

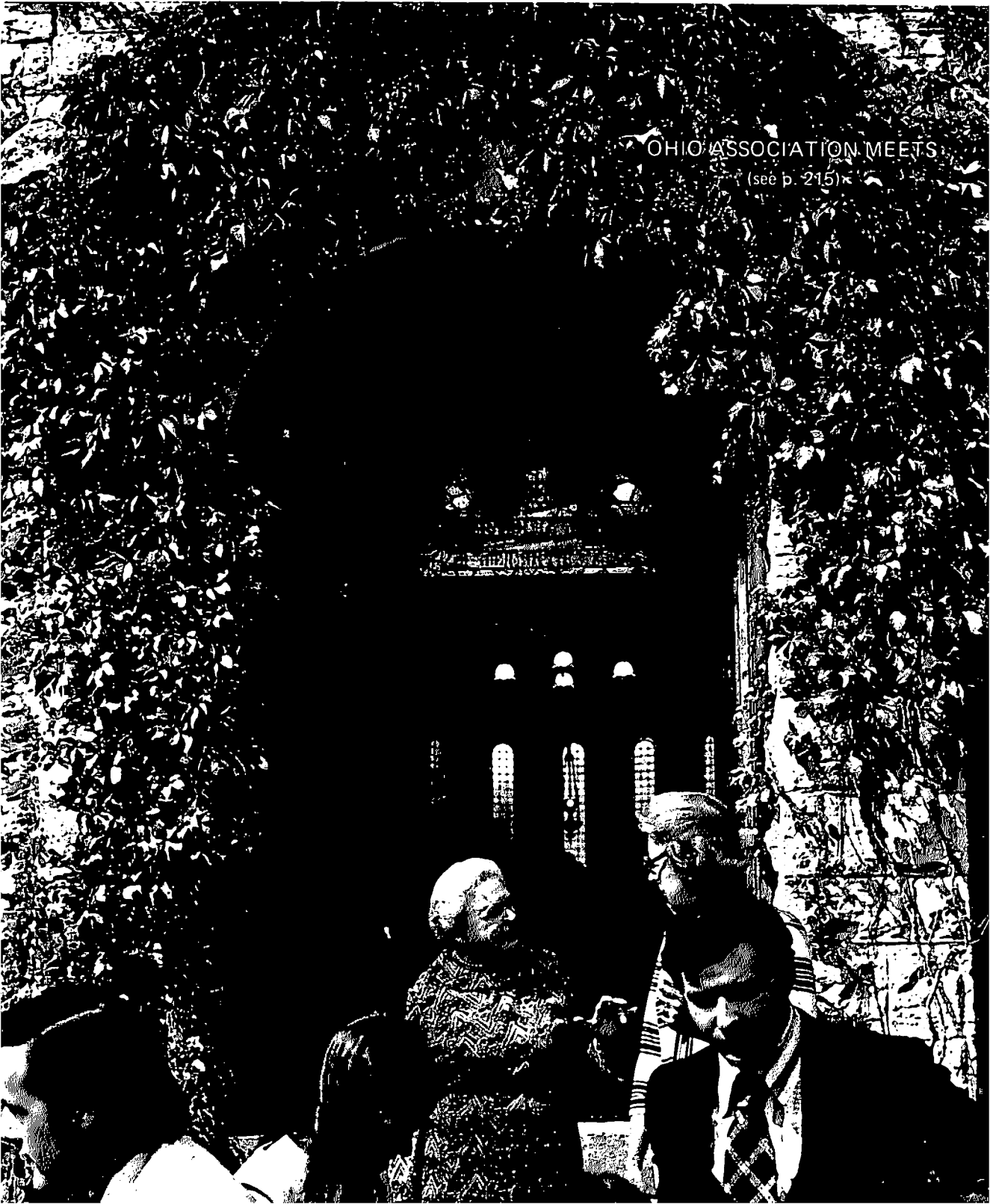
THE MESSENGER

Official Organ of the Swedenborgian Church

OCTOBER 1972

OHIO ASSOCIATION MEETS

(see p. 215)



SERVING THE LARGER NEIGHBOR

by Alice Sechrist

Continued from September Messenger.



However, the Christian Church gave us the New Testament, beginning not long after the Lord's Glorification. The Writings assign two divisions to the First Christian Church: the earlier one is referred to as the Primitive Church, while the later is designated as a period of ecclesiasticisms, persuasions, or religiosities. The Primitive Church was characterized by a certain innocence, when those who had known Jesus, or heard of Him from others who had, lived in a kind of communalism, sharing all things and loving each other. But that did not last, for Christianity seemed to be increasing, and political powers took it over, perhaps under the principle: *If you can't lick 'em, join 'em!*

In any event, what may have been a genuine church for a while declined as the Lord had foretold, and when there was no more "faith in the earth," a New Revelation came about, and the Lord's Second Advent was initiated, following the Last Judgment on the Christians gathered in the Spiritual World since the beginning of Christianity.

The New Revelation then given by the Lord through Swedenborg is perhaps too close for us to see it in perspective, but I view it as a kind of pivot, turning, turning, as John on Patmos turned to see the voice that spoke to him; so it is both a revealing and an unveiling. In *D. P. 264*, we read: "that

when the Last Judgment had been accomplished genuine truths would be unveiled, a New Church established, and the spiritual sense of the Word disclosed." Thus revelation or revealing came full circle, as it were, to a point where mankind had reached the depths and could sink no longer: so no further revealing would be required. This promise was made: The truly Christian Church which succeeds the first Four Churches will not undergo a consummation (*TCR 788*). So far, however, this Revelation has made little impact on the life of the nations of earth. What will give it POWER?

We still have the Word of Old and New Testaments, and the Heavenly Doctrines are drawn from it and confirmed by its letter. I think of these three revelations or revealings as like a family, a homogeneous family, the Old Testament as the father, the New the mother, and the Writings the children—and quite a brood of youngsters they are! They are evidently anticipating a New Age, for the former things, the establishments of church and state, are no longer adequate; and we are told that in the Spiritual World which is the universal mind of man, both the Catholic and Reformed "persuasions" are no more, although the external forms in this world will continue for some time. However, they will be very different internally because of the greater freedom of thinking and speaking which is developing in the New Age. Must not the same hold true for the period of Iron Mixed with Clay which seems to be still with us?

There is a statement in the Writings that "an internal sense of the Word also results from separate passages rightly collated, as may be perceived by those whose intellectual is enlightened by the Lord" (*AC 7233*). Must not the same thing be true of doctrines drawn from the Word, namely the Heavenly Doctrines in the Writings? They, too hold interior truths, but with "spiritual, not natural correspondences." (*AC 3464*, collated with *DLW 87*). Does this not mean that such inner senses are for the angels, not for people on earth? Of course all truths for earth-people would be more interiorly understood in the First Heaven, still more so in the Second, and most deeply perceived in the Third; but we on earth need not encroach upon these fields, at least not until we have given them an ultimate in this world more potent than merely being published in books, talked about preached—or even shared with a few individual neighbors! It is the Larger Neighbor who is needed to give them the POWER which is in ULTIMATES!

To return briefly to the subject of inspiration: we are told that no finite person can endure immediate inspiration or revelation from the Infinite Divine without being consumed (*AC 4809*²), and that there is no immediate communication of truth (*AC 6405*). So what does Swedenborg mean when he speaks of himself—and others—as receiving both mediate and immediate inspiration? An answer has already been suggested, but I'll reinforce it here. By *immediate*, a *simultaneous* process is signified, from Firsts to Lasts, and always from good on one level to good on the next lower level and so on—not from good through truth. How can this be? Well, *Good is One*, one with love, with Life Itself, no matter on which plane it is manifested, while truth varies from plane to plane. This is quite well put in the well-known little poem written about one hundred years ago by an Oxford student:

"The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

"The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When love is done."

All this may seem abstract, but it was evidently an important point in Swedenborg's view, for he is trying to tell us the difference between his inspiration and that of those through whom the Word of the Old and New Testaments was written. In the Word, inspiration was not generally, at least, into the rational minds of the writers, while Swedenborg's was, both mediately and immediately. It could be the latter because he was a regenerated man.

Should not his readers receive it so, i.e., be in freedom to think AS IF of themselves? "The Lord has revealed Arcana which in excellence excels anything given since the beginning of the church," he writes (*ML 533*). Also: "Who could know except from an interior searching of the Word, and at the same time from Revelation"—which I take to mean the Heavenly Doctrines which are confirmed from the literal sense—"how to explain things in the Word (*AC 3131*).

By way of contrast, we are informed that some spirits in the other life, when Swedenborg read to them extracts from what he had been writing, said that they were very crude and gross, so much so

that they wondered whether anything interior could be understood from them. "By a spiritual idea," he adds, "I perceived that they were right: my expressions were crude; but I was led to reply that they were only vessels into which purer and more interior things could be infused" (*SD 2185*). In another instance, some spirits from Mercury gave a similar opinion, saying that what he had written was crass, and his expressions more material than spiritual. He replied that the people of his planet would think them subtle and elevated! Then the Mercurians wondered whether such men could become angels! (*EU 27*).

He tells a different story in relating what he told some angel friends when they asked for news from the world; and he replied that the spiritual sense of the Word was being revealed. They rejoiced greatly that the Lord had provided that this great arcanum be unveiled (*ML 532*). And then when the *Brief Exposition* was issued in the Spiritual World, a beautiful phenomenon occurred which he describes; and he wrote on all the copies there: *The Advent of the Lord*.

Cont'd. on page 204

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SERVING LARGER NEIGHBOR—cont'd. from p.203

The writings say some startling things about the vital importance of social justice in the world. To quote: "The state of the civic and political life in a nation shows the state of the church in that nation." Again: "There are two things with man which **MUST** be in order, the things of heaven called ecclesiastical, and the things of earth called civic." (AC 10789) In another place, we read: "There are few who are regenerated in the world, and the few who are do not reflect.; for they do not know what spiritual good is, nor what charity is, and what the neighbor is in a genuine sense. . . Moreover, they separate spiritual life from civic life so widely that they would not even dare to derive any idea of the one from the other. Yet they correspond, and so exactly that spiritual life—which is the church in man—is reflected in civic life. This they do not know at all; yet the truth is that no idea can be had of spiritual life apart from what is in civic life" (AC 4366). This is all summed up in a brief sentence: "There is no genuine church in a nation where civic injustice and inequalities prevail." I read this to my S. S. class a few Sundays ago, and asked: "Is there a genuine church in any nation today?" My brother John spoke up and said: "I think there is, but Herod is after it." Another member of the class observed: "Perhaps the woman in *Revelation 12* has fled into the wilderness, and is waiting for the time of Her return." Well, these are both suggestive answers.

I have quoted many statements from the writings because I feel that they must address both those who look for some kind of external *authority* in them, and those who want to love deeply, understand intelligently, and act meaningfully. The Lord is said to have spoken "as one having authority;" but was that an external thing in Him, or was it the drawing power He mentions, when He says: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me?" Let us have three more brief quotations: 1) "What is believed on authority is from others in ourselves, and is not our own" (AC 10123³); 2) "Those who drink in the pronouncements of a man of authority see no truth from the light of truth, nor any righteousness from the love of righteousness, but only from the light of confirmation, which is a delusive light." (DP 168⁴); and 3) "Those who believe something to be true because it has been said by a man of authority are represented in the Spiritual World by magpies" (TCR 42). If the idea of external authority prevails anywhere in the Spiritual World, would it not be in the First Heaven—that of obedience? Or in hell? The Spiritual

Heaven would know only the drawing power of the Lord's love and wisdom, and the Celestial angels would perceive this still more deeply, with every beat of their hearts?

Now we have seen that many statements in the writings are contradictory, or appear to be so unless collated and collated with other statements—also things are often said which are incomplete. (Just a few days ago I read that a certain evil is not permitted in the World of Spirits. Then a few sentences later, it says that, if it is perpetrated, it is punished in a certain way. So evidently it is sometimes permitted, even though not willed by the Lord! It's like reading in a book on Etiquette: "Ladies and gentlemen never chew gum in public." Well, that was almost true when I was a child!)

Yet the relation of the church, THE Church, to civic justice and order, as depicted in the Writings, is direct and unequivocal—so much so that little collating is required, in spite of the fact that it is seldom mentioned: the world was just not ready for that when the books were written. Now I must repeat the question I asked a little while ago. What are we to do with this revelation or unveiling we have been given? Are we to devote ourselves to learning about the new truths, talking them over among ourselves, preaching about them and teaching them? Or are we going to work to promote the Lord's Kingdom on earth? Some of us, it seems to me, have gone off on a tangent in emphasizing an internal sense in the Heavenly Doctrines. Of course it is there, but I think it is not for us on earth, as I have suggested. The Heavenly Doctrines bring the spiritual senses of the Word down to their lowest level, the languages of earth; but they themselves, *are still* the spiritual sense for earth-men, externally taught. So what they desperately need is a literal sense in life and practice out in the world—that *Ultimate* which will give them power. Without that, they, the Heavenly Doctrines, will *remain* as *impotent* as they are now as far as world order is concerned.

I should be sorry to have any of you accept any of the statements I have quoted just because they are from the writings. Unless they have that inner drawing power on your minds and hearts, it would be better not to try to implement them. But if they do have this power on any individual who is a church, a citizen of the New Jerusalem, I feel sure he will want to do what he can to make this a more orderly world. He will interest himself in politics,

in social conditions, in economics—in any study which will help him to understand the roots of social justice and disorder, and what may be done to eradicate them.

Another thought! We are told in the Doctrines that the moral life is quite different from the spiritual life. One may be exceedingly moral for very selfish reasons: to be well thought of, to win promotion in a job, to be elected to high office, to profit personally in one way or another; but to be a spiritual man is to have a deep sense of human unity, of commitment to the Grand Man of Heaven and the Larger Neighbor on earth—and all this with the Two Great Commandments in mind. The spiritual man will want to serve the Larger Neighbor more than the family next door—to serve the World Community—to promote the Brotherhood of Man. In all this, too, he will act AS IF of himself, and not wait with limp arms for the Lord to move him to action, even though he will gladly acknowledge that all of his ability to act is from the Lord.

We must also learn how best to employ those whose ambitions lead them to live good lives for their own personal aggrandizement, for they often have more zeal in promoting the common good than really good people have. Perhaps the Lord's Second Advent is even more dependent on Publicans and Sinners than was His First Coming!

At all events, He is coming in the clouds of that heaven which is within us. Yes, I know that "Swedenborg says" that the clouds are the literal sense of the Word, but in the line of thought we are pursuing here they are the ignorance which beclouds our minds, and keeps us impotent. The New Jerusalem is being stalled in its descent, and will continue to be unless we prepare a place for it to land: and that place MUST be a state of order on earth in correspondence with the order of its golden streets, and its pure river of the Water of Life.

That is why civic order is so important. I do not mean to imply that our little church body should busy itself with passing resolutions for or against this or that—such questions as the pollution of our air and waters, relative values in spending the national income, racial discrimination, slums, ghettos, wars, etc. That sort of thing requires unanimity, it seems to me, and in general we are too ill-educated in world affairs, in root causes, to attain that state as yet—although I hope that we shall

some day. However, even before that state is reached, we as individuals could ally ourselves with groups that have a better world for an objective. Perhaps we could teach them something!

There are places in the Word that are naked and bare, with the spiritual sense so close to the letter that it shines forth from it. A world-wide order where civic justice and good-will to all men prevail may be hundreds of years in the future, but the New Church will lack power without it, and at least we have the promise that the earth, which He calls His footstool, "shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;" and also: "HE MAKETH THE PLACE OF HIS FEET GLORIOUS"

But He cannot do this unless we cooperate in service to the Larger Neighbor.

THE THIRTY GREEN VOLUMES

*A Series on the Writings of Swedenborg
by Brian Kingslake*

12. "The Last Judgment"

In 1756, when Swedenborg was 68 years old, the eighth and final volume of the Latin *Arcana Coelestia* came from the press and was displayed with pride in the bookshop of John Lewis, near St. Paul's Cathedral, London; and copies were dispatched, as usual, to Swedenborg in Stockholm.

The great work was completed.

Almost immediately afterwards, as if a restraining hand had been removed, the pent-up forces of the Judgment were released in that middle region of the spiritual world between heaven and hell which lies alongside our earth. Swedenborg, in his little square summerhouse, was busy writing his *Spiritual Diary* (second half of Vol. IV, first half of Vol. V) and through his somewhat pompous reporting of spiritual events, one hears the rumble of thunder as the earth begins to quake, and to smell a whiff of sulphur. "The Last Judgment," he says, "was commenced at the beginning of the year 1757, and was fully accomplished by the end of that year." Elsewhere he places it within the early months of 1757.

1757! A key date for the New-Churchman, and a critical year in universal history, whether the world knows it or not! Is it surprising that Swedenborg,

psychically sensitive as he was, should have had a premonition of it, early in his illumination period? Under date 1748, February 13, he records in his diary: "There was shown to me, in a vision, the number 57, or 1657. The numbers appeared written before my eyes, but what they signify I do not clearly know." (S. D. 765) Why 1657 instead of 1757? Probably what he actually saw was "57" and recognizing that it was a date, his own mind added the 16, not realizing it was prophetic—a leak-through from the future. Well, now 1757 was upon him, and vast events were afoot. He reports how, with increasing violence, mountains were sinking into the ground, leaving marshy plains and deep pools of filthy black water; great cities were folding up into the abyss (the middle sinking down, and the sides bending over together, shutting everything in); high buildings and "towers of Babel" were tottering; rocks were splitting open, forming deep chasms into which millions of souls were throwing themselves; trumpets were sounding; flames were crackling up from below, while a powerful east wind blew everything away, sterilizing whole areas where the evil had flourished for centuries.

Realizing that this was indeed the apocalypse described in the Book of Revelation, Swedenborg began at once to write an explanation of the spiritual sense of that book, using the same principles of exposition as he had employed in the *Arcana* for Genesis and Exodus. He saw, however, that this was a major undertaking, and would occupy him for two or three years; so in the meantime he prepared for publication an interim report on the Judgment, focusing mostly on the fate of the corrupt Roman Catholics; this he called *The Last Judgment, and Babylon Destroyed*. As things turned out, his work on the Book of Revelation, which he had hoped to publish in 1759, never got finished; so, five years later, in 1763, he published another interim report: *A Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment*, dealing with the judgment on the Protestant Church, and also with the state of the English, Dutch, Papists, Moslem, Africans, Jews, Quakers and Moravians in the spiritual world. (Both these two works on the Last Judgment are included in the green volume of "Miscellaneous Theological Works." There are also some unpublished notes appearing in "Posthumous Theological Works, Vol. I.")

Turning to the book, *The Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed*, we find that nearly half of it is devoted to removing misconceptions as to when and

where the Judgment was to take place, and upon whom. The church in the mid-eighteenth century was at a very low ebb, and was materialistically-minded to a fault, taking quite literally the predictions contained in the Apocalypse, expecting them to be fulfilled here on earth. The visible universe would be destroyed, and there would be a new heaven and a new earth. Swedenborg's thesis was that such a literal interpretation was not intended. The whole drama was to be enacted on the spiritual plane; and by a new heaven and a new earth was meant a NEW CHURCH, in heaven and on earth.

The Jews of our Lord's day had been equally materialistic in their understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the previous Last Judgment. At Pentecost (Acts 2) Peter had tried to elevate their minds to a more spiritual interpretation. After quoting Joel, that there would be "wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapours of smoke; the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood," Peter declared, "Today is this scripture fulfilled." In the physical universe? Obviously not! It was fulfilled in the spiritual world, where the Last Judgment on the Jewish Church was wrought by our Lord Himself, as part of the redemption.

In both Judgments, then and in 1757, the whole phantasy structure in the World of Spirits was brought down in ruins. Spiritual substance being highly responsive to thought, the religious leaders who had been coming over into the spiritual world had built up huge mountains of fake heavens, cities oozing with phony prosperity, all dedicated to self-love, self-worship, and the suppression of everything good and pure. Corrupt members of the Catholic hierarchy had continued to live, on the other side, as they had done in the world, in ornate monastic complexes, with pomp and ceremony, and services conducted in an unintelligible language, a kind of spiritual gibberish; the worship of bogus saints, the deification of the Pope. . . all devised to conceal unmentionable evils of life. This fearsome hypocrisy had been permitted to continue, like the tares in the wheat field of our Lord's parable, "until the time of harvest." But now, a powerful wind of reality was bringing the whole structure down to nothingness. The inflow of truth was increased, stripping away all fakes and shams, so that the people began to appear outwardly as they had always been inwardly: insane devils. (Was it not, perhaps, a relief to them, to be able to appear at last in their true colors?) On one

occasion Swedenborg saw thousands of spirits up in the air above him, looking like a great dragon which was trying to drag down the stars with its tail; eventually they were all cast into the pit. In the end, the whole intermediate region between heaven and hell was cleared, leaving only the good spirits, who, being somewhat dazed, seemed like prisoners released from a dungeon, or dead men rising from their tombs. These were gathered together by special angels, and were led away with joy to form a new heaven. No doubt they were singing: "When the saints come marching in."

There will be no more General Judgments. All the heavens are now complete, and all the hells are complete—three of each, corresponding to the

three degrees of the human mind. They are all "open" now; that is to say, anyone can go to any of them. Moreover, the machinery of judgment (the trumpet, the bright light of truth, the wind that blows away hypocrisies) is still operating in the World of Spirits, and it will never cease to operate; which means that every individual man and woman is judged immediately after death. There cannot be an accumulation of spirits any more; those who die begin to move on at once to their final home in heaven or hell. That probably explains why the effects of this Judgment are continuing on and on in the world, whereas with former Judgments they soon ceased as the World of Spirits began to fill up again. The dead weight has been removed forever; hence the unprecedented ferment in the world today.

PACIFIC COAST ASSOCIATION MEETS

The Pacific Coast Association was hosted by the Los Angeles Society at a very happy meeting the first three days of September. It really started Thursday evening, the last day of August, when Mr. and Mrs. Irving McCallum opened their home for ministers, board members and their spouses, at an informal dinner and social evening. Friday forenoon the Association board met to discuss financial and property problems and prepare a budget. At the same time the ministers held a meeting. Friday afternoon was given to a consortium on the theme chosen by the host society, "Sharing Spiritual Ecology." The topic was presented by Rev. Chungun Lee, pastor of the Los Angeles society; then Rev. Ivan Franklin introduced the consortium and assigned people to one of four groups for discussion. The four groups were named Olives, Grapes, Figs, and Youth. Leaders were Betsy Young, Ron Block, Mrs. Cassius Ball and Ted Bosley. After dinner in the parish house, and an enthusiastic hymn-sing with Ivan Franklin at the piano, the groups reported. At nine o'clock the young people entertained with a camp skit, and the evening closed with all in a circle singing, "Now the Day is Over" and "The Lord's Prayer," as is done at Split Mountain Camp.

On Saturday forenoon the Los Angeles Stitch and Study Club served a breakfast to all women registered for the meetings, and then there was a real love feast as Betsy Young and Elsie Reddekopp led the devotions and singing. Business meeting followed with the Alliance collecting money and spending it, mostly for the support of Split Moun-

tain Camp, but Urbana and the Alliance of New Church Women Revolving Fund were not forgotten.

During the Alliance meeting the men went out to breakfast and to Griffith Park Observatory.

The Business session of the Association on Saturday afternoon was presided over by the Presiding Minister, Rev. Erwin Reddekopp. There were 37 voting members present, which included 6 ministers. Six ministers and one board member were counted as absent voting members (four of these are either retired or inactive).

Most of the guests journeyed downtown Saturday evening for a dinner dance at a HOFBRAU INN, much enjoyed by everyone.

The Sunday worship was well attended, with sermon by Rev. John Billings, and communion presided over by the General Pastor, Rev. Erwin Reddekopp. Hospitality hour followed in the Parish House, and people were slow in leaving their friends. Many went to the 8:15 P.M. vespers at Wayfarers' Chapel.

We were especially pleased to welcome the Rev. Chungsun Lee's wife, Po Yung Lee, from Korea, and the two younger children.

Alice Van Boven

BOOK REVIEWS

Swedenborgians See It This Way by Paul B. Zacharias
A pamphlet of 9 pages published by the Department of Publication of the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches, 1972. 25 cents

Swedenborgians are jealous of their freedom and individuality, but Paul Zacharias notes in the introduction to this new pamphlet that we share the same general perspective on life. "When we look at the main issues of our lives," he writes, "*Swedenborgians see it this way*," the issues or subjects that he includes in this attractive, clearly written pamphlet are: The Creative Life Force; Eternity Is the Present Now; Love Is Life; Marriage Love; Why Are We Here?; The Flow of Providence, Creed, Ritual, and the Church; The Word of God; Revelation; The Second Coming; and Beginnings.

This pamphlet is addressed primarily to non-Swedenborgians who have expressed an interest in the church. It is not a catechism or a question and answer booklet, but a warmly written personal presentation of Swedenborgianism. Obviously not all the teachings of the church are covered in the 9 pages, but we get an overview of Swedenborg's system of thought.

It is easy to share the pamphlet with friends, for copies fit easily into a legal size envelope. Before sending copies to friends, sit down and read the pamphlet yourself. Another suggestion is to spend a few sessions of your adult discussion group discussing what the pamphlet means to you. Truth cannot be contained in any book or pamphlet. Paul Zacharias concludes:

"It is up to you and me to search for the truth that is meaningful to us, knowing that if our searching is sincere our Lord will open doors and will lead us as far and as fast as we want to go. All that is asked of us is that we stretch our spiritual muscles and reach for the stars."

There Was A Man Letters, Papers and Poems of Howard Davis Spoerl. Edited by Paul B. Zacharias, North Quincy, Mass., The Christopher Publishing House, 1972, 193 pages, \$4.95.

As we look back on our lives, many of us can point to a man or woman who has made a special impact upon us. It may be a teacher, minister, neighbor, or business associate. That person may have been the decisive influence in our choice of a profession or career. He may have helped us reorder our sense of values and given us a new sense of purpose.

Howard Davis Spoerl was such a person to young theological school student, Paul Zacharias, in the early 1950's. Dr. Spoerl was a part-time instructor at the school, and after Paul's graduation the two men kept in touch with each other through correspondence. Death came to Howard Spoerl in 1957. In the years that followed Paul was haunted by the persistent, growing conviction that his mentor's letters and papers should be published.

Paul Zacharias has followed through on this conviction, and in the collection called *There Was a Man* we are all beneficiaries. Those who knew Howard Spoerl and were active in the church in the 1940's and 1950's will take special delight in the letters that are included. Those who never knew the man will come to know him in the letters, poems, and articles.

Sermons: "The 'sermon tradition' tends to isolate people from one another, internally, while promoting a kind of intellectual pseudo-solidarity. Sometimes this is what is wanted. But an equally important place should be given to discussion, techniques that encourage give-and-take on an internal plane."

One purpose of the book is to confront Swedenborgians with the mind of Howard Spoerl as he prodded, stimulated, and challenged us. The potential impact is suggested by a quotation the editor has chosen for an epigraph:

"If the book we are reading does not wake us, as

with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? Good God! A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us." *Franz Kafka*

There Was A Man is a collection that includes forthright ideas on worship; religions education; the inner meaning of the Bible; the distinctions between religion, theology and philosophy; the meaning of immortality, and new forms of ministry. To whet your appetite for the book as a whole, I share a few morsels now:

Mass appeals: "The most important New Church truth I know is the truth that all mass appeals, standardization, 'engineering' procedures, etc. *won't work*. They work for Peale and for those who dispense claptrap. Remember the old Rolls-Royce—every engine specially custom built? That's what E. S. offers, and that's what people need for regeneration. 'Standardized' truths are a racket. Our faith has to be *individualized* or nothing. And you can't individualize anything over mass media—all you can do is push people around."

Worship: "I value most highly a regular 5 or 10 minutes of meditation, 'trimming ship for the day' each morning while I am more or less dressing (during part of the comfortable 1½ hours I allow for that, breakfasting, doing chores, etc., before going to 8 o'clock class)."

... "The Lord asks nobody to do any more than try to play life straight without asking special favors, without rationalizing stupidities and phoney impulses, without trying to be a Big Wheel or a Sound Christian. Easy does it. (This is the theme of my daily meditations, reminding me that I don't *have* to be any more of a jerk than my natural limitations make me.) To hell with pretense (including the pretense that one has done away with pretense).

Psychology: "Of Emanuel Swedenborg's many contributions to science, none is more significant than his work in psychology. Today, when large numbers of people are following the long road of psychology, in an effort to trace its turnings to some final understanding of human nature, the ideas of this famous philosopher and seer seem surprisingly fresh and modern."

Religion: "Religion is what people actually do in order to gain reassurance that they can afford to live in accordance with their highest impulses and

understanding. Every person's religion is thus intimately individual and completely private."

Theology: "Theology is more or less adequate explanation of why and how religion operates. While any individual might have a theology, it is chiefly important that theology exist in a general way, to monitor the situation, whether or not a particular individual embraces it."

Philosophy: "Philosophy is a reasoned interpretation of the total scheme of things in so far as can be conceived. It seeks to describe the setting in which religion may operate, but it is not directly concerned with the operation of religion or with whether or not one has a religion. A religious person without philosophy may act from what assurance he has; a philosophical person may have a rational, theoretical grasp of the universe whether or not he possesses trustworthy religious techniques."

"Obviously religion is more important than theology or philosophy, because it consists of saving power. One's greatest need is for religion, regardless of one's acceptance or rejection of theology and philosophy."

There Was A Man is too great a book to keep to yourself. Urge your friends to get copies and then get together to discuss particular articles, poems, and letters. You don't have to agree with Howard Spoerl's ruminations, but he will surely help to spark your own thinking and set wheels in motion that may not have been turning for some time.

Ernest O. Martin

HOWARD SPOERL: PHILOSOPHER, PROPHET, POET

by
Carolyn Blackmer

The years that have elapsed since the passing of Howard Spoerl serve to lend perspective to our understanding and appreciation of this most remarkable human being. And it is an uncommon perspective that we need for this purpose, for the quality of the man escapes the usual categories through which we ordinarily describe people. There is a phrase that gives us a lead for understanding him if we do not interpret it to mean that he was otherworldly—which he certainly was not. We

Cont'd. on page 210

might say that Howard Spoerl was *in the world but not of the world*: very much concerned with the issues and conflicts of our modern world but with a stance that set him apart for reflection.

He was also very significantly *in the church but not of the church*. His style of playing a role in the church set him apart from the ecclesiastical organization-man. Those who knew him well will be able to conjure up his wry smile on hearing himself so described in terms whose significance teases the mind with its many possible meanings. To all appearances he was *hors du combat*, but yet he was always deeply involved in the issues lying beneath the surface of ecclesiastical combat. He retained his psychic distance, the better to perceive and discriminate, and often to discomfit.

This anomolous role, difficult to maintain with integrity, gives any mind powers of penetration, and Howard's perceptive faculties were developed over the years to a high degree. I remember observing this acutely discerning quality in him from his first appearance at any of our church functions—a large gathering of people in the Boston church vestry where we listened to a talk commemorating Swedenborg's birthday. The usual encomiums had been pronounced, followed by the usual self-congratulatory beamings that all was well with us as Swedenborgians. Then I saw Howard's face quizzical, humble, quietly observant and, just behind his facade, his eyes flashing his very perceptive grasp of the whole scene. Then his voice drawled out a low-keyed appraisal with a gentle rebuke from a highly-charged mind: "You people ought to make something of this man's peculiar difference from all other mystics. Swedenborg was wide awake throughout his mystical experiences, never shutting out the world; indeed, making full use of the world for his own purposes."

We of the New Church were indeed making pronouncements of this difference; but *would we make something significant of it in the same open spirit that Swedenborg exemplified?* This was the tenor of his initial view of us as an organized church body. And in the following years when he identified himself more closely with the church this implied query about the main business at hand remained in the vanguard of his thinking, keeping us uncomfortably aware that as an organization we had made all too little of the church we had accepted.

For Howard was an uncomfortable man, at times arousing unease in those who heard him. There was something of the prophet in him, although he could scarcely be seen as taking himself seriously in such a role. He was capable of a searing kind of appraisal of our shortcomings as a church that was painful, and when he voiced his judgments with an antic sort of jest he was dead in earnest. I have watched his audience squirm under the onslaughts that were usually expressed in the most extravagant figures of speech for dramatic effect. But let anyone rise to take issue with him and he would quickly discriminate between footless defensiveness and genuine distress. With the latter he would turn very gentle, expressing great empathy for the bind that we are all in as members of a church organization attempting to become a genuine church.

To be in the church but not of the church is a thoroughly uncomfortable and trying position, and in such a role Howard left himself open to misinterpretation both favorable to him and unfavorable. He was aware of this risk and saw the irony in it. If you fail to take into account the outraged innocence and baffled gentleness that often make for a sense of irony, it may be easy to mistake it for sarcasm, especially in those with sophistication and a rich vocabulary. But if you interpreted Spoerlian invective for scorn or contempt of others, you would miss the mark, for he had a purity of intent in what he often said slyly and even equivocally. His inner gentleness was not too hard to discern if you did not misread the measured flamboyance of his style. He never condemned people but looked upon their shortcomings with his kind of compassion that was harder than pity and utterly lacking in sentimentality. He could distinguish between judgment and condemnation, and he saved the latter for the folly and blindness of our organized efforts.

Those who sought his counsel in genuine distress knew the man as he was, and felt the innocence within his exaggerated pronouncements. He could closely identify with people and yet retain enough distance to avoid setting up a transference neurosis when such a relationship would be inappropriate or harmful. Such wisdom in counseling can be read in his letters. His correspondence with many of his friends reflects his very perceptive grasp of their states of mind. He seems to take on the tone and color and pace of their individualities in a very personalized rhetoric that communicates his understanding and his concern. In the process he finds

ways of saying unacceptable things acceptably. A more representative sampling of his letters would doubtless reveal even greater diversity in style, vocabulary and metaphor.

The opinions he expressed in these letters need to be interpreted in the context of his habitual sophistry, if we understand "sophistry" to mean a purposeful commingling of different modes and levels of thought. He delighted in paradox, and knew that significant ideas cannot be expressed fully enough with the material to be found on a single level of thought or in ordinary language. Doubtless this is the reason why his poetry reveals the man more faithfully than his prose. But his figures of speech in any of his writing must not be taken literalistically, and his deliberate obscurities need to be interpreted through full knowledge of his intent.

The letters are full of opinions on a great many subjects, but the open spirit of the man should warn us not to let these views harden or stiffen in our minds into dogmatic ideas. Ideas, he believed, should always be in the process of formulation and evolution. They should never be accepted from others uncritically with certainty of faith or within oneself with such swelling of the ego that they remain unexamined. So the opinions which he so generously deals out in his letters should be taken merely as counters put forth in his own game of concept-formation. They allow us to watch the play of his well-endowed, subtle mind, and his skill in communicating with a rather wide variety of human needs.

The artist-teacher derives much of his skill from just such a spirit of surprise moves and playful improvisation. In this role, Howard dared to speculate about the most time-honored, revered views, and he encouraged his students to move into these deeper waters from the shadows of conventional thought. Genuine belief springs into being only by the force of an original, personal impulse, and often comes with an element of shock at critical points of development. As a good teacher, Dr. Spoerl recognized the crises and often administered the shocks. He helped his students shake themselves free from the tame and the safe, from unexamined opinions and borrowed beliefs. There is something more far reaching in this process than merely taking on "liberal" ideas, for these can become as tame and remain as unexamined as "conservative" ones, if they are merely borrowed from

others. In his teaching as in his writing Howard worked with a broad spectrum of philosophical and psychological resource materials that allowed a fuller use of Swedenborg's unique position than an exclusively theological approach alone could give. With these modes of thought he made a free-ranging exploration of New Church doctrine. Again he opened himself to criticism and misinterpretation which he took in his stride with a remarkable lack of egocentric pride or defensiveness. When, for instance, it was reported to him that his students criticized some of his methods, he replied that it does a lot for students to perceive the shortcomings of their teacher; it encourages them to respect their own minds when otherwise they might accept everything on authority.

To his philosophic mind, aware of the traps within blind acceptance of authority, it seemed vitally important for believers in this new age to discriminate between different kinds, sources, and levels of authority. Back of his rather strident language and his bold questioning of Swedenborg's meanings, there was the genuine humility of a seeker after the authority of Truth. But certainly no teacher, or preacher, or revelator, no matter how extraordinarily prepared, could take upon himself claim for inerrancy; true authority lies at a deeper level than claims, and its discovery is a deeply personal experience, and never total. In true Socratic fashion, Howard was always careful to say that he himself did not have the final, authoritative answer to his own questions nor to those of others who asked for his opinions. He continued to search, unafraid to question. It was his way of making something vital and personal of what Swedenborg had to say.

He said that the church does not pay enough attention to the really good parts of Swedenborg, and he was very dubious about our habitual argumentation from premises and "syllogistic demonstrations" to prove Swedenborg right in all his statements.

He himself seemed to assume that Swedenborg's thought was an open system, and the really good parts would always continue to invite speculation and further development. Taking Swedenborg in this fashion we could even develop techniques for communicating with sincerely seeking agnostics, but only if we had an understanding respect for their kinds of questioning, and engaged in an alert kind of search for new and evolving meanings. We would have to give up our monopolistic habits of thought, generously accepting other sources of

spiritual insight, while we perfected ways to develop Swedenborg's unique contribution beyond our traditional repetition of his generalized doctrines.

And he believed also that you cannot introduce Swedenborg's thought into this world without radically altering this world's entire conception of itself. In that prophetic statement he would have included the church organization whose whole concept of itself is ripe for change,—change not so much in ways of indoctrinating others outside the church as through internal transformation. The red tape and protocol of any organization, he felt, are for the reassurance of the timid, but the timidity of organization-men in the church baffled him. He saw them as runners-round-in-circles, inept in their board and committee work, forever postponing decisive action that would take the courage of conviction. He saw an incapacity, albeit unconscious, for functioning in any but the traditional way, and frustrations coming from self-imposed political checks and balances.

What Howard railed against was standardization in methods, procedures, opinions, and lives. Even if it should bring efficiency and "progress" to an organization, the results are impoverishing to the human spirit. The individual person is precious but is always in danger of losing his essential humanity through psychological, social and economic exploitation on one hand, and through his own self-defeating pursuit of "success" on the other. But the church has an opportunity and indeed a mission to interpret life more deeply and more effectively to individuals. What must be squarely faced however is that the dehumanizing process takes place within the church as much as in any other organization: it is at present of the world as well as in the world. Operating on something much less than their full human potentialities, people within the organization become timid and are constrained to use dubious kinds of standardized appeals to the public, or authoritative claims in teaching, preaching and reaching out to others.

"Our faith has to be individualized or it is nothing," Howard wrote to a friend. If individualized it cannot be standardized so as to have a single identical authoritative meaning for every man or for every state of any one person in the course of his growing. Nor can the individual hope to grow in his faith if he remains complacent in a very generalized understanding of what he says he believes. Standardized truth accepted by church

members as authoritative doctrine is the "stuck-record" that prevents us from getting on with the business at hand.

For all that he was opposed to this form of indoctrination because of its futility, he was not opposed to each man's transforming doctrine into techniques of charity for his individual needs so that the whole order of things in the church becomes highly individualized and yet communal. The true inner church is what it is according to any man's readiness to find himself in loving his neighbor. "A man comes into his own when, and not before, he leaves his attachment to group standards, ballyhoo, 'prestige,' etc., and stands forth as an individual in humility before the Lord," was the doctrine he himself transmuted into living experience.

The quality that a person finds in reading Swedenborg is often very revealing of what he values most for himself. So with Howard Spoerl when he writes: "It seems to me that without Swedenborg I could not have achieved any comparatively greater depth of awareness, through the Word or otherwise, that I may have reached. And when I read him it is more his benignity than his line of argument that impresses me."

Carolyn Allison Blackmer

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Religious Education Today



At the Post-Convention Conference (See Sept. Messenger) a working group focused on Religious Education. The group included Pat Zacharias, Millie Laakko, Alice Van Boven, Carole Rienstra, and Horand Gutfeldt—whose report forms the first monthly column, Religious Education Today.

The task of the committee was to explore different aspects of religious education in order to meet the needs of a changing picture in church and society. First, a view of the goal of all religious education had to be formulated:

The Goal of Religious Education

The ultimate goal of our educational efforts can be summarized very shortly: to help children and adults to develop the *capacity to love*. Of course, love is understood here as the highest level, which is the fulfilment of all the commandments, in the striving for union with God and man, for the general good, a growing and developing disposition. All instruction and doctrine is designed to further this goal, never as an end in itself; truth is to serve the good.

Love in itself involves creativity, so various creative approaches are to be explored and applied that promote growth in love, in knowledge and application.

The basic points at issue as to material are the Bible and the teachings of the New Church, with which the teachers have to be familiar not only as memory-knowledge, but more through living experience of application in life. The individuality and freedom of the child are to be respected in any situation.

Channels of Transmission

An understanding of the learning process and the stages of development of the child are necessities—an understanding of the emotional growth of the child, supplemented by Swedenborg's general indications of spiritual environment and loves of developing individuals, although this cannot be interpreted in a rigid way. Indoctrination is not the channel, but learning through interest and love.

Child-centered teaching is not to exclude subject matter, but to adapt it to the capacity and creative interests of children.

One of the most important areas is a living example! Experience of love and honesty, of justice and understanding, are more valuable than lectures.

Another important principle is active participation of children—not only a passive reception, but involvement: their own activity and formulation is necessary.

Areas of Implication

Teaching and learning occurs in the family, in special projects like Sunday School, in summer camps, retreat centers and sessions, adult conferences, etc. The traditional Sunday Schools are shrinking in most churches, because of the increasing mobility of the population. While we can expand programs in quality and scope, the limitations of our dispersed church have to be faced. A training of parents and teachers seems high on the priority list, helping and enabling them to make full use of all the materials and methods that are at our disposal.

One of the little explored areas is *dramatization*. Bible stories can be acted out in a number of different ways: in a more informal atmosphere in which the story is read and played, or in a more formal way that sections are memorized and put on the stage for an audience. This can bring the stories to life, and help everybody to feel the impact that points toward the internal sense. Some of Swedenborg's Memorable Relations can also be used.

Use of Materials

1. Teachers should have access and familiarity with different materials, including the Sower notes, the Sunday School Association notes, the Board of Education notes, as well as material from other denominations. A list of these materials should be available, and it should be one of the first steps to produce such a list (including Academy material).

2. Film strips of Bible pictures are available and should be explored—an oral explanation can be added by a good teacher according to his or her own insight and background from our church. Complete films are also available, such as the life of Christ.

2a. Such a filmstrip can be made and arranged as a group project. A few are already in existence, from New Church and other sources. A tape recording can add to this.

3. A new column in the *Messenger* is to be inaugurated for the sharing of educational ideas and experiences—this column as well as other material can serve as a basis for discussions. Also, contact with other New Churches across the world can be promoted in this way, and contacts with the thinking outside our church.

4. Other materials to be used: Some find the record set “Purple Puzzle Tree” (Concordia Records) a combination of books and records, a useful supplement.

Other Suggestions and Ideas

One of the most promising areas for our church, the youth camps, could be coordinated and work better together. They are administrated by camp boards, which often do not see the picture as a whole.

A national camp board with official representatives of these camps with the special task of coordinating and exchanging experiences can be originated as a subcommittee of the Board of Education.

A coordination with the LEI program for the preparation of leaders in camps, maybe a special session for this purpose, seems a possibility.

1. Have young people and children involved in the worship program of a church. This can be done in a more traditional framework, or in a more unusual and creative way. Some worship experiences can be made very meaningful, if they incorporate new ideas. Single individuals or whole groups may participate, regularly or occasionally.

2. Discussion groups with relevant contemporary problems find interest among young people, if good leadership is available that keeps the interest and shows the connection with our church's contributions, and yet is not obtrusive. (These topics may include sexuality, drugs, social issues—especially open-ended ethical problems have to be considered as helps for moral growth).

3. Involvement in neighborhood projects, perhaps together with other groups and churches is a possibility that has not been exploited very much yet.

Some long-term projects to which everybody looks forward can be related here. It may bring the whole class out for exploratory outings and walks—why not hold whole classes outdoors?

4. In general, doing is more valuable than just talking. Craft projects have been tried that include creative possibilities. (Making of a tabernacle, of an altar, of demonstration objects for other children and adults).

The Board of Education has been asked to compile a booklet of usable craft projects that have been tried.

Specifically mentioned special projects include: work in nursery centers, AA meetings, boy scout activities, twilight series on Sunday evenings, choirs, book reviews, reviews of plays and movies.

Priority of Activities

It was felt that the first project to be carried into practice is a training program for teachers, which would enable them to be more creative and resourceful. This can be done on a regional basis, combining one or more Associations, and perhaps including parents that are interested—also perhaps some young people themselves. A “Creative Leadership Retreat” can be arranged. Maybe also the SSR can offer courses for leadership. Such retreats may last for one day, or for several days and can be combined with other activities for personal growth, etc., and offer a deepening in Biblical and doctrinal areas. Carolyn Blackmer has started in the area in her seminars, “Learning about Learning.”

The growth periods of children in the light of the New Church can be studied with their various implications.

It is realized that the New Church has a number of talents that are only involved to a small degree.

Religious education programs that include all ages, seem a promising possibility for places where only small groups are together.

Further Recommendations

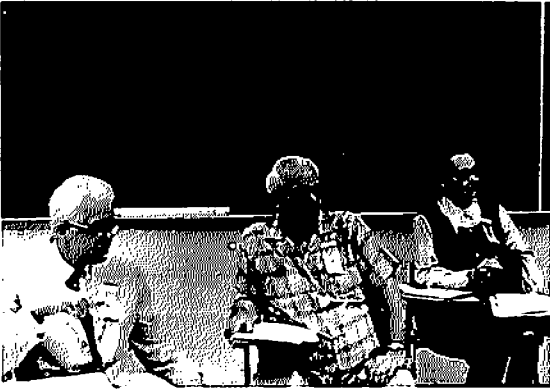
Marilyn Turley's report to the Board of Education needs careful consideration. It contains a good number of practical suggestions that are of great

value, and the theoretical observations are relevant.

Some books that have been found to be of value are: *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Dr. Thomas Gordon, showing new ways beyond the authoritarian and permissive approaches of the past; also Dr. Haim Ginnot, *Between Parent and Child*.

In concluding, we think that religious education is a subject that needs a uniting of all efforts and factions of the New Church, a subject that is of vital importance for our whole organization and beyond it,—realizing that we have great difficulties to overcome in every direction. We have to be flexible, open to new ideas, and employ all means that are available.

OHIO ASSOCIATION MEETS IN URBANA

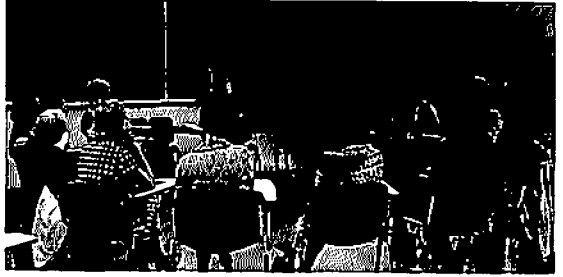


Pres. Charles Townsend (l.), Treas. Tom Zehner and Sec. Frances Boyle, preside over meetings, Sept. 15-17.

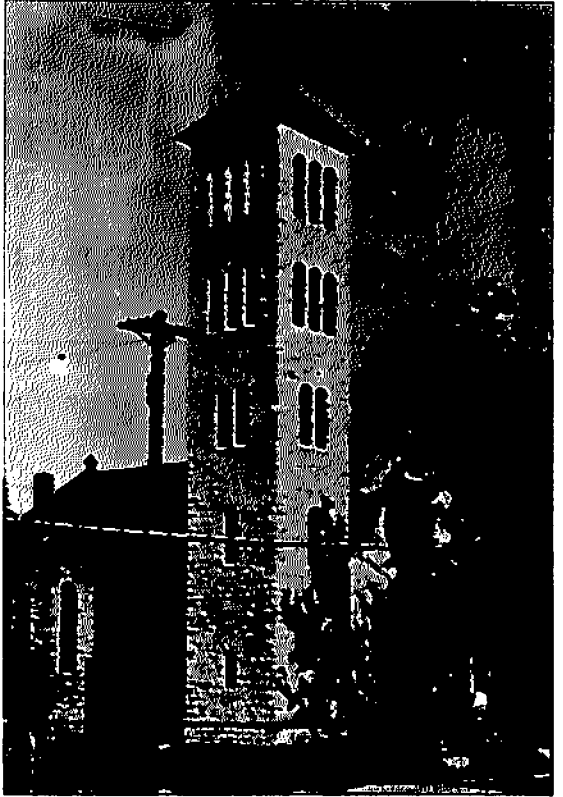


Convention Pres. Ernest O. Martin attended the session which was held in the facilities of Urbana College. With him were Monday Eichie from Nigeria, and Roger Paulson.

The Women's Alliance met on Saturday afternoon as part of a varied program of small-group and plenary sessions.



Sunday service with communion was celebrated in the sanctuary of the Urbana Church, familiar landmark on Main Street near the college.



Friends stop to chat outside the church after the service (also see cover) before lunch and the drive home.



THE MESSENGER

OCTOBER 1972

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