad lived in a culture that was largely pagan. The most notable exceptions were the Jews with their *taurat* or Torah and the Christians with their *'injil* or evangel/gospel. These books, Muhammad believed, recorded the wisdom of a series of true prophets of God. Muhammad heard himself called to be the seventh and last of this series, and as such he gave full honor to his predecessors, knowing from his own experience the import of that office.

These people of the book were set apart from the surrounding paganism. Through the pages of the book, through the mouths of the prophets, they had heard the voice of God calling them to righteousness. For them, religion was not a matter of propitiating capricious deities
(continued on page 99)

Angels Among Us

As my plane set down in Ontario, California, a few minutes before midnight on July third, I was regretting the decision to take a redeye to convention. The seats were uncomfortable to the extent that I found myself praying for something to distract me from the numbness in my legs. I mentally ran through my little checklist of mind over matter: meditate, get your thoughts off yourself and your body. I felt my prayer being upgraded—get mind off self, become open to an opportunity to help someone else, at the same time I grumpily hoped the seat next to me would remain vacant.

The girl was escorted down the aisle by the flight attendant, apparently the last passenger to board the plane. She was carrying a large bed pillow in an old-fashioned pink pillowcase and two stuffed monkeys dressed in pink and blue outfits, their fuzzy cloth limbs dangling, their realistic monkey faces comically inviting. She appeared to be about 14, slight to the point of frailness, and as the attendant helped her into the seat next to mine, I wondered if she might be retarded; do ordinary teens carry stuffed animals around these days? As I watched her long slender hands arranging the monkeys on the pillow, I saw that she wore no makeup, and her dark hair was parted in the back and combed forward over her shoulders with two ribbons, a startling replica of Judy Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. I commented that the monkeys seemed quite real. She smiled shyly and said that her mother had bought them for her so she wouldn't feel so nervous flying alone. Was she nervous about flying because she was alone or nervous about flying itself?

She used to enjoy flying, she replied, but she had always flown with her family before, and now there was so much in the news about accidents that she had begun to be concerned. I said that the insurance companies bet their money on the idea that people are safer in planes than cars, so we might as well believe it. She grinned and nodded, and seemed to become more relaxed. What were the monkeys' names, I asked. She hadn't thought to name them, she said, but she had a cat named Snicklefritz. We were sharing cat stories as the plane took off. I realized that my first feeling that she might be retarded was caused by the stunning sense of someone who belonged to another age, and this impression only deepened as I learned that her hobbies were collecting antiques—she had Shirley Temple dolls all the way back to the first one—and writing, music, and history. Her favorite subject in school was history. I commented on the beauty of her hands, and she said that her family assumed she would play the piano, but she really loved the saxophone, which she couldn't seem to play because she lacked the wind. She had been sick for a year, she said, with pneumonia and scarlet fever, and she was just beginning to regain her strength. A prickling sensation hovered at the back of my neck.

Scarlet fever. Didn't Beth in *Little Women* have scarlet fever? But who ever hears of it now? Well, she sighed, I read about it, and wondered what it was like to have it, and then I got it. She smiled gently.

What did she write, I asked. Children's stories. She had found out she was part Shawnee Indian, and the stories she wrote kept the flavor of the myths of that culture. Could you tell me one? I asked. She moved into a lovely tale of how the stars came to be in the sky.

I was aware that I was in the presence of a person who truly lived in pure mind and spirit, who had somehow been untouched by the corruptive aspects of our culture—a sort of modern-day Emily Dickinson. It was three o'clock in the morning. I was feeling transported, and I struggled against the urge to keep her talking through till dawn. There was a distinct feeling that if I closed my eyes I would awaken to find the seat next to me vacant. I would ask the flight attendant where the girl with the monkeys had gone, and she would reply, what girl with the monkeys?

But her voice was beginning to tire, and I suggested we should probably get some rest. "Thank you for talking with me, she said. "It helped me to not be afraid."

"I think it helped me to not be afraid, too," I answered. "Of all kinds of things." Again the gentle smile, as she curled up with her monkeys and went to sleep. When we alighted in St. Louis, I watched as she was met by the father that she hadn't seen in two years. Their faces were suffused with joy as they hugged.

My connecting flight from St. Louis was cancelled, and I arrived at Marymount College four hours later than scheduled, still under the spell of my transcendent experience. On the evening of July 5th, the ministers and spouses enjoyed a discussion of angel stories with guest speaker Sophy Burnham, author of *Angel Letters*. *Angel Letters* is, of course, a book about people who have written to Ms. Burnham describing their encounters with angels. Had I encountered one? I don't know. But the feelings of peace and strength stayed with me all that week, and there seemed to be a more peaceful atmosphere throughout convention as well.

Patte LeVan

The Messenger

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Cover photos: Convention kids at Lincoln Memorial; The newly ordained Rev. Pavel Heger with his wife Alice and children. Convention photos by Tracy Morris and Patte LeVan.

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.

To the Editor:

At the annual general meeting of the Alliance of New Church Women, I felt I had to bring up an issue with which I have been struggling for a long time.

When I read about the Women's Alliance, my expectations were that it would be a social action, political lobby organization. I opened the booklet and was dismayed to find the Divine Creator referred to only in the masculine form.

Since this issue has been on my mind for some time, it has evolved into a fountain within my psyche—a fountain that won't be stilled or repressed. I asked the (Alliance) president for some time during New Business, and addressed the issue by saying that language is of paramount importance—it not only directs us, but, in ways, defines our thinking.

(Continued on page 111)

Our Foursquare Gospel *(from front page)*

or of bribing them to grant fertility or wealth. It was a matter of obedience to a God who loved justice. This could not be occasional or halfhearted obedience. One who encountered the transcendent justice of God, the merciful, the compassionate, was called to total submission, the Arabic word for which is *Islam*.

Total submission to the book of a transcendent God can be fearsome. The four men convicted of the World Trade Center bombing responded to their sentences not by expressing remorse or by claiming that injustice had been done. Rather, they proclaimed their allegiance to God, "the merciful, the compassionate," and insisted on the rightness of their cause. One concluded his statement by saying, "Peace be upon those who follow the right way."

Total submission to the book of a transcendent God can also be beautiful. Islam has its full complement of lovely souls, souls for whom the path of submission has led to personal humility and profound spirituality. The dark ages of Christianity were a time of radiance for Islam, with brilliant philosophy, poetry, theology, medicine, and architecture. In our own time, we may turn to the Sufis as conspicuous examples, but throughout the Muslim world there are local sheiks revered for their beauty of character and depth of understanding.

Christianity, too, has both kinds of committed souls. It has its Mother Teresa and its Albert Schweitzer. It also has its Torquemada and its Jim Jones. When we look at the people who are most insistent on calling themselves Christians, though, we may well wonder whether we should let ourselves be included under that label. We do claim to be "people of the book" in the Muslim sense, people of the Law and the Gospel, yet we may feel like denying it when we hear what is preached as "the foursquare Gospel."

Certainly our theology warns us against false certainties. We never, in this life or the next, plumb the depths of divine truth. However highly we may regard Scripture or the doctrines, we can never place absolute reliance on our own grasp of them. Humility seems to call us to uncertainty. The line between commitment and arrogance can be hard to see. The Irish poet William Butler Yeats said it most trenchantly: "The best lack all conviction, and the worst are full of a passionate intensity."

What I want to propose is that we do have a "foursquare gospel" of our own, so to speak, drawn from the book whose people we are. We have chosen to call ourselves the church of the New Jerusalem—that is, the church of the city that lies foursquare. In explanation of this aspect of the Holy City, Swedenborg makes three comments that I would bring to our attention. First, he takes the statement that "the city lies foursquare" to refer to the presence of justice in the new church. Second, he takes the equality of length and breadth to mean that good and truth in this church make one. Third, he takes the equality of all three dimensions as saying that "all things of [this church] are from the

good of love" (*The Apocalypse Revealed* 905-7).

To pause for just a moment at this level of generalization, we can put these three statements together to say that there is genuine justice when good and truth make one and when the good of love is the sole source of everything. Moving just a little way toward particularization, we can say that perfect justice is perfectly merciful and that perfect mercy is perfectly just. As long as we feel love pulling one way and the law pulling the other, we have not discovered either pure justice or pure mercy.

This, though, seems still too abstract to warrant "total submission" or "passionate intensity." How turned on can we get about the conjunction of good and truth? The words are so familiar that they can seem almost schematic. They are blanks in the text, empty of meaning except as we fill them in. They need to be "applied to our lives," translated into the language of everyday interpersonal experience.

For that purpose, I would highlight a feature of near-death experiences which I think has received too little notice. The popular fascination with new information about *whether* we live after death has distracted attention from invaluable information about *how* we live both here and hereafter. These individuals do not come back as evangelists of immortality. They come back with a new sense of purpose, wanting to live better lives. They come back prizing human relationships and wanting to learn.

This is the effect of their encounters with angels. It is the effect of having had their whole being and life exposed to an inescapable light and an unqualified love. These people know what it is like to have their scariest thoughts and their most shameful actions disclosed without rationalization and to receive a message of total understanding and affection, with no trace of condemnation or even of recoil. The truth of total transparency and the good of unqualified love make one. This is justice, this is mercy, and this is the final judgment.

Clearly, there is nothing abstract about this experience, nor does it lead to nice tidy diagrams on the newsprint. It does not lack all conviction. In a quiet way it is full of a passionate intensity. Time after time we hear the confession, "There is no way words can convey what happened. However deeply I wish it, I cannot give you what I have received. I can only tell you that it is real beyond any reality I knew before and beautiful beyond any beauty I knew before."

Of course, these are extraordinary experiences. They are departures from this world, visits to the threshold of heaven, exceptions to the usual rules. But then again, how many times have we said the words, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven"? Can we pray those words with the passionate intensity they deserve? Surely that is what the church is all about. In the first paragraph of *True Christian Religion* Swedenborg wrote, "We call this the faith of the new heaven and the new

(continued on page 100)



George Dole

How
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The true new church is present in our worship, our four-square gospel is proclaimed, to the extent that the service is like a near-death experience.

Our Foursquare Gospel *(from page 99)*

church because heaven, where angels are, and the church, where mortals are, act as one like the inner and the outer of an individual. As a result, when someone in the church is [and I here deliberately use traditional terminology] in the good of love from truths of faith and in truths of faith from the good of love, that individual is, inwardly, an angel of heaven."

Let's start from the end of this quotation and work back. This angel of heaven is the being of light encountered after death, the being to whom we are utterly transparent, who sees our whole life in full detail, and who loves us not in spite of all this but because of it. "In the good of love from the truths of faith," then, means seeing the whole picture with such clarity that the only response possible is one of complete understanding and support. It means seeing the Lord's intent in everything, seeing the beauty of soul that providence has been working toward.

Correspondingly, "in truths of faith from the good of love" means that this love is so wholly focused on the well-being of the other that it is totally immune to deception. It needs to know exactly what is right and what is wrong in order to do exactly what needs to be done, say exactly what needs to be said. Its affection for truth is uncontaminated by any need for approval or desire to look good, free from any of the ego-centered needs that lead us to prefer distortion to clarity.

Our doctrinal task is then to give the familiar "good" and "truth" of the writings the angelic substance they surely intend. If in our reading we do not sense their transcendent beauty, let us have the grace to suspect that the fault may lie in our insensitivity. Those words should evoke memories of the most angelic moments in our lives, the moments of deepest insight and love.

The task of the church, in this view, is to provide experiences of that union of affection and

understanding. The true new church is present in our worship, our foursquare gospel is proclaimed, to the extent that the service is like a near-death experience. The true new church is present in working and social situations whenever this marriage of insight and affection occurs. The newcomer and the old timer alike should come away feeling, "These people really understand what I am going through, and their hearts really reach out to me. These people believe in me more than I believe in myself."

Under the Lord's providence, we are not provided with spigots we can turn on or buttons we can push that make this kind of understanding and affection start flowing. Quite the contrary, we are told bluntly and repeatedly that it takes thoughtful self-discipline in the form of self-examination, repentance, and reformation of life for this union to take place. There may be moments of special grace, but there are no short cuts to abiding angelhood.

This leaves us with a difficult question. Can we maintain a passionate intensity toward a goal that seems so remote? It is far easier to turn on to something more achievable, more quantifiable, and there can be no question that we do need short-term goals to keep us going from day to day. But let us be mindful of our "foursquare gospel." Nothing else deserves our total submission. There is nothing else to which we can submit that will not ultimately enslave us.

The kingdom will not come overnight on earth as it is in heaven. People will not have the experience of being totally understood and loved. But we have enough truth of faith to hear the call, and we have enough good of love to sense its promptings. It is possible that people will say, "These people want to understand and reach out." And that, at least, gives the Lord something to work with in the building of a church that is an earthly glove on the hand of heaven.

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

Seen Around Convention



ABOVE: First-time convention attendees Mark and Jody Bramel of the Washington, D.C. church.



RIGHT: Cindy and Horand Gutfeldt, El Cerrito, California. Hang in there, Horand!



Muff Worden (Limerick, Maine) demonstrates some tricky fingering for Eric Hoffman (LaPorte, Indiana). Welcome back, Muff!

The Second Ascent

James Lawrence

Commencement Address, Swedenborg School of Religion

The invitation to address the church at this august occasion happens to coincide with the tenth anniversary of my sitting in the graduate's chair on a similarly muggy evening in 1984 on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. At that event, which in addition to myself also unleashed Ted Klein and Robert McCluskey upon an unsuspecting world as SSR-trained operatives, Eugene Taylor, for the commencement keynote, delivered a wonderful old-fashioned philosopher's speech—a *tour de force* that covered more than a fair number of philosophical backroads and spiritual byways.

I am not going to attempt a masterly assessment of the spiritual state of the Lord's New Church throughout the known universe or of religion in the contemporary West or even of Swedenborgian Thought. The graduates have pondered the work of many a brilliant mind in the past few years and have considered these very matters under the care of abler hands than mine. What I have in common with tonight's graduates, however, is not something that can be said for many commencement speakers over the past ten years. What I share with the graduates is our *common experience* of what it is like to have committed a significant portion of one's life at SSR in a rigorous engagement with Swedenborgian studies. What they and I don't *yet* have in common is that significant chunk of post-seminary years spent in equally vigorous engagement with contemporary society as one who has been informed and conditioned by the training received at SSR. I want to speak to the graduates from that experience, recognizing that it is my own experience. Tonight's graduates will be on their own unique journeys, off in a totally different culture in one case, the others in somewhat differing professional capacities.

One perspective I would share has but slowly grown up within me: that it may be wise to travel lightly in terms of expectations, and to be *very* open to the leading of the Lord. We like to talk in terms of five-year plans, and surely it is helpful to focus our long-range vision as sharply as we can. But I am more impressed as I go along that we often see through a glass darkly in terms of our expectations, and perhaps we overlook opportunities that pop up which don't fit our expectations.

I happen to have a love for the books of our faith, for reading the great old classics and for publishing new works that I hope will lead people not just to new insights but to the writings themselves. This has been my own long-held (and tenacious) assumption for my ministry. My own excitement in discovering Swedenborg's writings in

1978 is still as clear as yesterday. The joyous sense of hope and relief that such profound truth existed and had been understood by at least one person completely altered the course of my life. And by various steps and decisions, I found myself assuming that success would be defined by my turning people on to the writings.

For sixteen years now, I have shared my enthusiasm for the writings with friends, family members, and total strangers. And yet even after preaching nearly 400 sermons in three parishes and helping to produce dozens of publications that have reached a reading audience in the many thousands, I am unaware of even a single new person coming into a relationship with the writings with anything like the life-changing excitement that I and many here in this room experienced.

What has happened instead, something that I have been painfully slow to appreciate, is that the Lord seems to be using the fire that he once set ablaze in me to help bring new understandings of spiritual life to hundreds and perhaps over time even thousands of people who are often grappling with responsibilities that leave me feeling quite humble. I have learned a bit about the interdependency of the Universal Human and about the need to let my expectations evolve with experience. I share with the graduates the warning that the Lord will often give a wink and nod to your expectations and then lead you into precincts that you do not intend nor foresee.

A second perspective that I would share with the graduates is that as exiguous as the perks and privileges seem to be as a leader in the Swedenborgian world, it comes home so often to me how extremely fortunate we are to be in a conscious relationship with Swedenborgian ideas. They, to my mind, have not lost their rare and commanding power to convey an ambitious spiritual vision in a grounded way. We can look in one direction to the very latest theological writing from mainline traditions, and they still seem timid, by my lights, in their view of what is real, and they lack the depth and systematic vision of Swedenborg's writings. And if we look in the other, nearly opposite direction, to the popular spiritual adventurers on today's hottest selling New Age charts, we get things like *The Mutant Message from Down Under* or the *Ancient Secret Fountain of Youth*. These are literally top sellers! To my mind, even the respectable writings from the transpersonal frontiers do not have the same steady theological grounding that

(continued on page 102)

It has become clearer to me over time that another challenge and responsibility accompanying our call to represent the vision of the heavenly doctrines is the absolute necessity of personal, inner growth.

Second Ascent

(from page 101)

make the writings an epochal spiritual transmission from the Lord.

But there's a seductive peril in being representatives of such an immensely impressive body of

theology as we are in the Swedenborgian community. *Because* the challenge to communicate the heavenly doctrines freshly is so very pressing and our numbers are so few, we run a danger of merely theologizing. We must remember always that truth remains a living

thing only as it is applied to its end, the uses of life. Otherwise, the life will go out of our truth, and the Swedenborgian movement will be left only with dusty definitions.



Parallel to this everpresent call to usefulness *through* our truth, it has become clearer to me over time that another challenge and responsibility accompanying our call to represent the vision of the heavenly doctrines is the absolute necessity of personal, inner growth—of becoming increasingly open to having *real* experiences that sear through our hearts in their vulnerable places, that move us to courageously risk in order to grow. Presenting our truth as a buttoned-down and factual enterprise can never suffice. We must be leaders in discovering authentic inner spiritual transformation or the whole enterprise is in the gravest danger. I would even submit that the only chance for Swedenborgian thought to continue to add any significant leaven to our culture is if we who are the conscientious purveyors of its truth—ministers and laity alike—if we develop ways of having and empowering dynamic inner growth *through* our theology, experiences that are at once noetic, transcendent and spiritually productive.

We cannot live by articulation alone, appealing only to the mind. First we have to know Swedenborg, but then we must apply ourselves to a *second ascent* up the spiritual mountain of the writings. If we are to contribute anything of real value to our world, it will be from the summit of that second ascent—it will be *from* the sort of transformative wisdom that such spiritual knowing can engender through its highest use. This is what the world hungers for, not encyclopedia articles on Swedenborg's life, not for recapitulations of doctrine, but for spiritual vision that knows how to grow and develop in this life from the prison of self-love into radiant interconnection with God and with others. And it is in this sense, dear graduates, that tonight is truly a commencement. The big work begins now—the sacralizing of what you have learned in the consecration of your living. May the

Lord bless you and may the Lord use you as channels of blessing.

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

The Grads Speak

Rene Morris: Hearing with Love
(Abridged Text)

... Swedenborg has a lot to say about the way Spirit brings to life and interacts with physical reality. Within each part of our physical body and within the whole body—there are specific *spiritual* processes going on. My thesis focused on one of these processes: The Hearing Process. Specifically, the spiritual dimensions of hearing.

What does it mean to truly hear another person? When have you felt most heard by another? What does it mean to hear yourself? In part, this means attention to the voice of conscience and attention to the presence of God.

How does God hear us?

In a nutshell, Swedenborg answers: to the extent that *love* is present in our intention, our motivation in our asking—to that extent God hears us and we are aware that it is so. Love connects us. It is love that wants to understand what is, that wants to acknowledge and actively follow Divine Will. Hearing happens in us and between us *because* we are willing, to some degree, to understand and do what is of love.

Part of living as channels of love is to allow love to *affect* us, for love to register at the core of our being, and when we are affected by love, which isn't always easy, our humanness becomes transformed so that when we hear, it is no longer only words and natural knowledge comprehended; rather, when love affects us, we begin to hear love sounding and truth speaking. Silence also becomes alive and meaningful.

...I look forward to doing more
(Continued on next page)

TOP PHOTO: Pavel Heger
2ND FROM TOP: Bob Kirven and Renee Morris
3RD FROM TOP: The Revs. Ted Klein, Jim Lawrence, Robert McCluskey, SSR Class of 1984. Happy Tentb!
BOTTOM: Dorothea Harvey with SSR graduates Pavel Heger (ordination); Renee Morris (M.A. in Swedenborgian Studies), Steve Thomas (Lay Leader Program)

Renee Morris (from page 102)

work in the area of hearing and spirituality, and I plan to work in the future with the deaf and the hearing-impaired, offering specialized worship services and pastoral care. I think we have a sub-group in our population very much open and ready for the light—and sound—that Swedenborg offers.

Renee expressed gratitude to the SSR faculty, especially Dr. Mary Kay Klein, and the Rev. Drs. Ted Klein, Dorothea Harvey, Lois Hoppe, and George Dole.

Pavel Heger: Mission Made Possible (Abridged Text)

This is a time of thanksgiving for me. My dream to be a Swedenborgian minister is becoming a reality . . . When I was 25 I came across Swedenborg's ideas and with my wife I became a Swedenborgian within a week. It took me another seven years to find a Swedenborgian theological school and be accepted as a fulltime student. Now I am 36 and . . . although this is the end of my journey to Swedenborgian ministry, it is also the beginning of my journey through that ministry.

I am planning to be a missionary. As a psychologist and psychotherapist I became used to meeting new people every day and talking with them about very personal issues. This is the work I enjoy and will to do as a Swedenborgian minister—to talk with new people and spread Swedenborg's ideas. I am to be employed in my mother's center for needy people, which was established right after the "velvet revolution" in our country in 1989. It is a place where people

bring things which they don't use anymore, such as clothes, shoes, furniture, books and toys. Then other people can come and get those things either free or for a very small fee. This center also helps people find jobs in emergency situations, offers counseling for people in crisis, finds company for lonely people, etc. The center also wants to establish several other branches. This is where I plan to find future Swedenborgians. Where I find several in one place, I would like to establish a new Swedenborgian center for needy people, supported by a Swedenborgian congregation.

I also plan to translate Swedenborgian books for adults and children. In our country we have several books by Swedenborg translated into Czech, but these are written in very old-fashioned language, and there are only a few copies of them. There is an urgent need for new translations of Swedenborg's books and collaterals as well as short pamphlets explaining the main ideas of Swedenborg's teaching. For children we need small booklets with colorful pictures to attract the attention of their parents. In my country there is a lack of religious literature for children . . . A third part of my ministry I see as starting some kind of school for children. In our country there is a big hunger for creative schooling

for children. The educational programs of public schools are under severe criticism at this time. People want their children to be educated in small groups with a lot of individual attention, and they value a religious background. The ideal for many people is the private or church school and a few such schools have already started their programs.

I would work with my wife to start a similar kind of school and offer children all these advantages against the background of Swedenborgian theology. I believe that many people will be supportive of this idea.

I want to begin work on all three projects as soon as possible, giving top priority to preparing simple booklets for children and adults on topics from Swedenborg's writings.

It is my deep desire to remain in touch with all of you—with the American New Church. I believe we will have much to say to each other.

Pavel's presentation included expressions of gratitude to President Mary Kay Klein and the SSR faculty, board and staff, and to all individuals and congregations who helped him and his family through the process. He and his wife Alice and four children are departing in late summer for Czechoslovakia to begin the ministry outlined above.



*Beltway Brass Quintet
at graduation ceremony*

Important Church Calendar Dates

September 9-10
September 26-29
Sept. 29-Oct. 2
Sept. 30-Oct. 3
November 6-8
November 17-19
November 19-22
January 20-21

Temenos Board of Managers at West Chester, Pennsylvania
Committee on Admission to the Ministry at SSR—Newton
SSR Board of Trustees at Marist Center—Framingham, Mass.
EDSU at LaPorte, Indiana
Retirement Committee at Central Office—Newton
Council of Ministers ExCom at Central Office—Newton
General Council at Central Office—Newton
Temenos Board of Managers at West Chester, Pennsylvania

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How Are We 'People of the Book'?



Christine Laitner

Community
can be
seen as
a marvelous
force
moving
forward
toward
the goal
of the
Holy
City.

Part 1 of a 3-part panel presentation
on the theme of Convention '94.

Two things that would guide the format of this presentation happened as I was trying to find a comfortable approach to the topic of: "How are we people of the book?" The first was that I found myself dealing with the question as if it were at least partially in some foreign language and needed translation. The words that I felt needed translation or definition or explanation were: *How*, *we*, and *book* . . . so I began thinking and mildly researching what those words meant to me in the context of this question and in relation to our church.

The logical place to begin, I reasoned, would be with Dick Baxter's 1993 convention sermon, as it had provided the springboard for the question. In reading and re-reading his sermon, I became aware of three concepts that seemed to especially catch my attention. They were *vision*, *action*, and *community*, with the last paying heed to how individual gifts contribute to the whole community. This awareness became the second "thing" to happen.

It occurred to me that my two sets of three items, the *book*, *we how*, and the *vision*, *community*, *action* had a real relationship to each other.

The idea of *action* in relation to church was planted in my thinking quite early in life. As a child, I attended Bible school each summer at St. James Methodist Church. It had been my mother's church until she transferred her membership to the Swedenborgian Church.

During the summer that I was ten, St. James was building a new sanctuary, and we were allowed to go in to watch as the finishing touches were done. My attention was caught by the stonemasons who were just completing the task of carving the words: "Be ye doers of the word" into the three stone steps leading up to the altar. Afterwards, I asked my mother what those words meant, and she told me that they meant that in order to be a good person, you had to act on the commandments and rules you learned from the Bible. She added that reading and knowing these things were just part of becoming a good person, but that acting them out—doing them because you knew they were right and you wanted to do them—was the important thing. Much later, I realized that she had given me a mini-lesson in both Methodism and Swedenborgianism.

No matter where I've gone, what I've done, seen or learned, "church" for me has always been based on climbing those three steps to the altar—the steps that said "Be ye doers of the word." Both literally and figuratively, they were and are "action steps."

In defining "book," the obvious answer is the

Bible. However, the Bible becomes more than just "The Bible" as one delves into the doctrinal and theological definitions of it.

Later, through the benefit of Dole notes and a couple of very good Sunday school teachers, I began to understand that the Bible offered me much more than simply the words I read on each page. During my undergraduate years, I also learned to view the Bible as both history and literature.

As time went on, I learned more about the word within the Bible. As the theological writings of Swedenborg tell us, there are 34 books of the Bible that hold inner or correspondential meanings. This is not to denigrate the other 32 books. The whole 66 books of the Bible constitute a "path of the good life." It is simply that, theologically speaking, the 34 that make up Swedenborg's "word" have inner meanings which allow us each a glimpse of that which we must do to proceed on the heaven-bound path of regeneration. All of the books of the Bible give us insight into the life God laid out for us in the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Golden Rule, and the greatest commandment of all.

Similar to Robert Fulghum's list of life rules in *All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, it is true that the Bible, both by lists and verses, gives us rules by which to live. It also gives us, through the lives of its characters, role models. Above all, it gives us the picture of an ever-evolving life of excellence lived by a man named Jesus who, in glorification, is Christ.

But it does more than that. The Word offers us, through its deeper, spiritual meaning, the way of our own regenerative process. It allows us to understand our own spiritual growth. It offers us a well-laid-out map, providing us with the knowledge to make the spiritual journey from the Garden of Eden to the Holy City, while the Bible as a whole is helping the most human part of us learn to grow and be safe in our everyday pursuits.

The "book" is the Bible. The Bible contains the Word. Together, they provide the vision. The vision can be a small one, such as a person allowing himself to grow enough to accomplish a single new task. The vision can be larger: A community reaching out and doing good. The vision can encompass the world, or it can, in its immensity, reflect the preparation, learning, and growth that leads a soul to heaven.

The word "how" implies the means of accomplishment. This is the active part of the process; the thing one does.

The Bible as we know it deals with both natural and spiritual growth. It appears as though humankind, grounded as it is in earthly things, learns best through natural example. Our spiritual side is nurtured by what we learn through real ex-

(Continued on next page)

perience. Here is an analogy that works for me:

The school in which I teach tends to be one that moves with new trends. We are currently caught up in Dr. William Glasser's "pyramid of learning" structure. Our pyramid indicates which methods of instruction produce the highest knowledge-retention rates. Two methods rate highly: when a student gets to reteach material that he or she has learned, the retention rate is around 70%. When a student is asked to do an activity—to immediately touch, feel and use what is being taught, the retention rate rises to nearly 95%. Dr. Glasser doesn't know it, but Swedenborg had the right idea long ago: We learn best from reality and then, as the knowledge becomes part of us, we grow inwardly.

Returning to the vision concept, the Word, perhaps the whole Bible, gives us the vision we need for specific projects and for spiritual growth. The vision is available to both individuals and communities such as the church.

But the vision remains just that: an idea of a "far-off thing" if we can't figure out the means to reach it. That's what the Word provides, giving us the action plan we need to follow both in the natural plane and spiritually.

The Bible can show us the how of our original question by providing examples of real experiences. Of course, the Bible is historically outdated, so we must create the "how" to fit our own time. But, the Bible has given us the framework and permission to do so. The work and Swedenborg's writings show us how to employ the natural to expand and enhance the spiritual.

Dick Baxter spoke of asking how the vision connects to community. The question has to do with individuals, each with separate gifts—and separate pilgrimages—being connected in the implementation of the vision.

We are the individuals who have chosen to be aligned with an organization which is constituted as a church. It is the coming together of these individuals, though, that makes us, as a community, work. Swedenborg has again addressed a current issue: that of bringing individuals together for a common goal. From *Heaven and Hell* #392, we read:

Each individual has his own particular contribution. For every common use is made up of countless elements . . . all these particular elements, arranged and structured according to the divine pattern and taken together, constitute and complete a common use, which is a common good.

And that brings us to the "we" portion of the question. The "we" is us as individuals; as members of local churches, fellowships and ministries, and as members, by legal definition, of the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian).

I believe that this church's acceptance of individuals "where they're at," and its penchant for offering everyone an equal stake in its belief system, coupled with its innate belief in and respect for the journey each individual is making on his or her route

to what Dick Baxter identified as "the Holy City," creates the basis of the only operable type of "real community" in this last decade of the twentieth century.

From my own perspective, there is nowhere better to turn for a discussion of community than to M. Scott Peck, best known, perhaps, as the author of *The Road Less Traveled*. In a subsequent book titled *The Different Drum* and subtitled *Community Making and Peace*, Dr. Peck explores the premise that "in and through community lies the salvation of the world."

The book is a discourse on and a pattern for community-building. A community is people living together in freedom and love—concepts certainly not foreign to people who subscribe to Swedenborgian precepts. People who coexist in community can be, as they say, stronger than the individual parts. Thus, community can be seen as a marvelous force moving forward toward the goal of the Holy City.

It is interesting to note in bringing the concept of community to the church and using Peck's model of community that we find Peck making several statements regarding community-as-an-entity that are important to our own theological beliefs. First, Dr. Peck states that "community is the state in which people accept and rejoice in their differences. He further states that although the exact definition of "community" is as elusive as an exact definition of electricity, a community can transcend the difficulties sometimes encountered by an individual alone as it contemplates the world outside and the world inside and strives to see the relationship between the two.

As Swedenborgians, we are aware of both a physical, daily living of our lives which is on a natural plane, and of a spiritual development also occurring. We, too, acknowledge what can be called an "inner and outer world," and are constantly seeing the relationship between the two. Each of us can be identified as a church and as a community, but we each have a very important role in the larger church community.

Returning to the original question, "How are we 'people of the book'?" with the emphasis on *how*, *we*, and *book*, then adding the important points of *vision*, *community*, and *action*, joining these two sets of words and ideas together, I would offer the following:

We, the community of the Swedenborgian church, are following the vision set forth for us by the Bible—especially as viewed through our doctrines—and are performing uses based on the models provided for us through Biblical stories and precepts. We are, through our local, regional, national and international organizations, offering:

worship experiences, camps, retreats, workshops, help for the poor and hungry, personal growth programs, artistic expression, assistance to/for those whose options have simply run out, alternative church experiences, pulpit assistance, traditional worship services, Sunday schools, books and

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"How Are We 'People of the Book'?"

(from page 105)

bookstores, programs explaining who we are, HIV and AIDS ministries, wedding ministries, social services, psychological and spiritual counseling, and myriad other programs.

We are, as those three steps to the altar said, "doers of the word." How are we people of the Book? By doing, being, and acting as the Book says. Each of us is a gifted contributor to this magnificent overall plan. We are all on the same journey, individually yet together, bound by freedom and love.

Christine Laitner is the chair of the Growth and Outreach Support Unit (GOSU) and is a satellite member living in Midland, Michigan.



President Edwin Capon and Treasurer John Perry display their "Temenos Challenge" T-shirts.

Progress Report:

A Summary of the President's Address

President Edwin Capon began his address to the 170th Convention of the Swedenborgian Church expressing the sadness felt by all that the Rev. Dick Baxter, former pastor of our National church in Washington, D.C., was no longer with us. "—It is appropriate," he said, "that the theme of this convention is taken from the sermon Dick delivered at last year's convention. In my own mind I am dedicating this convention to Dick, whose love for the Washington church was no less than his love for this denomination."

The Rev. Mr. Capon continued with a progress report on the four issues he raised for our consideration at last year's convention.

1. *Our shortage of ministers and the limited funds available to pay them:* "From the number of students in the ordination track at SSR, with more to come in September, the shortage problem is on its way to solution." However, he said the financial problem is not solved, and essentially our ministers must be prepared for ministries subsidized from work in some other field.

2. *Our priorities, in particular the importance we should place on providing guidance and assistance*

to our existing local churches. Mr. Capon stated that the Council of Ministers had been working on this during its sessions in the hope of being able to give guidance to General Council. He mentioned the upcoming report of the results of the survey which went out to all persons on *The Messenger* mailing list (see June, 1994 *Messenger* and General Council Report in this issue. The final summary of the results of the survey, not yet completed at this writing, will also be published in an upcoming issue of *The Messenger*).

3. *The role of Swedenborg's writings in our ministry:* This concern, Capon said, found support last fall when an evaluation was made of the potential for raising a significant amount of money for a residence hall at Temenos. Some potential donors raised the question whether there was enough Swedenborg represented in the programs at Temenos. Others did not. Mr. Capon pointed out that a number of our clergy, including himself, who were not born into the Swedenborgian church have cited Swedenborg's teachings as one of the most important reasons for coming into the denomination. Mr. Capon commented that the teachings Swedenborg stressed in his day may not be the ones needing to be stressed in ours, and much of his terminology may need to be translated into more modern terms; however, he stated "if these teachings are not always to be explicit in what we do, should they not be implicit? And should we not be able to point out how they are implicit?"

4. *Reducing or eliminating substantial deficits, particularly in unrestricted funds:*

The president reported that the projected deficit for 1993 was \$123,593; the actual deficit was \$85,000, due to great efforts of the Council of Ministers, Central Office, Support Units and General Council to trim expenses with the least harm to programs. In the face of a projected deficit in 1994 of \$175,000, General Council passed a balanced budget, and, although "it must be stated that such an outcome is contingent upon doubling the amount of giving to the Annual Appeal, should this not be achieved, our deficit would still *not begin* to approach \$175,000 . . . I hope you have all come to the conclusion from the articles in the *May Messenger* addressed to the question, 'Is Our Church Going Broke?' that we are not going broke. I hope that you also agree with me that it is important we be judicious in our spending. But perhaps more important is that we be very creative in finding new ways to minister to the spiritual well-being of people, whether in traditional parish settings or in new forms of ministry. It seems clear that there will be much less conformity in the future in the ways in which we carry our ministry. This should not concern any of us, however, as long as each ministry has a clear basis in our theology."

Mr. Capon spoke of the concern about General Council's commitment made in April of 1992 to
(continued on next page)



Esther & Edwin Capon

provide an additional half a million dollars to Temenos for the construction of the residence hall, which many felt could not be afforded. As reported in the *May Messenger*, ("Swedenborgian Summit Addresses Concerns and Hopes about Temenos," p. 75) the Temenos Board sought to determine whether it would be possible to raise the necessary money by gifts and pledges. A fund-raising firm was employed and two feasibility studies have been made, one to determine the probability that the necessary funds can be raised and the other to determine the likelihood that with the addition of the new residence hall Temenos can become self-supporting. After hearing a thorough report in both these areas during their convention sessions, General Council authorized the Temenos Board to launch a full fund drive (See General Council Report).

President Capon described the work done in the area of priorities during the Council of Ministers sessions (see Council of Ministers Report, Vision of the Healthy Swedenborgian Church, p. 109), concluding with the remark, "is it not likely that a number of creative minds bumping up against each other in a group situation might come up with more approaches to more effective ministry for the nineties? I am prepared to bring this idea to General Council for consideration and possible implementation."

Closing on a personal note, Mr. Capon explained that he and Esther are moving to the Boston area in the fall primarily to be closer to family, especially grandchildren, but he cited the advantage of being located nearer Central Office in Newton, thus having fewer trips at the church's expense. He expressed much warmth and admiration for the St. Paul congregation he is leaving and added his hope that they will not be without a minister for long. ♦

General Council Report

General Council met July 6 and July 9, 1994 in their pre-convention and post-convention meetings respectively. Actions taken:

- It was voted that the Temenos Board be authorized to proceed immediately with their fund-raising campaign, known as the Temenos Challenge, to raise \$600,000 for the construction of the residence building at Temenos at Broad Run; to accept the June 24, 1994 agreement between the Philadelphia church and Temenos; to authorize the General Council Executive Committee to take action on the signing of that agreement and proceed with the construction of the residence building if one half the

goal is reached before the next General Council meeting in November; and to repay to the Philadelphia church any money they have paid toward the site development if we do not proceed with the project.

- It was decided to send a complete copy of the survey results with a cover letter written by Karen Feil to every pastor, church, association, and to Cabinet and General Council members.

- There were some budget items that were discussed and changed, and committee appointments were made.

- General Council heard from representatives of both the Swedenborg School of Religion and the Cambridge church regarding their situation. After lengthy discussion it was voted to have three representatives of the school and three from Cambridge church meet together with a conflict resolution expert and that several representatives from General Council attend that meeting. The National church was also discussed and it was decided that the Executive Committee conduct their fall meeting in Washington and meet at that time with the church and as many trustees as can be present. ♦

Gloria Toot, Secretary

Election Results

President: Rev. Edwin Capon

Vice President: Phyllis Bosley

Recording Secretary: Gloria Toot

Treasurer: John Perry

General Council—3-year term: Pat Zacharias and Chris Laitner

Rev. Skuli Thorhallson

COMSU—3-year term: Rev. Erni Martin

1-year unexpired term: John Hitchcock

EDSU—3-year term: Pat Tukos

FPRSU—3-year term: Susan Wood

GOSU—3-year term: Lon Elmer

2-year unexpired term: Rev. David Rienstra

IMSU—3-year term: Lee Woofenden

PMSU—3-year term: Linda Tafel

Committee on Admission to the ministry—1-year term:

Rev. Marlene Laughlin

Marilyn Turley

Nominating Committee—5-year term: Sharon Billings

SSR Trustees: Richard Stansbury and Barbara Penabaker

Council of Ministers Report

The Council of Ministers met at Marymount University, Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the 1994 General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church. Thirty-two ministers were present for all or part of the sessions, and by invitation the president of SSR and four students attended all except the Executive Sessions.

The Council of Ministers' deliberations commenced the evening of July 3 and concluded July 6. The Rev. Dr. Roy Oswald, church growth consultant from the Alban Institute, led us in a workshop addressing the following questions: "What are and how do we develop spiritual practices, ministries and

(continued on page 108)

(from page 107)

programs that are distinctively Swedenborgian and foster the spiritual well-being of people?" Tuesday evening the ministers' spouses joined the Council for a discussion on angel stories with Sophy Burnham, author of *Angel Letters* and *The President's Angel*.

The business sessions began with opening devotions by the Rev. Eric Hoffman, agenda provisionally adopted, acceptance of the written reports, and addresses from the Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven, chair and the Rev. Edwin Capon, president.

Priorities Committee

In light of the challenges facing the Swedenborgian Church, the General Council requested that COM establish priorities to guide decisions concerning the use of church resources for General Council and other denominational bodies. Responding to this request, the chair of the Council appointed a Priorities Committee consisting of the Revs. Paul Zacharias, Ron Brugler, Steve Pults, and Paul Martin to design a process from which the Council would formulate these priorities. This process began with the Council forming into four small groups, facilitated by a member of the Priorities Committee, to discuss and establish priorities. The results of these discussions were presented to the larger group and compiled into one list. The Priorities Committee composed, out of this list, a Vision Of The Healthy Swedenborgian Church to be distributed by PMSU to all concerned church groups and was read on the floor of Convention.

Vision of the Healthy Swedenborgian Church

In carrying out our denomination's purpose, which is to facilitate the spiritual well-being of people and be open to the Lord's leading, we will support diverse forms of ministry, while at the same time identify a solid sense of our unifying principles. Our church leaders, both lay and clergy, will consciously practice direct, honest and caring communication in all our formal and informal meetings, and we will hold ourselves accountable to these high ethical standards. We will recognize the relevance of our theology to leading-edge movements and will be in dialogue with them. There will be "think tanks" for basic research out of which come resources for programs and materials for use by people of all ages. Our programs, classes, worship experiences and small group processes will facilitate regeneration and a variety of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs. These programs will be facilitated by trained lay and ordained persons. We will bring our theological and spiritual resources to all our involvement in social action. We will be planting new ministries, which may include the transformation to new forms of some of our existing centers.

Practical considerations in support of this vision include the following: Our centers will be on the road to or will have arrived at financial self-

sufficiency (where that is applicable). Our centers will create, update regularly and operate from five-year plans. Funds will exist (coming in some measure from centers contributing to the denomination) for new or existing effective outreach programs. Denomination's leadership will be pro-active in its visioning process in allocating personnel and financial resources. ♦

Swedenborg School of Religion

Dr. Mary Kay Klein, president, expressed her thanks to all who sent cards and letters to the late Mary Bryant, SSR secretary, and shared the school's gratitude for Mary's many years of dedication and excellence and their deep sense of loss.

Dr. Klein also reported that the Matching Gift fund-raising program begins this fall and that their goal is to raise between 3 and 5 million. Appreciation was expressed by the Council for the programs made possible through the Lilly Grant and discussion ensued on the topic of improving communications between SSR and the denomination.

The Council received Renee Morris and Kit Billing's Vision of Ministry and voted unanimously to accept the Plan of Ministry and to recommend to General Council the ordination of Pavel Heger.

Pastoral Ministries Support Unit

The Council accepted PMSU's document "Preparation for Church Membership" for ministers to use to welcome members into our churches, with the addition of the following topics: Uses, Charity, life in all levels of Community.

Procedures for Handling Allegations of Sexual Misconduct Against Our Ordained Ministers or Our Lay Leaders

After reviewing the Committee's report, the Council adopted the proposed procedure with the provisions that it be reviewed by the denomination's lawyer, an attorney with specific expertise in church procedures; consultation with a Canadian lawyer; consultation with the Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence; input from General Council, and due consideration of input from the COM, including the development of a procedures manual to supplement the document.

Our Daily Bread

The Rev. Dick Tafel gave a status report on ODB. After discussion it was decided that ODB remain under the oversight of the Committee on Worship and that General Council restore the funding of ODB to the full \$30,000.

Lay Leadership

Dr. Mary Kay Klein presented the report of the Lay Procedures Committee. After discussion, the proposed new Article XIII for the denomination

bylaws was adopted as a recommendation to General Council and the question of termination of lay leader status was referred back to the Committee for further study.

Also adopted was the recommendation that the consecration of Steve Thomas as lay leader to serve the Church of the Good Shepherd, Kitchener and the Association be held during this convention session and that the request from Urbana Society be tabled until the vote has been taken during the convention session on the proposed new amendment on lay leaders.

Elections

Regretfully, the Council accepted the resignation of the Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven and the Council of Ministers elected the following officers for the coming year:

Chair: Ron Brugler (3-year term)
Secretary: Susan Turley-Moore (2-year term)
Executive Committee Member: Carl Yenetchi (3 year term)
CAM Member: Skuli Thorhallsson
Convention Preacher, 1996: Robert Kirven

St. Thomas Church

The Rev. Horand Gutfeldt reported that a branch of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, St. Thomas Church, has canonized Emanuel Swedenborg, giving him the honored title of St. Emanuel, recommending the study of Swedenborg's teachings, and they have developed a litany of St. Emanuel.

The Council moved that the "Swedenborgian Church send greetings to the St. Thomas Church in awareness of our common search for truth and recognition of Emanuel Swedenborg and at the next convention in San Francisco we will welcome representatives of their church, with a special invitation to their Bishop Joseph Vredenburg."

The following motion was also passed: "On the occasion of this year of the 50th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, the COM asks this session of the convention to remember in a moment of silence, all who served, including those who died serving their country in armed conflicts.

Equally to be remembered are those who have served their country through conscientious objection and the pacifist movement.

May this occasion serve to remind all of us to work for peace and recommit ourselves to seek resolution of conflict through non-violent means." ♦

Susan Turley-Moore, Secretary



Interior of Washington, D.C. church

Address of the Chair

This year, the chair has no special wisdom to offer about the state of the church or its ministry. Instead, I want to share with you a little wisdom about life that has been new to me in the last year. Most of it has come through my experience as caretaker, as Marian's still unnamed condition fluctuates—better in some ways with new medication, but no prospect of real improvement. For brevity's sake, I will omit a lot of stories that I might tell if we had the leisure, limiting myself to a few slightly-expanded aphorisms. Call them "Sayings of Chairman Bob."

1. It is a circumstance that I attribute to Providence, that what must be done whether I want to or not, often and unexpectedly becomes what I want to do.

The business of taking care of Marian—something quite distinguishable from the closely related experience of caring for her—has provided not only satisfaction, but pleasures I had not expected. I had read of the joy that comes from service, but had not expected to find it in buttoning a button, turning a sleeve right-side-out, or cutting the meat off a chicken bone. I guess the surprise has been the amount of psychic reward for such simple and occasionally menial acts. There is a bonus, too, in the example of graceful acceptance of help, that I hope I can learn to emulate.

2. Communication is much less dependent on words than I had supposed while I was so busy finding just the right word to say.

Although I recognize a *few* equals, I know of no one who loves words more than I. Range of meaning, sound, appearance, all delight me, particularly the unanticipated *perfect* word that lights my mind like a skyrocket. How surprised I am to find myself equally delighted in meaning perceived when words are unavailable—when they are, in the end, superfluous! What Swedenborg wrote about communication in the primeval church—how it was accomplished by gestures, facial expressions, and a limited range of sounds—used to cue my mind to images of Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon folk. Now it makes me think of myself and my wife in normal day-to-day living, and expands immeasurably my conception of its inherent possibilities. It also suggests to me how very much we unconsciously communicate between and around our words. It is a marvel worthy of contemplation.

3. In the Yin and Yang of *Being* and *Doing*, there is more worth to be found, and more dignity to be honored, in *Being* than I had supposed while I was so busy getting things done.

The respect (sometimes, even, admiration) that I
(Continued on page 111)

Help in Sorting Things Out

Reviewed by Gard Perry

Sorting Things Out, a new book by the Rev. Dr. George F. Dole; Steve Koke, Editor; Published by J. Appleseed & Co., 1994.

Messenger readers who are acquainted with George Dole's sermons and lectures will be delighted to learn that J. Appleseed & Co. has published a splendid collection from his writings of the last decade. *Sorting Things Out* gathers into one volume a treasure chest of Dr. Dole's thoughtful and loving insights into our theology and its implications for living.

The editor, Steve Koke, writes in his Preface that the title, *Sorting Things Out*, "refers to an elemental skill in dealing with life. The powerful art of sorting through tangled issues until some of heaven's light breaks through all by itself is unfortunately not often seen. It is our impression that this subtle skill is what most persistently underlies George's thought."

I know from discussing personal and professional issues that the effect of George's guidance has been of help in sorting things out. While some of that counsel has come through personal communication, much of it has come through listening to his sermons and lectures, and reading them. I believe there is an array of skillful teaching in this new book to which pastors, members of the Swedenborgian church, and a larger reading public can usefully turn.

The lectures, many of which were delivered at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, offer the reader a route to the deepest theological concepts in Swedenborg's writings. There the reader

can view the beauty of the Lord and creation; then George leads the reader back to our everyday world, where he plays out one implication for living after another.

In "Who's Doing What Around Here?", Dr. Dole begins with a description of the swing of the pendulum between "Grace" and "Law" in orthodox Christian theology. He observes that:

Swedenborg is one of the few theologians who manages to maintain that there is an essential truth in both of these positions. Yes, we have no power to save ourselves, and yes, we must do the work of repentance and reformation if regeneration is to happen. This was an important enough point that he found a concise way of expressing it and used it repeatedly,— that we are to shun evils as if of ourselves, and at the same time are to acknowledge that it is actually the Lord doing the work.

The author walks the reader across a series of doctrinal bridges that are supported by examples from as apparently diverse realms as the 12 Steps of AA, and the phenomena of direct and indirect inflow from the Lord. One ought to read these tightly constructed pathways of thought to appreciate them. He then arrives at the central principle of doctrine: "God alone acts; we only react, and even this is from the Lord."

Having opened a window to heaven's light, Dr. Dole directs our attention to the story of a butcher who appeared to cut the meat effortlessly, and whose knives were always sharp. George sees that the man is cooperating with the essential reality of his situation by "slipping the knife into the little spaces that were already there."

He observes:

I like this from a theological point of view because it helps refocus my attention especially during time of difficulty. We sometimes betray our misunderstanding by referring to such times as "demanding." What the grace aspect of Swedenborgian theology is telling us is that the Lord is at work in this situation. It is not up to us to "fix it." What we need to do is to discern the Lord's intent, and cooperate with it.

A smile of recognition: the one who has often referred to life's difficulties as "demanding" is I. It is with a sigh of relief that I can now reflect on a situation I face, and let go into a less self-concerned, and therefore longer-sighted course of action. I see effects of the Lord at work.

This is one writer's view of the value of one of several lectures. There are many more sermons in the book than lectures, and many of them are fashioned within just five or six pages. Each one is composed of concepts from our teachings and a wide range of reflections on living. Our doctrines are illustrated with practical examples, and are linked in these sermons like pearls on a necklace.

I believe readers of this collection will have many of their own *Ab Habs*, and smiles of recognition. I know they will be invited to reflect on the "appearance" that our life is our own, and the "reality" that it is the Lord who is acting with us as we journey toward caring more deeply about each other. The reader might, too, receive just the right help in the process of sorting things out.

The Rev. Dr. Gard Perry is the minister of the Swedenborgian Church in Fryeburg, Maine.

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Address of the Chair *(from page 109)*

feel for Marian in circumstances of total inability to do what she needs or wants to do, casts a new light on the desire to *do* something that has motivated or driven me so often. The sensation is reinforced by encounters with others in my new community—the man celebrating his ninety-fourth year with a joke and thanks to a friend who had helped him, for example. Simple survival, concern for others, and a smile, together become a virtue quite independent of any action. To *be*, especially to *be a pleasure to be around*, transcends the *Do-Be* dichotomy and achieves both worth and dignity. This recognition reminds me that being in a chancel, being in a sickroom, being among mourners or celebrants, simply being there, being genuine, and doing no harm, is more than passive existence. Being is in itself a work to be honored.

4. In each new situation I encounter, the habitual responses, developed from experience in other situations, invariably prove counter-productive.

I first thought of "instincts," but changed to "habitual responses," because in fact my instincts are more reliable than my habits. For one thing, all the habits were formed before I had developed my present understanding of communication and being. For another, my habitual responses to Marian were responses to a seemingly different person. My instincts, or my spiritual influences, are much better guides to my speaking and doing. I find myself a neophyte in the skill of blocking my habit and waiting for another suggestion from within as to what to say or do; but the alternative is better every time. I wish I had begun practicing that a long time ago.

—Robert H. Kirven

SCYL



Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL), from left: Beth Harvie, NJ; Andy Yenetchi, West Coast Regional Officer, CA; Bill Baxter, NY; Michael Carlson, IA; Peter Little, President, MA; Tim Poole, DE.

Passages

Baptisms

Anderson—Eva Jeanne Anderson, infant daughter of Glenn and Laura Anderson, was baptized into the Christian faith May 15, 1994, at the Bridgewater New Church in Bridgewater, Mass., the Rev. Dr. George Dole officiating.

Chaplin—Erica Lynn Chaplin, daughter of Jeffrey and Diane (Swett) Chaplin, was baptized into the Christian faith May 28, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Confirmations

Adolph, Wilson—Linnea and Ed Adolph, and Debbie and Paul Wilson were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church May 29, 1994, at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, the Rev. Ron Brugler officiating.

Sekema—Venitia Sekema was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church June 12, 1994, at the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana, the Rev. Eric Hoffman officiating.

Marriages

Farris and Gurney—Jane M. Farris and Raymond A. Gurney were united in marriage May 14, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

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

Deaths

Aitken—Louise Aitken, longtime member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world May 22, 1994. Services were conducted May 25, 1994, the Rev. Ron Brugler officiating. Louise was the mother of Phyllis Haigh and Barbara Lederman.

Doyle—Valma Doyle, age 96, entered the spiritual world May 8, 1994. A service was conducted in Bridgewater, Mass. May 11, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Donna Keane officiating. Val was an active member of the Bridgewater New Church and served for many years as Sunday School secretary.

Hall—Doris (Dot) Hall (Mrs. Nelson Hall) entered the spiritual world May 1, 1994, at her home in Fryeburg, Maine. A resurrection service was held at Wood Funeral Home in Fryeburg May 4, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Lovell—Gregg Lovell, 27, a member of the Bridgewater church and son of Karen and the late Wayne Lovell, entered the spiritual world May 1, 1994. A service was conducted in Bridgewater, Mass. May 4, 1994, the Rev. Marlene Laughlin officiating. Gregg had received a heart transplant seven years ago. He is survived by his mother, his brother Glenn and his daughter Shainna Lee Lovell.

Perry—Lt. Col. Stewart S. Perry, longtime member of the Boston Swedenborgian Church, entered the spiritual world June 10, 1994, after prolonged hospitalization for Alzheimer's disease. A memorial service was conducted at the National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass., the Rev. Dr. George Dole officiating. A second service was held August 13 at the Fryeburg New Church in Maine.

Thompson—Ralph D. Thompson, age 73, of Fryeburg, Maine, entered the spiritual world June 10, 1994. A graveside service was conducted June 22, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Change of Address

Raymond and Olive Wong of the San Francisco church have moved from their home of 27 years on California Street to: 165 Parker Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118. Telephone: (415) 752-6571

Moving On

After 18 months teaching in Prague, the Rev. Kathleen Easton is due to begin serving the two churches in Mauritius this month. Of her time in Prague, she writes, "This part of my spiritual journey has been indescribable, as far as its meaning is concerned. I think that, in true Swedenborgian form, I'll see its meaning retrospectively."

(Editor's Note: Attempts thus far to extract a report from Kathleen on her sojourn in Czechoslovakia have not met with success. It is to be hoped that she will do better in this respect once she settles in at the Manse in Curepipe.)

Opinion

(Continued from page 98)

The church has always taught me that the Divine Spirit is masculine and feminine. I hear much support for the use of inclusive language in casual conversations with Swedenborgians. This support has not filtered into the language used in services or even in newly published material.

I trust this dialogue will continue

and the feminine will one day be fully acknowledged.

*Esther Fyk
Garland, Manitoba, Canada*

(Editor's Note: Ms. Fyk's comments brought forth many varied and in-depth responses from several women present, including the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, Elizabeth Johnson, Sharon Billings, the Rev. Sue Turley-Moore, and Renee Morris. Those responding and others who wished to were invited to write out their comments and send them to The Messenger. The invitation extends to all Messenger readers.)

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.



Photos by Craig Murray, courtesy of The Enterprise, Brockton, Mass.

Fire Damages 122-Year-Old Bridgewater Church

Fire broke out in the choir loft of the Swedenborgian Church in Bridgewater, Mass. on the morning of July 13 and quickly spread to the inside of the steeple. No one was hurt, as the building was unoccupied at the time, but damage to one side of the slate roof and the front of the building was extensive, and the steeple, one of the last original steeples, was destroyed.

Although the cause of the fire has not yet been determined, it appears that it might have been caused by the heating plates used to peel the paint off the outside of the church. The two-year renovation of the church's exterior would have been completed by mid-August.

The Rev. Marlene Laughlin, former minister of the Bridgewater church, reported that the sanctuary from the roof line down was undisturbed and the Sunday School, despite extensive water damage throughout the whole building, is in relatively good shape. Merrilee Phinney, secretary of the church, reported that they hope to be able to use the Sunday School room for their services by September 11. Because the roof was partially destroyed, the pews had to be removed from the sanctuary and stored to prevent weather damage. The Hook organ, one of only three in New England, has been removed by the Hook Organ Company for repairs that, it is estimated, will take about five months.

Both Marlene and Merrilee reported overwhelming support from the community as well as church members. One member entered the building and saved the record books from the 1800s; other members and passersby rallied to the rescue to remove all the valuables from the building within fifteen minutes after the fire was brought under control. These have been stored in homes or at the Elmwood church. Non-members came by to offer their help and concern and express their love for the building. According to the *Boston Globe* report, about 75 firefighters from Bridgewater and seven neighboring communities battled the blaze for 90 minutes before bringing it under control.

A healing and prayer service was conducted at the Elmwood church July 13 by the Revs. Laughlin, Donna Keane, and Kit Billings who did student field placement at Bridgewater this year.

An update will be published in the October *Messenger* when details have been clarified. Cards, letters and 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.

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